

Strategies for the Revitalization of Urban Centers: The Case Studies of Almada, Setúbal, and Batumi

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Over time, urban centers begin to show signs of vulnerability and to lose their identity. These centers, often referred to as “devitalized” or “lost” urban centers, require urgent urban revitalization programs. Until today, most urban intervention actions were based on physical principles, which caused the disappearance of important dynamics of vitality and give rise to the concepts of urban renewal, rehabilitation, and requalification. These concepts create a utopian idea about the city. This article intends to define strategic guidelines that will transform a devitalized area to an area more attractive to socio-economic investment. These guidelines must meet the “right to the city” by promoting the urban center as a space of belonging, with values of citizenship, ethics, and aesthetics and that does not only focus on the functional level, but essentially social. It is against this background that some successful cases of urban revitalization actions in the medium port cities of Almada and Setúbal in Portugal and Batumi in Georgia are presented. Presenting these cases is essential for understanding the situations, methods, and strategic actions to be applied in urban revitalization. This paper gathered that obtaining creative and innovative ideas would contribute to the promotion of urban revitalization.

Keywords: urban revitalization, urban rehabilitation, society, quality of life, attractiveness, dynamism

Introduction

Urban centers are defined as “urban groups with historical interest whose homogeneity allows them to be considered as representative of cultural values, namely historical, architectural, urban or simply affective, whose memory must be preserved” (DGOTDU, 2005, p. 129) and are also a “succession of testimonies from various eras, and gives us the temporal dimension with the sequence of facts that structure identities” (Barata Salgueiro & Medeiros, 2005, p. 259). In addition to the more physical patrimonial value, the urban center of a city is part of the collective memory of that same city, because “like people, societies and peoples have a collective memory that constitutes an essential part of their identity as a group and whose loss may cause serious disruption” (Barata Salgueiro, 1999, p. 388).

It is in this collective memory that a framework of references necessary for psychological balance is established, and this is essential in responding to the constant changes in society.

Therefore, the urban center is not a watertight unit independent of the rest of the city; on the contrary, it is a living organism inseparable from the rest of the urban structure through which it extends, both in physical and social terms. It is the traditional functional center of cities and is considered the symbolic place par excellence,

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that of local history and collective memory.

The value of these urban centers is recognized in several international charts, of which the Nairobi Recommendation stands out. The Nairobi Recommendation maintains that the historical complexes and framework of urban centers make up an “irreplaceable universal heritage” and their safeguarding and inclusion in collective life must be an “obligation for governments and citizens of the States in whose territories they are” (Lopes & Correia Brito, 2004, p. 178).

In other words, in the preservation of historical sites, it is strictly necessary to safeguard cultural values, which represent the identity of a people. In view of this, it is essential to find solutions that solve these problems, and its revitalization is urgent.

How are urban centers revitalized?

Urban centers can be revitalized by maintaining existing residents, combating the flight of population to the periphery, attracting new inhabitants, diversifying the economic base, promoting the implementation of new activities for the urban center sectors, and valorization and qualification of public areas and heritage conservation.

Contributions to Be Considered in the Revitalization of Urban Centers

The Case Study of Almada, Portugal

Almada is located on the south bank of the Tejo River, in a territorial area of 71 square kilometers and has a 10 kilometers riverside strip to the north, overlooking Lisbon and the Tejo River. With 101,500 inhabitants, it integrates into the district of Setúbal administratively and forms part of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area.

Since 1986, the Municipality has been considered as a strategic vector of municipal policies, having 11 publicly approved historical nucleus. Therefore, in 1987, the Historical Nucleus Office was created for to study the approved nucleus. In 1988, with the entry into force of the Special Regime for Participation in the Recovery of Leased Properties (RECRIA) and the Recovery of Urban Buildings under the Horizontal Property Regime (RECRIPH), the Municipality of Almada obtained funds from donors, such as the Integrated Operation for the Development of the Setúbal Peninsula (OIDPS), the “Partnerships for Urban Rehabilitation” (PRU), and the “Cities Policy-Partnerships for Urban Regeneration” (QREN).

With the funds realized, the Municipality of Almada began an urban rehabilitation policy in the 1990s by investing in heritage valorization and urban regeneration in Almada Velha and Cacilhas, giving rise to the establishment of the first Urban Rehabilitation Area (ARU) in the country, Cacilhas, on May 16, 2011.

The Urban Rehabilitation Area (ARU) of Cacilhas is part of a municipal strategy to revitalize historic centers and covers the central nucleus of Cacilhas, namely, its most relevant artery, Cândido dos Reis Street. The Cacilhas ARU has a 10-year term, which ends in 2021 and is extendable for another five years.

