

WHOSE HERITAGE? CHALLENGES COMING FROM TURNING CITIES AS TOURIST PLACES.

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Abstract: The tertiarisation of society along the second half of the 20th century and the correlated growth of culture and leisure industries created an unprecedented pressure for change on historic centres, creating paradoxical relations between tourism, heritage preservation and urban development. This model of development provided a more intense cross-cultural confrontation, with the corresponding differences in recognition of heritage(s) values. This paper intends to discuss the transformation of heritage from 'shared heritage' into 'consumer good' cross-checking its effects on middle-sized cities Portuguese. The desertification, abandonment and degradation of the old areas created the challenge of their repopulation and their reuse. In turn, tourism has provided reuse of buildings and built new social and cultural dynamics, making it necessary to discuss how can one preserve the values and meanings of historic centres, and for whom. Recently, the Portuguese government has created fundamental changes in housing, rental and rehabilitation policies, with specific financial and legal instruments. However, their effects have not prevented the emergence of local challenges in housing law because of tourism, nor have they contributed to the promotion of new social constructions associated with heritage(s) understood as shared heritage(s). That is, public investment has not been able to enhance the heritage of the historic centres as good of public interest. For its part, the 'touristification' shows it has the power to catalyse its rehabilitation but implies changes that we intend to discuss focusing the perspective of who visits and who lives and assessing the losses and the gains for the communities.

Keywords: shared heritage, heritage-led development, urban rehabilitation, tourism

Introduction

The newest international urban planning policies defend a change in development from the urban expansion model to a densification model, evoking the return to the city. (UN, 2016) The purpose is to reduce the urban sprawl and create sustainable, inclusive and resilient cities, which requires a shift of urban policies to reinforce urban cohesion that needs, in its part, an increase urban rehabilitation.

However, the ancient urban districts, especially since the eighties, were abandoned by the urbanisation policies focused on urban expansion and got decayed. This process is unsustainable but also represents a threat for our understanding of ancient cores as centres of identities, since with the loss of their inhabitants, which have switched the traditional areas for the new modern neighbourhoods built on the peripheries, with larger streets and more comfortable houses, we assist to a loss of significance and importance in urban identity.

Besides the new agendas advocating the return to the city and the need to shift urban development to a rehabilitation model, in Portugal, the 2008 economic crisis contributed to foster these desired tendencies. The



media and the governments defunded the idea that the solution to the crisis would be the investments in buildings rehabilitation and tourism. (Diário Imobiliário, 2016). Consequently, a new wave of interventions in the old cores is taking place, mainly the rehabilitation of buildings for housing and hostels. However, they are being made without any integration into strategic planning for the development of cities, as advocated by technicians and researchers. Many of them applied questionable criteria, and despite regenerating some ancient areas, they are also contributing to their desertification by the abandonment of the few inhabitants that still live in these areas. Due to the pressure caused by tourism or by new social classes, mostly foreign investors, inhabitants are leaving and/or protesting. This change of user from inhabitants to tourists creates new challenges regarding the authenticity and integrity of this heritage.

This paper, focusing on the case of Coimbra, a medium size city, whose university was inscribed in the world heritage list, in 2013, discusses the rehabilitation policies being put in place in Portugal in the last years, trying to understand the real impacts of those interventions and the contribution of tourism to the rehabilitation and revitalisation of the old urban districts. Moreover, it claims that local cultural heritage led development may integrate tourism as an added value.

Urban development and decay of the ancient cores

Cities in Portugal, like in the rest of Europe, have suffered an unprecedented expansion in the last five decades. Due to some political weaknesses and wrong options of urban plans, together with the ease of accessing bank credit to build residential neighbourhoods on the outskirts, many cities doubled their perimeter. The new urban areas solved some of the housing shortages and created easily accessible services and equipment, but at the same time contributed to the gradual abandonment of the ancient neighbourhoods.

The simultaneity of the development model of the last five decades focused on growth, the excessive restrictions of building interventions due to heritage policy, and the lack of private investments to improve the living conditions on old urban districts led to the weakening of its physical and socioeconomic framework.

In addition to these factors, the displacement of trade and services to more accessible areas or large shopping centres built on the outskirts has also contributed to the same effect. Progressively, the old districts, centres of identity, were abandoned and occupied only by the elderly and the poor.

Some urban rehabilitation programs were created to control the raising problems of the old districts, including the provision of financial incentives and the financing of the rehabilitation of degraded housing. Alongside the implementation of these programs, most of the municipalities made some improvements to urban infrastructures and public spaces.

