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# Rethinking Alcântara and the Tagus River from a Time-Based Perspective

It is in the area of Alcântara that we can find an excellent sample of all the different ways in which Lisbon has related to its territory for the past 150 years; we can easily identify some of the most significant approaches that have been taken throughout this period:

- The idea of overcoming nature, combined with the positive paradigm of urban against rural, the channels built into Ribeira de Alcântara, making it a work of engineering of some significance. However, this situation is no longer discussed and nowadays this issue is closed. For the City Hall, commissions, ministries, etc. the Ribeira is very well piped, and will be so for the rest of its life;

- Once the Ribeira was piped, the industries and the warehouses arrived at the beginning of the 20th century to cover up the old riverbed, so close to the Tagus River that the port industries started to take shape;

- However, at the beginning of the 20th century, tourism was taking its first steps thanks to cocoa, from the African colony

of São Tomé and Príncipe. Railways started to be built from the town centre to the waterfront, first to the riverside, then spreading to the sea front of the Atlantic Ocean;

- Later on, with the expansion of road transportation, this train line was duplicated by a road, known as "Marginal";

- in the early 20th century, in the 1930s, at the northern boundary of Alcântara, Duarte Pacheco (who was Minister of Public Works in 1932 and became Mayor of Lisbon in 1938) created the Monsanto Forest, almost as large as the city of Lisbon at that time. Destined to be a green reserve at the beginning of the 1970s, it would be saved by Gonçalo Ribeiro Teles in the summer of 1974. This is a vision of the future which in the following years and until nowadays Lisbon Mayors haven't stopped coveting for various ends and purposes. Yet none of them has added one single inch of green to the Monsanto Forest;

- With so much free space in the riverbed, nothing better than installing the Wastewater Treatment Works (ETAR) there at

the present time (2011), to be resized to serve 800,000 inhabitants;

- In the past 30 years the spaces occupied with decadent industries, the future wastelands, are open to real estate speculation, to be followed by architectural projects with towers and without towers occupying those spaces, turning old houses into new ones. On one side there is Jean Nouvel, and on the other, Sua Key. Every day the riverbed (fortunately the Ribeira is still channelled) is taken up with more construction, including a sewer treatment works, office buildings, luxury residential development or even the relocation of Casal Ventoso. Even when basements and streets are flooded, the only thing people can do is say: "The good Lord has ordered pouring rain... but indeed the firefighters came quickly!";

- At the beginning of the century, at the waterfront there was the unloading of codfish into the refrigerated warehouses, and coals for the power station. But with the Great Colonial War, the passenger port that existed there – from where the

great ships with soldiers departed – and the Maritime Platform of Alcântara were mortgaged in favour of larger port facilities for freight goods. Replacing them, we find containers and their actual extension, which are involved in a suspicious legal suit. Regarding the Maritime Platform of Alcântara, it still hasn't had the chance to show its Almada Negreiros tiles;

- Also in front of the river, Alcântara has seen the redevelopment of the old warehouses in exchange for the restaurants and bars of "Docas", a reference of the "best" of Lisbon nights near the river, despite the permanent noise of the train and cars from the bridge, which rali over that place, and the really foul smeli, garbage and mice in the recreational dock.

The final analysis of the ways in which Lisbon has been connected to Alcântara, and the latter to its own territory, is a true lesson which explains what has been done, when it is done without a long term vision, where we can see the consequences of replacing urban planning concerns for immediate architectural decisions.

In Alcântara the time dimension has never been present in the mind of those who have taken the decisions, the ones who simply have overlooked issues, in the past as well as in the present, considering the immediate situation without any concern for urban issues. Had the Marquis of Pombal depended on Lisbon's Mayors, City Councilmen and others (those who make regulations for a 10-year time span and for an imaginary population of 35 million), his task would indeed have been daunting.

In this context we've put forward as challenges the following considerations:

- Every Territory has North, South, East and West;
- Since at present the Ribeira de Alcântara is piped, it is necessary to undo the channels;

- If the railways are a barrier that prevents access to the Tagus River from the Lisbon centre, then it's necessary to provide a link to the west using the underground system, starting in Pedrouços;

- If "Marginal" is also a barrier, due to the characteristics of this road, then it's necessary to give it the characteristics of an urban avenue, linking it with the tram system, taking it back to the northern boundary of that area, which is nowadays a wasteland of old industrial facilities;

- If it is already a nightmare to keep the container port as well as its road and rail accessibility, then the only solution is to remove all this to some other place, where they should always have been located, preventing its expansion and redeveloping that area;

"In on urban plan for  
o 100-years span, L..J  
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be better off, os o result  
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relationship between  
nature and the city."

- Monsanto being an essential district for the city of Lisbon, it is necessary to link it to the Tagus River waterfront and redevelop the entire area, from the new urban avenue to the north, and from the Cordoaria building to the western area of the container port.

