

Cultivating the Commons

an Action Plan for the Colonia Casa de Campo

The Plan “Regenera Madrid” aims to regenerate pre-1985 neighborhoods of Madrid, which have aged housing stock and undefined, fragmented open spaces of poor quality. But what does regeneration mean? How do we regenerate? And what planning instruments do we need?

With our proposal for EUROPAN 18 in Madrid, we propose an Action Plan (AP) as an impulse for commoning - to reclaim the undefined interblock as spatial commons of the city and its inhabitants. Integrated into a co-governance structure the fragmented open space is transformed into a nuanced network of accessible, green and integrated spaces of different uses. The AP is developed as a strategic plan for the Colonia Casa de Campo. As a vision for an integrated approach including planning and financialization tools it is developed with replicability in mind.

Taking action by Cultivating the Commons shows that urban regeneration must be thought of as an integrated approach of top-down and bottom-up processes, taking into account the built environment but also the social, ecological, economical and cultural dimensions of a neighborhood.

Principles of Cultivating the Commons

Cultivating Co-Governance

For the AP the entirety of the open spaces of the UB is analysed and divided according to the proposed co-governance system:

- Public Infrastructure in the responsibility of the City Hall: Roads, pedestrian networks, and placitas (neighbourhood squares)
- Spatial Commons managed collectively by residents : Corrala courtyards and other interblock spaces

The base unit of the spatial commons are the ‘corrala units’. They are clearly bound commons managed by the surrounding residents. They collaborate with the City Hall through the Neighbourhood Regeneration Office (ORB). The ORB assists the establishment of commoning struc-

tures, by facilitating the self-organization of the corrala assembly and assisting in the implementation of the corralas by being the local communication link to the city hall. This is done by technical support as well as legal advice and support in the application for subsidies, e.g. for accessibility, energetization or naturalization.

Cultivating Public Infrastructure

This clear system of responsibilities linked with spatial qualities, reshapes the open space as a clear network ‘public roads - neighbourly squares - domestic corralas’ and provides a circulatory network functioning for everyone - by foot, bike, wheelchair or car - as the base of any regeneration. Central part of the AP is thus the circulation plan which defines transformations in the road network and adds further pedestrian connections to the network of public infrastructures. At suitable locations where paths and roads meet, the placitas are placed.

The municipality creates this network either by voluntary easement agreements (*servidumbre voluntario*) with the owners, or can forcibly acquire management rights and rights of passage by defining the corridors as *Espacio Libre de Uso General* (ELUG cf. Rodríguez Suave 2023).

Cultivating the Ground Floor

Each corrala unit encompasses an interblock space. It is bound by the surrounding buildings and a transition zone around to strengthen the domestic character of the corrala courtyard. Through this transition, basement and ground floor apartments are provided with better living conditions, as a zone 1m wide all around the buildings can be appropriated with open built structures, such as pergolas, terraces or stairs. In consequence licensing the lowering of the windowsills to create doors from windows is eased. Further out lays a secondary zone where planting provides certain distance and privacy. Here, either spontaneous vegetation can flourish as species-rich third landscape, or the residents tend their own plantings. A pathway separates this part from the corrala core, a central area of usage decided of and planned collectively by the corrala inhabitants.

Cultivating the Soil and its non-human Inhabitants

For climate adaptation the open spaces are developed into blue-green infrastructures. Desealing where possible and permanent ground cover vegetation retain rainwater and let it seep into the ground water, while also cooling the open spaces through shading and transpiration. At the same time a permanent vegetative ground cover helps the soil regenerate and prevents erosion of topsoil. Green spaces should thus be inhabited by native, xerophile species, requiring no, to very little irrigation and less maintenance. This can range from more permanent shrub plantings to meadows of annual flowers and herbs.

While the municipality can easily implement this in the public spaces, further incentives to naturalize the corralas, like subsidies or plants from the municipal nurseries which are distributed amongst the inhabitants free of charge, have to be developed in parallel. In this way the ecological character and value of the Casa de Campo can eventually be extended into the UB and costs of maintenance can be reduced.

