

IN(C)(V)ITE: THE IN-BETWEEN PROJECT

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Abstract

The present paper presents an alternative urban design approach that explores the project as an in-between mechanism. By in-between, we assume that “the project is neither the beginning nor the ending it is just an in-between in places’ time, both past and indeterminate future.”[1] It is an in-between time process that crosses several scales, actors, and places. We found *the in-Between Project* by searching through the existing *cracks* [2] in the contemporary built environment – uncertain and abandoned places/buildings and wastelands – generated by four factors: (a) the increasing of a fragile global economy; (b) the recurrent urban transformation processes (such as the over construction of road infrastructures and the cyclic destruction/construction of the old/new housing planning); (c) the absence of activities/production; and (d) the consequent abandonment of buildings and urban plots. Therefore, it was acknowledged that these *cracking processes* are creating a catalytic effect in the built environment, causing uncertain cross-scaled consequences between time, space, and society such as: not knowing the future of these places, not expecting positive scenarios for these places, not conveying the relationships of these places, and not engaging socially with these places. When addressing this problematic, fundamental questions arise: *how can we articulate the (dis)connections created by the existing cracks in the urban environment? How can we transform the waste inherent to these cracks into a life potential? How can we create a viable metabolism with this waste? How can we generate new activities? How can we attract new inhabitants? How can we transform cracks into magnets?* In this research, we realised that these questions cannot be answered through the narrow design solutions formalized by neither the conventional object/programmatic approach, nor by the top-to-bottom/bottom-to-top urban strategies, detached from the indeterminate cross time-scale relationships of these cracked places. An alternative urban design approach was required. The *in-Between Project* is structured using three interconnected concepts: *Cite*, *Recite*, and *Incite*. *Cite* is to select the time traces found in the place to trigger and ground the design project. *Recite* is to transform the cited elements into a simple base structure that stimulates unforeseen appropriations and becomes adaptable to change. *Incite* is to critically imagine future possible scenarios for the created base structure.

These ideas are presented, tested, and developed in one specific design research in Azenha do Mar, a remote fishing village on the southwest coast of Portugal. It is acknowledged that the *in-Between Project* is a simple practice of *in(c)(v)itation*: it *incites* the hidden potentials of cracked places and *invites* human beings to appropriate them in an imaginative and unforeseeable way.

Keywords: Built Environment; Urban Processes; Cracked Places; in-Between Project; Scenarios; In(c)(v)ite.

1 INTRODUCTION

The present paper reveals the *in-Between Project*, an alternative urban design approach, explained here in one case study integrated in a more profound design as a research practice that was tested both theoretically and practically between 2010 and 2016 in Portugal [3]. This practice is seen as a path for *learning*, one that identifies and questions particular *cracked places*, located in distinct built environments, caused by specific *cracking processes* [4]. Within this context, we present the case study: Azenha do Mar [5], a fragile fishing village established in 1967 and located in Odemira (the southwest coast of Portugal), an area that has been facing a gradual process of abandonment and social instability caused by the economic crisis, unemployment, and an unstable infrastructure.

“In(c)(v)ite: the in-Between Project” is structured in three main parts: in part one – *(re)(in)cite* – we explain theoretically the three interconnected concepts that structure the *in-Between Project*; in part two we develop the case study by following the practical concretization of *cite*, *recite*, and *incite* toward its inherent specificities; and in part three, we reflect on several conclusions about the integration of this urban design approach with the case study here explored.

2 (RE)(IN)CITE

Cite is the first stage of the *in-Between Project*. To explain the meanings of *cite* we connect this action to writing. As when we write a text, we *cite* parts of other texts, creating a dialogue between our thought and others’ thoughts. Similarly, to *cite* a project becomes a dynamic *site* of multiple intersections, generating a dialogue between the “designed” place and the “real” place. *Cite* is selective and looks for time traces of everyday life, including the seemingly unimportant things. These time traces may be physical, for instance a wall, a permeable ground, or a specific way of living in the space. As we know, they are interrelated. *Cite* is rooted in the “as found” concept, developed during the 1950s by the British Independent Group, where aligned with the interconnection of the architects Alison and Peter Smithson, the artist Eduardo Paolozzi, and the photographer Nigel Henderson, the everyday life culture was valued and the beauty of the ordinary and discarded elements was seen and valued: “As Found is the tendency to engage with what is there, to recognize the existing, to follow its traces with interest.”[6]

