

PALACES LOST IN TIME

Adaptation to the contemporary demands as a preservation strategy

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ABSTRACT

Unravelling the meaning behind the loss the title refers to, we jump directly to the global and topical issue that the study addresses: the need to preserve architectural heritage as part of a collective memory that should be kept for future generations. As this is a wide ranged topic, we were only concerned with undervalued heritage, currently in danger of becoming an effective loss.

We need to be realistic and acknowledge that there is no universal nor perfect answer to the issue. Nonetheless, in order to increase the chances of being an effective study and having a practical application, we narrowed down the investigation and chose a category that in Portugal is repeatedly subject to general carelessness – the urban palaces – selecting as a specific context, the city of Lisbon, rich in examples of this nature.

Believing in the benefits of repurposing unused architectural heritage for societal use, the investigation was centered on the evaluation of such a strategy.

Architectural heritage | Urban palace | Adaptation | Compatible use | Cultural academic use

GOALS AND METHODOLOGY

Having established the aim of the thesis – trying to

find an effective answer to induce the preservation of urban palaces (after rehabilitated, if needed), that could eventually be extrapolated in terms of method to other categories of undervalued architectural heritage – we needed to define a suitable method for the research that we based on the order in which to answer the specific goals.

Before anything else, to develop a proposal that had potential to be truly viable, we decided to rely on the identification and study of good practices when intervening in this type of heritage. For that, we divided the method into three initial steps consisting on specific goals that led us to a fourth one.

The first step was to understand the heritage itself so we could establish a hypothesis that would attend to the specificities and limitations of the buildings. It was also important to recognize the moment when they became a significant piece of the urban fabric as well as the motives that led to the lack of care or to the disrespect towards them.

The second step was to gather theoretical bases, both to justify the answer to be proposed as to be able to identify and study practical cases. It was during this process that we decided as an option, in which the entire investigation ended up focussing on, the adaptation of palaces to the current demands of society. As part of this theoretical investigation, it became imperative to evaluate what kind of needs we were talking about as well as its compatibility with the structures in question.

The third step came from the need to evaluate the viability of the theoretical hypothesis, i.e., to develop a practical analysis. For that reason, we

chose three case studies from a pioneer context in the field of conservation and restoration of heritage, with a wide range of repurposed urban palaces: northern Italy. Those examples needed to have the potential to be studied as successful interventions and being in line, at the same time, with the characteristics we found preferable from the previous theoretical investigation.

Because the “successful cases” were not from Lisbon, the context that we proposed to study, we decided to study a fourth case, a palace located in this city that had been adapted for the same sort of use as the others. The difference was that instead of a good intervention, this case was meant to be judged critically. This way we would obtain a new perspective on the viability of the proposal that could either refute it or turn it into a stronger one, according to the possibility of making a realistic counterproposal to its actual intervention.

CASE STUDIES

All the cases (the ones from Italy and the Lisbon one) were chosen based on the use they were adapted for. This meant that nowadays they serve a cultural, specifically academic, function. From the three Italian cases, there is one that stood out and therefore was thoroughly analysed, as the other two intended to be a complement to this detailed analysis. The main case was the local university of Venice, that included on its network several historical palaces that host part of its infrastructures. Ca' Foscari, a residence built in 1452 for the doge itself, now the headquarters of the entire institution, was selected among them since it was subjected to two strict interventions from the architect Carlo Scarpa, a main figure on the field of conservation and restoration of architectural

heritage. Besides that, the latest intervention of readaptation (2004–2006) was awarded in 2007 with Torta's prize for the “architectonical restoration of Venice” and the building ended receiving in 2013 the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, becoming the “oldest LEED-certified building in the world”. The other two cases were Tassoni Palace in Ferrara, probably restructured in the 1490's decade by the famous Biaggio Rossetti, and the Giuliani Palace in Verona, built in the mid-16th century and restructured in the last quarter of the 18th. These two were chosen based on their opposite approaches on the thematic of the new elements' expression in the old building's fabric, subject that inevitably is a part of the adaption project. All of these examples are integrated in cities classified by UNESCO as world heritage, in 1987, 1995-99 and 2000 respectively.