In ARU there is a program called “Urban Rehabilitation Strategy” that includes a series of incentives for those who want to rehabilitate their property. The incentives are divided into two parts: those granted by the Tax Benefits Statute and the benefits conferred by the Municipality of Almada.

The Municipality applies a non-repayable subsidy, up to 20% of the value of the work, with a limit of €2,500.00 per fraction for buildings constructed prior to 1951 and €1,000.00 per fraction for constructions after 1951. The Municipality ensures the reimbursement of €100 monthly rent subsidy for a maximum period of six months and for a fraction that demonstrably needs temporary resettlement.

In the Cacilhas ARU exhibited, the Pedestrianization Project of Cândido dos Reis Street which started in

2010, was presented in an application by the Municipality to the National Strategic Reference Framework (QREN). With an intervention area of 5,700 m² the visa project requires urban requalification of the area through the creation of pedestrian paths at the expense of parking lots and traffic. The devolution of the urban space to people and their functions in the commercial and leisure area, meeting and socializing, contribute to improving the quality of life of users and residents.

The adopted methodology focused on a first contact with the owners, making the program known, and creating the Rehabilitation Desk for clarification of doubts. Next, the property was inspected and the current state of the property and areas requiring intervention were documented in a technical report and assessment sheet. If the owner agreed to proceed with the work, an application was filled out and the owner was asked for an estimate. This estimate was analyzed by the Municipality to confirm the unit prices of materials in the market. Works which are classified as having little relevance, according to the law, require the presentation of an architectural project for licensing.

The owners were advised on which materials to use and which, in view of the construction date, would be more adaptable and durable (in this case, lime-based mortars and silicate paints were advised). The owners were also advised on the colors of facades and window frames as well as the preservation of eaves, stands, roofs, roofs worked at the interior level; that is, on the use of original elements that characterize the time.

At the end of the work, new evaluation forms were prepared and a comparison to the previous results was made. The expectation at this stage was that the work must have progressed two or three levels relative to the initial state of the property.

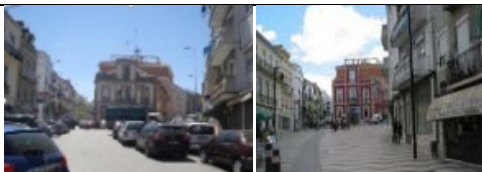

The organizational model followed, the cooperation and proactivity of the service providers towards the applicants, and the innovative measures adopted by the Municipality were a decisive factor in the success of the rehabilitation operations.

The strategy adopted for the urban redevelopment of Cândido dos Reis Street gave visibility to the street through the dynamics created either by the pedestrianization of the street or by the rehabilitation of buildings that throughout this process had been significantly increased.

The requalification of public space, the centrality of the area, the proliferation of new economic activities and the ability to attract foreign investors, whether with the emergence of a new type of qualified trade (restoration and creation of local accommodation units), were all linked to the rehabilitation of the buildings and the current economic situations in the country were the decisive factors for the creation of these dynamics, leading to a significant increase in the urban revitalization of the street.

Table 1

Images of the Urban Rehabilitation and Revitalization of Cândido dos Reis Street (Before and After the Work)

Intervention in the Cândido dos Reis Street	
Urban requalification	Urban rehabilitation
After/before	After/before
 <p>End of Cândido dos Reis Street</p>	 <p>Cândido dos Reis Street No. 37-39</p>

In the specific case of ARU de Cacilhas, a rapid revitalization process that spanned five years totally changed this area of intervention.

Another relevant ongoing project is the Urban Refurbishment of Cais do Ginjal, which involves the requalification of an area of eight hectares with one kilometer of river front. It includes the rehabilitation of the old warehouses located on the first coast line and the increase of the public promenade. It also includes housing, commercial, cultural spaces, and a panoramic view over Lisbon. The project is expected to be completed in 2027.

With greater relevance we have the Urban Rehabilitation Project of Margueira: the City of Water. It is a mega-real estate development with a territorial area of 465,000 m² and 630,000 m² for the construction. It includes the construction of a housing park, a hotel, a marina, and a passenger river terminal. The total investment value is more than one billion Euros.

Dynamizing Actions in Almada:

Project with “Péna Rua Cândido dos Reis” that includes music, dance and cultural workshops; urban craft fairs; musical concerts and antiques fair.

The Case Study of Setúbal, Portugal

Setúbal is the capital of the Setúbal District, in the Lisbon region. It is located on the south bank of the Sado River estuary and southeast of the Arrábida Natural Park. It has a territorial area of 230 square kilometers and 101,500 inhabitants.

The Municipality of Setúbal has invested in several programs in the urban center in order to promote the rehabilitation of buildings associated with the promotion of dynamics in the urban center of Setúbal, to encourage urban revitalization.