How to Cultivate the Commons: Digging - Sowing, Growing, Harvesting

Being based both on top-down and bottom-up actions, the AP drafts a solid structure that allows for incremental development with different paces according to different preconditions in different spaces. As a matter of course the development of the public infrastructure needs to be implemented in spatial subprojects.

Digging:

The first step is digging deeper to understand the needs and potentials of the neighbourhood, as well as preparing the ground for the following steps:

- identification of subunits of the open space as potential corrala units
- establishment of a Neighbourhood Regeneration Office (Oficina de Regeneración Barrial - ORB) providing information and guidelines for corrala transformation, technical support, legal facilitation and in community-self-organization, monitoring and adaptation of the AP
- mapping of movement patterns through fieldwork and consultation of the corrala communities
- analysis of the needs of motorized traffic like external-

and internal traffic as well as parking

- identify ecological risks such as slopes, dips etc. that can provoke erosion or flooding
- analyse utilisation of commercial spaces

Sowing:

The co-drafting of a circulation plan lays the structure for the further diversified transformation of the corrala units as new spatial commons.

- Development of a cohesive network of pedestrian paths by dividing proper paths from parking surfaces, formalizing desire paths, and creating new footpaths. Creating placitas as transition zone between the roads and the corrala courtyards. Various uses co-decided with the residents are placed in the middle of the newly created corrala courtyard
- Transforming the road network prioritising pedestrian safety and accessibility
- Development of green connections along the pedestrian network and - if possible - roads

Growing:

- establishment of the corrala zoning:
- establishing of the ~1m buildable zone -
- clearing of the ~2m buffer zone -
- construction of the circulation pathways
- construction of the corrala courtyard usages

Harvesting:

- corralas as commons have increased residents' living conditions
- multimodal connected mobility within the UB and to the surrounding is improved
- further commons like resource sharing hubs or energy communities have been developed from the organisation of residents

Cultivating the Colonia Campo de Casa (CCdC)

These principles of the proposed action plan method were devised from an in depth analysis of the neighbourhood unit Colonia Casa de Campo. Following, its implementation in the concrete neighbourhood is explained.

Diagnosis

Connectivity Paradox:

CCdC presents a striking connectivity paradox. At the metropolitan scale, it enjoys excellent access through the multimodal Colonia Jardín station, connecting efficiently to downtown Madrid and suburban destinations like Somosaguas campus and Ciudad de la Imagen. However, at the local scale, the neighborhood is completely isolated from surrounding areas by large highways, with only scattered pedestrian crossings to Casa de Campo park and minimal connections to adjacent neighborhoods of Aluche (metro Campamento) and the actual Campamento district.

Regulatory Legacy:

The consequences of the planning instrument of “alineación oficial en volumetría específica” are evident throughout the neighbourhood. This regulatory approach created buildings aligned to property boundaries rather than creating coherent public spaces, resulting in fragmented interblock areas with unclear access patterns. Many building entrances are located within the interblock accessible only through poorly lit paths or informal desire lines carved by residents.

Circulation Challenges:

Pedestrian movement within the neighborhood and to the surrounding relies on narrow sidewalks or fragmented pathways. Passages through buildings are often not linked by good walkable paths but just open dirt spaces. Residents have thus created an informal network of desire paths connecting buildings to services and transit, indicating clear circulation needs unmet by formal infrastructure. Paradoxically, while many residents don't own cars, the neighborhood serves as an informal Park & Ride area for commuters, creating parking pressure that fragments the already limited open spaces.

Commercial Geography:

The neighborhood was planned with distributed commercial spaces throughout, creating an oversupply that has

resulted in widespread vacancy. However, C. Fuentesauco from the metro station to the central portion of C. de Galicia have emerged as the central commercial area.

Open Space Fragmentation:

Interblock spaces vary dramatically due to different ownership and management patterns. Some areas feature formal irrigated gardens with low ecological value, others have park-like arrangements, while some have reverted to wild meadows receiving only annual mowing. Most lack basic amenities like seating or water access, functioning primarily as visual buffers rather than ecological or social spaces.

Topographical Challenges:

Some interblock spaces in sloped conditions, particularly in blocks north of C. Fuentesauco, show evidence of soil erosion due to human disturbance and precipitation runoff.

