

**Resource Architecture – XXI World Congress of Architecture
22 to 26 July 2002 in Berlin**

Forum 5 Centre and Periphery – Balanced City

Name Ph. D. Arch. Sonia Ricon Baldessarini

Center as Periphery: studies to revitalization of traditional Downtown areas

Pelourinho in Salvador /Bahia

The downtown area around the famous Pelourinho Square in Salvador, Bahia/Brazil, is the oldest intact historical site in Brazil. Tomé de Souza, the first General-Governor sent by the Portuguese Kingdom, grounded the city at March 29th 1549.

For its political and economical meaning, Salvador was the most important city during the Portuguese domination in Brazil until 1763 when Rio de Janeiro, nearest to the iron mines, became the capital.

After the middle of the XIX century the traditional inhabitants move out from the downtown area into the south, around the beaches on the bay area, die Bahia de Todos os Santos.

Since 1985 belong the Ensemble around the Pelourinho's site to the UNESCO's World Heritage.

The deterioration-process of the historical district started going on in the 30's. In the 60's began the effective measures toward an urban revitalization in this area.

The first interventions to contain the deterioration of the historical buildings were based on the Census of the Pelourinho Area, which was elaborated at 1967. It included the conservation and restoration of the single buildings.

Central in this policy is the role of the IPAC (Instituto do Patrimônio Artístico e Cultural da Bahia) created 30 years ago. In its different phases of intervention, the IPAC has been trying several work philosophies to redevelop the historical center of Salvador. Mostly concentrate on the technical conservation and restoration of the buildings, actually the competency it was created for, the IPAC set the recuperation of the area of the Pelourinho quarter as a priority. Time showed that it minimizes the effective intervention against the decadence-process in the other quarters and ignored the complexity of the social structure. This model of intervention reproduced the relationship "Center – Periphery" inside the historical district as an internal cellular problem: the renovated cultural and historical buildings at one side, and at the other those buildings next to Pelourinho but still left out of the process, keeping their "ruin-stage".

Brazil's typical dynamic of the increasing "void" between social sectors and their economies is well reflected in this situation.

So are the studies from Brigitte Thomae, developed in the 80th years, still valid today. It pointed out the critical problems of the quarters around the Pelourinho/Maciel area as following: poverty, prostitution, drugs, degradation of the living conditions, and development of informal economic activities with low incomes.

It all resulted in one process of urban-architectonic deterioration as well as social degradation which have made the old downtown Salvador's, for many native inhabitants of the town, an avoided area with "periphery" character.

Prostitution and informal economic activities are no longer any more a part of the "private" space in this area, because their demands had changed. It doesn't mean that these practices do not exist "ambulant", as a form of interchange in the public space, where the tourists and visitors also circulate.

The Revitalization of the historical area of Salvador achieved a new phase in 1991, when a new Regulation, the "Termo de Referência", created a list of priorities and steps to the Recuperation's Program for the historical center of Salvador.

This document introduces an Architecture quarter-management model and some strategies to the relocation/dislocation of the inhabitants. Under other forms of appropriation of the private space, the Program proposed, for ex., to the owner of two buildings the free-cost restoration of one of them. In charge, the State would keep the second one for its property.

One of the positive aspects of these new rules has been the expansion of the urban infrastructure and services to the historical area.

Although the interventions in the last decade intensively increased, the critical situation of the area as a whole remains.

It may indicate that social problems almost always turn into urban-architectural problems or, in another words; the solution in both cases should be searched together. Like other disciplines, and that is the epistemological reason why they do exist, architecture and urban planning are not to be considered only as an aim for itself, but even more as a way to deal with human problems and these environmental consequences.

So far quantitative instead qualitative criteria are being used, there will be no improvement of the living conditions and the respective infrastructure, and that is a point that also belongs to the urban character of historical traditional living areas.

Bairro da Lapa dos Mercadores in Rio de Janeiro

Alexander Von Humboldt was the first who called Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil, "the most beautiful town of the world", says Gustav Faber in his book "Brasilien: Weltmacht von Morgen". At this time the Capital of the former Portuguese Colony had already some thousand inhabitants.

Humboldt was a Nature's lover and probably became very impressed from the tenderly hills and the sinuous topography of the old town. He could not imagine how the later physiognomy of the city would look like, but he surely saw one of the most ancient Landmarks of the historical central district from Rio de Janeiro: the Bairro da Lapa dos Mercadores and his Aqueduct, build in the XVIII century to bring water to the neighborhood.

Humboldt's expression became famous. "Rio, Cidade Maravilhosa", is today the second biggest city in Brazil (5,8 Million Population – 2,7 Men; 3,1 Women IBGE 2000).

The City of São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro was grounded January 20th 1565, at the foot of one of the many hills on the seashore, the Morro do Castelo, which was

demolished in the second decade of the last century to give place to the Esplanada do Castelo. The colonial town expanded around the Square with the Residence of the Vice-Kings, today the Praça XV.

The urban modernization from Rio de Janeiro began already at the beginning of the XIXth century when the Portuguese Real Family arrived at 1808, running away from Napoleon's Army. According to the European needs, the Monarchy build public and private buildings and parks, like the Botanic Garden, near the Lake Rodrigo de Freitas.

