

The Reuse of Historic Buildings as a Preservation Practice

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Abstract: This paper aims to discuss the concept of reuse as a preservation practice for historic buildings. One of the inherent characteristics of architecture is use. It is among the necessary conditions for its preservation. Thus, considering cultural assets and the architectural heritage of different historical moments, currently recognized as depository of artistic, social and memory values, worthy of being preserved, the issue of reuse assumes relationships that go beyond pragmatic aspects to become a cultural matter. To this end, it can be observed the debate about the reuse of heritage buildings has been gaining prominence in the academic and technical sphere of construction. In May 2018, the 5th International Forum on Architectural Heritage Brazil-Portugal (FIPA) took place in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This event had as a study dimension the reuse while a preservationist practice. That is why the methodology used to structure this text is bibliometrics, in other words, this study was based on papers presented at the event in direct dialogue with the concept under analysis. In this context, it is observed the attribution of a new use, compatible with the characteristics of pre-existing structures, which becomes an important preservation tool.

Key words: Preservationist practices, reuse, historic buildings.

1. Introduction

The reuse is one of the ways to preserve a built heritage, because it enables a new function to the buildings, allowing them to remain alive in the city landscape and in the society's living. Currently, reuse has been widely discussed in the scientific community and an example is the 5th International Forum of Architectural Heritage Brazil/Portugal (5° Fórum Internacional do Patrimônio Arquitetônico Brasil/Portugal—FIPA¹), which took place in the city of Rio de Janeiro between May 23rd and 25th at the National Historical Museum (MHN) and Paço

Imperial with the support of IPHAN² and IAB³. This event, until then annual, had no new editions after this one and it is a partnership between the IAB—Campinas Center, the University of Aveiro from Portugal and the Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas, which aims to promote interdisciplinary debates about the practices of intervention, management and promotion of the architectural heritage through dialogues and exchange of relevant information on these topics.

It was from the 1980s that the discussions and actions on the reuse and rehabilitation of the built heritage gained prominence, both in the aspect of participation and awareness of society, the value of the heritage and its legacy, and the importance of the adequacy of the reuse of buildings as a guarantee of their own preservation, environmental sustainability, preservation of collective memory and peoples' identity [1].

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¹ The proceedings of the 5th International Forum on Architectural Heritage Brazil/Portugal are available online at: <http://iabcampinas.org.br/fipa/> and http://portal.iphan.gov.br/uploads/publicacao/fipa_2018_final_light_com_capa.pdf; both accessed on Jun. 18 2021.

² Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional.

³ Instituto de Arquitetos do Brasil.

According to Shicchi et al. [1], this context can be evaluated from 3 aspects: the first from the technical point of view, with the incorporation of new materials and techniques that expand the performance of professionals; the second, where the reuse of spaces is seen as a guarantee of preservation of quality of life and inclusion of the population in the incorporation of new functions to these places where they are not only for cultural and tourist activities; and the third, where public policies enable new forms of financing for rehabilitation and conservation and also the participation of local agents in heritage preservation.

For the architect and urban planner Maria Rita Silveira de Paula Amoroso [2], general coordinator of FIPA in Brazil, this International Forum of Architectural Heritage brought valuable contributions to think about the reuse of built heritage today, both in the national and international contexts. The Forum's organization sought to highlight the importance of reuse in view of the current conservation of heritage in parallel with plans and projects for social requalification and urban and rural revitalization.

2. Method and Materials

Bibliometrics is a quantitative analysis method for scientific research. The data systematized by means of bibliometric studies seek to measure the contribution of scientific knowledge derived from publications in each scientific area. However, the present work appropriates this method not to quantify the productions of the event, but, rather, to construct a qualitative discourse of a concept, the reuse.

The choice of the texts participating in this event synthesizes some aspects in which reuse has been thought and applied in the contemporary world. The emphasis in the debates about reuse happens due to the need of ensuring its own preservation, since the current reuse interventions are the greatest guarantees of preservation of collective memory and identity of populations, and alongside the sustainability of the

environment, they create an undeniable involvement of society with its material heritage [2].

From this perspective it is considered as a hypothesis for this work the following conjuncture: in face of the approaches outlined in this event it is possible to contextualize the construction of a concept for this preservation practice. As a main objective it stands out the possibility of analyzing and understanding the current scientific production having as a source of studies the design activities that qualify historic buildings. Thus, the paper is structured in four parts: in the first one, the introduction, it is intended to characterize the theme; in the second part, the methodological procedures, it is explained the scientific process that made possible the elaboration of the text. The third consists of the analysis of some papers from the FIPA event, which aims to discuss the reuse and its inflection in the technical environment; and finally, the fourth part, the final considerations, understanding the reuse as a preservation practice.

