

Puerto Madero and Porto Maravilha: The Transformation Process of Port Areas into Tourist Zones

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Abstract: Transformations in the use of urban space in contemporary cities have common features and projects in the global era take similar themes, such as requalifications of port areas and waterfronts. The main objective of this paper is to revisit the process of urban transformation and valorization of the port areas of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, completed in 1990 and 2015, respectively. It recapitulates their historical processes from decay to recovery as tourist zones, following the implementation of the “Strategic Plan of Antigo Puerto Madero”, from 1990, in Buenos Aires, and of “Urban Operation Porto Maravilha”, from 2009, in Rio de Janeiro. While planning and strategies differ as they sought distinct locations in different times, they were similar in attracting massive investment from the real estate market. Therefore, consequences of the projects for the cities and the local population are a more important issue than formal results achieved.

Key words: Urban design, waterfront renewal, Puerto Madero, Buenos Aires, Porto Maravilha, Rio de Janeiro.

1. Introduction

Ports were indispensable for the commercial and urban development of cities. In the industrial revolution, with the technical progress of maritime transport, they became the central axis of urban life and economy. At the end of the 20th century, however, they turned into obsolete structures, inadequate to meet new demands. This process of deterioration of port areas initiated in the post-industrial period when, as a result of the urban expansion, city-port relations shifted from interdependence to autonomy, and port areas underwent a period of marginalization. From the 1960s, there has been restored interest in these areas, understood as potential spaces to renew urban centers and enhance quality of life of the population. Port areas were again considered as strategic places in cities that hold the existence of waterfronts to revalue

them as elements of their collective imagery [1].

Emphasis should be given on how the phenomenon of requalification of port areas pairs-up with urban valorization resulting from investments in new attractions, particularly those with visibility in the international scenario. Renewal of waterfronts became an element of urban and territorial competitiveness among several cities around the world, the main focus of the interventions being on the attraction of the tourist and consumer public, thus turning cities into commodity [2].

Interventions proposed for port areas have in many ways been similar to those for degraded urban centers. Recognized as symbolic references of cities, urban center undergo through interventions to promote functional reactivation, recovery of physical structures, valorization of local economy and compliance to aesthetic standards, with the objective of improving the image of the city, valuing the patrimony, boosting the economy, thus attracting investment, residents and tourists [3]. Therefore, urban interventions’ designs

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are inserted, mainly, in a politic and economical context of urban development based on grand scale projects spurred and consumed as a result of powerful marketing strategies. In addition, the patrimonial value of urban centers attracts productive activities and dynamizes tourist and real estate markets.

Tangent to the economic factor, the environment factor is observed in issues related to sustainable urban development, as the requalification designs of underutilized central areas propose reuse, occupancy, and upgrading of urban voids [4]. It is of utmost importance to assess the impacts that works, displacements, and expansions of the urban network have on the city [5].

The valorization of waterfronts goes back to the process of formation of cities, linked with the existence of water ever since, were it for reasons of subsistence, transportation or leisure. Most cities in the world have grown due to some kind of navigable waterfront being available [6].

All factors mentioned so far show that old port areas are privileged spaces and furnished with urban infrastructures. Nevertheless, they were created for an use that eventually fail to cope with increasing demands. Therefore, processes of requalification of these areas, frequently include redefinitions of their functions. This is the case of the subject of this paper, Puerto Madero, in Buenos Aires, and Porto Maravilha, in Rio de Janeiro: even though their architectural structures were preserved, their use was changed. Puerto Madero became a commercial and residential area and Porto Maravilha developed as a tourist and cultural zone.

Although the two interventions are part of strategic plans, it is essential to understand and distinguish that the requalification of Porto Madero is a product of the end of the 20th century, with a series of shifts in the ways of producing and managing culture, leisure, social organization and public administration of urban spaces. While in the particular case of the requalification of the port area of Rio de Janeiro, a

product of the 21st century and related to the 2016 Olympics, investment was made in the central area by new interveners in the urban space having tourism as na ultimate purpose. This paper discusses the process of development of these two areas, as well as their transformations, their period of valorization and their period of degradation.

2. Historical Backgrounds of the Construction of Ports: Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro

The ports of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro originated from different demands. In Buenos Aires, Puerto Madero was built from 1886 through 1898, due to the need to expand commercial transactions. The Port of Rio de Janeiro has its origin linked to the urban development process of the city.

In Buenos Aires, located between the riverbanks of the Rio de la Plata and the traditional center of the city, Puerto Madero was built with the purpose of promoting the city into the water transport scenery. Eduardo Madero ordered a British engineering office a project, which was named after him when completed. In less than two decades, however, Puerto Madero became inefficient and the construction of a new port, Puerto Nuevo, the now existing port of Buenos Aires was then planned and initiated in the middle of the 1910 decade, nearly thirteen years past the inauguration of the original port, to overcome the deficiencies of Puerto Madero to cope with new demands.

