

Residential Neighbourhood or Event Venue?

Conflicting use of public space in Parque das Nações, Lisbon

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Lisbon hosted the World's Fair in 1998. Nowadays called Parque das Nações (PN), the selected site was a former industrial quarter and, while its regeneration was not explicitly programmed in any spatial development strategy, the event triggered a massive requalification of 330 hectares and 5 kilometres of riverfront. Moreover, its legacy eventually made up for the country's lack of a quality venue for large events. Since then, the area has increasingly been recognised as a versatile event site of reference in Europe, hosting major events like the Web Summit or the Eurovision, as well as world class sports competitions and several other smaller festivals. As a multipurpose land use area, PN also established itself as the new economic centre of Lisbon, where many multinational companies and national institutions and services are based. Furthermore, it has become a residential area for medium/upper class, with some of the highest property market values in Lisbon, also providing for other commercial, touristic and leisure activities. Thus, the self-sustainability of PN was never dependent of event hosting. In fact, during the early years after EXPO'98, the site struggled with problems of maintenance but quite well withstood market shocks and economic downturns thanks to the existence of resident, work and visiting populations. But as its somewhat unexpected success in regularly attracting events has grown, every time an event takes over the place the right of these populations to use their public space is severely limited. Paradoxically, while the site's transformation into a vibrant neighbourhood has been steadily achieved, regularity of events presents the biggest challenge to the neighbourhood's normal operation. Resorting to online news, opinions on social networks and my own in-site experience in tourism entrepreneurship, this work debates the practical conflicts between land uses in PN and draws an agenda for future research to improve its urban space management and sharing.