Recite is the second stage of the *in-Between Project*. *Recite* has a double meaning, as when we recite a text, there is “repetition” but also “change.” Every recitation is unique, with a unique succession of active sounds that somehow could shift the meaning of the text, even when the words said are exactly the same. The prefix “re” gives an interesting clue: we go back to the place recurrently in search for tools to ground the design and “we cite once more,” a repetition that also (re)draws the previous *cited* elements into a *base structure*, thus transforming them. The base structure’s idea is rooted on Cedric Price’s “Free space and its operational matrix”[7] where he correlates the act of eating with the act of designing architecture in comparing the eating plate to the architecture and the supportive table to the site: “The plate as the architecture and its relationship to the supportive table as its siting enables the comparison of free-space to an operational matrix (...) the operational matrix becomes a tool for the users rather than for the designer.”[8] Price argues that if the eating plate is an open and flexible structure with distinct velocities, skilful and changed by its users’ needs, the architectural design should also be considered in the same way, working as a flexible and open matrix/base structure that accepts uncertain occupations. Furthermore, the base structure is understood as a *field*, as John Habraken defines it: “The term *field* encompasses all. Fields are only conceivable as coherent and enduring physical entities because they are inhabited, subject to and continuously reshaped by the unending actions and interventions of the people who live within the material fabric.”[9] Thus, fields have a particular and very important double feature: endurance, and adaptability to change. A field endures in its traces but is flexible and anticipatory, stimulating cultivation. Therefore, we also adopt Habraken’s claim: “To deal with the ordinary physical environment does not require production but for cultivation. (...) Architects who profess love for the ordinary should become gardeners. The gardener does not make, he cultivates.”[10] In sum, the base

structure is an ambivalent field that is both specific and indeterminate. It is specific because is designed through transforming the cited time traces into opportunities, hence reciting; and it is indeterminate because it is adaptable to change, in order to catalyse uncertain programs for an unknown future.

Incite is the third step of the *in-Between Project*. This concept invites the designer/architect to critically imagine future possible scenarios – *what if...* – over the base structure created. Furthermore, *incite* takes Bernardo Secchi’s (2001) position regarding the relevance of creating scenarios: “that can contribute to the construction of visions within which different actions and projects can simultaneously find their own legitimacy.”[11] Moreover, we argue that in the creation of these scenarios, it is possible to anticipate an architectural design that catalyses change and prepares the place-project in order to integrate it for social, economic and political unknown conditions, thus incrementing a flexible process that incites new opportunities. As Philip Christou (1999) argues: “The main task is one of designing catalysts for change, as pieces of landscape infrastructure.”[12]

These three concepts presented are interconnected. In simple terms, the *cited* elements are transformed into a *recited* base-structure, a field of opportunities, both permanent and open to change, within which future scenarios “what if...” are *incited* to take place. Thus, **(re)(in)cite**.

3 AZENHA DO MAR: A REMOTE FISHING VILLAGE

Azenha do Mar is a small fishing village founded in 1967 and located in a remote area in Odemira, the southwest coast of Portugal. This village embodies the encounter between the land and the sea and its associated activities (fishing and agriculture) that generated this place, the prosaic habits and dynamics that structure the everyday life of its inhabitants, and also the feeling of distance to what is around or a state of dependence on basic structures not yet in existence. Based on a very complex system that shaped Azenha do Mar over time, there are diverse *cracking processes* that have impacted the village’s systems such as its morphology, land use, population, and activities. Questions arise from this time transformation: *how can we integrate the cracks of Azenha do Mar as chances for change? How can we create a strategy that responds to the diverse scales problematic? How can we anticipate open scenarios for this uncertain and fragile place?*



Figure 1. Vacant Lots in Azenha do Mar, Odemira (Portugal).