In Brazil, the port area was defined for the defense of territory of the new Portuguese colony [7]. In the area of Prainha, where the Port of Rio de Janeiro developed, trade and industry concentrated due to the urban reorganization that followed the arrival of the Portuguese Court, in 1808, and, with the Decree to Open Ports to Nations, Brazil joined the overseas trade activities. In 1889, after the Proclamation of the Republic and the denomination of Rio de Janeiro as its federal capital, a renovation of the city was planned.

One of the main points of the proposed reform was the modernization of the Port of Rio, aiming to insert the capital into the international capitalism [8]. In its modernization project, completed in 1910, the Port of Rio area was expanded, with the inclusion of the Gamboa Wharf and São Cristóvão Wharf. From then on, the port started to be consonant to the importance of the city.

3. The Decay of Port Areas and Their Rediscovery by the Real Estate Market

The emptying of urban centers was a key factor leading to the decay of port activities in cities during the second half of the 20th century, when they entered a period of intense deindustrialization. Modernization of the processes of production and consumption that followed the industrial revolution, together with urban expansion, emptied urban centers, and resulted in economic, physical, social and environmental decay and deterioration [4]. The containerization and the specialization of port operations also required the transfer of port facilities to new locations, further away from the centers and better prepared technologically [5].

In the case of Buenos Aires, the old area of Puerto Madero spontaneously became a leisure area of the city. Therefore, in 1920, the first project was developed to convert the area of Porto Madero into a public park. A commission was then organized by the Municipality, in 1923, to propose, among other issues, the remodeling of the central area of the city and the expansion of a large park in the port area [9]. Le Corbusier's visit to Buenos Aires in 1929 concurred to the development of a new proposal embracing Puerto Madero. The French architect came up with the idea of transforming the port into a collective equipment to host activities related to sports and recreation [10]. In the early 1980s, the abandonment of the facilities and the degradation of the area contributed to the devaluation of the site and increased rejection of the

population.

In the same period, although decreased importations caused the underutilization of the Port of Rio de Janeiro, a number of other intervenient facts more significantly contributed to emptying the port region. After the transfer of the federal capital from Rio de Janeiro to Brasília, the city of Rio de Janeiro remained as a symbol of the country and its nationality, but urban traffic had become a problem. In the 1950s, there was a densification of the southern and northern areas of the city, concomitantly with the residential emptying of the downtown area. As the downtown area kept concentrating the work places and activities, daily commuting back and forth between districts and downtown caused traffic problems and required larger public investments in constructions in the transport sector. In this context, the Perimetral Avenue was designed running along the line of the city's waterfront [11]. The project was part of the Doxiadis Plan, whose proposition was to reconnect the city through radial expressways departing from the downtown area [12]. Directly linked to the beginning of the decay and devaluation of the port area, the first part of the Perimetral Avenue Viaduct connecting General Justo Avenue to Brasil Avenue and overpassing the Quinze Square, the Mauá Square and the entire extension of the Port of Rio, was inaugurated in 1960 [11]. In the period between 1976 and 1985, there was a decrease in the port usage. Therefore, studies of the early 1990s indicated that the effective area of the Port of Rio was being underutilized and that the port was incompatible with demand in several aspects [13].

Even though port activities of both regions declined, these areas remained perceived by the population as ports because of their historical backgrounds. It was precisely the historical and symbolic importance of these zones for the cities that aroused interest of the public authority to invest in interventions of urban requalifications of these areas.

4. Ports and Processes of Urban Requalification

Processes involving interventions in deteriorated urban areas encompass several terminological discussions. Most of the designations are based on a historical division and are divided into urban beautification, urban renewal and urban revitalization [14]. Also, some authors observe that the word “revitalization” suggests the inexistence of local urban life therefore choosing “requalification” as a more suitable term. The chronological division of terminological meanings can also be classified as: “Urban Renewal, relating to the 1950s and 1960s; Urban Preservation, developed in the 1970s and 1980s; and Urban Reinvention, emerged around the 1990s and extended to the present day” [3]. In contemporary times, the strategies of intervention in space can be called by the term “urban regeneration” [15, 16].

In fact, the processes to recover historic centers and neighborhoods began in the mid-1950s, first in Europe, and then in North and South America. The implementation of these projects was based on tourism, in response to the crisis of the capacity of investments of the public authority, the expectation of humanization of the urban life and the growing cultural and patrimonial interest [14].

