

INTERVENTIONS IN URBAN CENTERS – OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES AND RESULTS

INTERVENÇÕES EM CENTROS URBANOS – OBJETIVOS, ESTRATÉGIAS E RESULTADOS

Reviewed by Andréa Costa *

In recent decades, urban centers with historical and cultural significance are being seen, besides being spaces that maintain the memory, identity and values of a society, as cultural assets with high potential to give leverage to and assist local development. Their preservation, then, is not just a question of protecting the heritage, it is also an aspect to be taken into account in urban planning.

In this context, some terms have appeared, such as restructuring, renewal, revitalization and other "re's", the objective of which is to make possible the social, economic and cultural resurrection of these spaces, guided by coordinated action between public authorities, private enterprise and civil society. In Brazil, the intervention plans and projects implemented or in the process of implementation in urban centers point in this direction, consisting of initiatives that aim at the promotion of urban development by means of preserving these areas.

Nevertheless, despite this fact, references to models of intervention in Brazilian urban centers are few, while international experiences are given greater prominence, for example, Barcelona (Spain), Baltimore (United States) and London (England). While one cannot disregard the relevance of these projects, one needs to recognize that, for the development of successful national strategies, what is essential is the analysis of local experiences, which bring more pertinent contributions, as they tackle the special characteristics and interferences of our reality.

The book under review, "*Interventions in urban centers - objective, strategies and results*", heads in this direction. The study brings together projects that have been concluded, or are still in course, in urban centers of seven Brazilian state capitals - Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Porto Alegre, São Luís, Belém, Aracaju and Fortaleza - described and analyzed by different architects and city planners, and besides two chapters which deal with the concept of urban center, a retrospective look is taken at the question of the preservation of the built heritage and there is discussion of the types of urban intervention in historic centres.

The preface by Ricardo L. Ferrat (Neur – Universidade de Brasília) classifies two types of urban interventions in central areas: the city planning model with focused action, in contraposition to the angle that considers the preservation of the physical structures, the need for social inclusion and economic revitalization. He makes a general evaluation of the case studies reported on in the book, and stresses that actions in urban centers must

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deal with questions such as exchange-value and use-value, the relation between public authorities and initiatives from the private sector, the diversity of uses, the consumption of the built heritage and its being used as spectacle, the construction of urban settings, and participation by the population at large.

Heliana Comin Vargas (Doctor of Architecture and Urbanism and professor at FAU-USP) and Ana Luisa Howard Castilho (Master of Architecture and Urbanism from FAU-USP), the organizing authors, conceive the book as being inserted into the current context, in which the meanings of time and space are modified, which, in turn, confer a new meaning on the concept of urban space and lend another point of view to interventions in urban centers. They define the book's main objective as being to fill the existing gap by drawing on Brazilian examples in national and international literature about projects in historical urban centers.

In the first chapter, "*Interventions in urban centers - objective, strategies and results*", the organizers of the book tackle some of the terms used. They explain why they choose to use the concept of *urban center* instead of *historical center*, since the latter is linked to the idea of urban nucleus, with value being given to the past and the architectural and urban elements, while *urban center* is configured as the point of convergence of flows and activities, and is tied in with the rest of the city because of its function and meaning. As to intervention, they hold that "*to intervene in urban centers presupposes evaluating their historical and patrimonial heritage, their functional character and their relative position in the urban structure, but mainly to specify the reason why the intervention is required*" (p. 03).

Accordingly, they take a brief retrospective look at types of intervention. They put them at three moments which overlap: urban renewal (1950-1970), urban preservation (1970-1990) and urban reinvention (1980-2004). In each one of these periods, the authors enumerate the main objectives and strategies, the projects and management actions undertaken and, finally, the results achieved. They also lay bare the main difficulties faced in the intervention processes, which range from political influences to the lack of specific professional training and drawing up a diagnostic that does not reflect local reality. Therefore, they set out a broad view, which is very didactic and elucidating, of the history of interventions in urban centers. This puts into context the projects presented in the following chapters.

