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STRATEGIES FOR THE
POST-SPECULATIVE CITY:
THE CASE OF
VALLEC/KAS,
MADRID

ABSTRACT

In times when the economic crisis and different administrative problems are leaving behind ghost cities and abandoned extra-large urban projects, it is urgent to start reflecting to react. Provoking discussion among young urban planners and other related professionals is very important to open up more up-to-date and innovative solutions, by thinking about short and long term solutions for our cities and their future. The burst of the housing bubble in Spain has triggered a deep crisis for the city as a project. One of the most important casualties of the economic crisis, P.A.U de Vallecas - one among the main six large areas which were previously planned to accommodate overestimated urbanisation for the city of Madrid – was chosen as the focus of discussion and study during the 4th European Urban Summer School. By analysing and diagnosing the present situation, the main challenge of this project was to find urban design solutions for this area by assessing quality of life through physical parameters.

1. INTRODUCTION

The one-week workshop of the 4th European Urban Summer School (EUSS) 2013 aimed to guide the participants to find a balance between the already existing situation of P.A.U de Vallecas, and the challenges that it presents for its future. The task set by the EUSS organisers consisted of finding possible solutions to improve the quality of life in the area, by assessing it through physical parameters and how they affect quality of life in this neighbourhood and its wider context.

The work carried out was related to an understanding of the planning system of Madrid, and in particular in the P.A.U de Vallecas, followed by a SWOT analysis of the area. This formed the basis for ideas towards making the Vallecas area more attractive, by

resorting to sound and minimalist proposals for the area, as opposed to the over-dimensioned grand designs conceived before the crisis. These proposals were targeting especially the improvement of public space and the reduction of vacant land, and thereby upgrading the rather poor urban image of Vallecas.

The next section describes the team's working methods and how team members shared their multi-cultural and rather different academic backgrounds to apply their creative knowledge jointly in devising proposals for the improvement and upgrading of this urban area. The third section gives a general description of the PAU de Vallecas area. The next two sections portray the urban situation of Vallecas at the present time in terms of the team's analysis, followed by a diagnosis and a strategic approach for change proposed by the team based on their analyses and observations. The final section consists of a description of the team's Vision for Vallecas in the future and several proposals for district's improvements, followed by the Conclusions. Both the old Villa de Vallecas and the new Vallecas - PAU de Vallecas - are incorporated in the vision for the area.

2. SETTING UP THE TEAM-WORK PROCESS

Once given the assignment, the team of five members was free to choose its own working method and approach. The team was very dynamic and the members complemented each other with their different backgrounds. Two site-visits took place, using different means of transport as part of their observation. During the site visits team members undertook quick interviews with district's inhabitants. Using different ways of transportation, walking as well as the public transportation system (buses + metro), provided the team with valuable insights into people's feelings. Conducting

several surveys of people living, working or strolling within the project area proved to be a very rich experience that led the team to a more accurate diagnosis.

While completing the urban inventory and preparing the photographic documentation, the team decided to work on a series of analyses, eventually incorporated in a SWOT (Strength- Weakness- Opportunities- Threats) analysis. After the analysis and diagnosis sessions, the team proceeded with drawing up a strategy and formulating a vision, which was also translated into a series of proposals for improving the future of the P.A.U de Vallecas. The real teamwork started with a choice of the work method and the general plan for a week-long activity. The team members decided to divide a general plan for their engagement into six phases (see Figure 3). The completion of one phase was the condition for the beginning of the next one. Such an approach enabled team members to manage the complex task during such a short period of time.

"Site visit & data research" was the first phase of the preparation of their strategy. Special care was placed into gathering more data than the one provided by the tutor team. The team was challenged to find and use additional data that came from other official documentation of the municipality of Madrid, from scientific papers and from social pages on the Internet- e.g. a Facebook and a neighbourhood forum which gave a wider perspective of the social problems of the Vallecas district.

The second stage of teamwork, the "analysis" was managed by applying the world-wide known technique of the SWOT analysis, used to support strategic decisions for



1. Vallecas site visit



2. Vallecas site surveys



3. A Diagram of the teamwork's six phases



4. Data research for Vallecas site

the long-term development of cities or regions. The four SWOT components were adapted to the Vallecas district of the city of Madrid:

S-strengths

internal factors, which positively affect the district,

W-weaknesses

internal factors, which negatively affect the district,

O-opportunities

external factors, which positively contribute to the district,

T-threats

external factors, which negatively contribute to the district.

