Contemporary interventions in public spaces and buildings
Patrimonial, social and urban effects

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Extended Abstract
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ABSTRACT

At present, the urban intervention plays a key role in the regeneration of cities, contributing to the balance and cohesion of the urban dynamic in historical city centres. Urban intervention involves the study and analysis of various social, urban and historical realities that coexist and constitute the city centre; seeking to focus on the architectural unity and spatial continuity of urban spaces. Thus, a key factor in urban intervention in the city center and historical heritage are elements of public nature, which are constitute the basic support of the activity and urban life, influencing urban mobility as well as the daily movements of citizens. This paper seeks to contribute to the framework and understanding of the dynamics of urban intervention at the level of public spaces and buildings, urban mobility and rehabilitation of the historical heritage.

The first part addresses the study and theoretical framework of concepts inherent to urban mobility in historical city centres, whilst the second part focuses on the importance and evolution of the concept of public space, establishing itself as a key element in the spatial continuity of the city. Then we proceed to the study of the main doctrines and international conventions that address the importance of intervention in the urban area and architectural revitalisation of the historical heritage. Finally, we intend to understand the influence of contemporary architectural interventions in the public sphere, electing two case studies, namely the conversion of Quarteirão Império and the rehabilitation of the Estação do Rossio and Largo Duque de Cadaval; analysing the main effects of each intervention in terms of social, urban and historical context.

This dissertation revealed the importance of urban intervention in public spaces and buildings for revitalising degraded and disqualified historic city centres, the enhancement of public spaces as vital elements in urban mobility and spatial continuity, as well as the rehabilitation of historical heritage within the social context of the city. The main questions that have arisen from this dissertation relate to consequent effects of an urban renewal and how they integrate and relate themselves with rest of the city, as well as how the sustainability of an social, urban and historical intervention influences the daily lives of people. This work aims to contribute to one of the main challenges posed to urban intervention nowadays: the proper integration, complementarity and compatibility of contemporary architecture within historical city centres.
00 INTRODUCTION

Urban intervention plays a key role in the regeneration of cities, contributing to the balance and cohesion of the urban dynamic in historical city centres. Currently, it has become a practice that interprets the city as a whole, composed by various and diverse parts. Thus, to intervene and revitalize the historical city centre, no longer it is possible to solely address the technical rehabilitation of some elements and specific buildings. Nowadays, it is compulsory to focus on the architectural unity and spatial continuity of the city and to carry out a complex and integrated urban development process. The main objective of this work is to study intervention cases in integrated urban areas within historical city centres, including the functional reversal of the built structure, and to understand the consequent effects of this process on the public sphere of the city; having as case studies the conversion of Quarteirão Império and the rehabilitation of the Estação do Rossio and Largo Duque de Cadaval. To this end, the following objectives are outlined:

1. Contribute to the study and critical analysis of processes of revitalisation within urban public space;
2. Establish a theoretical framework around mobility and the importance of urban space and public buildings to the spatial continuity of the city;
3. Determine the factors (patrimonial, social and urban) that result from intervening in historical urban areas;
4. Understand, based on the case studies analysed how the architectural intervention and rehabilitation are linked to the social and urban dynamics of a historical city centre.

Firstly, this work is based on a literature review of the theoretical framework of concepts inherent to urban mobility, the evolution and notion of public space, as well as the main doctrines and conventions that address the importance of intervention in the urban area and architectural revitalisation of the historical heritage. The practical research starts by analysing the chosen case studies based on the collection of graphic and theoretical information in order to establish a framework and evaluation of how urban rehabilitation has been applied and, consequently, how it has influenced the renewal and revitalisation of public space within the dynamics of the historical city centres.

01 MOBILITY WITHIN HISTORICAL CITY CENTRES

The contemporary city is a city in motion. According to Aldo Rossi (1966), the city is conceived as a spatial system, composed by several and different parts. Nonetheless, this system consist not only of different parts but also of the relationships it establishes. The physical relationship between the various urban elements have a direct influence on the way the city works, mainly affecting urban mobility.