These programs intend to promote the urban requalification of the exterior spaces and the urban rehabilitation of the building with the aim of preserving and maintaining existing buildings, which could potentially serve as anchors for the spread of good practices in private surrounding buildings.

As an example, we have the Integrated Program for the Enhancement of the Setúbal Riverside Zone (PIVZRS), designed in conjunction with POLIS, and structured according to objectives related to the urban reintegration of degraded, expectant, and vacant areas, the improvement of legibility and functionality of the urban structure and public spaces.

The program focuses on the Urban Rehabilitation of Machado dos Santos Square, which is characterized by great social vitality, being considered as one of the typical neighborhoods of the city and the Urban Requalification of Public Spaces of the Vasco da Gama Street-Fonte Nova Square. It aims at the requalification of the riverside area to make these spaces more attractive and stimulate private investment in residential real estate and food establishments. The program also includes the Urban Renovation Project of the West Riverside Front intervening in an extremely degraded area, occupied by debris resulting from shipyards and abandoned vessels. The conversion results in the construction of a riverside promenade, recreational areas, and tree planting.

Another program that based its design on a set of structural projects with a strong urban and environmental component and the central objective of strengthening the cultural, tourist, and recreational connections between the Urban Center and the River Sado is the Urban Requalification and Environmental Enhancement of Cities Program (POLIS).

It included the Urban Rehabilitation of Luísa Todi Avenue, in 2008, the most important structural route of the urban layout of the city. It represents a treated public space, where surfaces are divided into different areas of nature, combining stone floors with water and green areas, and sculptural elements give rise to a very attractive and competitive recreational space.

The Urban Regeneration Program of the Historic Center of Setúbal (RESET) includes projects financed with the 7 million funds from the European Regional Development Fund with the contribution of the instrument “Partnerships for Urban Regeneration” of the Lisbon Regional Operational Program, included in the Framework of National Strategic Reference. It covers an area slightly larger than the delimitation made by the 17th century walls, which includes nuclei such as Tróino/Fonte Nova, Comercial Área, Palhais, Fontainhas, and S. Domingos.

Table 2

Images of Setúbal's Urban Rehabilitation and Revitalization

Intervention in the urban center of Setúbal-urban requalification	
	
Luísa Todi Avenue Bocage Square	

Based on the incentives for properties located in areas of urban rehabilitation and in the historical core of Setúbal, the Regulation of Fees and Other Revenue of the Municipality of Setúbal (RTORMS) provides for the special regime for municipal administrative fees to encourage the realization of urban operations related to urban rehabilitation.

Dynamizing Actions in Setúbal:

Steps are taken to revitalize the urban center, such as the Bocagianas parties, in honor of the poet Manuel Maria Barbosa du Bocage. The Festa do Senhor do Bonfim is a religious festival that marks the beginning of the fishing season. The Set festa is a party of the associative movement of the parishes of Santa Maria da Graça. The Feira de Sant'Iago is the main fair in the county and one of the largest in the south of the country. Festroia-Setúbal International Film Festival seeks to publicize the best cinematographic works.

The Case Study of Batumi, Geórgia

Batumi is a city located in the Adjara region in the country of Georgia, located in the Caucasus region of Eurasia, between Western Asia and Eastern Europe and bordered on the west by the Black Sea.

According to the 2014 Census, the city has a population of 152,839 inhabitants distributed over an area of 65 square kilometers.

Its rapid economic development and growth in the last decade is attributable not only to its geographic conditions and subtropical climate, but also to the Government of Georgia's commitment to introducing more flexible legislation towards entrepreneurship.

The Program for the Rehabilitation of Historic Districts and Tourist Infrastructure of Batumi was adopted by the Municipality and was effective from 2009-2013. The objective was to maintain the local identity through the restoration and preservation of historic monuments and buildings thus promoting urban development in the

coastal park in Batumi.

This strategy boosted investment in construction, building, architectural and urban requalification projects for residents and helped to promote tourism in the city where the projects were approved.

The preparation of strategies that focus on the urban revitalization of the city results from experiences acquired over several years, and the knowledge sharing of best practices at the various international conferences that took place in the city of Batumi and in the capital of Tbilisi.

As an example, the XI international conference entitled European Path of Georgia 2014, which took place in Batumi on 10 July 2014, was organized by the State of Georgia to discuss European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. Issues discussed were related to the implementation of an Agreement that included the Free Trade Area and the EU-Georgia cooperation agenda ahead of the 2015 Eastern Partnership Riga Summit and the possible regional security and stability challenges as well as future prospects for cooperation after the integration.

Since 2017, the Municipality of Batumi has promoted the urban and economic development of the city through the presentation of a series of initiatives.