However, as shown by the fragile condition of most historical centres, these policies had very few results, except for rare cases of success, such as Guimarães, although using different methodologies. The reasons for this are several, but they are related to an understanding of urban rehabilitation as a policy associated with safeguarding historic nuclei, with a protectionist purpose only. This purpose made sense in response to the urban transformations of the 19th century but at the end of the 20th century and today, the pressures in the city have changed. Today the city and the country population is sharply decreasing, and the most concerning problem of the ancient areas is the abandonment and the desertification.

Moreover, the interventions carried out within these rehabilitation programs were restricted to building rehabilitation and requalification of the public spaces, always limited to the preservation of its image, disregarding the most significant weakness, the lack of people and the need to attract people.

Today the challenge is to attract people and maintain the liveability of the ancient cores; however, this can become even more difficult when we consider the demographic projections for Portugal, marked by a low birth

rate and an ageing population. According to the National Statistical Institute (INE) by 2060, the Portuguese population will have decreased around 40 per cent (INE, 2014). With this framework, the question might be who will use this heritage? Moreover how? How will it be appropriated?

The previous models of urban management policies proved to be ineffective in attracting people and containing desertification, likewise the consequent degradation of the physical and social environment.

Tourism, rehabilitation and urban transformation

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines Tourism as "the activity of persons travelling and staying in places outside their natural environment for [...] no more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes." (WTO, 2005) Although not a new activity, it has developed mostly after the Second World War with the stabilisation of the middle class and in recent years it has grown more sharply, mainly because of the increase of low-cost airlines, which have made air travel accessible to a higher number of people.

As for cultural tourism, ICOMOS defines "all forms of tourism that allows visitors to get an experience of the cultural aspects of the place of destination, their way of life, gastronomy, topography, environment, cities and towns, as well as their sites historical, cultural and artistic performances." (ICOMOS, 1999) In this sense, culture and heritage become a factor of differentiation, attracting people and investments, and through tourism becomes an economic catalyst.

Today cultural tourism has crucial importance for the economic development of some countries, namely Portugal, directly promoting sectors such as hotels, restaurants and handicrafts, but also for the preservation and valorisation of cultural heritage as a distinguishing factor of each city.

In fact, in recent years, in Portugal, tourism has been seen as an opportunity for development and enhanced some changes in urban policies. The first measures were local and municipal initiatives and limited to sectorial actions, improving public space, rehabilitating some monuments and creating a set of cultural events to attract visitors.

At the same time, the government has encouraged private investment in rehabilitation through tax incentives and by a set of political measures, mainly putting into force the New Urban Rehabilitation Legal Regime (2014), which has simplified the rehabilitation process¹, and streamlined the New House Rent Law² and the first Lodging Law³. Also, some other initiatives such as the strategic promotion of tourism with marketing operations stressing the country's excellent conditions, with rich landscapes, good weather, but most importantly the

¹ The first Urban Rehabilitation Law (RJRU) was approved by Decree-Law 307/2009, of October 23, amended by Law 32/2012, of August 14 and by Decree-Law 136/2014, of September 9. Also noteworthy is the publication of Decree-Law 53/2014, of April 8, which creates an exceptional and temporary regime applicable to the rehabilitation of buildings or fractions built for at least 30 years or located in Areas of Urban Rehabilitation.

² The New House Rent Law was approved by Law no. 6/2006, of February 27 and amended by Law no. 31/2012, of August 14, by Law no. 79/2014, of December 19 and Law no. 42/2017 of June 14.

³ The first legal regime governing local lodging was Decree-Law no. 128/2014. This decree was the subject of the first (small) amendment in April 2015, with Decree-Law no. 63/2015.

climate of peace and security, and the affordable costs of living for most European countries. Finally, and the most contested measurement was the encouragement for foreign investment, by tax reduction for those who decided to live and invest in the country⁴. This measure enhanced a wave of building rehabilitation works in the ancient cores. Despite the advantages of the investments, this contributed to the rise of property prices and encouraged the abandonment of the local population that could not afford to live in the ancient areas.

This policy had more significant effects in Lisbon and Porto the most prominent and more accessible Portuguese Cities. In fact, in these cities, most of the rehabilitation interventions were focused on the construction of luxury housing, much of it for foreigners. Between 2010 and 2016, the numbers of foreigner people living in Lisbon increased from 43 142 to 53 470 (INE |SEF/MAI, PORDATA, 2011). Moreover, the prices of housing for rent increased and for acquisition increased up to 25,2% depending on the area of the city (Idealista, 2017). The abandoned of these districts and the gentrification process is becoming a severe social problem in the two major cities, Oporto e Lisbon. Also raises the issue of the authenticity of these heritage areas where the population that forms the basis of its identity and local culture tends to disappear or to be replaced by tourists.