Urban mobility is defined by the condition in which it carries out the movement of people and assets within the urban space, and should be considered as a leading indicator of the evolution of life in the history of cities (Reichen, 2006). Mobility relates to the degree of freedom that we move in space, and reflects the way and the intensity in which we move; establishing itself as an urban, spatial and architectural concept. It focuses on the physical movement and ease of access to different destinations, on the use of different means of transport; however, it also addresses the of prioritisation of people and social interactions.

Consequently, urban mobility is related to pedestrian mobility in cities. In the Middle Age, man as a pedestrian was the primary user of the exterior public space and the cities were formed and defined by its everyday use. However, in late XIX century, with the industrial revolution and a change in mobility patterns, this situation changes and different conflicts begin to emerge in urban areas, creating an imbalance between the pedestrian and motorised vehicles.

Hence, urban mobility is characterised as a diverse, segregated, and heterogeneous reality, generating a need to redefine and enhance the mobility and pedes-
trian accessibility in historical city centres. Accessibility in urban areas should not be an exclusive problem of a social group or a particular mode of transport, with specific technical solutions; but instead, a concept to discuss and address in the early stages of urban planning and design.

Despite the fact that historical cities represent important elements of European history and culture, there is very limited accessibility to its heritage. Accordingly, it is fundamental to create a compromise between historical heritage and urban facilities that allows and fosters the preservation of architectural values as well as the pedestrian mobility and accessibility.

02 PUBLIC SPACE AS A CONTINUOUS SPACE

Public Space

Public space is the space that is owned and used collectively by society, where Man is related to the others who live in the same environment. Physically, public space organizes the urban area of the city, allows mobility and movement, permanence and recreation of its inhabitants, coinciding with the existence of public facilities and infrastructure; establishing itself as the structuring and defining element of morphology and urban life. However, it is also a place of identity and relationship, a contact and meeting place between people, urban life and expression of society. Borja and Muxi (2003) explain that public space is thus a factor of urban centrality, it organizes and gives meaning to the city; not only being the residual space between the streets and buildings or empty space.

Throughout history, the notion of public space varies and evolves along with the evolution and definition of the city. The importance given to the cities goes back to Ancient Greece, and as time passes, there were various definitions and urban proposals of the concept of an ideal city, starting from the Greek agora and the Roman forum to medieval towns, including the “garden city” of Ebenezer Howard and functional city of Le Corbusier, and concluding in the modern city based on the principles of the Charter of Athens and the contemporary city that aims to revitalize itself.

As a result, the city has always reflected the state of society and although its uses have varied throughout history, the public space has always been a meeting, trade and circulation place. However, in the twentieth century, particularly in industrialised countries, the conditions for the three uses of public space have changed. The new traffic, commerce and communication patterns no longer coexist in the same environment, an environment focused on the appreciation of urban mobility rather than accessibility of inhabitants.

However, in a society in which often daily life takes place in the private sphere, there are clear signs that the city and urban areas have received a new and influential role as a public space and forum. Contrasting the strong existence of indirect communications and private spaces, the opportunity of people to use their senses and interact directly with its surroundings is becoming increasingly more appealing. The need for life and vitality in public spaces increases exponentially and the contemporary city has become personal, in the way that new urban spaces are owned and defined by people who live in them (Gehl and Gemzoe, 2002). The importance of urban public space is based on the fact enables the contact between different kinds of people, and this personal contact is the basic principle of a complex and heterogeneous city.

Spatial Continuity

The constant transformations and changes in urban space and the dynamics of a city are realities that, each and every day, have created a process of growing fragmentation and disorganisation. The contemporary city is thus characterised by its disintegration. Recently, architecture has tried to respond and solve the urban challenges of a fragmented city. Hence, it is of utmost importance to find a way to transform the contemporary city in a continuous space, or a succession of continuous and permeable spaces that demonstrate and improve the quality of urban public spaces.