From Lisbon, it was selected Condes de Redondo Palace, a palace from nobility probably restructured from former noble houses in the turn of 17th to the 18th century, in the same constructive trend of that period (the one we dedicated the architectural analysis on the first step of the investigation). It serves nowadays as Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa and the quality of the adaptation project, held in 1985-98, raises serious questions on a preliminary analysis, motivating its choice. This situation needed to be confirmed in a more objective way, as well as have its motives clarified. For that reason, the palace was carefully contextualized and its original state, transformation process and adaptation project were analysed.

STATE OF THE ART

The thematic of the reinterpretation of heritage,

including the specific area of buildings' reuse, is in fact an issue frequently debated and widely studied from different perspectives. However, it's a field open to discussion, where we found some of the most critical situations when it comes to the practical application of the conservation and restoration theories, including in the "rehabilitation" of urban palaces. In the theoretical investigation built to support the hypothesis we proposed, since the range is wide, the information was carefully and objectively selected according to its the interest for the argument, excluding non-essential explanations or an extended historical contextualisation.

Information essentially is lacking in the area of Portuguese (including Lisbon) urban palaces. The existing one comes from articles and academic studies, being the few reference works general and normally circumscribed to a historical or urbanistic perspective. This meant that the step where we propose to understand the heritage itself, particularly on the architectural analysis, was based on a few specific works. For example, the exterior analysis mainly relied on the text written by João Vieira Caldas in 2012 as an architectural paper, "João Antunes e a casa nobre do seu tempo" (in press), and on the conclusions offered by Pedro Durand's master thesis in architecture, where he studied a sample of twenty cases. The interior analysis of these buildings was largely grounded on the knowledge published so far in the aim of the investigation project *FCT (PTDC/EAT-HAT/112229/2009) – The Manor House in Lisboa and Rio de Janeiro (17th, 18th and 19th centuries). An inside view*. It's also important to reference the doctoral thesis of Maria Isabel Albergaria, as it is not related to Lisbon. As the specific information turns out to

be insufficient, we gathered precious knowledge from that research, carefully selected from the one referring to the national context.

The rest of the academic studies are normally focussed in a specific case or intent to compare different contexts. These circumstances make of the present research, for the relations of compatibility that it proposes to study and for the unconventional motives that led both to the selection of the main case study and to the rare development of a counterproposal (even if theoretical and preliminary), an alternative distinctive study. Ultimately it gives a huge contribution to a monographic study about Condes de Redondo Palace, that has not been done so far.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Palatial Heritage

There was in fact a moment when the construction of palaces in Lisbon suddenly increased. This was related to the concentration of the court in the capital-city, that came with the end of the civil war (1640-1668) and the definitive restoration of the Portuguese independence from the Spanish domain (1581-1640), breaking the nobility's former trend of being spread throughout the country (Cunha e Monteiro, 2010-2011). The national aristocracy, recently empowered, aimed to conveniently represent their new social status and for that it became imperative to renovate their residences, for those who already had a house in Lisbon or for those who didn't to build a totally new palace (Caldas, 2012). This advent ended recharacterizing the urban landscape by introducing new structures that actually obeyed a

standard. These circumstances allowed the study of a congruent type of palace, making it possible to conjecture about the same strategy for its preservation and, when needed, its rehabilitation. And in turn, this study provided the basis to the analysis of the selected case study (constructed during the climax of this (re)constructive period, the turn of the 17th to the 18th century lasting approximately until 1725 (Caldas, 2012)).

As it makes sense according to the representative aims of the aristocrats that commissioned them, the façade was the element that truly distinguished and uniformized these palaces (Caldas, 2012). Their configuration is based on alignment and repetition of windows decorated with classical simplified motifs, and the composition claims the same sobriety and simplicity we find in Portuguese plain architecture.

