

**Project for the New Lisbon Congress Centre in Parque
Eduardo VII**

Extended Abstract

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Project Report to obtain the Master of Science Degree in

Architecture

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October 2016

Preface

This report was developed within the course of Final Project 2, inserted in the last year of the MSc in Architecture at Instituto Superior Técnico, in which the work of Final Project 1 was expanded upon. It describes the conditions and adopted procedures and proposes a reflection on the elaborated design, highlighting the strategy and the options taken in the proposed design.

The study theme – New Congress Centre, located in Parque Eduardo VII – was released together with Lisbon City Hall in order to explore a relevant program on the current dynamics of the city of Lisbon.

It is the growing importance of business tourism in Lisbon that justifies the desire to build a congress centre in a central area of the city. The Parque Eduardo VII emerged as the study area because of its strategic position in the central axis of the city, excellent accessibility and hotel accommodation on offer within its surroundings. Sought to take advantage of the built-up area in a degraded state of the Pavilion Carlos Lopes, and at the same time to rethink the park as one of the key elements of the urban structure of the city.

It was a goal of the proposed work to reach an attractive solution that took advantage of the urban conditions and could be presented to the municipality, contributing to the debate and discussion about the city, and in particular about the role of Parque Eduardo VII in the current urban dynamics.

Purpose

The purpose of this design exercise – the new Congress Centre of Lisbon in Parque Eduardo VII - is to seek an alternative to the design and implementation of a building, which by its scale and importance, enhances the current relationship of the park with the city. It is intended that the design of the new building be a study on the possibilities of a complex building be an urban intervention, and study hypotheses to transform and upgrade the park in this scenario. This means reaching a solution in which the main architectural elements of the proposal draw the public space.

Thus, a building is proposed that houses the programmatic functions required in the programme provided by the City Hall, and that is at the same time an urban design integrating the building as a link between the park and the surrounding area.

The city of Lisbon is one of the best destinations for business tourism and increasingly offers more favourable conditions for the growth of this segment: the location of the city, the infrastructures available, the quality/price ratio and the mild climate are the main gains of a city with reputable experience in hosting high profile events. The construction of a new congress centre is a way to capture these events and continue to invest in an international exposition of Lisbon. It is essential for the promotion of new programs, events and a new living space, making it a focal point of the city in recreational and cultural terms.

Image 1. Intervention Area, its Places and Accessibilities. Source: Author.



Site

The study area has always been a target of two main concerns: as an answer to the need for expansion and development of the city; and to constitute a large green space for the population as a recreational area.

The Parque Eduardo VII brings together several features and potential to become one of the most attractive urban parks in Lisbon. Due to its location and accessibility it has the conditions to become an appealing meeting point in the city. It is an important element of urban space and its vegetation density works as a barrier to the noise allowing it to be a place of contemplation and reflection, articulating different cultural, tourist and leisure activities.

The park paths are presently disfigured and do not satisfy the need for connections and crossing, however, they carry the memory and the history of what the park was once before and offer a possibility to rethink what the internal structure of the park could be.

Throughout history is possible to identify the desire of the existence of an architectural landmark in the park: the plan for the installation of the City Palace at the top of the park, that today is a renewed and qualified garden space, and the integration of the Pavilion Carlos Lopes, currently disused and a weak point, presenting itself just like a sculpture without participation in the park. This landmark is still needed in this location, and it has to be integrated with the low-rise buildings within the park, reaffirming this as a predominantly green zone and where the presence of the new building should not overshadow the garden.

The position of the Pavilion Carlos Lopes is the key point for the development of the project, it stands out in the park, emerging as the choice for the location of the new Congress Centre, using its elevated position in a positive way by placing the building in order to connect garden levels and thus facilitate the access and crossing of the park from Avenida Sidónio Pais to the central corridor. The area immediately around the Pavilion is characterised by the lack of dense vegetation, due to the non-permeable soil, allowing the integration of the new building in this space to respect the green area.