Continuity and permeability are presented as theoretical concepts studied mainly in the field of architec-
ture, yet only assume its true meaning when they are put into practice within the city. The architecture is defined by the articulation of spaces and how these spaces relate to each other, causing its user a unique spatial experience. The articulation of continuous and permeable space only becomes real in architecture when Man lives the architecture naturally, without realising that this space was designed for the actual purpose it serves. Similarly, the articulation of different spaces in the city have to be designed, always seeking the natural movement and the relationships of its citizens. It is essential for continuity and permeability to always to be prevailing values in architectural design, whether the architect is designing a single building or a entire city.

**City Scale**

One of the most important elements in the architecture is scale. The spaces that are part of the everyday life of the company need to be adapted and proportional to their users, so as not to lose their functionality. Thus, architectural design must always take into account the human scale and how it relates to the design, whether it concerns smaller interventions as a housing or urban planning. According to Gehl (2010), the architect must design cities constantly bearing in mind a smaller scale, the human scale. The urban area should be considered from the perspective of people, taking into account that is experienced through the five human senses. The most important hierarchy to be considered in the architectural design of a city is hierarchy of people first, then spaces and finally buildings. Never buildings, spaces and people.

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**03 URBAN INTERVENTION WITHIN HISTORICAL CITY CENTRES**

Architectural and urban intervention is needed in a city. The city should not only be a place in which we live and is part of our daily lives, but also a subject worthy of ongoing attention and should be preserved and taken care of. It is essential it not only deals with preserving the historical elements and heritage of the past, but also tries to live and adapt the city’s heritage to the present and future of society. The “new” and “old” must coexist in the same reality, within a homogeneous area, where the urban configuration is consolidated by its long existence. Urban regeneration usually requires usually a coordinated and organised intervention on the many elements that constitute the urban morphology.

“Rehabilitation is a medium or long term urban revitaliz- ing or regenerating process. It is above all a political act aimed at improving components of the urban space and improving whole the population’s well-being and quality of life. (...) Rehabilitation therefore forms part of urban project / urban development plan, requiring approach involving all urban policies.”

(Council of Europe, 2005)

There are several definitions and interpretations in the context of urban regeneration. Gonçalo Byrne (2014) states that rehabilitation is a response to “disabling” of the city, the loss of life, and that its rehabilitation is defined as the connection between the built environment body and life.

One of the main dilemmas of urban regeneration nowadays is the devaluation of historical city centres, due to population growth and development of cities. However, the historical centres still define themselves as the heart of a city and need to be integrated in the future of urban and social dynamics. Thus, the historical centre of a city not only has importance on a more physical point of view, but also expresses the collective memory of that city, which becomes crucial to the balance of society in dealing with the changes that constantly prefigure urban areas.

Currently, it is most important to act and intervene in the rehabilitation of historical and urban centres. There are several actions that need to be taken urgently such as differentiated procedural actions according to the specific problems of each area of the city, maintain representative and cultural significance within the urban centre, halt the degradation and revitalize the oldest and most affected areas by urban growth. The definition and understanding of what constitutes a historical centre has been changing over the last few centuries and, being a concept which is mainly addressed in the twentieth century, opening a recent line of discussion and establishing an international
theoretical framework of how to intervene and preserve the historical city centre.

04 CASE STUDIES

In the development of this work, two case studies were chosen, which fall within the theme of contemporary interventions in buildings and public spaces, in order to be possible to analyse the existence of its diverse historical, social and urban effects in historical city centres. The first case study is the project known as Quarteirão Império, located in the Chiado area, designed by architect Gonçalo Byrne. The conversion and revaluation of this quarter was developed within the framework of revitalisation plan of Baixa-Chiado; beginning construction work in 1998 and ended in 2001. The second case study is the Rehabilitation of the Estação do Rossio and Largo of the Duque de Cadaval, designed by the international architectural atelier Broadway Malyan. Situated in Baixa Pombalina, the construction started in 2004 and was completed in 2008.

