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AYUNTAMIENTO DE ORIHUELA
Concejalía de Educación

Dpto. de Construcciones Arquitectónicas

SUMMER COURSE

# SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS IN ALREADY BUILT ENVIRONMENTS

ORIHUELA, 23TH-27TH JULY, 2012

## STUDENTS' ASSIGNMENT

### Intro

Orihuela is one of the oldest cities in the middle- east Mediterranean Sea coast. Along the history it has been the second most important city in the Kingdom of Valencia and it was the headquarters of the bishopric and it also had the second university of the kingdom. At the middle of the XIX century it loses the primacy in benefit to Alicante and at the 70s of the XX century the bishop moved its chair to Alicante.

Richness came to Orihuela through agriculture, the riverside of the river Segura allowed to grow any kind of vegetables and fruits, the special quality of the soil and a very warm climate provided the best conditions. The river has been an important cultural and socio-economic item for the cognition of the city and the connection to it related to the other main (historical) anchor points are one of the strongest points to consider.

The last decades of the XX century and the beginning of the XXst century were the time of the crazy urban development where everything was allowed and all the development of the municipality was conditioned by the building expectative. The agricultural use of the land was placed in a second position and the possibility of qualifying land for building conditioned its use.

In 2009 the real state bubble exploded, many building and gated communities got un-finished. Huge areas of agricultural land got empty as they were sold as future built areas.

After this huge and un-controlled urban development the results showed that nothing was done at the historical city, the connectivity among the different villages was very complex and coast, the engine of the development, was developed without any kind of coordination, no equipments and chaotic infrastructure.

### Orihuela

Orihuela is one of the most complex municipalities in Spain. It has 90.000 inhabitants that are spread out in many urban settlements. The two biggest ones are the historical city and the sea coast with 35.000 inhabitants each. The 20.000 left are divided among 19 small villages that are spread out along the Segura riverside. The distance between the inner village and the sea arrives to 50 km. The distance between the sea coast and the historical centre is 25 km.

The historical city was grown between the river and the mountain. The river has been a physical limit along the history. Once crossed, the arrival of the train at the end of the XIX century defined the already existing limit at the south of the city. The former train is now being substituted by the high speed train, AVE, that will be even a biggest limit.

The coast city was a former summer residential area for people from Orihuela and from the inner part of Spain. The 8 km of coast became then a second residential area for many people especially northern European retired people. This area was in the 90s and 00s one under a

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crazy urban development. Every part of the coast was developed by an investor and without any city structure. Going there is like visiting a labyrinth.

**Foro Orihuela 2030**

The city of Orihuela is at the moment developing the new master plan. The new city council wanted to change the collapsed urban model into a new one much more reflexive and focused inwards, in the already built city.

Trying to involve the Orihuela's society in this process, the City Council contacted the University of Alicante for organizing an opinion forum. It was called Foro Estratégico Orihuela 20-30.

At this forum institutions and professionals from Orihuela gave their opinion about the current situation at the city and they also gave some guidelines for future developments. The participants were organized in groups following the methodology of the RGBG Strategic Model.

Commercial: Commercial Chamber of Orihuela, CROMA Urban Designer and the Comunidad Valenciana Commercial Chamber Federation.

Infrastructures: CIVIS Engineers and Federico Lizón Architects.

Green Areas: Privative Water Court, Young landsmen Association and the University Miguel Hernández.

Equipments: University of Alicante, MARQ and Immochan.

All the information provided by the participants has been organized by the University of Alicante following the legenda and colours of the above mentioned method.

**The next step**

All the participants will receive the cognoscitive plan developed in this analysis phase and they will give their opinion about the current global situation and guidelines for the new master plan.

A publication will be developed with the lecture they gave and their conclusions. A general meeting will be held were all the participants will sign a proclamation with which could be the future of the city.

**The Summer Course**

Beyond the Foro Orihuela 2030 the opinion of the architects of the future has been much appreciated, that is why the university and the municipality agreed to organize a summer course trying to receive the "fresh" opinion of the students.

A meeting with the master plan designers will happen where areas to work will be defined.

The idea is to divide the work in four big areas. Each area will address to a conflictive zone of the city according to the results of the cognoscitive map. At every area three groups of 5 students will work. Every area will be ruled by two teachers, one international and one local.

The starting point of the workshop will be the final map of the analysis; every group has to develop a SWOT map under their area point of view and then developing and giving ideas about how to improve the quality of the public space and the life of the inhabitants.

Probably the big issues will be the ones we are used to manage from the IP, Identity, Connectivity, Liveliness, and another one but focused on the areas agreed with the master plan designers.

The Summer Course will be focused over the following big areas:

1. Around the mountain of the castle.

It is a very complex area. There are serious problems with mobility, at some points the distance between the river and the mountain only allows a couple of streets.