Thanks to the conclusions from the “analysis” phase, the team members were able to diagnose and choose a model for a strategy which they would adopt for their further proposals. The two phases - “diagnosis” and “strategy” - opened the discussion on the general vision. The aim was to closely link the model of their strategy to a vision. The reason of this approach was obvious: these decisions had a strong effect on the final proposals for the Vallecas district and on their usefulness.

3. P.A.U DE VALLECAS, THE ORIGIN AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE PROJECT

P.A.U de Vallecas is one of the main six large areas planned during the 1997 Master Plan, expected to fulfil the needs of urbanising the city of Madrid. According to this masterplan, the city would go through a very fast process of urbanisation and development. In order to accommodate and welcome these changes, there was an immediate need to prepare a significant amount of land for housing purposes, and to reactivate the real estate sector, which seemed to be somewhat slow at the time.

A series of wide and high capacity roads

linked up all these areas planned to host these new developments, and a great amount of land was allocated to each of them. For the southeast sector about 10,000 hectares were scheduled to develop, and P.A.U de Vallecas was one of the biggest areas of implementation, with a surface of 736 ha to accommodate 28,058 dwellings. The area was developed as an expansion of the old district of Villa de Vallecas, which used to be an independent village, and was only designated in 1950 as one of the districts of the city of Madrid.

The partial plan, which defined the content for the development of the district of Vallecas was approved in 1999, while the other six units which form part of the plan for its implementation were approved only in 2002. The building process of the new development came to a halt in 2010, but at present, the district of Vallecas is completely urbanised and about 90% of the planned buildings are already built.

The urban structure for the new implementation was planned as a separated district, not preserving and promoting the connection and cooperation between the old and the new Vallecas. Quite the reverse, the plan foresaw a strip of services and public facilities between these two districts, thus deepening the division between them even more. The new urban district is mainly residential, composed of collective housing arranged into perimeter block of six floors, as the dominant building typology. Only the southern corner is providing two rows of detached houses, which seem to offer more qualitative open space, but it is for private use and planned in a very rigid and strict way.

The district is continuously divided (in a northeast-southwest direction) by the road system composed of three main types of streets: boulevards, streets for distribution (vial) and streets of coexistence (vial + pedestrian), which are also surrounded by green belts along their



5. Example of built-up areas in Vallecas site



6. Strict urban design and implementation of buildings in Vallecas



7. Example of the wide street pattern in Vallecas



8. Examples of Vallecás' open and green public spaces



9. Examples of Vallecás' open and green public spaces

longitude. Two main greenways that follow the tracks of old livestock paths, planned as landscape infrastructure, also border the area on the southern part and try to be incorporated into the district as well. Despite the qualitative service it offers, this system of streets, greenways and big open spaces, increases the division between the different parts even more within the district, makes the area lose its human-scale and discourages the pedestrians to use the space.

The layout of the district includes also a large shopping mall, a social and commercial local centre, three new underground stations, public facilities and green areas. As for the public facilities and green areas, the application of the standards legally required (81 and 74 hectares, respectively) reduces the residential density to 40 inhabitants per hectare, a considerably low figure in relation to the number of housing units planned.

From the design perspective, as more than half of the dwellings are under official protection, the City Council saw this as an opportunity to experience and present new construction techniques, materials and typological configurations, with the aim to “provide new sustainable solutions” for the planned district.



10. Examples of Vallecás' modern architecture buildings



11. Examples of Vallecás' modern architecture buildings

In addition, in order to gain more financial support from the LIFE Program of the European Union, the EMSV (Municipal Housing Company) developed a proposal called “Eco-Valle Strategy”, which contained three sustainable projects located within the district: a residential one (“Sunrise building”); a pedestrian area of 550m x 50m for the neighbourhood called the “Eco Boulevard”; and La Gavia Park, a 38 ha open space designed for the whole new expansion.