Quarteirão Império

The intervention project of the Quarteirão Império was based on a reconstruction and recovery of a substantial part of the block and common patio within. The 8 buildings, and the interior of the block confined by them, have become the subject of comprehensive action to the whole surrounding area, although it did not include all the bringing within the entire block volume. The main concern was to reintroduce a functional supplement in the area by strengthening housing and commercial offer, not forgetting the maintenance of some office areas and the creation of an underground parking lot, to support all the different uses in the area. The intervention aims to redesign the unqualified areas inside the bock, organising the inner patio and recreating, in the present, the pré-pombalinos pathways that allow an internal crossing through the built environment.

Located in the historical city centre, Quarteirão Império is placed on one of the most notorious and historic areas of Lisbon, Chiado, establishing itself as an essential element in the area’s rehabilitation. Despite main-
its own block. Being a typical closed-off block, its influence on urban dynamics is not as open and clear to the city and users, resulting in a subtle influence on the mobility of the surrounding area.

The main objective of the project is expressed in the connection established between Rua Garrett and Largo do Carmo. This connection is made via the in-block crossing, intending to create a closer and more enjoyable connection between two of the most recognisable elements of Chiado. The high density of movement in the surrounding urban roads influences the importance of intervention in Quarteirão Império, enabling a clear accessibility and urban mobility to the area of the block, and thus resulting in a better integration and spatial continuity of the urban dynamics. Quarteirão Império is situated in an area that is distinguished by a strong and qualified existence of several urban public spaces. The conversion of the bock intends to establish clear and direct connections within the city scale, but also intends to position itself as reference of a smaller but still pleasant public space. The interior area develops a spatial continuity and mobility at the level of human scale, taking hold of the public sphere. Introducing itself as a place of passage and connection with its surroundings, Quarteirão Império offers a complementary and functional sequence of urban public spaces.

From a social context, it is essential to understand how the proposed intervention influenced the way people used the proposed new spaces in contrast to its previous uses and also what were the main consequences by proposing a new spatial organisation. The project stands out for its desire of multifunctionality, assuming this variety of social functions as a vitalising element of the surrounding urban area and resulting in a more dynamic and frequent daily use. Clearing the inside patio and opening it to the outside, allowed to create a clear and simple functional organisation that enhanced the permeability and spatial continuity; transforming people’s movements in a more fluid and natural way. The main element of the project, expressed by the internal block crossing, is also the main element of circulation, via a stairway and escalators. It is the essential tool in the spatial dynamics of the block, creating a direct link between the entrance floor at the level of Rua Garrett and the entry floor near Largo do Carmo. Thus, the visual permeability and physics of this circulation space contributes positively to the flow and movement of persons within the intervention.

Within the historical context, Quarteirão Império is essentially an architectural intervention on a pre-existing block that was forgotten and degraded, and by the use of a simple architectural gesture regains new life and urban dimension. The recovery of the memory of the pre-pombalinos pathways becomes essential for the project’s decision to create the internal crossing the block. The street facades and the general volumes have been preserved.

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**Image 03 - Main access to Quarteirão Império**  
Source: Own making by author

**Image 04 - Movements and flows within Quarteirão Império**  
Source: Own making by author
Estação do Rossio and Largo Duque de Cadaval

The rehabilitation project of the Estação do Rossio was developed with a global perspective of urban integration, articulating the different public spaces with a functional complementarity and sequence. The aim was to give back the space of Largo Duque de Cadaval to its citizens by changing the present excessive and chaotic parking area into a public space of passage and leisure.

Estação do Rossio is an emblematic building of Lisbon and is characterised by its neo-manueline facades, with a total height of three floors, making it possible to overcome the difference in elevation between the Rossio square and the train’s platform. The intervention involved an upgrade structurally and functionally, restoring the original structure by removing any additions made and creating new spaces for offices and shopping areas. The main design approach aimed to restore the dignity of the original building. Various modifications to the station had been made over the years, with little or no regard for the overall harmony of the building, thus resulting in a dysfunctional structure. Consequently, the architect proposed a dramatic solution - the removal of three additional floors and restore the building’s original layout as well as the spatial design of high ceilings.