The Parque Eduardo VII presents a lack of planning and discontinuity in the built area that is dispersed in isolated elements. The park space was left indifferent to the growth of the city but on the other hand, it is a place with enormous potential to become a multifunctional hub of great importance in the city, for which the contribution obtained by the congress centre is crucial making the most of the resources and position of the park.

The new Congress Centre will emerge as the structuring element in the rehabilitation of the park in order to recover and clarify its relationship with the city. However, the integration of such equipment in the park will be reflected in a change not only of the dynamics of use and function, but also the city's dynamics and its infrastructure. This operation will take advantage and expand upon the existing economic dynamics based on the large hotel and commercial capacity around the park and in Avenida da Liberdade, clarifying the centrality of the location.

Image 2. Site Plan Proposal. Source: Author.



Proposal

This project has the conceptual principle of ensuring the preservation of the identity of the park while responding to the wide-ranging needs of the programme in an effective and contemporary way.

The proposal seeks to reinvent the design of the park according to the original design of the architect Keil do Amaral, not only by balancing the dimensions of the green areas and eliminating invasive buildings, but also by redesigning a continuous inner traffic road in the park, essential for the functioning of the new Congress Centre.

The sports facilities from the Club VII and the subway office building, both disturbing elements which constitute an obstacle to the permeability of the park and to the flow of the paths, will be relocated.

The integration of the Congress Centre in the Parque Eduardo VII is an intervention in the public space, the shape and building planning of which according to the walking paths of the park facilitates the crossings and promotes the participation of people while simultaneously creates a new image of the intervention area as a permeable space.

The squares, stairways, loggias and bridge are part of the building and of the garden paths arrangement. This allows for contemplating and enjoying the nature and architecture at the same time. To participate in the building is to participate in the garden, its topography and its views.

Without abdicating the visual impact associated with this type of buildings, the footprint area is reduced in order to minimise the impact on vegetation and the congestion of the park. The proposal overlaps the biggest areas of the programme and combines different functions in the same space allowing maximum flexibility and spatial interaction, making the building a compact core and releasing the garden area.