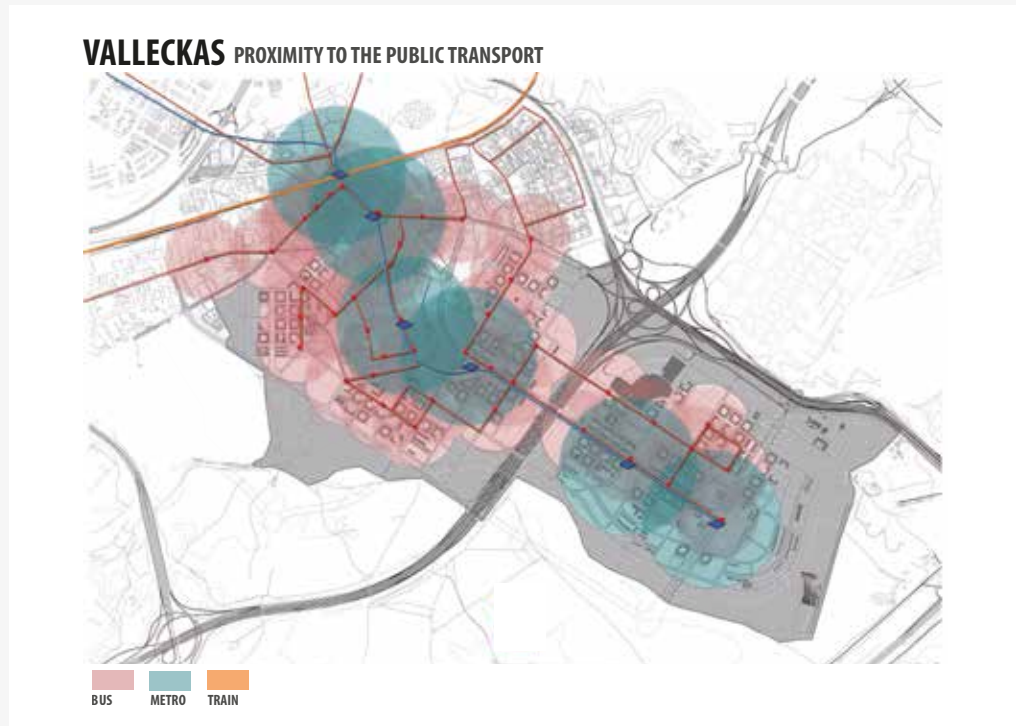
13. Views of Vallecás' Eco-Boulevard

12. Views of Vallecás' Eco-Boulevard

4. VALLECÁS' PRESENT TIME. RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

The SWOT analysis consists of four components, i.e. strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. In use of these components different subjects were raised by team members while using these components. This enabled them to look broadly at Vallecás and its surrounding area. The following paragraphs present in detail all the parts of the four SWOT components, which are also shown in Figure 3.

First of all, team members focused on the strengths of the Vallecás district. During the interviews made among its inhabitants they noticed that the local community of Vallecás appreciates its neighbourhood and is quite



Map A. Public Transportation Accessibility in Valleckas

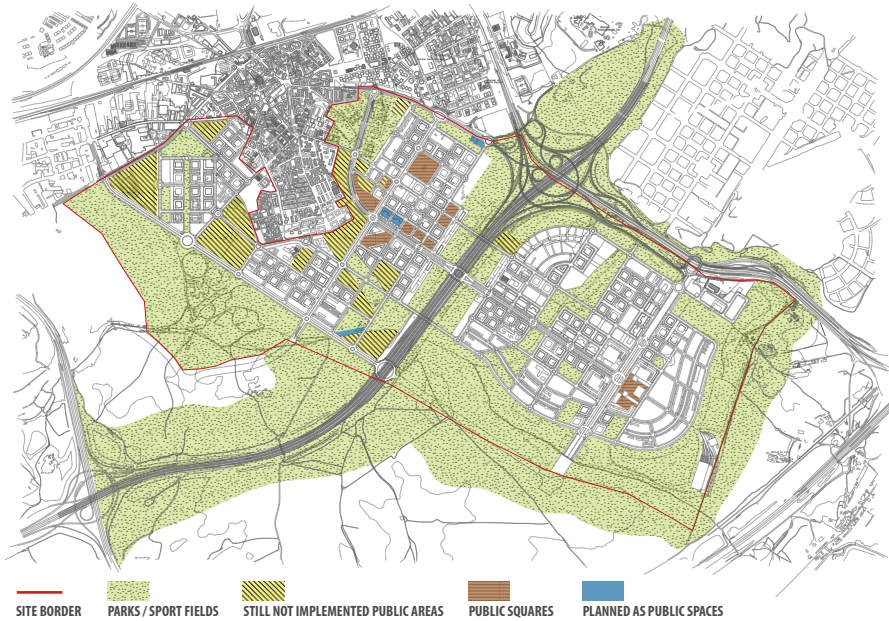
proud of living there. One of its reasons could be the good quality of dwellings and their rather large size in comparison with other parts of the city. What is worth mentioning is that the local community in Valleckas is active and its members organise many public events with the help of a dedicated association. Proximity to public transportation appeared to be poor as a first impression of the team members. However, more detailed analysis showed well designed distances to bus and metro stops with good connections to the centre of Madrid, and thus public transport was classified as a strength.