The urban plan included rehabilitation of buildings classified as monuments of cultural heritage, educating the owners on how to preserve them, and the adaptation of such buildings into cultural centers or conversion to services/commerce centers, such as hotels. Thus, the buildings are converted to public meeting centers and, consequently, economic centers, functioning as a source of income for owners or residents.

The Municipality also announced a program that allows people who live in the houses of the old city to transform their courtyards into open spaces, where cultural programs and activities can take place, thus giving new life to the urban center.

Urban requalification projects have had a great impact on the development of cities and improvement in the quality of life in places such as Boulevard, Seaside Park, from Miracle Park, 6th May Park and Nuri Geli Lake, from Lake Ardagani, from Europe Square, Drama Theater Square, Piazza Square, the Argo Cable Car, and ongoing projects such as the New Terminal at Batumi Seaport, Batumi Harbourfront, Batumi Waterfront Master Plan, and Batumi Riviera.

Clearly, the privileged geographical location, which comprises a large area of coastline and has an important sea port for Georgia, is an asset. However, without political will there would be no development of the city.

Visible result was seen in the beginning of 2019 when Batumi received the title of Main emerging tourist destination in Europe at the World Travel Awards Ceremony, where Batumi was listed as one of the best European cities to invest in 2020.

Dynamizing Actions in Batumi:

Actions were taken to revitalize the urban center through the organization of shows including music, dance, theater, and cinema events. These include the Black Sea International Festival, Black Sea International Jazz Festival, Batumi International Festival of Night Serenades, Chveneburebi Festival, and many more.

Table 3

Images of the Urban Rehabilitation of the Boulevard in Batumi, Georgia

FICHA DE PROJETO DE REQUALIFICAÇÃO URBANA					
PAÍS: Geórgia	LOCALIZAÇÃO Costa do Mar Negro	AUTORA Vanessa Soifa Hilário Norberto	TIPOLOGIA -	ÁREA DE IMPLANTAÇÃO -	FICHA 1
REGIÃO: Adjara	PROPRIETÁRIO Estatal	DATA Junho de 2019	FUNÇÃO Requalificação Urbana	ÁREA BRUTA -	EPOCA (SEC.) XX
VISTAS GERAIS			PLANTA DE LOCALIZAÇÃO		
					
PORMENORES					
					
					
Figura 10. Batumi Bouleva – imagens do percurso junto à costa do mar negro			Figura 11. Composições escultóricas existentes no percurso do boulevard: Esculturas do Amor.		
CARACTERIZAÇÃO DO PROJETO DO BOULEVARD					
<p>A construção deste parque à beira-mar ao qual os georgianos chamam de <i>Boulevard</i> teve início em 1881 e desde então, após vários projetos de desenvolvimento territorial, aumentou consideravelmente tendo atingido atualmente os oito quilômetros.</p> <p>O Boulevard circunda parte da zona costeira de Batumi através de uma via definida por zonas de passagem, conciliando zonas de pedestres e ciclovias com dez metros de largura, alugueres de bicicletas, cafés e restaurantes, esplanadas sobre a praia e elementos escultóricos que vão demarcando e dinamizando o percurso. Esta malha projetada, essencialmente por áreas verdes, prolonga-se sob várias seções de traçado ortogonal que se interligam através de praças e pracinhas, ou largos, com o centro da cidade.</p> <p>Ao longo do Boulevard, observa-se uma vista panorâmica do mar negro acompanhando este percurso com mobiliário urbano tais como os bancos de estadia, candeeiros, fontes e as estátuas com temática do Amor demonstrado com corações vermelhos de amor, tal como um homem a patinar, outro a jogar golfe ou de joelhos a oferecer o amor da sua vida.</p> <p>A avenida marítima tornou-se uma fonte de inspiração para muitos artistas que, através destas composições escultóricas relacionadas com o Amor e que contam a sua própria história romântica.</p>					

Concluding Notes

It is necessary to design a model of the revitalization process for urban centers based on the development of urban requalification projects that create public spaces that encourage the population to develop feelings of identity and belonging to those places.

In summary, through requalification of physical spaces, the reinforcement of economic support, and the encouragement of cultural support, urban centers will be able to project themselves in the future without loss of identity.

The conclusion is that each urban center is unique and there is no perfect model. There is no single solution, but there are insightful plans and guidelines based on the local cultural, financial, technical, and human resources, supported by local values and traditions. For the urban revitalization process which, consequently, will also be economical, if you develop and follow a successful meeting, you must consider the following factors below: change in political intentions; urban centers related to urban and regional development; participation of all inhabitants in Urban and Social Revitalization Projects; strengthen comprehensive functions and improve living conditions for inhabitants; consolidate urban identity through creativity, innovation, and cultural diversity; and requalification of public spaces.

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