



sense of place

Words and Pictures Dr Shelley Egoz, Lincoln University

Progress comes at a price in the countryside of Portugal.

⦿ TENSIONS BETWEEN wanting to retain a landscape in order to maintain the richness of a traditional lifestyle, set against pressure for landscape change to sustain economic viability are common in many parts of the world. This example from the Alentejo region of South Eastern Portugal, although more dramatic than the situation most landscape architects would encounter in New Zealand, highlights issues and concerns we share with colleagues overseas.

A striking landscape change underlies a project taken on by Ana Paixao Ferreira, a Portuguese landscape architecture student in the department of planning of the biophysical landscape at the University of Evora.

The Alqueva Reservoir is Europe's biggest artificial lake, 80km long and 152m deep. Its main purpose is to irrigate a historically parched and poverty-stricken region. In 2002 the floodgates of the US\$1.7billion EU

funded Alqueva Dam on the Guadiana River were opened and the water began covering an area of 250km². Under the water lies the village of Aldeia da Luz, (Village of Light), that had to be moved and rebuilt – including the village church and an ancient cemetery – to re-house the residents whose ancestors had occupied the place for generations.

In addition to the impact on people, the dam project attracted a lot of controversy as the water

covers prehistoric rock art and it has significant ecological implications on endemic flora and fauna.

While the original intention of the reservoir is to revolutionise the agricultural potential of parts of Portugal and Spain, the artificial lake holds significant opportunities for water recreation and tourism in the area. Landscape change and future prospects are the topic of Paixao Ferreira's final project.

She interviewed the villagers ☞





of Monsaraz, a now vulnerable community, and presented them with virtual landscape scenarios of possible future landscapes. "The goal of my project was to analyse the relation between the stakeholders and the landscape and its probable evolutions, and from there to contribute to the definition of feasible uses and functions, while assuring the integration of a collective memory in a future management plan. By doing so, I hope to secure the link between humans and the landscape. I found that the method of interviewing the stakeholders in the landscape, combined with presenting a computer simulation of visual scenarios, triggers the viewer's imagination and assists people to respond to landscape change in an unmediated way.

"The lake to most people is seen as the opportunity for the development of the Alentejo and for the safeguarding of its population. Public discussions regarding The Alqueva Landscape Plan did take place; however the participants were not the general public but rather politicians and professionals involved with the plan.

"For the aging population of these villages such public exposure feels intimidating. Nevertheless, in my inquiry I found out that most stakeholders are in favour of the new undertaking because, for them, it represents progress and recognition. They believed the lake will attract tourists and investment thus driving economic development."

Monsaraz has been dying for years. By 1960 the population was 347 and by 2003 there were only 145 with more than half aged over 70 and fewer than 10 children in the whole village. The Alqueva reservoir and dam project flooded the plains and submerged most of the old landscape including the paper mill that had been a major source of employment.

Remaining agricultural opportunities for the people of Monsaraz were submerged underwater. With its proximity to the Spanish border and the largest artificial lake in Europe, Monsaraz became exposed to the pressures of tourism. Today the main source of income for villagers is indeed tourism based, however, the small community with deep ancestral roots

has lost its vibrancy. Daily socialising that revolved around everyday agricultural activities such as harvest, handicrafts and livestock herding ceased to exist.

Paixao Ferreira set up a few research questions to find out whether there is a particular relationship between current Monsaraz inhabitants and the landscape.

- Do people consider maintaining this landscape important?
- What type of landscape do they want?
- How is their identity represented in the landscape?
- Is it possible to maintain the current landscape and benefit from tourism at the same time?
- Should landscape change be driven by tourism vectors?
- Is the economy of Monsaraz sustainable?
- Is Monsaraz able to survive without tourism?

To find out how the inhabitants of Monsaraz connect to their landscape and engage them with future plans, she chose three possible landscape change scenarios: urban expansion,

agricultural production and nature conservation.

Using a digital photo manipulation programme she created images of these scenarios. In March 2003 at a public meeting she presented the images to inhabitants of Monsaraz, tourists, politicians, professionals and new residents. The majority (84 per cent) preferred the nature conservation scenario for the sake of promoting tourism. The belief being that this scenario is most likely to be both ecologically and economically sustainable because it includes the continuation of the traditional agricultural activities such as olive oil and honey production, rug weaving etc.

However, most villagers, mainly the older people, did not attend the public debate so she called on them individually to get their views.

"In the interviews the people expressed a symbolic value of the surrounding landscape: their memories of the past characterised by the Guadiana River and its valley, a symbol of livelihood and during the long decades of dictatorship, the channel



of desired contraband unattainable in Portugal.

"The now immersed paper mill was a symbol of wealth and economic well-being, the shrub areas, the common lands, pasture and olive trees were all places that evoked nostalgia for a past lifestyle."

In contrast to the public discussion, the inhabitants expressed their preference for the urban expansion scenario combined with the nature conservation one. This, she says, reflects the tensions present in the inhabitants' way of life.

"On the one hand they value the isolation, silence and tranquillity which are Monsaraz's trademark, and on the other hand they would like a more dynamic village, more tourism, more economic development. The threat of total decay of the village explains why they wanted more houses without compromising the current character."

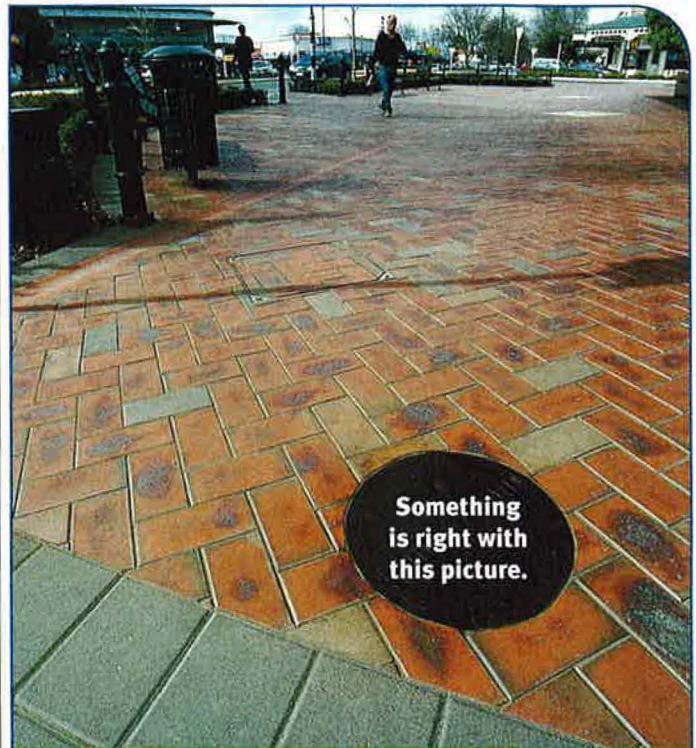
To Paixao Ferreira this demonstrates that while in the past engagement with the land through traditional agriculture activities resulted in a close relationship with the landscape, today people

feel somewhat separated from the landscape.

"This means that the landscape of Monsaraz keeps changing, without strategies and priorities being defined, without crossing its memory with its changing, without anybody knowing who's going to relate with the landscape and how."

New Zealand, unlike Portugal, hasn't been settled for thousands of years. Yet, traditional lifestyles and landscapes which hold collective memories and are just as meaningful to communities, are often susceptible to economic pressure.

Similar to the Portuguese case, significant landscape changes may occur under our effect-based RMA policy "without strategies and priorities being defined." ❧



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