Finally, the team noticed many open spaces, which could be used for individual sport activities.

The weaknesses were pointed out as the second component. The huge commercial

centre called “La Gavia” was recognised as a big difficulty for the Valleckas development. The concentration of shops and cafes under one roof in the north part of the Valleckas blocked the ground level activities in the core of the district. This situation resulted in a lack of rapidly accessible services located more closely to the dwellings and in a lack of public life on the streets. The existence of the shopping mall intensifies car dependency. It was clear for the team that the district was designed for moving by car and not for pedestrians. The best sign of the Valleckas car dependency are the oversized streets and the motorway, which divides the district into two independent parts. One of the most important weaknesses in the eyes of the team members was the bad urban design of the new part of Valleckas. This was due to many

VALLECKAS ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLIC SPACES_ ACTUAL SITUATION



Map B. Public Squares and Greens in Vallecas

aspects. The poor urban composition resulted in a very monotonous urban fabric without any landmarks or significant buildings, nor a main square, which are required by contemporary theory of urban design. The oversized public spaces formed part of poor urban design as they could not be filled up with people, because of the low population density there. Moreover, the existing public spaces were not in good condition. They were dehumanized and deprived of shades and water elements which are so essential for thermal comfort. The rigid segregation of functions into living, working, leisure and transport sectors reminded the team members of the beginning of the modernism era and the obsolete ideas of the Athens Charter from 1933. These aspects were probably conceived as a better working environment by the urban

designers of the Vallecas. But the incomplete development of the area (including missing facilities for education, sport and public services) resulted in many urban voids and they intensified these weaknesses. The last thing to notice is the segregation between the urban fabric of the new PAU Vallecas and the older one in Villa de Vallecas which is much more alive. This resulted in tenuous links between both areas.

Opportunities are positive factors, which could help the further development of Vallecas, but the district does not have an ability to directly shape them, because they come from the outside (city-, nation- and world-wide factors, e.g. international economic trends). The international interest on Vallecas was noticed in architectural magazines (e.g. Dezeen) and Internet websites (e.g. ArchDaily). This attention focuses especially on the award-winning part of the Vallecas - i.e. Eco Boulevard. This situation was judged as an opportunity to gather worldwide specialists to improve the district in the future. Another interesting approach was the recognition of the post-speculative reality as an opportunity, not as a threat as usual. The decision of this action was made in the belief that the end of the over-optimistic era of development could change the way of designing and managing the cities from the quantitative approach into the qualitative one. The sustainable aspects of Madrid's reality, like the 21 Agenda's activities and the contemporary alternative mobility solutions became the opportunities for further improvement of Vallecas in the eyes of the team members. Also the economic instruments - such as entrepreneurship elicitation and PR activities - could be better used as well.

The last part of the SWOT analysis - threats - are also factors coming from the outside, but they have a negative impact on the development

activities of the district. Three citywide trends had been featured here. Firstly, the planned development of another south-east area in Madrid. The team guessed that the further expansion of Madrid's urban area, as written in the city's plans, constitutes an extremely negative situation, because it will not help completing the existing districts, including Vallecas. The second citywide trend is the long-term debt of the municipality's budget which means that there will be a shortage of money to spend on further improvements. The last of Madrid's trends listed as a threat was the demographic

forecast, which confirmed the impossibility of filling up the urban voids with new buildings. Another point is the surrounding area of the Vallecas district. It is situated quite close to the municipal waste of Madrid which generates air pollution, and close to probably the biggest slum area of Spain's capital called Cañada Real. These factors could make living in Vallecas less attractive. The continuation of the star-architecture way of development on the site instead of thinking about the quality of the inhabitants' life was also marked as the threat.

