

**Oraş echilibrat** is an urban regeneration project with several purposes:

- To **reverse the process of** urban and social **segregation** in the project area.
- To develop support for a local politic that **fosters a tolerant and multicultural society**.
- To generate a **coherent and suggestive image** of the whole.
- To promote **the integration and reuse** of existing buildings.

The fundamental problem occurs with the immigrant population, especially Romanians of gypsy ethnicity. The project focuses on the idea that the solutions to be adopted do not consist only in the reconstruction of decent housing, but to promote urban strategies that enable the gradual social integration of this population in the neighbourhood of San José and in Almendralejo in general. This is the only way to achieve a balanced city (*oras echilibrat* in Romanian) in terms of social equity.

*...we must accept the new reality: our societies, in all latitudes, are and will be multicultural, and cities concentrate the highest level of diversity. Learning to live together in this situation, knowing how to manage cultural exchange on the basis of ethnic difference and remedying inequalities arising from discrimination are essential dimensions of the new local politics in the conditions arising from the new global interdependence.*

*The Multicultural City. Manuel Castells and Jordi Borja*

## URBAN STRATEGIES.

The main strategies that balance and reverse the process of social exclusion in the San José neighborhood focus on: housing, open space, equipment and work.

### 1. ACTION ON HOUSING: **rehabilitation + relocation**

#### - Rehabilitation

Today, the area where action is to be taken has almost double the number of dwellings per hectare compared to its immediate surroundings and the average for the city. This density has led to dangerous settlements with uninhabitable conditions, excessively small dwellings and, in the dwellings in zones 2 and 3, a lack of ventilation and lighting. Spatially, the proposal reduces this density with the aim of obtaining more public space, cross ventilation and exterior spaces for all the spaces in each dwelling. The number of bedrooms is reduced in order to achieve a decent size for each of the rooms, thus avoiding the division of the dwelling into several family units. Balconies are included in living rooms and bedrooms and some duplexes for larger families.

Respecting the existing and encouraging reuse, we intervened by demolishing as little as possible, preserving 100% of the volumetry of zone 1, and eliminating certain parts of zones 2 and 3. In this way we recover ventilation, lighting and connection with the public space. Total demolition is avoided, understanding "*Los pisos del Marqués*" as an ecosystem to be given a new life cycle.

In terms of infrastructure, accessibility and energy saving, spaces have been reserved for air machines, a lift for each block and the façades are clad on the outside, correcting the current thermal shock.

In this process, the current 174 dwellings have been reduced to 100, in exchange for substantial improvements in the quality of life of the inhabitants. The remaining 74 dwellings are recovered through the process of relocation.

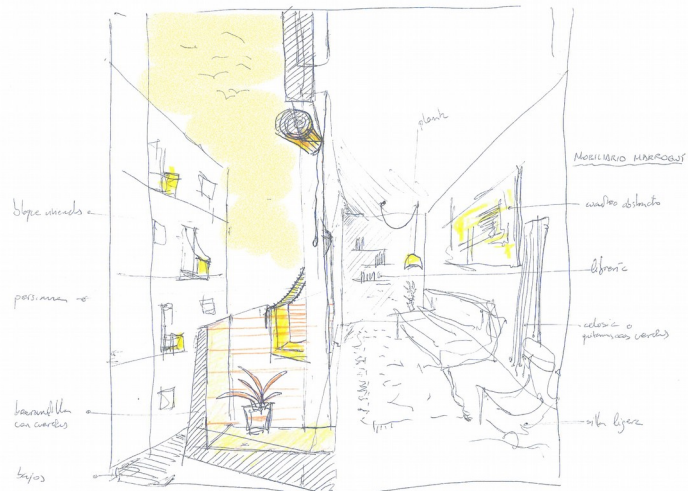
#### - Relocation

The spatial concentration of seasonal workers has led to the creation of a black hole in the social structure of Almendralejo, in which poverty, deteriorating housing, urban services, crime and lack of professional opportunities are mutually reinforcing. We have an obligation to demand a local policy that avoids these concentrations and integrates these minorities into the rest of the city. These inhabitants have to be able to choose whether to continue living in their neighborhood or go to another one and that in both cases they could develop their life with the same guarantees and dignity.