Besides, these interventions are based only on the economic impacts of tourism and made for the tourist to see. Also, the focus is to preserve the exterior image and renewing all the interiors, in some cases even disregarding the urban pattern by connecting several buildings to increase the building area and changing the typology and the structure of the buildings. Although called rehabilitation, these new processes have nothing to do with the urban rehabilitation that experts have come to define and to advocate. However, they are the result of processes of adaptation and urban transformation that need further reflection and problematization, because they are more than design options and demand a new responsible urban policy.

The rise of the housing prices caused social protests, contesting the municipal policies or the lack of them. They required "the urgent adoption of a national and municipal housing policy that favours and stimulates leasing, public and private, with rights and duties, security and stability".

Coimbra. Alta and Sofia World Heritage

Coimbra is an excellent example of the difficulty of maintaining and attracting population to its old nucleus. On the other hand, after the inscription of its University in the World Heritage List in 2013⁵ (UNESCO-WHC, 2013), the city faces an exponential increase in the number of tourists and have begun a new dynamic with the rehabilitation of buildings in the ancient core.

⁴ We highlight some measures to attract foreign investment, such as the very favourable tax regime for Non-Residents (since 2009) and Real Estate Investment Funds, as well as the Golden Visa or Residence Permit for Activity program of Investment. The effects of these measures were most pronounced in Lisbon and Porto.

⁵ On the basic criteria (ii) Exhibit an important exchange of human values over a given period of time, or within a particular cultural area, on the development of architecture, technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design (iv) Offer an outstanding example of a type of construction and of an architectural, technological or landscape ensemble, which illustrates significant periods of human history. (vi) Be directly or tangibly associated to events or living traditions, ideas, beliefs or artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (UNESCO-WHC, 2013)

However, like all other cities, urban sprawl was responsible for the desertification of the ancient areas of Coimbra, in fact between 2001 and 2011, the population decreased around 20,4% in the four ancient parishes (Almedina, Santa Cruz, São Bartolomeu and Sé Nova), decreasing from 17 538 inhabitants to 13971 inhabitants.⁶ The opening of commercial areas in the new peripheral zones fostered this expansion, which resulted in the closing of the traditional commerce that characterized the Baixa, the old commercial district, situated by the river. Also, the construction of two university campus in the peripheral zone of the city fostered the displacement of students from the Alta area, that is, foundation hill where Coimbra's University is seated.

The desertification and the degradation of the ancient areas fostered some municipal interventions mainly in public spaces, improving the pavements and creating stairs or by technical and financial support to the owner who intended to rehabilitate their houses, framing these interventions in national support programmes. However, these incentives have not been able to reverse the depopulation trend.

In addition to these interventions, the municipality began to envisage a plan that would safeguard the ancient core and promote urban rehabilitation. In 2003 while the city staged the Portuguese Cultural Capital event, the municipality requested the University a detailed study of the physical and social characteristic of Baixa, to drawn up a plan. However, and despite this survey, the plan was never drawn up.

After years of abandoned and without policies, in 2012 was finally approved a strategic plan for urban rehabilitation of this, and another two areas, one for the riverside and another for Alta, including the University hill and the surrounding buildings. This strategic plan proposed a set of six objectives and defined a set of 30 structuring projects for urban rehabilitation. Meaningfully, two of the six objectives referred to the promotion of cultural heritage and tourism. The objective number five proposed *valuing the cultural heritage*, planning the rehabilitation of some monuments and particularly the revitalization of Rua da Sofia (a street built in 1537 to set the University) and the development of tourism, proposing an increase in the number of hotels in a specific area and the creation of facilities for tourists. (Parque Expo, 2012)

One year later, in 2013 the University was inscribed in the List of Mundial Heritage, and since then, the city faces a sharp increase in the numbers of tourists. This tourism has allowed the development of a set of private investments. However, at the public level, the approved plan and the structuring projects already built have not been able to encourage change and captivate more residents or even prevent the departure of existing ones.