5. DIAGNOSIS AND STRATEGIC APPROACH

After the SWOT analysis the diagnosis for the PAU de Vallecas was undertaken and a strategic approach was chosen. As risks and weaknesses clearly outweighed the strengths and opportunities identified in the Vallecas area, the team members investigated the fields of social challenges and well-being of the inhabitants, economic conditions, mobility as well as security. Therefore the diagnosis is focused on these factors with special attention to social challenges to achieve a socially and economically viable as well as a desirable and ecologically sustainable development of Vallecas for the future.

This approach implies that the team tried to focus on strengths and opportunities to fix weaknesses and reduce potential risks derived from threats.

One strength which is a very important factor of attracting people to live in Vallecas is the fairly high quality of dwellings. People there seemed to be satisfied with their living situation such as having their own parking space within the building, a pool inside the block and enough privacy. Also accessibility to Vallecas is ensured bearing in mind the good connection to the city centre by public transportation and the direct

Strengths	Weaknesses
Appreciation of the place by inhabitants	No ground level activities
Public transport connections to city centre and inside of PAU Vallecas	Commercial centre: mall „La Gavia“
Social activities of inhabitants: association of inhabitants in PAU Vallecas	Not-diversified society
Enough space for individual sport activities	Bad urban design
Good quality of dwellings	Bad architectural solutions
	Fragmented area (urban voids)
	Slow development of facilities for education, sports and public services
	Undeveloped working areas
	Car dependency and car-oriented design
Opportunities	Threats
International interest on this site (award-winning Eco Boulevard)	Technological Park Madrid and its growing impacts
Post-speculative reality	Demographic change
Alternative mobility solutions: carpooling, carsharing, P&R	Bad reputation
Madrid Agenda 21 activities	Area isolated by highways: „island“ Vallecas
Identity of the old Ville de Vallecas	Debt of the municipality and the private sector
Municipality stimulation program for opening new entrepreneurship	Urban decay
PR activities to promote the Vallecas	Star-oriented architectural trends
	Increase of the slum area in the neighbourhood
	Development of another South-East areas

link to the highway. However, Vallecás within its borders shows weaknesses due to mobility. Especially bicyclists and pedestrians seem to be at a disadvantage. Nonetheless, this weakness should be taken into account when pushing alternative solutions for private transportation, such as car-pooling or car sharing.

Another strength which outweighs the presence of diverse weaknesses and risks, seems to be the connection to the old Vallecás. Whilst an identity is already existing there, just around the corner, the PAU of Vallecás seems to struggle with defining and clarifying its identity. Both parts, the old Villa de Vallecás and the PAU of 'Vallecás' may benefit from each other.

For that a creative global identity of 'Vallec/kas' must be created.

To achieve the Vallec/kas goal, four different strategic approaches were discussed. An overview on these strategic approaches will be given in the next paragraph.

Aggressive strategy: applies to huge and well managed areas where strengths can be aggressively used to take advantage of the opportunities;

Competitive strategy: uses opportunities and tries to eliminate weaknesses; can be implemented when the area has a fairly high amount of strengths to encourage its competitiveness;

Defensive strategy: tries to eliminate weaknesses and threats; typical for less strong areas, it is characterised as quite populist with good social acceptance;

Traditional strategy: is based on strengths and tries to avoid threats; it is used for maintaining existing values.

After comparing the SWOT outcomes and the characteristics of the various strategies, the 'traditional strategy' was chosen.

This selection is derived from the fact that the PAU de Vallecás has many weaknesses

of different nature, such as social, architectural, spatial, economical, mobility and safety. Nevertheless, strengths have also been identified. Using the 'traditional strategy', the strengths and opportunities which have been identified were used to conceive the vision of 'Vallec/kas' by eliminating weaknesses and reducing future risks. The post speculative reality which enables to sustain and improve the current situation in the PAU de Vallecás requires a low-cost proposal which is highly linked with the activities of inhabitants and different social groups.