3.1 Cite: Time Resonances

Azenha do Mar was formed by several *cracking processes* that over time, created a significant impact in the place’s systems. In our cause-effect historical study, it was acknowledged that these *cracking processes* caused a specific result or *Time Resonance*, as we prefer to call it. For a better understanding of this idea, we expose diachronically the *cracking process-time resonance* (cause-effect) structure present in the village’s development. The first of seven *cracking processes* came in 1967 when fishing and algae harvest proved to be a profitable activity, attracting fisherman from different regions of the south of Portugal to settle in Azenha do Mar. Despite this great flux of people, the ways in which the inhabitants constructed their houses were illegal and in precarious conditions,

resonating until today as an unstable social environment. Concurrently, the fishing activity has become a compromised fragile activity because of its dependency on a precarious seaport. The second *cracking process* was caused by the Land-Use Regulation imposed by the Odemira Municipality in the 1980s, due to the illegal settlement of inhabitants. Despite the fact that this legal process brought better living conditions to some families over time, many were forced to leave the village, mainly because a great segment of the population didn't have legal fishing activity. Consequently, today the resonances are still visible: loss of population, dependence on the resources (social services and equipment) of the neighbour villages, and the appearance of vacant lots. The third *cracking process* came with the construction of Azenha do Mar's restaurant in the 1980s that until now was a positive feature: it put the place on the map, attracted tourists and created a dynamic village, and promoted the continuity of fishing production. The fourth *cracking process* occurred in 2012 when the village was integrated into the *Vicentina* Route, creating new pedestrian connections in the area. The fifth *cracking process* happened with the creation of the Local Social Associations in the 2000s that resonated with the development of new social activities in the village for the purpose of improving the fishermen's living conditions. The sixth *cracking process* occurred with the construction of sanitation/electricity infrastructures and some public space imposed by the Odemira Municipality in 2006. However, this planned act created an unfixed and fragile public space that still remains. Lastly, the seventh *cracking process* occurred with the Economic Crisis that began in 2008 and which continues today. This crisis incited a struggle for investors and for Azenha do Mar's inhabitants, resonating in a continuous feeling of uncertainty.