3. Results and Discussions

In the same dimension that culture is dynamic and changing, so is the concept of cultural heritage. Both the concept of heritage and that of culture are open, resulting from an accumulative process, regardless of being subject to ideological constructions, which does not mean that every cultural asset should be heritage or protected. The recognition of a good, by the State or community, should be done based on criteria, which, however objective and democratic they may be, will always be subject to subjective perspectives. Although, it is important to note that the broader the concept of heritage, the greater the diversity and cultural wealth. Hence the importance of replacing the concept of elitist exceptionality is prone to establish a cultural hegemony, for a concept that expresses representativeness, able to ensure in its hall the different sociocultural segments [3].

With the expansion of the cultural heritage concept, the term reuse as a preservationist practice also goes

through a process of resizing and conceptualization. Thus, for the theoretical basis of this discussion, we take as reference some papers that were presented at the 5th FIPA, among them, the following stand out: “Plano e projeto, ideologia e hegemonia no reuso do patrimônio construído: da conservação à reabilitação integrada” by Pedro [4]; “Metodologias de intervenção no patrimônio edificado” by Costa and Tavares [5]; by Schlee “*A política de patrimônio material do IPHAN*” [6]; “*O reuso como instrumento de preservação: princípios e práticas em confronto*” by Almeida [7]; by Freixo “*O uso como condição à revitalização: um novo tempo para as ruínas do Mirante das Lendas. Teresópolis, Rio de Janeiro*” [8]; “*Reuso e valorização do bem cultural—o caso da Ladeira da Misericórdia/RJ*” by Gomes and Oliveira [9]; by Costa “*Ensaio sobre uma ética do reuso patrimonial*” [10] and, finally, “*Por uma ideia de patrimônio cultural: o seu valor, a preservação e seu reuso*” by Santos [11].

Over the last few years IPHAN has been conducting a critical review and improvement of its practices. The constant updating of these led the Department of Material Patrimony and Inspection (Departamento de Patrimônio Material e Fiscalização—Depam) to make available to society the draft of the Material Patrimony Policy (Política de Patrimônio Material—PPM). When this document is consolidated after public consultation, IPHAN will adopt it as a guide for carrying out actions and processes, such as those for identification, protection, recognition, conservation, diffusion, and heritage education, among other actions that are related to the material dimension of cultural heritage [6].

The PPM presents five general objectives, namely to qualify and expand the actions and activities of Cultural Preservation of Material Nature; to establish practices for the collective construction of preservation instruments, in order to increase legitimacy before local communities and public agents and to facilitate the definition of strategies for the

shared management of the protected properties; institutionalize the preservation practices and instruments developed or suggested by the World Heritage Committee and the Mercosur Cultural Commission; delineate institutional understandings about specific terms or concepts applicable to the preservation and strengthening of the Cultural Heritage of Material Nature of traditional peoples and communities that carry the references of country’s identity, action and memory [6].

Tumbling is another item approached in the PPM draft, which proposes the adoption of 8 criteria in the selection of the assets to be tumbled, as follows: represent the creative capacity of the forming groups of Brazilian society, with expressive symbolic level or expressive degree of artistic, technical or technological skill; represent an evident exchange of ideas and values of the forming groups of Brazilian society; represent a living or vanished cultural tradition that exemplifies forming groups of Brazilian society; represent or illustrate a significant stage of forming groups of Brazilian society; represent the human interaction with the environment, with expressive symbolic level or expressive degree of artistic skill, technical or technological; represent modalities of artistic production from a knowledge arising from popular tradition and the experience of the individual in his social group; represent modalities of artistic production that are oriented to the registration or representation of events, with great symbolic value, the national history and represent modalities of artistic production that are oriented to the creation of objects, parts and or useful constructions to the Brazilian in their daily lives [6].

The Material Heritage Policy, defined by principles and premises, and with social participation, establishes a new level in the preservation actions developed by IPHAN because this dialogue with the subject becomes the entry to this new stage.

The different technical, scientific and ideological positions have been debated in preservation policies

since the creation of the National Historical and Artistic Heritage Service (Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional—SPHAN) in 1937, with the intention of mobilizing society about its importance in the construction of the Brazilian identity. There is a clear need to congregate the population that is close, immediate and user of this great heritage that must recognize its relevance and introduce it as an important part in their daily lives, enabling its sustenance and representativeness so that its preservation is socially effective and integrated [4].

The convincing discourses contained in these plans and projects in front of the population must be transparent around their ideologies to be able to sensitize society of their importance. Moreira [4] cites as examples of preservation the city of Ouro Preto in Minas Gerais, the Pelourinho in Salvador, and the landscape of Rio de Janeiro, all located in Brazil. These places endowed with value, globally known and recognized, are the result of the conservation structuring plans and projects, with clear ideological motives, where the union of the user population and the instrumentalization of the preserved heritage for the sustenance of this same population is present.