In the second chapter, authors Lélia Mendes de Vasconcelos and Maria Cristina Fernandes de Mello, explore the terminologies used to define intervention processes in urban areas in the text "*Re: behind, after ...*". They refer to the ideas that came from urban medicine, examine the actions undertaken since the 60s and take up again the concepts presented in heritage charters. The authors deal with the terms *renewal, rehabilitation, revitalization, restructuring, requalification, regeneration and restoration*, and seek to establish their origin, and similarities and differences between them. They emphasize that, in spite of the nomenclature used, one must aim at the objective of preserving culture, an underlying premise of all these terms, which is the great challenge of interventions in urban centers.

The other chapters consist of case studies of urban projects in central areas of seven Brazilian state capitals.

Chapter 3, "*Lapa, the bohemia of the city of Rio De Janeiro: a process of cultural regeneration? Projects, interventions and the dynamics of the place*", by Lílian Fessler Vaz and Carmen B. Silveira, deals with the revitalization process of the district Lapa, and tackles the Cultural Corridor Project, approved in 1984 as a municipal initiative, and the Cultural Squares of

Lapa Project, by the State Government between 1991 and 1994 and the Cultural District of Lapa Project, instituted in 2000.

Maurício Faria Pinto and Horacio Calligaris Galvanese, in "*Requalification of the center of São Paulo – Cultural Corridor Project*", tackle the recent process of reevaluating São Paulo's historical center. The Cultural Corridor Project proposes to interconnect the most relevant poles of activities in the area, such as the Bank of Brazil Cultural Center, the Museum of Art of São Paulo, the Municipal Theater and others.

Next there is "*The historical center of Porto Alegre and the Monumenta Project: the strategy of the axes*", written by Briane Panitz Bicca. He recounts the experience of the Monumenta Program. This is a project of the Ministry of Culture in partnership with the Inter-American Bank of Development (BID), in the historical center of Porto Alegre, defined by the axes formed by the protection perimeter defined by IPHAN and by the municipal project Rua da Praia Cultural Corridor.

In chapter 6, entitled "*Municipal management plan: the revitalization of the historical center of São Luís*", José Marcelo of the Espírito Santo reviews actions of integrated management in São Luís for listed conservation areas under municipal, state and federal laws, such as analysis, evaluation, negotiation, implementation, monitoring and control.

The experience of Belém is registered in the text "*Windows on the river: intervention projects on the urban promenade of Belém of Pará*", by José Júlio Lima and Luciana G. Teixeira. They set out the proposal for the Docks Area which aimed at the revitalization of the port area, with the objective of making it possible to view the river more and to create spaces for artistic-cultural exhibitions.

Thereafter, Ana Luiza Prata Libório, in "*Municipal market of Aracaju: the reinforcement of local tradition and the recuperation of the urban landscape of the historical center*", expound on the urban interventions that have resulted in the integration of the markets of Antônio Franco, Thales Ferraz and Leite Neto, with a view to requalifying the area, by recovering the urban landscape and consolidating the uses and meanings of the place.

The last chapter, "*Sea-Dragon Centre of Art and Culture: a project of requalification of the old port area of Fortaleza-CE*", by Linda M. P. Gondim, Ricardo Figueiredo Bezerra and Sabrina Studart Fontenele, deals with the setting up of a cultural facility in the historical area of Iracema Beach, as an instrument to stimulate the urban requalification process.

The description of the case studies related above, describes the historical and physical characteristics of the area which is the object of this study, the description of prior projects, the objectives, the premises and detailing the interventions undertaken, and, finally, an evaluation of the successes and imperfections of the plans. This model facilitates the understanding of each case and of the whole for it establishes a common line between them. This homogeneity is stressed in the last chapter of the book, when Heliana Vargas and Ana Castilho take up the main points again, and classify the projects presented into two groups. One of these comprises those which are concerned with making economic life more dynamic and with improving living conditions and the population affirming its identity. The other group is related to those which aim at the cultural consumption of the places by targeting international tourism.

An important characteristic of the book is that, instead of mulling over already well advertised experiences, such as the district known as the Bairro do Recife (Pernambuco) and Pelourinho (Bahia), this book forms a collection of little or unknown reference material on Brazilian urban interventions. However, its greatest merit is to focus not only

on how intervention projects have been drawn up but also on how they have been implemented, and presents both the positive and negative points, against a background which shows political interventions to exert strong pressure on planning processes in urban areas in Brazil.