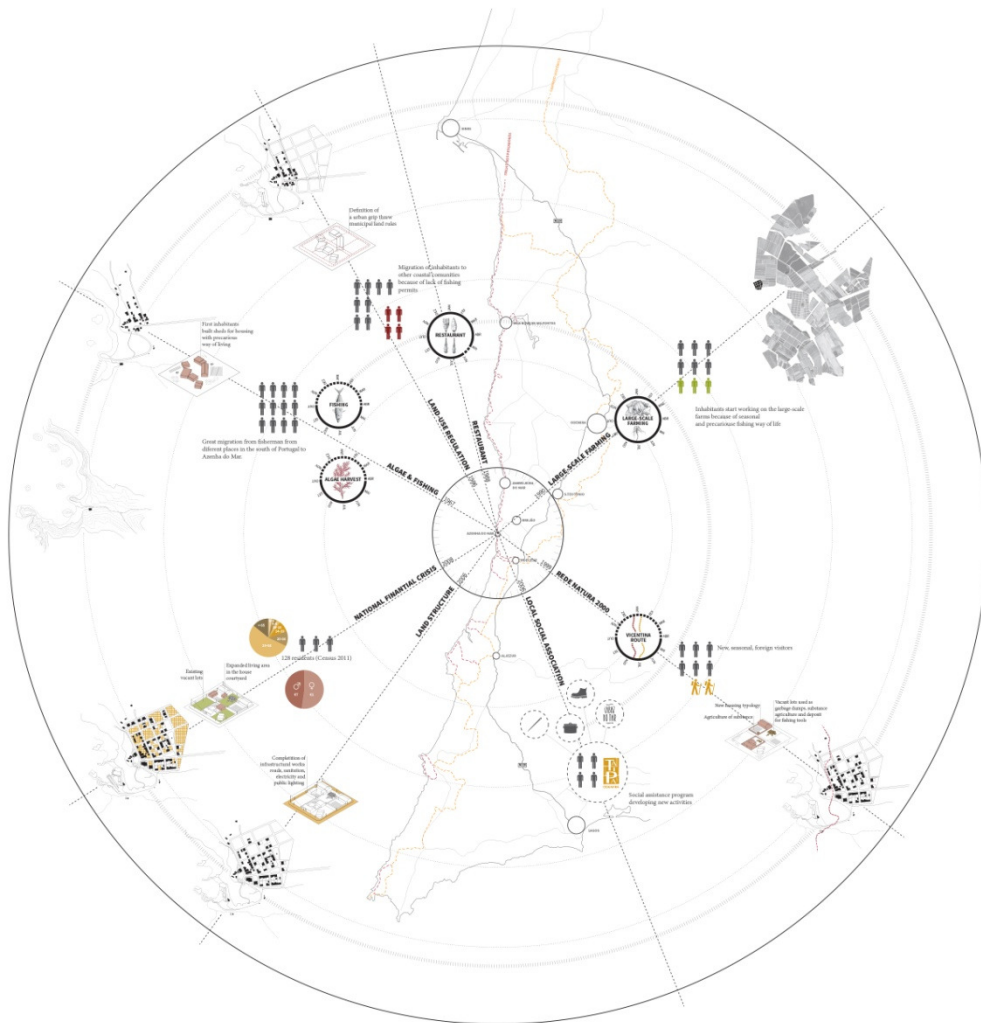


Figure 2. The *cracking process-time resonance* (cause-effect) structure present in the Azenha do Mar's systems

(morphology, land use, population, and activities).

To summarize, the *Time Resonances* found in Azenha do Mar are: the loss of inhabitants, the precarious sea port, the vacant lots, the *Vicentina Route*, the Azenha do Mar restaurant, the fragile public space, the local social associations, and the dependence on the neighbor villages' resources. Here, the *time resonances* concept is understood as a metaphor that simultaneously *cites* the specificities of Azenha do Mar and enhances the capacity of the resonances to catalyse better changes for its future. As Hertzberger contends, "Architecture in its relevance-to-people can only deal with the things that matter to ordinary day-to-day living, in particular the exaggeratedly small things; things which at first sight are far too unimportant to have any earth-shaking effect, but at any rate are practicable and — what matters most — assimilable by the people they are intended for." [13]



Figure 3. Cite_Diagrams of the Found *Time Resonances*.

3.2. Recite: Structure of Resonances

The *citation* of specific *time resonances* found in Azenha do Mar trigger the act of *reciting* a *Structure of Resonances* for this fishing village. In creating this base structure, our aim is not to impose a deterministic program, disconnected from the real issues of Azenha do Mar. Instead, we seek to construct a base structure that not only *recites* what-is-already-there (*time resonances*), but also a base for *reciting* social engagement processes that will eventually catalyse new dynamics and activities for the unpredictable future. However, to achieve this, it was defined a four-step process to prepare the construction of the base structure: step 1 - cleaning the garbage and organizing the existing deposits of the place (this could happen through a simple action of awareness/engagement within the inhabitants); step 2 – demolition of the existing precarious and illegal structures; step 3 – regulation of Azenha do Mar's land in concordance with Odemira Municipality's planning, applying the definition of private/public land, permeable/non-permeable soil, and land uses (for the vacant lots); step 4 – reconstruction/relocation of the precarious structures that were demolished and creation of a new housing typology with a more suitable approach.