The Housing Delegation of the Almendralejo City Council, together with the General Directorate of Housing of the Government of Extremadura, should take on the allocation of these 74 remaining dwellings throughout the

city, intensifying the procedures for the settlement of social housing. The injection of immigrants into the different neighbourhoods corrects inequalities and promotes a multicultural society.

On the other hand, Almendralejo stands out for the number of empty dwellings. It is more than 15 % of them and this percentage is increasing. A tendency that needs to be solved and which we propose as an area of opportunity for re-housing policies (for example, a tax per square metre of empty houses could be implemented, the proceeds of which would be invested in the acquisition of social housing).



## 2. ACTION ON THE OPEN SPACE: **connection + naturalisation**

### -Connection

Within the limits of the San José neighbourhood, there are no open spaces at all, which is another major urban imbalance. There is only a small presence of wooded areas at the entrances to block courtyards (Calle Luis Lencero), or at the entrances obtained from local realignments on Calle Rodríguez Moñino.

In order to restructure this system, the proposal connects the open spaces on the other side of Calle Alfonso X with the weak presence of trees in the neighbourhood. This reduces the hinge or boundary effect of this street. The possibilities of connection are exploited to the maximum through a network of small squares and tree-lined pedestrian walkways. The area of the open space between buildings is limited. In order to gain space, a large part of the ground floor of the buildings in zone 1 is freed up, and 4 elevated squares are created above the lower parts of zones 2 and 3

### -Naturalisation

In parallel, we propose a permeabilization of the pavement as a strategy to contribute to an immediate increase in the quality of life of the residents. The replacement of sterilising paving in favour of draining soil, the intensive naturalisation of the neighbourhood landscape. Trees, fountains, landscaped areas, etc. Trees, fountains, landscaped areas, etc. Local species are used to plant new trees, especially palm and lemon trees.

## 3. ACTION ON THE EQUIPMENT: **usability + multiculturalism**

### -Utility

The approach of the competition programme states that the project area is very well endowed due to its proximity to the conglomerate of facilities on the other side of Alfonso X street. However, we highlight two aspects that once again reveal the imbalance between zones: 1 Within the limits of the San José neighbourhood, the level of facilities is irrelevant, as scarce as the level of public spaces. 2 The facilities in Calle Alfonso X are limited to sports and educational facilities, they are urban-scale facilities and are insufficient to meet the demands of the residents of the neighbourhood.

We need spaces articulated with the nearby housing and that cover the needs of the groups of the *Pisos del*

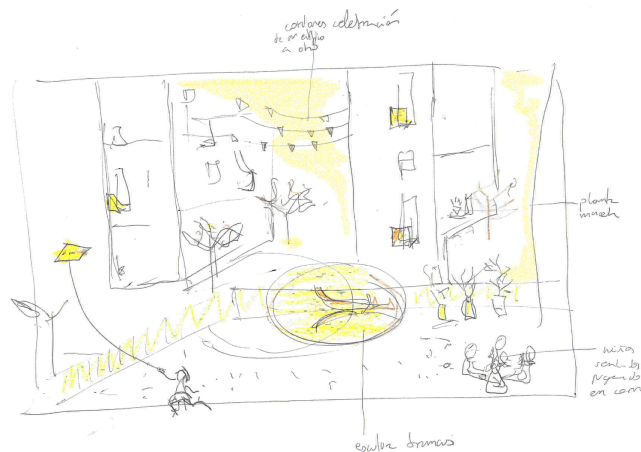
*Marqués*. These spaces are made up of platforms under the houses in zones 2 and 3. The programmes are set out below, although due to the flexibility and polyvalence of the spaces, these programmes can evolve and change depending on the circumstances.