At the end of the XIXth century Rio de Janeiro became Capital of the new Republic. The historical center suffered more interventions in order to make place for the new administration buildings and to improve the traffic conditions. Large historical sites went through demolition while large avenues like Av. Rio Branco and Av. Presidente Vargas were opened. A consequence of this policy, that privileged the commercial and administrative use of the traditional areas, together with the loss of architectural historical substance, was the transfer of the inhabitants to other expansion areas: the upper classes to the beach quarters at the south, the workers and lower middle classes to the suburbs in the north of the town. People with less income and those unemployed remained in the old houses, as well as some immigrant families who held there their small stores. They keep settled in the fragmented living areas in the surroundings of the traditional downtown. Those areas build a "social periphery" along the commercial and administrative miles. One of these living forms is the "cortiço", a kind of urban "favela" where the private space of the old homes is reduced to "comodos" (small rooms). In these small single rooms lives sometimes a whole family, with seven or more persons, together.

The process of destructive interventions in the urban context of Rio went on until the 70's. At this decade the historical district Lapa lost one of its characteristic hills, Morro de Santo Antonio, and part of the ancient houses.

Lapa quarter is the last bastion with living character just inside the historical downtown area in Rio de Janeiro. Like other examples from inner city neighborhoods it has to complain about the same problems: poverty, prostitution, drugs, degradation of the living conditions, and development of informal economic activities with low incomes.

In Rio de Janeiro, in addition to that, is the homeless problem extremely acute.

However with the beginning of a Revitalization movement since the late 70's, some changes can be observed. These changes can be classified into two tendencies, according to Lilian Fessler Vaz: one can be related to the development in the European metropolis and "Global Cities" around the world. This tendency admits the "gentrification" and the commercial and cultural use, with the establishment of cultural institutions and show business. The second tendency respected to the "downgrading" with the progression of the informal economic activities and the concentration of homeless population.

This situation reproduces also the phenomenon "Center as Periphery".

Over-the-Rhine District in Cincinnati

The district Over-the-Rhine, in the City of Cincinnati (Ohio/USA), is like the other downtown areas cited above, an area that has long been known for its architecture. Several buildings were erected to the end of the XIXth century and give a typical interpretation of Architectural Historicism.

The buildings still deserve the attention from public and specialists. The major problem of the area however is the social deterioration

In the past usually inhabited by German immigrants, the District Over-the-Rhine is located on the shores of the Ohio River that inspired them to call the place in honor of the Rhine River.

The District is part of Cincinnati's downtown core, taking the North section.

As an inner city district, Over-The-Rhine suffers from classic problems of poverty, conflicting forces of homelessness and gentrification, of housing abandonment and debilitation by absentee landlords.

According to the Over-the-Rhine Community Council the district owns the following features:

- Over the Rhine is Cincinnati's poorest neighborhood.
- of its approximately 12.000 residents, 95% live below the official poverty level according to the last census.
- Over-the-Rhine historically has received many poor forced-migrants from the Appalachia and the rural South
- 5.000 of the 7.500 apartment units in Over-the-Rhine are damaged or abandoned.

Besides these structural problems the neighborhood developed a strong civic community that struggles to keep living at the place.

For its special character Over-The-Rhine can be compared to neighborhoods in other American cities such as the French Quarter, Greenwich Village, and Beacon Hill. Like these neighborhoods, "Over-The-Rhine" has suffered much urban decay in the last thirty to forty years.

In addition to some other measures toward the urban revitalization in Over-the-Rhine, the district will receive a new impulse to strengthen its social and cultural identity: exactly in this eruptive downtown area the Contemporary Arts Center is building its new house in Cincinnati, having the Architect Zahal Adid as Designer. It will be the first American art museum to be built by a woman and her first project in America.

Bairro de São Vitor in Porto

Besides the classical forms of intervention in urban sites, Portuguese architects and authorities used the favorable climate of social and political changes after the Cloves Revolution and try to implement a new model.

The SAAL (Serviço de Apoio Voluntário Local) was an official initiative to improve the living conditions and take care of the acute home deficits of the population.

The initiative had a short period of existence (1974 until 1976) but could register a successful work.

Concentrating their activities on projects with residential character the work groups (Brigadas) tried to operate on the basis of a social communication with the inhabitants and potential neighbors. Some of the projects were carried out in the historical areas of cities like Lisbon, Porto, and Guimarães. The planners made critical revisions and interpretations of the old site structure in order to answer to the needs of the present.

Dealing with the complexity of formal, social and urban character of the city landscape is possible to achieve for the building a new specific identity that will reflect in the qualities of its use.

By the intervention in the houses-complex of São Vítor's Quarter, in Porto (1974-1977), for example, the Architect Álvaro Siza Vieira worked consequently with these conceptions.

References:

Alves Costa, Alexandre. Portugal Architektur im 20. Jahrhundert. DAM.

Faber, Gustav. Brasilien. Weltmacht von Morgen.

Prefeitura da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro. "Corredor Cultural"

Thomae, Brigitte. Programme u. Problematik der Altsiedlungsanierung in Salvador.

Vaz, Lilian Fessler. „O Bairro da Lapa“, in: Viveren e l Centro, Ludena, Pfeiffer ed.

Wilhelmy, Herbert. Südamerika in Spiegel seiner Städte.

Zane L. Miller and Bruce Tucker, Changing Plans for America's Inner Cities