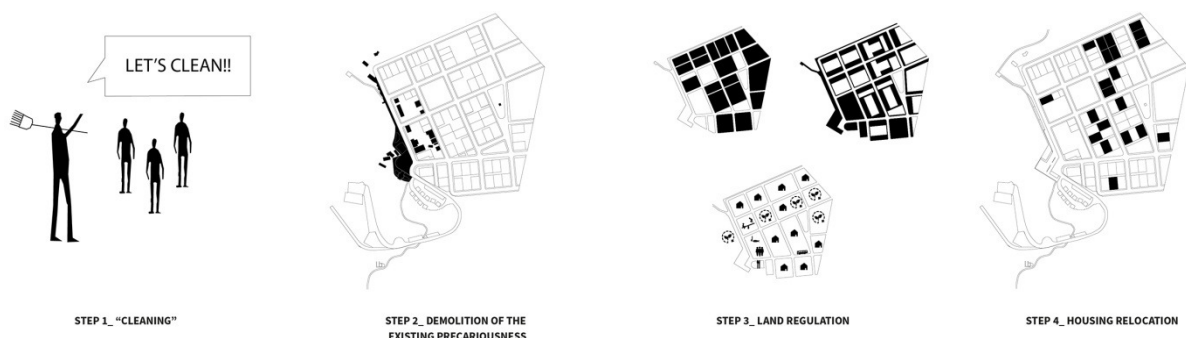


Figure 4. Recite_Diagrams: Several steps to create a *Structure of Resonances*.

After the implementation of these four steps, the *Structure of Resonances* is created according to proposal's two levels: one that is more permanent and applied to situations we define as the most urgent to be addressed such as the refurbishment of the seafront public space and the old sea port, the incorporation of a new bus stop/route, the integration of recycle bins/gas station in the village, the insertion of a social structure, a Fishermen's House and Housing Typologies (although flexibility in its design and uses was always considered). And a second one where we just *recite* the soil's permeability towards its regulation/organization and maintenance structures for each vacant lot, such as parking, water deposits, and warehouses in order to generate activities in those fields.