Measures that need to be taken are definitely the improvement of public spaces and the reduction of vacant premises, inter alia, to create new bars, local services, or even bicycle parking.

The strategy should target concentric diversification, which implies further businesses with synergetic possibilities but also unrelated businesses that represent promising investment opportunities, such as ground floor activities or the creation of a start-up cluster in Vallecás. Furthermore, both communities, the old 'Vallecás' and the PAU de Vallecás may use more joint ventures and build strategic alliances also by resorting to the agenda 21 procedures. It is very important to combine the new part with the far longer existing old part, to avoid isolated structures.

6. VISION OF VALLECÁS IN THE FUTURE. PROPOSALS FOR DISTRICT'S IMPROVEMENTS

Our ambition for Vallecás is the addition of a programme that increases the liveliness of the area and that accentuates the local identity using vacant plinths and land. For that reason the team proposes neighbourhood activities on the central square and the main avenue of the site. Local organisations and entrepreneurs

will be invited to host events. It is important to involve associations from Vallecas and central Madrid. The former because of their relation with the area and the latter to create a connection between the site and Madrid. The latter is important to generate positive exposure for the area, which could be reinforced by neighbourhood branding. Given the limited budget, the proposed number of physical interventions is limited.

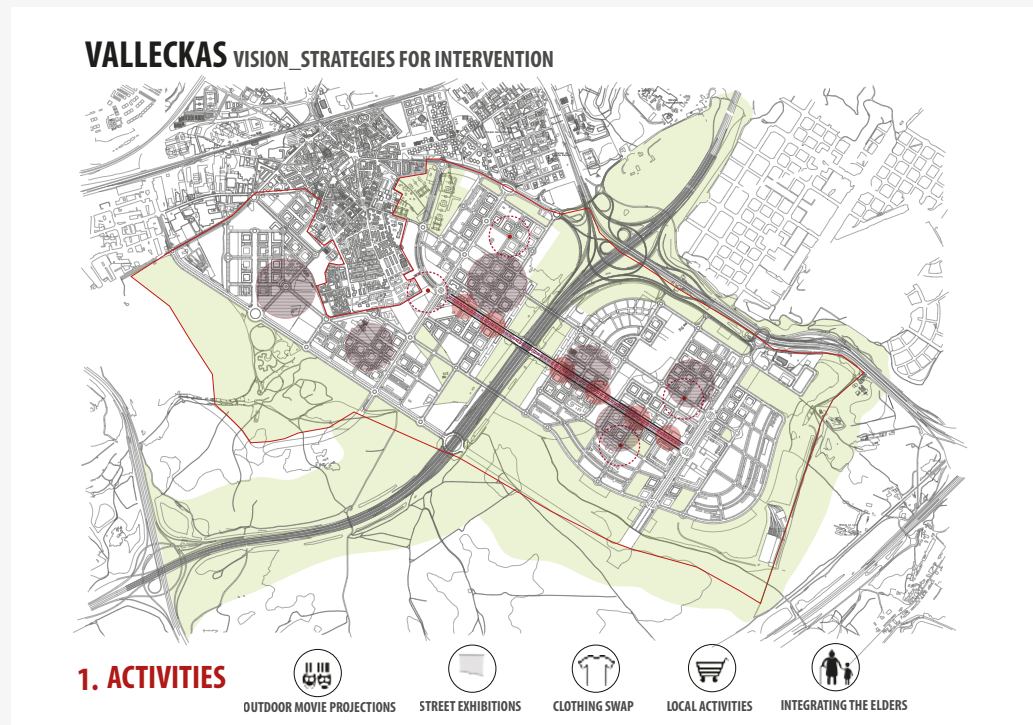
Accordingly, the proposals were set to fit the needs to cover main aspects, such as:

- Central Square and Main Avenue vibrant with activities,
- Sport activities in green zones,
- Local economy,
- Neighbourhood branding,
- Physical interventions,
- Transportation.

In the following section our concept will be further elaborated.