Santos [11] states that the preservation and reuse of cultural heritage are possible when an act of countercurrent is made with the devaluation of the “old” in detriment of “innovation”, and also completes that, to value preserving cultural heritage makes us question about the way we collectively use it, and that any individual or collective act will be part of the cultural heritage that we will leave for future generations.

For Costa [10], a heritage work has a value of its own, regardless of its original use or reuse, where it goes beyond the mere use of the space, being praised in what can be called as “use of belonging”, which would be a function or new function that enhances the human flow in the building. In this way, experimenting with new uses for a building of heritage value is “instituting the dynamics of the ethical procedure in

the daily life of society. It is to carry out a retrospective exercise of the historical occupation in order to make it alive and connected to the social yearnings”.

The intervention on a built heritage, where we recognize value or values, must be properly thought out, designed and executed, under penalty of losing the building irretrievably. Thus, when we talk about reuse of a heritage, it is essential to previously define the possible functions compatible with the pre-existing building [5].

However, in practice, the new functions chosen, do not consider the compatibility criteria with the pre-existing building, which is one of the main reasons for the loss of the historic object. So that Costa and Tavares [5] believe that it would be important to document the correct practices, the values of this heritage, the intervention methodologies, the documentary knowledge and the projects or transformations of the past belonging to the buildings, to serve as basis for future rehabilitation actions.

Completing this idea, Choay [12] reports that the reuse, “which consists of reintegrating a deactivated building to a normal use, subtracting it to a museum destination, is certainly the most paradoxical, audacious and difficult form of heritage valuation”. In this case, the building is spared from disuse to be exposed to wear and tear and usurpations of use, where its new function should not be based only on resembling its original use, but rather, take it into account the state of the building and an evaluation of the flow of potential users is necessary.

Costa and Tavares [5] point out the adoption of a methodology that follows the assumptions of the principles established in the “Recommendations for Analysis, Conservation and Structural Restoration of Architectural Heritage” (ICOMOS⁴ Recommendation Letter-2003). This letter recommends that the specificity of the heritage structures requires the

⁴ ICOMOS, or International Council of Monuments and Sites, is a non-governmental civil association, linked to the UN, through UNESCO.

organization of its own structure and proposals in the phases: analysis of the historical information, identification of the causes of damage and level of degradation, selection of the intervention actions, and consolidation and control of the effectiveness of the interventions.

It becomes fundamental the knowledge of the pre-existing materials and building systems, before any intervention and, also, the survey of information about the building in its original version, changes over time and current state. Another principle to be considered is the current structural safety of the building to justify the intervention measures [5].

After all the information gathering, the interventions should be discussed in detail in the Structural Inspection and Diagnosis Report, where no action should be taken without demonstrating that it is indispensable, and it should still be clear how to articulate the strategic design base objectives suggested by international charters or recommendations regarding integrity and authenticity [5].

Therefore, it is possible to rehabilitate buildings, once the rehabilitations are regulated, based on standards that consider the characteristics of existing buildings and thus preserve their cultural and historical identity and state that the application of this methodology allows achieving the quality of the intervention with minimal disfigurement.

The intervention in pre-existent buildings of documentary and architectural interest gains even more prestige when performed by contemporary architects who know how to deal with this pre-existence, where the notions of memory and place are the guideposts of architectural projects. We discuss, then, a dispute established between the architectural project that proposes a contemporary intervention superimposed or juxtaposed to the existing building, which is not considered a supporting, and the restoration project that must consider its pre-existence, original structure and

history. Given this, the question is to dismantle the barriers between the restoration project and the architecture project to prioritize the solidarity and complementarity inside these interventions, conjecturing how contemporary architecture can meet the fundamental guidelines in the intervention of a building with heritage value [7].

Giovanni Carbonara, an important researcher, and reference in the theme of preservation, states that restoration is characterized by two parts: on the one hand, the conservation part, and on the other the revelation which, in this case, is done to facilitate the reading of the testimonies of history and art. Therefore, it is essential to link the restoration and the historical-critical investigation of the building of heritage value that will receive the intervention [7].

With the purpose of establishing a relationship of presence in today's world, reuse should not be a free field for architectural trials, so as not to entail irreversible losses to the building. "The suitability of each intervention will depend essentially on the quality of the project and its realization." [7].

In a case study on the "Ladeira da Misericórdia", in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Gomes and Oliveira [9] present intervention proposals and urban and architectural recommendations for this cultural asset and its immediate surroundings based on the analysis of the historical, cultural, and social context, which affirm its importance to the local identity and to the national heritage.

The remaining stretch of Ladeira da Misericórdia, opened in 1567, is the last testimony of the existence of Morro do Castelo, a place full of historical and symbolic references, where the urbanization of the city of Rio de Janeiro began and that followed the evolution of the major urban reforms and the dynamics of the city's daily life [9].