By removing the additional floors, many original details such as the iron windows frames by the architect José Luís Monteiro are highlighted and visible in a simplified environment. The use of white walls and wooden floors throughout the project create clean, simple and modern spaces; whilst the high lighting choice enhances the simplicity and verticality of the long walls of Rossio Station, allowing the presence of natural light and transforming the main spaces into more comfortable work areas.

The surrounding buildings were also included in the intervention. The old market square, adjacent to the station building, now known as Largo Duque de Cadaval, was being used as an illegal and disordered parking lot. The space has now been transformed into an elegant public square, with terraces and commercial areas, providing citizens with a pleasant and inviting space of the city of Lisbon. The facades of the surrounding buildings have also been renovated in order to match the quality of the renovated exterior of the Estação do Rossio.

Located in Lisbon’s historical city centre, Estação do Rossi has always been considered, since its construction, as a reference in most privileged historical area and its rehabilitation was established as essential for the functioning and dynamics of urban mobility. Situated immediately next to the Rossio square, the station establishes a
close relationship with Baixa Pombalina, allowing a clear connection between the station and the lower part of Lisbon, near the Tagus River. One of the most important relationships established by the location of the Rossio station is also height connection between spaces of downtown area with the neighbourhoods of one of Lisbon’s hills, such as Bairro Alto and Chiado.

Thus, Estação do Rossio is a key spot in the pedestrian movement between the different levels of the city, establishing simple and various connections between many places of interest. These connections, not being always so close and direct, are made easier and highlighted by the rehabilitation of Estação do Rossio and allow a better spatial continuity, exerting a direct influence on everyday mobility. The station is surrounded by the strong presence of urban public spaces such as the Rossio square, Praça da Figueira, Restauradores, Miradouro de São Pedro de Alcântara and Largo do Carmo. The project is strongly characterised by its need to integrate into the surrounding public space, not only establishing itself as an element of passage and connection between other surrounding areas but also as a point of reference in the continuity of public space.

In order to better understand the social component of this case study, it is important to study how people use the proposed new spaces compared to the prior use of intervention as well as how the new spatial organisation influences the functional dynamics of the area. The architectural project intended to facilitate the enjoyment of various social and public spaces of the building as well as a spatial reorganisation of the various functional components of the station.

Consequently, the project reinforces the role of architecture in interactivity and coordination of the social interactions happening within the building. Reestablishing a clear and simple spatial organisation, the project solution to remove the three additional floors allowed a full openness and permeability between different functions, resulting in a fluid, light and natural movement throughout the building. This natural flow is also a consequence of the various accesses to different areas of the station. The area of the stairway is characterised as one of the strongest elements of the design and rehabilitation, working as an essential tool in the spatial dynamics, as well as providing a clear visual and physical permeability between the ground and top floors.

The rehabilitation of the Estação do Rossio and Largo Duque de Cadaval established as its main objective, within the historical heritage context, to restore the dignity of the original building of the nineteenth century. Having suffered several interventions over time, the Rossio station has now been reinstated as the main railway station, as the “Porta de Lisboa” and a historical monument of the city.
Comparative analysis of case studies

It is essential to establish a conclusive analysis of the success or failure of each of the contemporaneous interventions; and a comparative analysis of consequent effects in order to achieve a better understanding of what elements of project contributed to their integration into the urban dynamics.

The conversion of Quarteirão império successfully achieves the main objectives with an architectural intervention that is characterised by its clear and direct approach of a simple gesture, embodied in the internal crossing of the block, establishing connections between different indoor and outdoor. However, there is a clear failure expressed by the use of the spaces proposed in the block. The constituents buildings present a housing occupancy of maximum capacity, as well as in the buildings destined for offices and services. Unlike the housing sector, the commercial sector has a low occupancy on the outside streets and a null occupation inside the block. The architectural constraints of the concept of a shopping arcade inside the block result in a public space that does not establish a clear and direct visual contact with its casing, making it uninviting to people work or live in the surrounding area.