Thus, the once again flooded riverbed will flow into the Ribeira de Alcântara, linking the eastern part of Lisbon to the Monsanto Forest in the west, and the city to the north with the Tagus River waterfront. This will unquestionably be done sooner or later. In an urban plan for a 100-year span, not an architectural project looking just at the immediate situation, the spaces occupied with construction will come to the end of their life cycle and surely Lisbon, Alcântara and the Tagus River will be better off, as a result contributing to a better relationship between nature and the city. And let us not forget that on the other side of the river there is also the other bank. •



f. Diagram of the Ribeira de Alcântara



EWWUD  
European Workshop Waterfront Urban Design  
**LISBOA**  
14 \_ 28 march 2010

# Alcântara – Lisboa – Tejo

Mário Moutinho



[www.urbanismo-portugal.net](http://www.urbanismo-portugal.net)





urban layers  
old industry  
historical buildings  
recent projects  
canalized river *Alcantara*  
containers  
*Cascais* railway  
*Marginal* road





# Alcântara XXI !!!

**New towers**  
**More containers**  
**Historical buildings**  
**Jean Nouvel/ Sua Key**  
**canalized river *Alcantara***  
***Cascais* railway**  
***Monsanto*- waterfront**  
**separation**  
***Marginal* road**



Plano urbanístico para Alcântara, dos arquitectos: **Aires mateus e associados** e **Frederico Valsassina**. As 3 torres na maquete, da autoria de **Siza Vieira** foram canceladas, substituidas por um projecto de **Mário Sua Kay**

Projecto (EPUL) de habitação e comércio do arquitecto francês **Jean Nouvel**, incluído no projecto Alcântara XXI que pretende regenerar toda a zona.





Proposta do arqtº Mário Souto Kay, 8 pisos ~25m  
- habitação e escritórios

Proposta do arquitecto Siza ( 3 torres de 35  
pisos, 105m) habitação e escritórios

<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=161740>



Zona de acostagem e operação de barcas

Ligação ferroviária desnivelada ao terminal e feixe de mercadorias

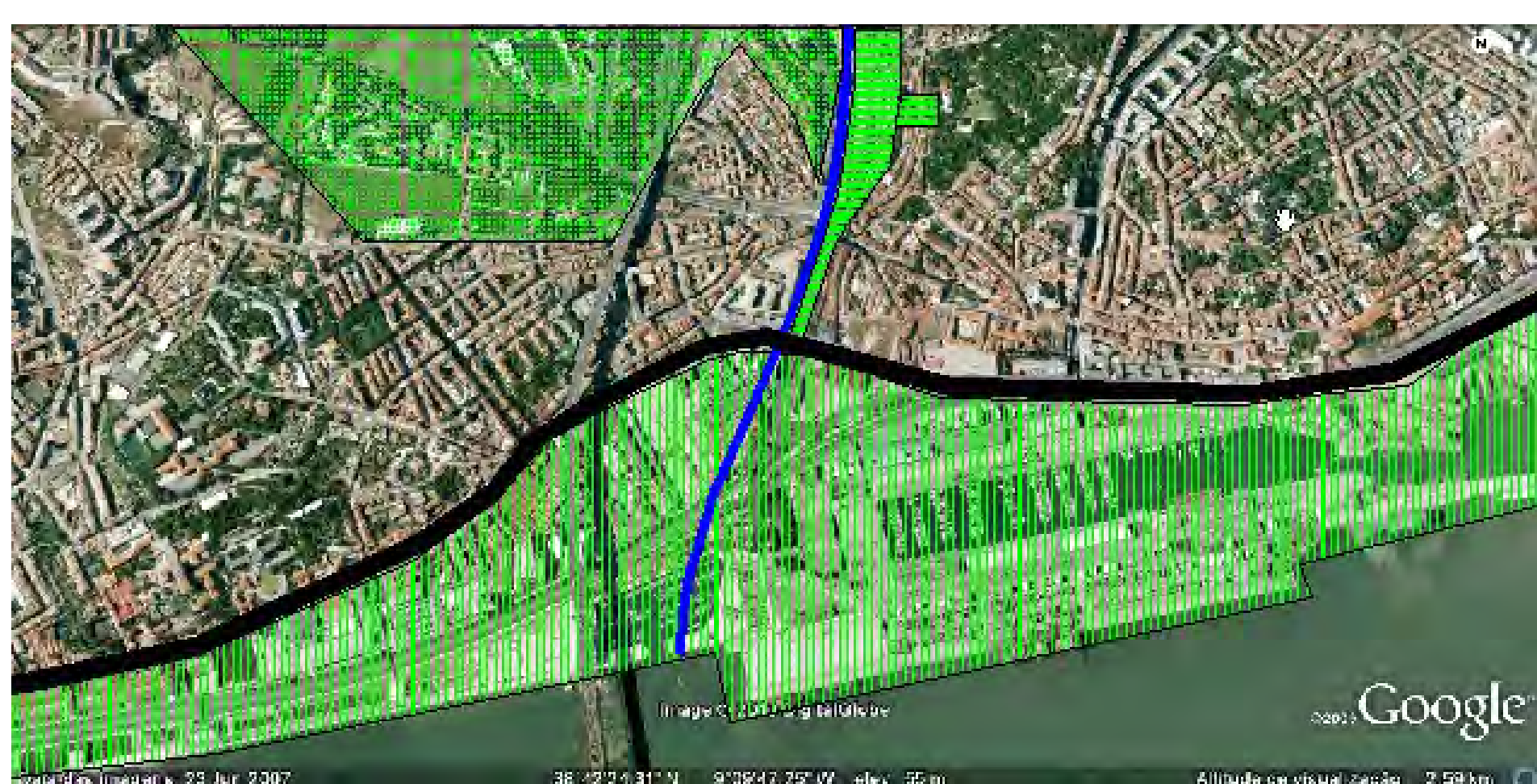
Ampliação, reorganização e reapetrechamento do terminal

Melhoramento das acessibilidades marítimas

Total inv. = 348,4 M€







## Resources

*Monsanto*

Historical buildings  
waterfront

open air river *Alcantara*

Urban avenue

*Monsanto/* waterfront