Meaningless green spaces

Many of the interblock green spaces lie idle. Others are covered by an more or less intensive garden usage. Those gardens are arranged in very formal designs and lack possibilities for usage or appropriation by the inhabitants. The formal gardens require irrigation and frequent maintenance. We argue that is a reason for some of the spaces' bad shape although they are maintained professionally. The inhabitants can't use them, therefore don't care about them and don't take care of them. This way the means for maintenance don't have a real effect.

Urbanisation

Applying the aforementioned principles to the Colonia Casa de Campo and mentioned diagnosis the most important aspects should be highlighted here:

Cultivating Co-Governance

Besides two central blocks with no interblock, corralas and superblocks are imaginable in all zones of the neighbourhood. While the north-western area already has a very clear already coralla-like structure, the north-eastern part owned by the municipality will benefit the most from the spatial restructuring by separating domestic corrala units from public pedestrian networks.

As the former market hall is vacant, it could be activated as a circular construction hub as well as, providing generous meeting and workshop spaces for the neighbourhood.

Cultivating Public Infrastructure

Putting an emphasis on pedestrian circulation, the street system is adjusted to prevent through traffic by one-way trajectories. Where necessary driving lanes are made smaller in order for the footpaths to be widened to at least two meters for each side of the road. Road intersections are generally carried out as elevated shared spaces. This way overspeeding of cars is prevented and pedestrians as well as cyclists and persons with impaired mobility or pushchairs profit from stepfree passage even diagonally and always prioritized. On C. Galicia and C. Villaviciosa as the main crossroads, reducing car space gained even enough space for bike lanes in both directions, bridging gaps between the Anillo Verde Ciclista and Aluche and Campamento.

Pedestrian connections are formalized and added, resulting in a homogenous scale of connections. To this aim central sections of C. Fuentesauco and C. Galicia are pedestrianised to create the Colonia Casa de Campo Boulevard. Connecting to shared spaces they create a safe walkable connection from the metro Colonia Jardín, nearly up to the station Campamento, strengthening local businesses through increased pedestrian traffic and more quality of stay.

Pedestrian connectivity to Aluche is generally expected to improve with the tunneling of the A5 - especially if executed until Av. de los Poblados.

Cultivating the Ground Floor

Nearly all ground floor housing units benefit from the introduction of the transition zone, especially in the buildings west of Plaza Juan Carlos Argüello “MUELLE”.

Cultivating the Soil and its non-human Inhabitants

Being located right south of the Casa de Campo creating blue-green infrastructures is especially beneficial, essentially creating ecological connections to the Bosque Metropolitano. The establishment of native plant species as part of the green interblock spaces benefit from the spreading of seeds from Casa de Campo accustomed to the super-local climatic conditions.

In the corralas between C. Fuentesauco, C. de Ayllón, Cta. de Boadilla del Monte and C. Galicia the slope is transformed into terraces, retaining water and preventing erosion. It gains a huge potential to be transformed by the residents into rain gardens.

Cultivating a Replicable Urban Regeneration Model

The proposal for Cultivating the Commons in the Colonia Casa de Campo shows how the AP can be understood as a replicable method for urban regeneration in Madrid. It defines clear guidelines of analysis and implementation by basing it both on the municipal and citizens' agency. It integrates spatial restructuring, ecological design, and co-governance into a coherent action plan and reframes urban regeneration as an inclusive, layered, and adaptable process. Through a nested governance model, clear zoning of interblock spaces, and phased implementation steps (Digging, Sowing, Growing, Harvesting), the plan aligns local realities with metropolitan objectives.

Crucially, the methodology offers a scalable framework: from the unit of the corrala to the superblock and beyond, it can be applied across other vulnerable neighborhoods targeted by Regenera Madrid. It does so by transforming fragmented open spaces into shared, ecological, and infrastructural commons—anchoring regeneration in lived practices and long-term stewardship.

Cultivating the Commons thus bridges regulatory reform and civic engagement, environmental restoration and everyday accessibility. It demonstrates that sustainable regeneration in Madrid must be rooted not just in new materials, but in renewed relationships—between people, their environments, and the city they co-create.