When it comes to the interior, the configuration of these palaces was influenced by the pre-existing houses they were frequently adapted from and depended on the topography and urban fabric. Despite the major variations, there are some coincidental features. For example, a hierarchy by levels, a progression from more public to more intimate spaces, while advancing in the noble floor, a transition zone between the street and this level made by different sequences of specific spaces (state stairs, interior and/or exterior halls, courtyards), state apartments (a set of wide and more elaborated rooms with ostentation purposes, normally facing the street) and *enfilades* (replacing the corridors on the most important areas).

Some of these and other examples from other

periods, didn't survive the 1755's earthquake (Miguel, 2012) and those that did, have not been treated with the respect such a significant testimony from the past deserves. From abandonment to over-exploitation and from degradation to vandalism, to abusive transformations that disregarded the authenticity and identity of this heritage, it's possible to point out several critical situations. They came from an inversion of values and an overlap of economic interests (sometimes individual ones) to those that intend to preserve the meaning of these buildings to the community and to respect the right and the duty of passing them on to future generations.

2. Intervening in architectural heritage

Despite some harrowing acts committed to palaces even when they are protected by national law¹, the concern about heritage in general has been increasing. Nowadays the diversity and legitimacy of different approaches towards cultural heritage is recognized, keeping open the possibility of trusting a strategy based on the main purpose of architecture, a strategy of reuse. Nonetheless, such a strategy needs to be justified, appropriate and thoroughly analysed. First, to be justified, the building can no longer serve the purpose it was built for, and this repurpose needs to answer to a real need of society, avoiding becoming just a random act. As its big advantage, this method can provide requalification (by revitalization) of disabled heritage, specially the undervalued one, having chances at the same time of contributing as a sustainable measure to the reversion of the economic crisis (by constraining the waste in new

¹ In Portugal, the classification of urban palaces happened relatively late. In the case of Lisbon palaces, it took place mainly

in the 90's and some cases weren't officially gathered until the 21st century.

construction and further on, by generating some sort of income – not necessarily direct). Giving back the purpose to a building, besides the revitalization of the building itself, allows people to experience it, promoting a closer relationship between monuments and individuals, that provides the re-appropriation of the heritage by the community it is established on and related to.

To study society's current needs, we draw from an analysis and complexification of the individual human needs, studied and defined hierarchically by Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), a famous psychologist. This analysis pointed to the self-actualization needs (top level of Maslow's pyramid) as those that the west European society mainly expresses. With this being true, we presently face a paradigmatic situation: people's safety is threatened worldwide and we live in an environment of fear and insecurity. The general identity crisis it triggered leads to the growth of intolerance and discrimination in a society enriched by its cultural diversity. For these reasons, it becomes urgent to create strategies of social cohesion and to set up mechanisms to address ignorance and individualism.

In the current panorama, we believe that the general access to culture could not only provide an answer to the self-fulfilment needs and to the intellectual and creative quest, but also to give a major contribute to the reversion of the social crisis. So, in the same line as the current architectural tendencies of cultural valorisation, we decided to investigate further the hypothesis of transforming disabled urban palaces into cultural facilities for the service of local populations.

To be sure this is a valid transformation and the entire strategy is appropriate, we carried out an evaluation based on the concept of compatible use. As implied in the definition presented by ICOMOS in 2010 – "Compatible use means a use which is consistent with the cultural heritage value of a place, and which has little or no adverse impact on its authenticity and integrity" (ICOMOS, 2010) – we established as parameters to measure compatibility between the building and the new use, the impact that the second one has on the authenticity and integrity of the first. However, we suggested the use of the notion of identity (meaning the group of values that represent the cultural significance of the asset) instead of integrity, that could also mean "whole" or "intact".

Also, we cannot forget that each case is different. Even if we are trying to develop a general strategy for a group of buildings from the same typology and context, the solution needs to always be re-evaluated according to the specificities of each situation.