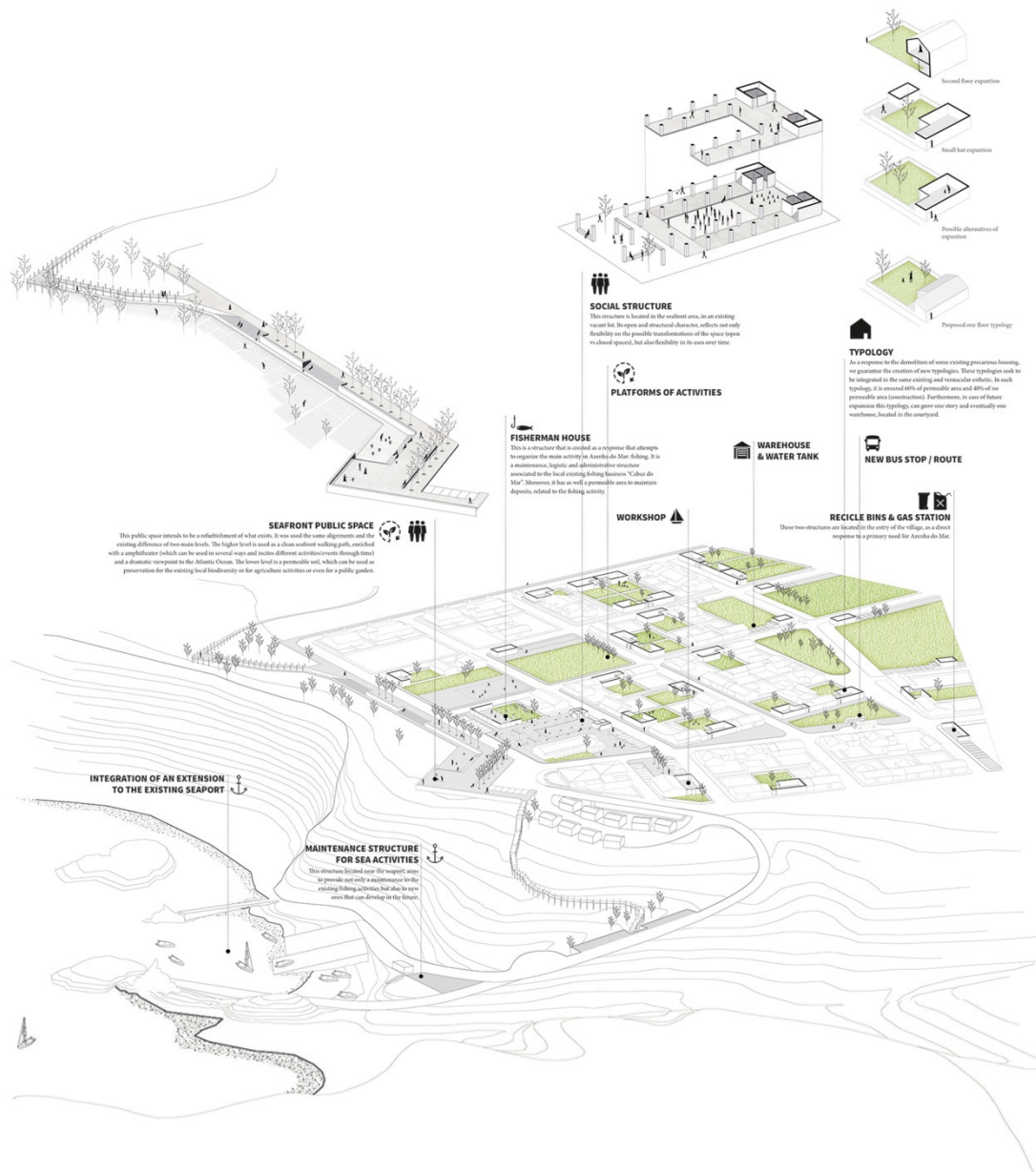


Figure 5. *Recite*_General View of the *Structure of Resonances* for Azenha do Mar.

3.3. Incite: 'What if' scenarios

The creation of a *Structure of Resonances* for Azenha do Mar is just a device, a catalyst of a complex process that not only engages architects but also other interdisciplinary and important agents/actors such as the existing inhabitants, potential investors, the Odemira Municipality, the local social

associations, the surrounding villages, etc. Following this way of thinking, we present three possible future scenarios for Azenha do Mar that integrate two different types of actions for changing the structure of resonances: (1) a *Social Engagement action* (made by discussion/workshops/social happenings between Azenha do Mar inhabitants and local agents) and (2) an *Investment action* (made by public or private investors).

3.3.1. What if... Existing Activities boost and new ones are created?

This first scenario proposes the creation of a participatory project, which would raise the following question: *How can we catalyse sustainable activities over the vacant lots in the structure of resonances?* By this question, the village's population and local agents would conclude that it is sustainable to use these vacant lots for agriculture production, resulting in the creation of a local association that would support this idea. The first phase requires small investment by local public investors. However, if this activity is a success, in the second phase, this project could apply for national and European funds in order to construct a solid and profitable agriculture project for the entire Azenha do Mar community.

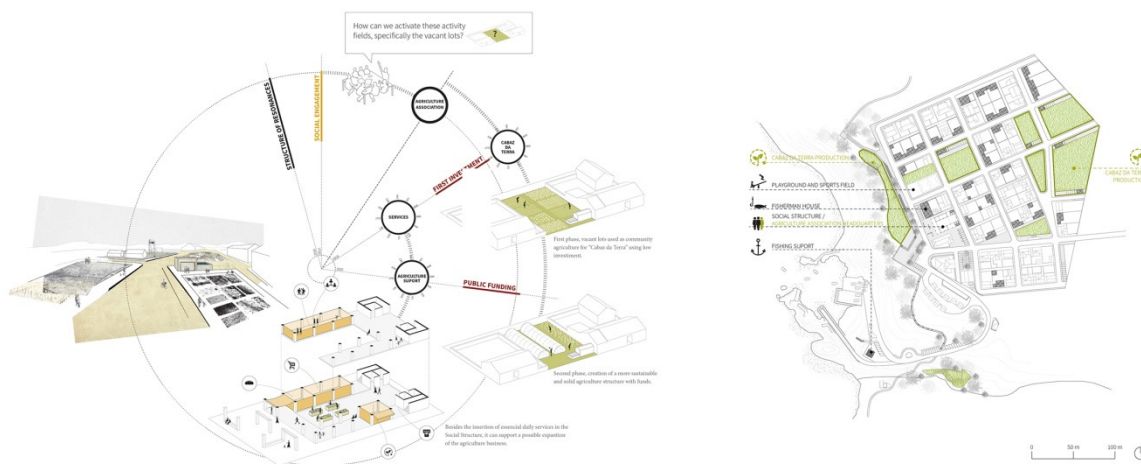


Figure 6. *Incite_ What if... Existing Activities boost and new ones are created?*