Requalified port areas contribute to central metropolitan areas to recover their strategic role in cities, besides renewing their image [4]. This is one of the consequences of these interventions, which also stimulate urban economy and the spirit of community and belonging in the metropolis [3].

In Buenos Aires, it was in the 1980s that a renewed interest existed in Puerto Madero, supported by a discourse on the valorization and preservation of the historical patrimony. The first initiatives for the renewal of its port area came through a competition held in 1986. Democracy had then been restored, so Argentina allowed itself to be influenced by exemplar Spanish interventions. Nevertheless, it was only in 1989 that the public authority decided to go ahead

with the plan [17].

In the 1990s, in search for insertion in the international commerce scenario, Argentina’s economy enjoyed the global economic restructuring network. Thus, a neoliberal policy gained strength in the country and invested in the sale of the public patrimony. This was one of the factors that, along with others, contributed to the process of transformation of the Puerto Madero area. The Puerto Madero Project should, therefore, be seen as a political and economic act, an exponent of the 1990s. It was just during this period that the “Puerto Madero Strategic Plan” was developed, with a proposal to link Puerto Madero to the central area, thus providing for a new administrative, commercial and residential area for the city.

The project was developed in accordance with a program consisting basically of a large green area encompassing an exhibition center, hotel, recreational and cultural areas, residential buildings and restaurants. With the implementation of the requalification design of Puerto Madero, the city gained a new public, relevant space in the metropolitan context, therefore attracting tourist public. However, it was not able to withstand pressure and speculation of the real estate market.

In relation to the Porto Maravilha project, in Rio de Janeiro, similar criticism is voiced as to the role of real estate speculation, a factor that reinforces social inequality. Being a product of the 21st century, when the government lost exclusivity in urban space interventions, the project was conceived by a “Consortium for Urban Intervention”, granting the involvement of private initiative in the process of transformation of the area. Being an instrument of strategic planning, the law instituting this consortium was based on the characterization of the port area as an area of special urban interest, and amended the existing urban planning legislation on the region, including changes on height, parameters and use [18].

Beginning in 2009, when Rio de Janeiro was

elected host city of the 2016 Olympic Games, the objectives of Porto Maravilha Project were divided in sectors such as infrastructure, housing, culture and entertainment, commerce and industry [19]. The project was planned to be executed in two phases with funding from different agencies: the first entirely financed by public resources and the second, by private funds, through the Consortium for Urban Intervention. The Porto Maravilha program consisted of the construction of anchor buildings, renovation of public spaces and mobility infrastructure. After the demolition of the viaduct of Perimetral Avenue and the transformation of its space into a boulevard, the waterfront of the port area resigned new relations with citizens. The historical importance of the area and the use of anchor buildings with cultural functions, added tourist attractiveness, under the concept of urban marketing.

In the light of the two projects here analyzed, it is observed that discussions about construction, promotion and export of the identity and design of the city became a paradigm still valid today for the so-called globalized cities. The globalization of the economy and culture has spread a competitive spirit that gained concrete forms in the urban space of metropolises. Points of weakness resulting from the requalification processes of these two port areas are similar to those existing in large projects implemented all around the world. To those who defended both the Puerto Madero Plan and the Porto Maravilha Urban Intervention, the public-private partnership proved to be an optimal solution. For those with a negative perception, however, both projects were no more than instruments to serve real state speculation, with the side effect of having social inequality reinforced. A positive outcome was that the experiences connected with these two projects of requalification of port areas succeeded in enhancing both cities as tourist destinations.

5. Conclusions

The 1990s were important for the definition of the

current urban situation in the Puerto Madero region, in Buenos Aires, the same way urban theories and experience influenced the contemporary urban scene of the Rio de Janeiro port area so far.

It is interesting to note that globalization, which appeared to be a process solely connected with external issues, came to bring tension between the “local” and the “global”; once cities need global visibility, their images are produced and exported worldwide, especially supported by the media, and, more specifically, by marketing agents. In this context, it can be reached a wider understanding of the Puerto Madero and the Porto Maravilha projects.

Urban interventions in port areas concentrate massive investments, thereby being highly significant. The transformation of Puerto Madero recuperated the traditional vitality of the city and rebuilt its cultural roots. By contrast, in Rio de Janeiro, issues such as disregarding the historicity and authenticity of the area, failure in providing housing policy for inclusion of the middle and less-favored classes in the district, and the overestimated height of commercial and office towers suffered criticism.

As expected, the port areas of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro show that urban regeneration projects continue to challenge the logic of capitalist space production. As more and more urban planning policies tend to involve many levels of social agents in integration to seek for the qualification of urban space, a question remains as to whether efforts made towards this success will remain valid within a larger spectrum.

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