There aren't different kinds of activities at this area. The relation between them some times is conflictive.

The mountain is surrounded by very low level people. The quality of dwellings is according to this situation.

So the work in this group will be about the connections, the position of the castle and the green area of the mountain, the program at the spot, and the way to combine several elements in the surrounding area to a whole cognitive experience, so something like making a specific pavement, or an area without cars. Under three big points of view: Mobility, Uses and Quality of urban frame.

2. The coast.

The coast is an urban chaos. The results of the urban development are a big disaster. There's no city structure although the coast has a suitable number of equipments. There's no feeling of identity insider the inhabitants of this area. Most of them are retired foreign people.

The assignment for this group must be related to how the labyrinth can be opened or become a feature of quality; the possibilities are different and depend on the amount of people and spatial conditions related to the anchor points.

Interrelations between anchor points 'stepping stones' is important.

Next to the boulevard, in-land connections are important to give people a clear view about how to related the beach with the inner-land and smaller settlements.

Working with connectivity, identity and liveliness as subjective tools to improve the quality of urban space.

3. Territorial and city connectivity, the small settlements.

Two bigger cities one historical and one on the coast surrounded by 19 smaller settlement's generates a very complex municipal frame. The way that this small settlements work and the relation between them and with the agricultural boundaries, the reason they were created, is one of the challenges of the new master plan.

We've chosen two small villages, Rincón de Bonanza and La Murada. The first one belongs to the group with a lack of infrastructures and problems with the village border. It is placed between the river and the mountain, as Orihuela, but in a smaller scale. The second village is La Murada, it is the furthest from Orihuela city and the biggest one. It has its own identity and the size and structure of a small town.

The assignment for this group will be to study city structure, relation with the landscape, identity and liveliness of these small towns always under the umbrella of the two big cities.

4. The big infrastructures.

The city of Orihuela is limited at the south by the railway since the end of the XIX century. It has been a wall that has not allowed the city to grow in that direction. Crossing this infrastructure has always been a problem. The new high-speed train will arrive to the city in the close future. The size of this new infrastructure exceeds to what the city was used to and cannot be final limit.

The aim of this group is to work with this infrastructure defining the no-limit of the city, how the city can go across this line and how the city can grow beyond it. By the other way one of the most important entrances to the city, the one that connects with the sea coast happens through

the railway. Beside this entrance a shopping mall exists. The study of this area will be one of the issues to study.

Keynotes above Orihuela

1. River

The river has been an important cultural and socio-economic item for the cognition of the city and the connection to it related to the other main (historical) anchor points are one of the strongest points to consider.

2. Agriculture

Fragmentation and disconnection will be active in this new areas, so it is interesting to show this aspects and look for possibilities to heal the city. Interesting to look for new opportunities to reinstall the agriculture, related to the city using modern technologies for water and temperature management in buildings etc.

Gated communities and the colonization of landscape.

Shrinking means: take you losses, sell out, reconsider the strategic areas, connections and anchor points, concentrate on the key elements and connect them so they can work together and represent some functionality.

3. The coast

Detect the frame system, install the missing links, give form and priority to the dominant elements and connect the strategic destinations, anchor points, make a stepping stone system.

Consider the time-space budget of users and make the system work in term of spatial and programmatic functionality.

If necessary re-position programmatic elements, and connections, even parks and shopping malls.

4. Municipal structure

Two central elements related to sea and land, and a sprawl of 15 small elements around, related to either one of them in particular. The overall 'time-space budget' is about 30-60 minutes by car. The one related to the historical centre is halve of it, 15-30 minutes by car. Car use is dominant and a problem also. Private budgets are under shred, income savings are low. Solutions for good and simple collective transport are interesting.

The north side of the river is a historic element; the south side became a bigger barrier. Reconnecting is a issue and also what shall be connected, is there a interesting and necessary program to connect.

Coast city will probably not have any historical element left from the old days. The coast city needs a reconstruction in terms of frame connections to provide users with a clear cognition about the urban network and the position of destinations anchor points and the sea, the context.

If there is empty office- and housing blocks or apartment buildings, it should be necessary and interesting to look for different type of use.

**The Assignment**

What we are waiting from you is to be part of this process working in one of the four areas. Giving ideas and developing concepts that will be assumed by the urban designers of the new master plan as guidelines for the document already in process. The ideas can be materialized modifying the urban frame, designing a building, modifying the social structure of a

neighbourhood or increasing the density of an activity in the area. You are free of using the tools you consider best for your ideas with the only condition that it must fit with the RGBG Strategic Method.

Developing your work in order to be a part of the publication where the opinions and articles of the forum and the Summer Course will be gathered.