Since not every "cultural use" has the same impact on the authenticity and identity of the asset, we subdivided the type of possible facilities into categories, in order to proceed with a proper evaluation. For their technically and constructively demanding programs, we excluded from the hypothesis facilities for recreational activities (like performing arts centers) as well as research centers dedicated to science or technology. For the symbolic value needed we excluded worship or memorial spaces.

For the other categories, that represent more flexible uses, we established risk factors and favourable characteristics that needed to be

balanced to establish the level of compatibility with the building. To improve the evaluation's accuracy, they should be directly analysed in a situation they are applied to when they exist, eliminating the need to be predicted (a fallible method, not always possible).

From the balance we made between the pros and cons of each use, after narrowing the best options to libraries, museums or facilities linked to educational institutions, we decided to further investigate the adaptation of urban palaces for academic uses. To evaluate its practical application and effective compatibility, and because, in fact, the success of the adaptation depends more on the intervention than on a further development of the guesswork, we identified and clarified some other notions. They were needed as evaluation criteria for the selected interventions (besides the already identified concepts of authenticity and integrity/identity, that implicate by definition a methodical and accurate study of the building). They concerned the reversibility of the actions, the interventional level – e.g. minimal intervention (meaning that each act needs to be justified) – and the possible relations between “old” and “new” (i.e., the expression of the introduced elements ruled only, according to Navarro, by the unique purpose of promoting the intelligibility of the values that define the building: documental, architectonic and symbolic values (Navarro, 1999).

3. The Italian example – adapting urban palaces for cultural academic uses

The Italian cases served two separate purposes. The first, as successful interventions, they intended to be an initial approach to study the viability of the strategy that in theory had the potential to address

the identified problem. The second, to understand the practical reasons for that success, requiring a study about the interventions and how, how intense, following what strategy and based on what criteria were the previous identified concepts applied. By the end, the necessary tools for the analysis of the Lisbon case were gathered.

“While being settled in a unique group of disabled palaces, the Venice University respected the quality of its spaces and brought them to life, for its students' delight” (Choay, 1999). From the analysis of the adaption and re-adaptions of one of its palaces, Ca' Foscari, we were able to identify, in the same object and even in the same intervention, different strategies that led to the respect and revitalization Choay pointed out. The choice made for the new use, was itself one of these strategies: it was chosen an institution that while representing the trading traditions and naval origins of Venice was a pioneer business school not only in Italy but in Europe. So, based on a strong connection with the territory, the recovery of the former greatness of the palace by the renewal of its identity was a totally deliberated act.

More specifically, on Scarpa's interventions on the building (1935-37 and 1956-57) we were able to identify different ways to create meaningful relations between old buildings and contemporary intervention, that gave value to both by their perfect mutual integration. For example, Scarpa tried out material opposition, articulation of different systems (like metric, proportion and natural light systems) and intangible references to local traditions, normally as way of differentiation. The intervention itself pointed out the importance of details, of the quality of the used materials, and of the specificity of the solutions that addressed each

single problem. In both interventions of (re)adaptation, he projected according to the climate, sometimes using local resources, clearly pursuing the functionality of the spaces, taking advantage and emphasizing at the same time the strengths of the old building, he tried to recreate environments as a whole and give them a human scale. He looked for flexible and reversible solutions, especially in the introduced parts that clearly state the contemporary language of his architecture.

On the more recent re-adaptation (2004-2006) we gathered information about possible strategies to maximize the potential of resources (though the intervention included other restoration works as some archaeological excavations). This meant an evaluation of the program's organization and distributional and infrastructural systems. As global guidelines, this intervention aimed to requalify according to the present demands of comfort and security and to unify the buildings that nowadays form the university complex. For that it was imperative to develop a cohesive project with clear and generic goals.

