



Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST)

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Snapshot: Expressions of Urban – Peri-Urban – Rural Relationships

Aldeia da Mata Pequena Turismo de Habitação

Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA)

1. Brief Description

The project of *Aldeia da Mata Pequena* is about the rehabilitation of an abandoned rural village for tourism development. It is located in the Mafra municipality, about 40 km from Lisbon, and was included in the ROBUST Lisbon meeting field tour as a site visit. It is the initiative of a young couple that about 10 years ago decided to move away from the Lisbon urban area and settle down in this rural village. Their main objective was to contribute to the preservation of the region's heritage and identity by developing a touristic site. Even before the tourist project started, the owners had already made the decision to move from Lisbon to a quieter area. They started the project by first rehabilitating their own house; a few others followed and then the tourism business company was initiated.

Currently, about 12 rehabilitated houses comprise the rural tourism offer in this village, together with a range of diverse activities that focus on the cultural and historical 'landscape' of the territory. The project created five direct jobs and is one of the main customers of local suppliers such as the bakery, laundry and local farmers that produce vegetables and fruits.

This case exemplifies urban-rural synergies from various CoP perspectives but particularly in terms of representing new business models in using rural resources, but also including ecosystem services (provision, regulation and cultural services), maintaining the rural character of the territory, and activities, yet complementing urban services and destinations and attracting urban users.

2. Questions and/or Challenges

The project *Aldeia da Mata Pequena* has a strong cultural and historical context, also focusing on the valuation of existing ecosystem services. The motivation for this initiative was to bring people closer to rural areas and to promote the cultural heritage of rural practice.

In the context of urban-rural relationships the main challenge that has motivated *Aldeia da Mata Pequena* are:

- > Governance aspects
- > Conflict with other territorial activities (e.g., wind power generation)

3. Main Insights

3.1. Indications of the application of the new concept of 'New Localities'

The loss of value due to land and population abandonment is being replaced by an increasing demand on natural resources due to this private initiative. The appreciation of urban dwellers for material and immaterial heritage present in this initiative is giving new life to the region. Furthermore, the business owners have put great effort into marketing the project which has subsequently increased their clients. A 'new locality' was developed in Mata Pequena due to this initiative. When going to Mata Pequena, visitors are also able to live like in the old days and experience the daily life of that rural area many years ago. The village offers the possibility for visitors to have new experiences like riding a donkey, interacting with farm animals (such as pigs, rabbits, chicken, geese, etc.), exchanging experiences with the remaining local residents, or just enjoying the landscape and the beautiful views. Today, Mata Pequena is a rural tourism destination that can be considered trendy.

3.2. Insights related to the broad area of 'Smart Development'

Aldeia da Mata Pequena shows great interest in terms of smart development. Firstly, it started with a business strategy based on recovering an abandoned rural village. Rigorously respecting the typical *saloia* architecture, owners used traditional building materials (stone masonry, lime mortars, straw tile, poplar wood, cedar or bush), furnished and decorated them with pieces and objects from old times, and, at the same time, provided all the modern comforts that clients demand today. The work done in the village mobilized knowledge on traditional construction methods used in the region's popular architecture and adapted them to the demands of today.

Secondly, the revitalisation of the village aimed at tourism purposes. *Aldeia da Mata Pequena* has today 13 houses of different typologies (from T1 to T3), all of them with a living room, bathroom, equipped kitchen, and a backyard (even one with swimming pool), and with evocative names, such as uncle Eduardo or Grandmother Aurora. The project also wanted to provide guests with services and experiences other than just accommodation, which created positive externalities in the region. For this, Mata Pequena established informal networks with business owners in the region in the nature tourism sector. Some of the activities offered include beekeeping, walks, birdwatching or night walks to observe fireflies. Guests can go cycling, hiking, or take jeep or donkey rides on routes in the protected area of *Penedo do Lexim*. These routes highlight rivers, waterfalls, mills,

waterfalls and abandoned villages in the region. These new activities contribute to the increase of new businesses in the region. As an example, an all-terrain business opened in the area, driven by the demand that exists in Mata Pequena. The opportunity created for the arrival of such business is only possible because of the establishment of Mata Pequena in the region. This strategy enabled a network of services to be created that have the potential to become the backbone of the economy of the region establishing stronger rural-urban interactions.

3.3. Other insights that could be relevant for further work

Mata Pequena is located in a designated area called “Special Protection Zone of Penedo do Laxim” (Property of Public Interest due to its geological and archaeological heritage), where there is an extinct volcano that houses an important archaeological site. This area has a magnificent and well-preserved natural landscape, contributing to the continuity of the related ecosystem services (cultural heritage, aesthetic, recreational). This landscape attracts visitors that come, mostly, from urban areas, within Portugal and from all over the world. Nowadays they receive National and Foreign guests. The Portuguese come mostly in the winter and are from the municipalities nearby (Cascais, Loures and Lisboa). They usually come to spend the weekend and they choose Mata Pequena because they seek a different environment. Foreign guests come mostly in the summer, mainly from Europe (Germany, Netherlands, and Spain) but they also have guests coming from other continents, such as Americans, Canadians and Asians.

4. Data Sources and Indicators

Table 1 identifies a collection of indicators that will allow, further, to better analyse and assess the project in relation to its contribution to the rural-urban connection.

Table 1 Data / Indicators for Example 1

Data / Indicator	Source
CHARACTERISTICS/CONTEXT/ DIMENSION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •€/year •Clients/consumers (Nº) •Working team (Nº by function/job): 	To be collected with Mata-Pequena developers
BENEFICIAL RELATIONS (Maintenance of agricultural activity; Creation of employment; Development of the local economy; Stimulating entrepreneurship; Landscape maintenance) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longevity, life plan of the business, self-sufficiency • Nº of new jobs 	To be collected with Mata-Pequena developers

Data / Indicator	Source
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulating entrepreneurship: replication, franchising, increasing scale • Landscape valorization: recovery actions 	
RURAL-URBAN PROXIMITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and origin of the clients • Employees Resident 	To be collected with Mata-Pequena developers
NEW TECHNOLOGIES (in particular ICT/digitization) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependence of the digital elements 	To be collected with Mata-Pequena developers
INNOVATION (social, technological or a mixture of the two) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • innovative/distinctive element • nº of initiatives that used the same element 	To be collected with Mata-Pequena developers

5. Critical Appraisal of Data Use

The information available concerning *Aldeia da Mata Pequena*, at the moment, was collected from its website, other web references, and an interview to obtain more detailed information regarding the project.

The data available collected to perform the present Rapid Appraisal is only subjective, being the objective data to be collected with “Mata Pequena” developers in the future, as showed in Table 1.

6. References

<https://www.aldeiadamatapequena.com/>

<http://www.cm-mafra.pt/pt/turismo/aldeia-da-mata-pequena>

Telephone interview with Diogo Batalha, the owner of the business

Mapping of governance institutions and actors: Owners, Employees, Local community, Suppliers, and Tourists and visitors

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