We propose the following:

- Multi-religious centre (including Orthodox/Catholic chapel) and small mosque (under the block in zone 2).
- Gastronomic school including multicultural restaurant (under the block in zone 2).
- Consulate with office and co-working spaces (under the block in zone 3).
- School of dance and folklore with multi-purpose space for cultural and ideomatic programmes (under the block in zone 2).
- Open-air sculpture museum (open space zone 1, 2 and 3).

### **Multiculturalism:**

We intend these spaces to function as cultural catalysts with a large ripple effect on a city-wide scale and to be identified with the presence of immigrants of varied ethnic origin as well as citizens of local origin. Fostering this synergy is the leitmotif of the project.



## **4. ACTION ON THE LABOUR SECTOR: dignification + change of model**

### **- Dignification**

The Regional Government of Extremadura, the City Council of Almendralejo and the Agricultural Employers' Association have to take the necessary measures to ensure that day labourers are provided with adequate public services, decent housing and decent work contracts.

Trade union representatives fighting for the agreement point to the recent report by the UN rapporteur on poverty, which makes it clear that the lack of supervision of agricultural work is perpetuating the substandard housing in the *Pisos del Marqués*. That is why the labour inspectorate is urged to be more proactive, not just to visit fruit plantations, but to go to the field.

The realisation of the European project makes no sense if at the same time its inhabitants do not obtain basic labour rights.

### **- Change of model.**

The new super-intensive varieties of grapes and olives that are being introduced in the region are no longer harvested by hand. We are heading towards a countryside without farmers in the Almendralejo region. The tendency shows that fewer pickers will be needed in the near future. We have to propose alternative employment for migrant day labourers who want to stay in the city, in their homes. The project proposes a series of spaces that can be gradually occupied by these workers so that they can develop new work projects. Under the dwellings in zones 2 and 3, within the multicultural offer, workers would be needed for restaurants, schools, etc., and the ground floor of the dwellings in zone 1 would be destined for commercial premises.

**BALANCED CITY PLAN:**

A population and a political class committed to city-making is essential. The opposite favours attitudes of rejection towards the difference. We need an active and committed citizenry that demands a community and multidimensional policy. A socially active citizenship calls for a socially inclusive and balanced city, i.e. one that is built in a shared manner between the different actors and the different sectors of citizenship.

We propose to define all the measures in an urban adaptation and rebalancing plan with concrete and time-bound points.

**Decalogue**

project area (in 5 years)

1- As a general concept: A political climate characterised by assertiveness and courage involving various levels of public office. Transversal in the mobilisation of the Administration's resources. Sensitive and empathetic towards the actors involved and with specific training in the field.

2- Development of the plan for the conversion of 170 to 100 dwellings belonging to the Marqués flats by means of AURRR (Aid for Urban and Rural Regeneration and Renovation) of the Regional Government of Extremadura. (Project proposed in the tender proposal)

3- To provide, in addition to housing, specific facilities that allow a better quality of life and offer families complementary facilities for their training and education, as well as equipment in the building and in the neighbourhood. (Project proposed in the tender proposal)

4- To anticipate the subsidies at the beginning of the works.

5- To carry out an effective follow-up by means of contact sessions between the agents involved.

It is important to highlight that the management of the administration in these areas is reinforced by the integration in the multidisciplinary teams: members of associations (such as the Immigrant Programme (Department of Social Services of the Regional Government of Extremadura + Almendralejo City Council) or the collaboration of Romanian or Moroccan organisations such as the association of Romanians in Extremadura which is located in Almendralejo.

6- Continued support and assistance to families in their adaptation.

urban scale (in 10 years)

7- Almendralejo City Council and the Regional Ministry of Housing participate actively, in close relationship with the neighbourhood organisations and their technicians, making possible the expropriation or acquisition of the necessary land and investing in infrastructures, equipment and housing.

8- To sign the necessary agreements with the Department of Social Services of the Regional Government of Extremadura for the re-housing process.

9- Raise awareness and sensitise the receiving citizens, in order to reduce prejudices towards the re-housing of the marginalised population. Counterposing interests and generating empathy between them as a way to bring positions closer together.

10-Citizen participation, effectively conveyed through professionals (documented and overcoming the assembly model).