From the program's organization analysis some strategies stood out. Strategies of zoning, of revitalisation (particularly of the exterior spaces, as middle term between the street and the university), of multifunctionality and optimization of spaces as well as a clarification of their order. The distributional system was used to solve the homogeneity issues of the entire complex, promoting a fluid circulation. Accessibility and permeability were principles followed as guidelines, which implied the destruction of occasional architectural barriers. The main goal on the infrastructural system's renovation was to become

efficient. Besides that, it aimed to cause the minimum invasion possible on the old buildings fabric, looking for quality over quantity and flexibility of use, concerning aesthetics at the same time.

The Tassoni Palace from Ferrara and the Giuliani Palace from Verona, chosen to complement this analysis, provided another perspective on the thematic of the introduced elements, summarizing two different, though legitimate, approaches. On the intervention of Tassoni palace, it was used a strategy of minimal intervention, mainly on the representative spaces, allowing for some occasional reconstructions and restoration works that did not dismiss the important testimony of the passage of time. The contemporary expression was left for the furniture that decorates the spaces that are mainly multifunctional. The intervention on the Giuliani palace was based on a reinterpretation of light (natural and artificial) and colours. The strategy to distinguish new elements, intensified on service areas, made use of a creative lighting project and chromatic variations.

4. Condes de Redondo Palace

It was proved that the strategy of adapting urban palaces for academic uses could be not only possible but also efficient. On this point, it remained to be done the analysis of its application to the Lisbon reality.

To do so we chose Condes de Redondo Palace, a remarkable example of the analysed group of palaces that despite the 1974's classification as public interest, was stage of an intervention that seemed to comprise numerous flaws.

For the analysis, it was important, also this time, to

understand the heritage itself. The historical and urban contextualization of the palace revealed some inheriting discrepancies (related to the troubled passage of the Count of Redondo's title of nobility, especially when the 9th position vacated in favour of the crown), a period of decay as a result of nearly a century of abusive usages (c.1880-1985) and the absolute change of the surroundings, from a farming area on the edge of the city (where it was included the farm connected to the palace), to a new fully urbanized area, which dictated new levels of pollution and, as a consequence, the increment of the degradation process. Then, from the few documents, images and drawings collected from the municipal archives and the national archives of Torre do Tombo, in articulation with an investigation *in situ* (limited by the available resources) we were able to partially reconstitute the original configuration of the palace. Both the reconstitution and a developed hypothesis for the original organization of the residential usages can be consulted in the dissertation this paper refers to. Besides allowing us to confirm the affinity with the palaces constructed on the turn of the 17th to the 18th century in Lisbon (standing out as a unique example among them), this was an essential tool for the evaluation of the intervention that transformed Condes de Redondo Palace into Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa. Aiming the confirmation and clarification of the motives behind its apparent failure, we started by evaluating the new use. Although it establishes no strong bond to the territory as the one from Ca' Foscari did (Autónoma was recently founded and represents a private institution), the university was responsible for the renewal of the old palace's identity, as a new place of knowledge, promoting

the rehabilitation of the building and saving it from eminent ruin. Next, the evaluation of the functionality. As it was impossible, on such a short study, to undertake a proper research to measure the university's demands, the evaluation was linked to the level of conservation and protection that the new usages meant for the old building, in a more general point of view. As an evaluation strategy, we relied on an analysis analogous to the one that had revealed to be suitable to the Italian cases (program's organization, distributional system and technical adaptations), adding a comparative component to the evaluation method. Then, we made a total reevaluation based on the application of the gathered notions (on the previous theoretical and practical analysis) related to conservation and restoration of architectural heritage – to principles, actions and interventional levels.