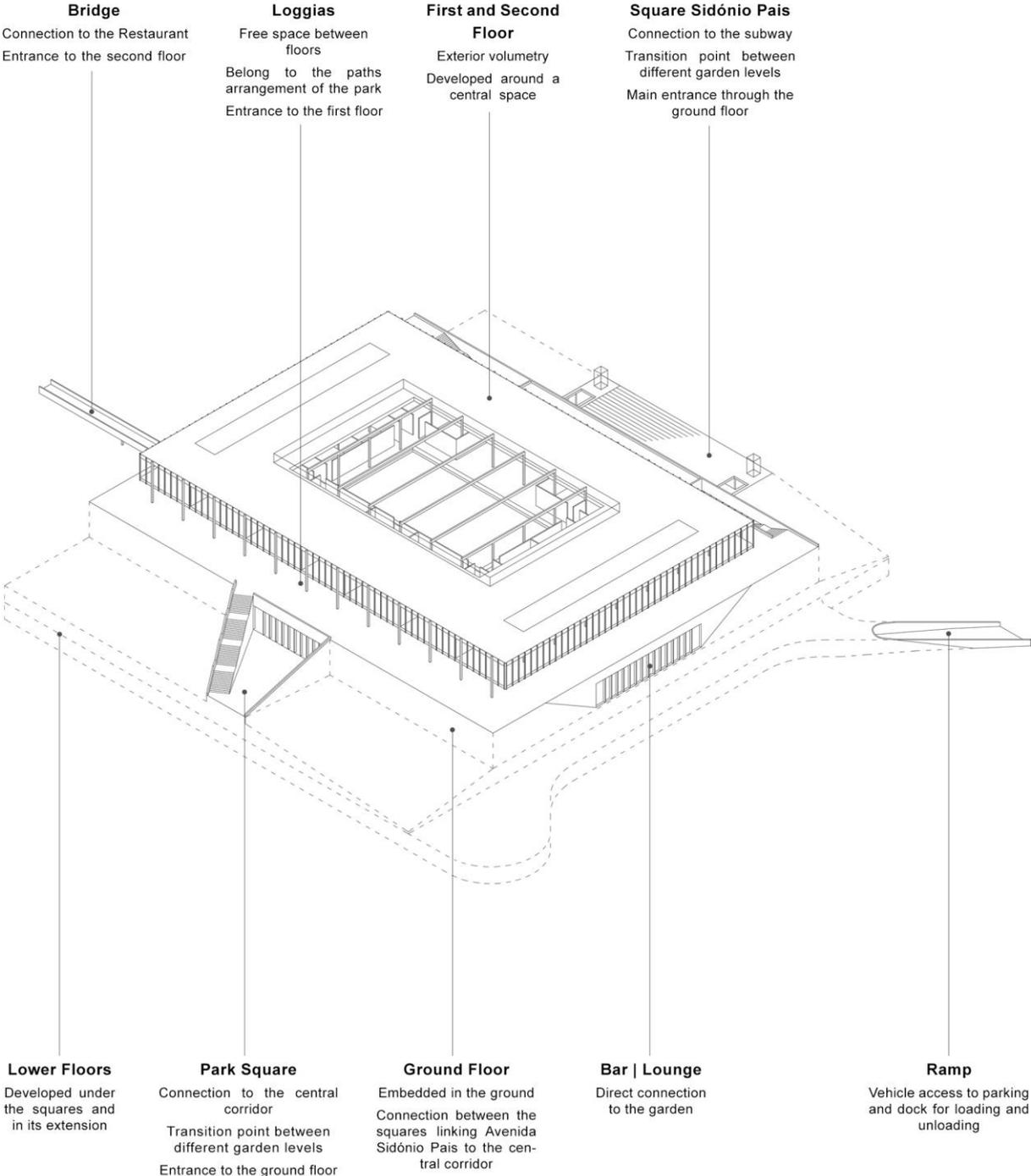
Inside the building, additional spaces are organised around the auditorium which occupies a central position, the exhibitions/sports area and meeting rooms/offices are designed as hybrid spaces to easily adapt to the constantly changing programme. The atmosphere of the space changes with the programme and the building redefines itself accordingly.

The design of spaces at the garden level, the structure and materiality of the building blurs the boundary between the outside and inside and disassembles the building into the natural landscape.

The new Congress Centre of Lisbon does not work as an independent object in the Parque Eduardo VII, it is proposed as a building that not only works with the pre-existing structures but also creates new spaces in the park, redefining itself as a functional element in terms of accessibility. The Centre is an urban structure which simultaneously delineates private and public space belonging to the garden. It becomes a link between the park and the city by removing obstacles and discontinuities.

The succession of areas and paths drawn, going through the building and following the morphology of the garden into a part of its paths, results in a building that is topography.

Image 3. Axonometric Projection. Source: Author.



Conclusion

The proposal is presented as a consolidated, conscious and informed work which responds to the elaborated strategy, to the program and to the needs of the place in accordance with the future plans of the City Hall in the touristic and economic context of the city.

The requalification of the park and the construction of the Centre is an asset from which the surrounding area benefits by promoting this space in the city, introducing new themes, opportunities and benefits, working as an attractive pole, satisfying the needs of different audiences from tourists, citizens, culture and sports enthusiasts and conference participants.

Creating events and marketing functions as a promotion of the internal image of the park and in particular of the city of Lisbon will attract more investment and greater adherence by consumers.

Intervening on a central area in the city of Lisbon as Parque Eduardo VII is undoubtedly a challenge and a privilege with the potential to change the relationship between the park and the city.

Both the proposal and the report allowed an understanding to be formed of the responsibility and meaning of what considerations should be given to act in an area with such a broad influence, and revealing that it is not the buildings themselves which generate urban quality but the public space created by them.

It is important to restate the relevance of the topic as well as the interest that the intervention area represents to the development of this exercise, since it offers the possibility, through an academic project, to participate in the discussion of a current architectural and urban problem.

It is expected that this project will contribute to the question relating to the future of this area of the city of Lisbon as a way of visualizing its reintegration into urban life.