Central Square and Main Avenue vibrant with activities

The Central Square and Main Avenue lack the liveliness the big city avenue structure would presuppose. Dead walls and empty plinths are giving a feeling of abandonment. Therefore, the first proposal is to invite entrepreneurs and local organisations to showcase cultural and commercial activities on the vacant plots and empty retail spaces. The involvement of the existing organisations in the neighbourhood and the ones from Madrid in this joint cultural organisation is very important. The first because of their local knowledge and support. If they organise an activity it will be more likely that it appeals to the local tenants and that a group of visitors can be mobilised. The Madrilenian organisations are invited as well to generate a bridge with the city. These



organisations should be able to create events that are attractive to the inhabitants of the city. Likewise, central city inhabitants can discover this neighbourhood in a more positive way. We think this leads to a more positive image of the area. Possible activities are art workshops, outdoor movie projections, clothing swap, other local activities integrating the elderly in all of them, and play zones for children and teenagers. These activities would take place in the sites that give sensation of emptiness to the area. As an immediate consequence, the main objective would be reached: to make the district a much more attractive place.

Sports in green zones

Increasing attention is attributed to a healthy and sportive lifestyle. The rough void areas in

VALLECKAS VISION STRATEGIES FOR INTERVENTION



2. SPORTS



Vallecas could be suitable for sport activities like jogging, skateboarding, boot camp, hiking and mountain biking. Sport clubs should be informed about these possibilities so that they can use the space. To facilitate this we propose the municipality to help them with permits to generate a smooth start for these activities. Considering that playing sports is beneficial for health and social contacts in the district there will be the extra added value of generating a more lively environment in the evening hours when many people are active outdoors.

Supporting the local economy

The vacant retail spaces in the plinths show that it is difficult to set up a business in Vallecas. The large commercial centre in the district is a strong competitor for shops and bars on

the main avenue. We think that it is possible to fill in the void retail spaces by broadening the scope to any kind of business. Examples of other business are creative companies, solicitors or practices for physiotherapy and accountancy. Not all of these initiatives will be able to pay high shop rents, especially start-ups. Therefore the owners of the spaces will have to be convinced that it is wiser to (temporarily) house cheaper tenants to make their plots used and therefore more attractive. Given the fact that it is difficult to open up an economic activity in Vallecas, it is advised to collaborate with marketing and business experts. More specifically, start-ups from the Regional Council of Madrid and the Faculties of Economy and Business should be involved. These institutions can point out the market opportunities and can give legal and financial advice regarding the setup of a business. A tool to generate attention is the organisation of a communal event on the main avenue. Visitors can taste from bars and restaurants and can get a massage or basic legal advice during the event. This will raise exposure for the start-ups.

Neighbourhood branding

To improve the image of the neighbourhood we propose neighbourhood branding for the area. The branding can consist of a slogan, colour and logo, designed by local artists and inhabitants. This logo should be introduced to street furniture. PR materials, both from the neighbourhood and from the local entrepreneurs can thereby show their pride of Vallecas. Furthermore, it is important to promote the cultural, sportive and commercial activities in Vallecas on a local and national level. To raise international attention we want to set up a Vallecas Blog in which experts can give their view on the district. The best proposal is to participate in an annual international competition

for improvements of post speculative cities. Like this Vallecas can become the experimental site for post post-speculative interventions.

Physical interventions

Given the financial crisis we propose limited physical interventions. However we think it is important to make at least some interventions. First, we want to improve the spaces for vegetation. The existing local plants are contributing to the identity of the districts and they also contribute to the drainage of water and the capturing heat. The current plants are in bad shape and we want to improve their quality. To make maintenance cheaper, tenants can be invited to participate. We think about the adoption of borders. To make sure local vegetation is used we propose to organise a workshop on local vegetation. Our second proposal is on the positioning of shading panels that are also used in the Madrid city centre. They would make public spaces more attractive during the hot noon hours. Our third proposal is to introduce a water reservoir in one of the void spaces. This can help to cool down a part of the area during summer periods. Engineering knowledge has to be brought in and further research is needed by hydrological and thermal experts.

Transportation

The current metro stations can be made more attractive by concentrating activities there. Also, we aim to create a car-pooling site close to the Valdecarros metro station. That would enhance its function as intermodal traffic change to get to downtown Madrid. To stimulate healthy activities we further suggest to implement cycle paths in the area as well.