3.3.2. What if... Tourism becomes the main activity?

In the second scenario, the creation of a participatory project is proposed, raising the following question: *How can we enhance Azenha do Mar through existing structures and resources such as its landscape or its biodiversity?* By this question, inhabitants and local agents would conclude that generating tourism as a primary activity could bring new profits through the use of local accommodations such as seasonal rentals. In the first phase, Azenha do Mar's inhabitants interested in renting rooms in their homes could make a small investment to upgrade a room in order to receive tourists (i. e., an *airbnb*). Then, if this business is a success, in the second phase people could construct an addition to their homes to accommodate even more tourists. Through the creation of these two actions, it would be possible to use the created *Social Structure* as a space for creative hubs and stores related to touristic activities (walks, diving, sea sports). Moreover, in the long term, if tourism becomes Azenha do Mar's main activity, it could possible to create a health care centre in order to attract tourists and to create profits throughout the year.

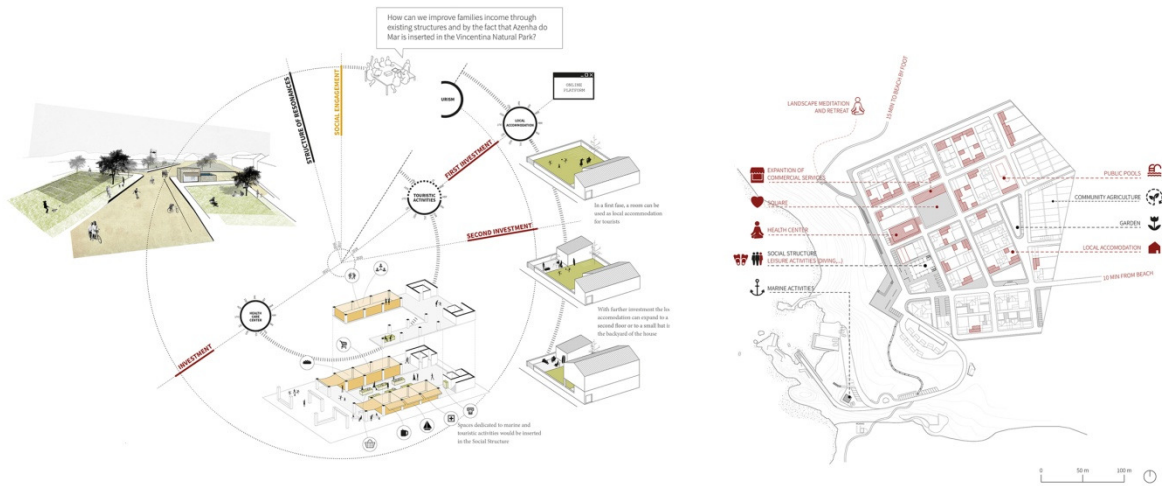


Figure 7. *Incite_ What if... Tourism becomes the main activity?*

3.3.3. What if... There is no action over the structure of resonances and nothing changes?

This is a scenario that explores the possible consequences if there is no development in terms of social engagement and investment in the structure of resonances. In this scenario, the structure will certainly change/improve smaller problems but it won't change/improve the bigger problematic in Azenha do Mar. Addressing this, *what could possibly happen to this place?* Perhaps in the long term, this community's population would continue to decrease because profitable activities or even attractive opportunities wouldn't exist primarily, because the economy of the village is currently dependent on the fragile fishing activity and a local restaurant.