On this evaluation, we identified and summarized as strengths of the whole intervention, the zoning strategy (even if showing occasional inconsistencies), that induced an intentional revitalization of some spaces (courtyards and level 1) and the possible reversibility of some of the actions. However, the majority of the intervention reflects a weak and disrespectful approach towards the authenticity and identity of the palace as a whole, confirming the previous "suspicions". As major critical actions, we can point out: the dilaceration of some significant spaces, like the state apartments from the west wing and the main hall, just due to a poor choice on their specific usages; the lack of judgement on the maintenance of elements from previous interventions (those that came from the prior series of incompatible uses, like a mezzanine floor over the west wing's state

apartments); the absence of occasional reconstruction or recover of a former state that would promote the intelligibility of the values that define the palace; a terrible management of the potential of the new elements and the strengths of the old building, like natural lightning and spaciousness (from the removal or coverage of some windows or by the bad distribution of usages that created unneeded subdivisions of spaces). It is almost impossible to distinguish some of the new elements from the original ones and some recompositions and relocations are not properly identified on the place, turning the buildings timeline impossible to read. There was no desire to unify the fragmented fabric of the building, making the reorganization of the circulation system worthless (to the point that for people with reduced mobility it's impossible to access the palace/university).

We strongly believe, as the evidences seem to point out (including the lack of documentation), that there was neither a thorough preliminary study nor a cohesive adaptation project with global guidelines and goals. So, probably, it was not a product of an incompatibility of the use. The changes suggested to the real adaptation – formalized in a theoretical proposal also incorporated in the dissertation this paper refers to – confirmed this preliminary evaluation. Addressing the problems identified on the critical review, it was possible to ground the proposal on a functional program's reorganization (with a clearer zoning strategy, adding multifunctional semi-public spaces), on the reconfiguration of the distributional system, solving the issue of the circulation of people with reduced mobility, and on the redefinition of the strategy for the new elements'

expression (suitable to each area, different for significant spaces of the palace and secondary, intensely transformed areas). There was no need to change the academic use of the palace.

CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account the predefined aim of the study – to find a possible answer to the problem we risk facing: the loss of important testimonies of the collective memory due to not recognizing on urban palaces for their true value – we believe to have reached a viable solution. It was definitely a result of the chosen methodology, a progressive focus of the investigation or, in other words, the establishment of specific goals to be answered in a certain order.

By contextualizing and studying Lisbon's urban palaces, the selected strategy was grounded on the heritage itself. The state of abandonment, degradation and especially the undervalued condition of many examples, opened the possibility to an adaptation strategy (based on the rehabilitation by revitalization). Alerted as well for its dangers, the abusive transformations that come from an overlap of economic interests over the cultural value of the heritage, the main cause of disrespect and destruction identified. To be a viable strategy and not an unjustified act, increasing the chances to become a self-sufficient intervention when applied and, in that way, to prevent the main identified threat to the urban palaces preservation, the new use needs to answer a real collective demand. With the first step accomplished, the current society's demands were identified as being the self-actualization needs, the sense of belonging and the need to find urgent means to fight the current social crisis. Then, by a theoretical

evaluation of the compatibility with the buildings in question, we isolated as the best solution the adaptation to academic uses, which is a compromise between the incentive for preservation, the genuine re-appropriation of the palaces and the potential to achieve the sustainability² of the intervention and of its future management.

So, in theory, the strategy has the potential to work. The practical cases studied as having successful interventions of adaptation into this type of use, by the evaluation of the effectiveness of the success, proved that such a strategy could be viable. The conclusions about the motives that led to a bad adaptation of Condes de Redondo palace and the counterproposal made to solve the problems identified, confirmed the viability of the strategy and the applicability to the Lisbon context. This counterproposal also showed that it is not impossible to revert abusive transformations done to urban palaces, giving us hope to recover some of the examples identified as being on that same situation.

Naturally each case is different and they should all be subject to further studies, based on scientific accurate methods and analysis *in situ* (even Condes de Redondo Palace). Nonetheless, we propose a future analysis on the hypotheses of including several of the urban palaces in the local university network, just as the integrated solution used in northern Italy, to protect and preserve these significant elements of the collective memory.

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² When sustainability is linked to the thematic of intervening in architectural heritage, it is specifically related to the notion of durability.