With all these proposals implemented, the vision of Vallecas may well change in the future, as the area of the “PAU de Vallecas” gets more popular and attractive. This way

VALLECKAS VISION STRATEGIES FOR INTERVENTION



6. PHYSICAL INTERVENTIONS



TENTS FOR SHADING

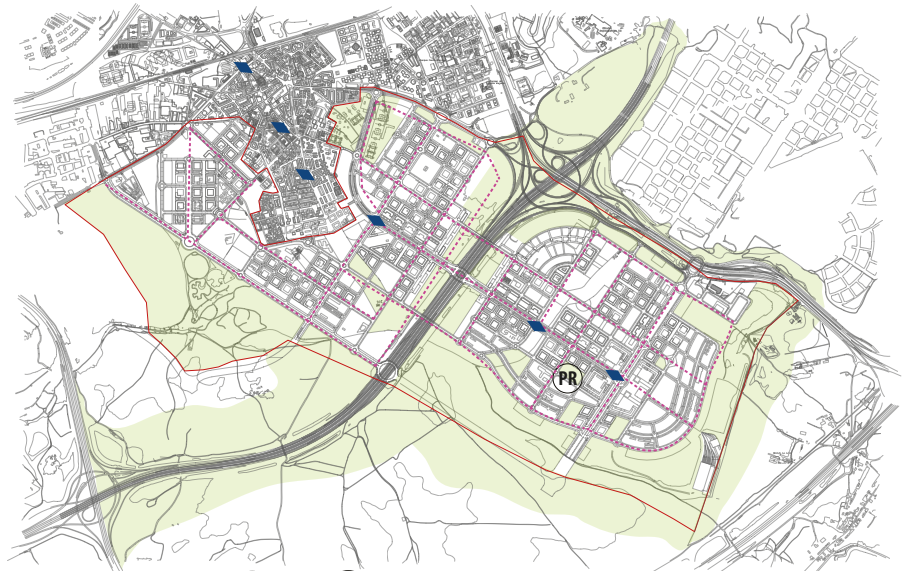


MORE LOCAL PLANTS



RAINWATER CATCHMENT

VALLECKAS VISION STRATEGIES FOR INTERVENTION



7. TRANSPORT



CYCLING PATHS



PARK & RIDE

the consequences of the housing bubble make space to a city for citizens, that it is enjoyed and socially active.

7. CONCLUSIONS

We want to make Vallecas a more attractive neighbourhood, for current and new inhabitants, with minimal physical interventions and the stimulation of activities. The redefined Vallecas should also be promoted to attract people to the area. The activities itself have a promotional character, aiming at a vibrant neighbourhood full of movement. If they are promoted more their success could be amplified.



Our strategy aims at gradually introducing new activities to the area. First an organisational structure should be set up consisting of the municipality, local entrepreneurs and social movements. This structure aims to attract other organisations to act in the area. It also operates as a facilitator, giving advice and assistance with the application for permits. The responsibility for neighbourhood branding also lies with the organisational structure.

With the implementation of our interventions Vallecas can become a more lively city neighbourhood that is attractive for the city inhabitant of the 21st century. It is not our aim to implement a copy of central Madrid, and we acknowledge the fact that the needs of the Vallecas tenants are different from the ones who live in the central city. Therefore we think it is important to work with local organisations.

They know the people who live in the area and it is more likely that they can instil a communal feeling in this area for it to become a more attractive part of the city.

Our approach allowed us to get an insight on the neighbourhood and the way it is connected to the city. The combination of desktop research with on-site observations and talks with local inhabitants allowed us to get a satisfying image of the district. We could set up an interesting vision for this district, by benefiting from the different qualities of the team members. There were also some lessons to be learned. Some extra time would allow us to dig further into the needs of the tenants and to get into contact with existing local teams. Likewise we would be even more certain about the proposed strategy. Furthermore we could elaborate our organisational structure by giving one of the members the role of project manager. Like this our working process would have been a bit smoother which would have freed time. However this adventure has generated a great feeling of satisfaction which may hopefully be picked up by someone in the Madrilenian city council. In this way, Vallecas can become the attractive neighbourhood it deserves to be.