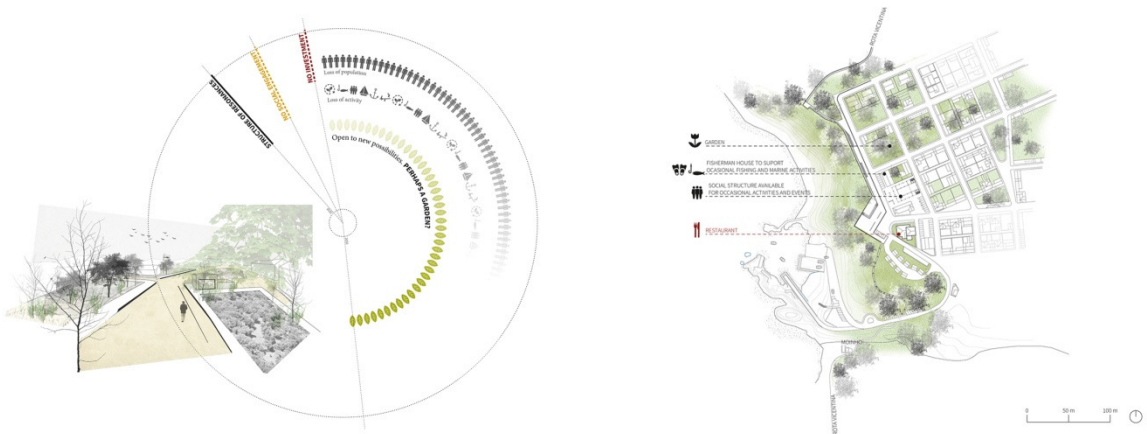


Figure 8. *Incite_ What if... There is no action over the structure of resonances and nothing happens?*

4 CONCLUSIONS

We can now move forward to emphasize that the structure of the *in-Between Project* – *cite*, *recite* and *incite* – embraces a time paradox: they are at the same time conjointly successive and coexistent [14]. On one hand, they are successive because they sum up the design actions where *recite* follows *cite* and is followed by *incite*. On the other hand, they are coexistent in time; we cannot know where one stops and the other starts. For instance, we *recite* throughout all the duration of the design process. As stated, we repeatedly go back to the “real” place to find new tools to inform the

“designed” place. Therefore, there is a seesaw motion across the three. Throughout this experience we have learned seven aspects about the *in-Between Project*:

- 1) It is a simple practice of *in(c)(v)itation* [15]: one that *incites* the hidden potentials of cracked places and *invites* human beings to appropriate them in an imaginative and unforeseeable way.
- 2) It has the potential for seeding new possibilities for other places that are not only close to our everyday reality, but that are also ordinary situations found in other territories.
- 3) The (re)presentation is the in-Between device, connecting the “real” place with the “designed” place — to “present once more” by seeking a closer language, both written and drawn.
- 4) It is dependent [16] on the specificities of each place. Therefore, *cite*, *recite* and *incite* is not to be understood as a rigid method but rather as a simple basis for following an idiosyncratic path, where the risk factor and the feeling of jumping into the unknown is always a constant sensation; this is an approach that fundamentally acknowledges the changing nature of each place and situation, reclaiming the continuous reinvention of assertive methods to what is there to be found.
- 5) The coexistence of time: the potential for future scenarios is already embedded in the *found* time traces that are *cited*. As Friedrich Kümmel argues, “the future represents the possibility, and the past the basis, of a free life in the present. Both are always found intertwined with the present: in the *open circle* of future and past there exists no possibility which is not made concrete by real conditions, nor any realization which does not bring with it new possibilities.”[17]
- 6) It is an open and flexible mechanism over time regarding the distinct specificities of the places researched. Actually, over the years of this research practice we saw an incremental movement in the exploration of the design as an “open process” and visible in the case study here presented. Not only is the *recite* a succession of steps that prepare the ground for the base structure to become actual, but *incite* also is one of several possible scenarios that are again a set of time actions, which may or not happen and are dependent on the interrelationship among different agents, including foreign investors, inhabitants, and the Odemira Municipality. This takes us to the seventh conclusion.
- 7) The stretching of time throughout the imagining of scenarios, the future is integrated as an extended complexity of possible but unknown imaginary *time stories* that may happen successively, conjointly, separately, or not at all.

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