While private investments are limited to the economic profit and do not question who lives in and who uses the ancient core, creating services for tourists use. Thus, the old residential buildings have given place to new lodging houses, like hotels and hostels. Only in four years, between December 2013 and December 2017 the capacity of lodging increased from 2348 beds to 3873 beds, this increase was sharper in the numbers of local accommodations, from 23 to 197 while the number of hotels increased from 19 to 20 hotels.⁷

⁶ The reduction o the numbers of inhabitants is not exclusively of the ancient parishes, but the decrease is much sharper, in the entire city the population decreased from 148 443 inhabitants to 143396 inhabitants, around 3,4%. (INE, 2011)

⁷ In December 2013 there were registered 23 local accommodations with capacity to accommodate 106 guests, while in December 2017 there were registered 197 local accommodations with the capacity for 1408 guests. Hotels, in 2013 were 19 with the capacity to accommodate 2301 guest and in December 2017 there were 20 hotels with the capacity to 2561 guests. (TURISMO DE PORTUGAL, 2017)

Similarly, the number of souvenir shops is increasing and replacing the local commerce and sell the same products sold in any souvenirs shop of any other Portuguese city, with no relation with the city, its unique values or its traditional products such as porcelain.

At the same time, the municipality has encouraged tourism by replicating attractions and events. Some are promoting the local culture, such as fado's recitals, gastronomy fairs and local folklore performances, others less typical, such as the mediaeval or handicraft fairs that are taking place in other cities.

However, the increase in tourism has led to the rise in the rents price and lead to the detachment of residents of these areas. Even the student rental market, which in the Alta of Coimbra was very important, is today at risk. The buildings occupied by students are giving place to local accommodations for tourists, and students are looking for housing in the periphery, next to the new university campus.

It is time to rethink what is happening and act before it is too late to do something. Tourism can and shall remain a driving force of Coimbra's development. However, local authorities must prevent the loss of the resident population. Otherwise, the old core might become an open-air museum or a large lodging facility.

Some notes and recommendations

Cities are much more than places of living, production, storage and socialising, they are attractive and consumer goods, mainly because of its distinguishing features and its built heritage. Tourism has become an essential activity for many cities. However, once tourism is primarily an economic activity, it should be considered that the city and its heritage by becoming a consumer product, must respond to the expectations and motivations of the market. In this sense, cities tend to become artificialized constructions (Ashworth, G. J. and J. E. Tunbridge 1990), such as thematic parks, replicating actions and models, such as "street markets", "ethnic neighbourhoods", "medieval fair" that we must counteract.

In the current competitiveness between cities, every city must be attractive, especially medium-sized ones (Gomes, 2012), however in a scenario of demographic decrease more than attract tourists; the older urban districts must attract residents. The resident population is the base of the ancient cores' identity and heritage.

The challenge is to establish a global vision for the city future and then define a policy and management framework for the city and its heritage that can articulate the various agents and articulate the development of tourism with housing, the central function of all cities.

Heritage-led development can be a driving force of local pride, enhancing the character of the neighbourhoods and increasing the attractiveness of a place to invest and live (Barrera-Fernandez, 2016). Besides, it is also necessary to reinforce rules for housing and local accommodation, ensuring the dynamics and variety of functions in these areas, thinking mainly in the more permanent residents; in their quality of life, in their needs, in their jobs, in their daily lives. Investing in public transport and urban mobility, in schools, in green spaces, in support for the elderly, in civic centres, in cultural spaces of proximity, create housing incentive programs with credit lines for those who want to live in these areas and develop areas of conditioned leases.

Also, drive policies that include those who inhabit and create this heritage, creating forums meetings, measures to listen to the needs of the residents as the participatory budget, among other initiatives. Moreover, involve the

<https://rnt.turismodeportugal.pt/RNET/Registos.ConsultaRegisto.aspx?Origem=CP&MostraFiltro=True>

communities in the advantages of tourism, for example, by preparing and sensitising the population so that they can be the tourist guide, showing the visitors their neighbourhood.

Moreover, the urban planning and management policies cannot be limited to the old centres but need to recognize the city as a whole, with a holistic understanding. Nonetheless, more than traditional urban preservation policies is required an integrated approach that involves physical, economic, social and environmental initiatives, in particular, consists of the integration of residents into decision-making processes, ensuring consistent governance, shared and inclusive.

Only in this way, it will be possible to respond to the new challenges that desertification and tourism are placing, especially since the nomination of Portugal as the best European destination for the third year (Santos, 2019). This designation promises an increase in tourism which can only be sustainable with local management and policy capable of driving the transformation of the current urban development, and then "people [will] have rediscovered their land after a long time." (Távora, 2003)

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