The rehabilitation of the Estação do Rossio and Largo Duque de Cadaval is successful in achieving all the initially proposed objectives. The current building presents itself as an qualified social public space, which is well integrated in its urban environment, being regarded as a monumental landmark of the historic heritage of Lisbon. The main architectural decision allowed a better use of building’s capabilities, through the opening of the space that connects the ground floor and the upper floor of the train station. The public building establishes a balanced spatial organisation, with a clear separation between the functions of public character and private character. The multifunctionality of the various areas of the railway station allows a diverse use of common public space that is intended for various activities, giving a new vitality to the whole intervention area.

In conclusion, this architectural project is a successful response to the lack of qualified public buildings and social spaces within the historical city centre, providing an urban restructuring of the physical and social morphology and creating a new image based on the existing urban environment.
CONTINUOUS CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary interventions within the urban rehabilitation have an essential role in the revitalisation of the city, strongly contributing to the balance and cohesion of social and urban dynamics of the historical city centre. Through the conversion of Quarteirão Império and the rehabilitation of Estação do Rossio, the architect seeks to enhance the public space as a meeting place, but also as a place of enjoyment of historical and cultural heritage. Thus, public space becomes a factor of urban centrality, being the space that organizes and gives meaning to the city, ensuring paths and elements of continuity; while organising relationships between the various buildings, facilities, landmarks, roads, transitional and open spaces in each urban area.

The rehabilitation of Estação do Rossio and Largo Duque de Cadaval presents itself as a development in urban integration that can answer the dilemma of the lack of relationship between physical space and the life of the city, enabling a coexistence of the main uses of the city within the same public sphere, creating a meeting place of people, trade and circulation.

The reconversion of Quarteirão Império, just as Estação do Rossio, aimed to redevelop and re-introduce a functional complementarity in the area, by strengthening housing and commercial components. Despite being characterised by its clear and direct approach and a simple gesture that seeks to establish connections between the different public spaces, it does not have the same impact restructuring the physical and social morphology as Estação do Rossio. There is a clear appreciation of the citizen as the main user of space, through the use of human scale when designing the internal crossing the block; for establishing direct connections with the surrounding public space.

There are several factors that need to be taken into account when dealing with the urban integration of contemporary interventions in the historical city centre, due to the fact that it essential to seek the proper integration of a complex and diverse urban environment, focusing on the public nature elements as vital elements for urban mobility and spatial continuity. Urban regeneration has to answer the three key domains for the quality of life in the historical city centres: the urban, social and heritage context.

Reflecting on the questions arisen by this dissertation, it is considered that the existence of architectural interventions such as Quarteirão Império and Estação do Rossio play an essential role in the development and revitalisation of the contemporary city, particularly in the city of Lisbon, nonetheless they can only be successful interventions when it is possible to carry out a complex and integrated urban development process, always taking into account the major effects, be they social, urban or historical.

This dissertation constitutes a small contribution to the study and critical analysis of the various revitalisation processes of urban public space. It also expresses a particular interest in the possibility of new projects or interventional methods designed to guarantee the full integration, complementarity and sustainability of contemporary architecture and how it handles the evolution of social and urban dynamics of a historical city. Urban regeneration is a response to the city’s disabling or the a loss of lively quality, and the consequent qualification is defined as the connection between the built body and urban life. The city is made by the people and the lack of interaction of people with its architecture, devoids the city of its life. The role of the architect, together with other elements and areas of urban planning, is to understand the physical body of the city but also what are their inherent bases and circumstances of fixating population, qualifying public space, always fostering the sharing and convergence of people. Hence, architecture plays a key role in finding a response to the increasing challenges of cities, within a society that is constantly evolving.
References