Some demolitions on the slopes of the Morro do Castelo began in 1904, and in the 1920s, with the proximity of the Exhibition Commemorating the Centennial of Brazil's Independence (1922), opinions

in favor of its destruction gained strength. In 1921, with the need for the definitive implementation of the 1922 exhibition, the demolition work began, where the space occupied by the Bairro da Misericórdia gave way to buildings with eclectic features and exhibition pavilions from all states of Brazil and other countries such as England, the United States, France, Italy, and Denmark, which would be demolished in the twentieth century [9].

Currently, the Ladeira stretch is in a context of multiple temporalities, being surrounded by historic streets and buildings and by contemporary ones, legacies of the revitalizations carried out for the 2016 Rio Olympics, but which were arranged in a way that does not favor the establishment of affective relationships between the population and the cultural asset [9].

There is no doubt about the importance of Ladeira da Misericórdia for cultural heritage. Its listing was an important step towards its recognition and protection. However, its preservation involves both preventive conservation issues and urban planning actions.

Gomes and Oliveira [9] point out that “although Ladeira da Misericórdia is full of significance, having part of its functionality in this, a closer approximation among this heritage, its surroundings and society was found to be fundamental”. Heritage preservation and interventions involving reuse are strong allies in the protection of those areas, which will reverse the abandonment and emptying of them.

Another case study, now in the revitalization of the Ruins of the Mirante das Lendas, conducted by researcher Freixo [8], brings proposals for intervention in the heritage asset with the aim of returning the Mirante to the use and contemplation of the population, without erasing its scars of the past and thus allowing future generations to enjoy this space.

The Mirante das Lendas is located at the top of a hill in Granja Guarani, a residential neighborhood of

Teresópolis, state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Its significance lies not in the volumetry of its forms, but in its ornaments composed of rare Portuguese tile panels depicting indigenous legends by the Portuguese artist Jorge Calaço. Built in 1929 with neocolonial characteristics and currently in ruins, the Mirante has a privileged view of Granja Comary and part of the Serra dos Órgãos [8].

For Freixo [8], it is difficult to pinpoint the moment when the Belvedere began to suffer vandalism, since documentary material about it is scarce. However, in some reports in newspapers of the time, it is pointed out that there were already some damaged tiles a year after its construction, in 1930.

The toppling of this property took place in 1991, but this did not guarantee its preservation, which further aggravated its deterioration process. Only in 2011 the land was expropriated and then donated by its former owner to the City Hall of Teresópolis. Despite the physical conditions and lack of infrastructure of the site, the community recognized it as valuable, due to the joint cleaning efforts, cutting of vegetation and campaigns with the government for the restoration of the Belvedere [8].

The intervention plan actions should consider the connections between the surroundings and the monument itself, especially when the property has a strong connection with the landscape. It is also essential that the Belvedere's tiles (which are the most relevant features and its main attraction) receive an intervention to reconstitute its losses related to its paintings, recovering the unity of the set's reading without causing a false history, respecting the rest of the original material.

Thus, based on the architectural surveys, the pathologies of the construction and the study of the surroundings of the Mirante das Lendas, Freixo [8] points out that any intervention to be proposed should consider three areas of action. The first is the intervention in the surrounding area, with the purpose of enabling survival and use once the project is

complete. The second would be the reintegration of the gaps and restoration of the tiles, allowing their reading and, the third, recovering the architecture of the Belvedere as an indispensable condition for its survival and as a protective support for the tile panels.

4. Conclusions

Through the considerations presented by the works of the 5th FIPA it is clear the concern with the reuse of heritage buildings. Any intervention should follow coherent criteria through design methodologies based on scientific studies on the subject and the legislation in force in the cities. Following the analyzed articles, a thorough study of the heritage asset that will receive an intervention project is fundamental. To know its original structure, its pathologies and especially its history, specific project guidelines can be drawn for each building, enabling them to suffer the least possible loss of their originality and identity.

Proposing an intervention in a heritage building, besides a new use for it, is configured as one of the most important tools for the preservation and conservation of this asset in its environment, but this new use does not have to be only associated with cultural or tourist activities. Often, a new residential or commercial use is more efficient for the maintenance of these buildings and closer to society.

The relationship between the asset and the individual is the essential key to valuing the built heritage of cities, and thus its perpetuation for future generations. This can be achieved through heritage education for the population, so that they know and recognize the importance of a building to the history of its people.

Therefore, we can define that reuse is one of the practices of preservation and conservation of a building of heritage value, where its intervention project is based upon project methodologies grounded on scientific bases and contextualized in the uniqueness of each building, considering their physical

structure and history, ensuring the buildings do not lose their original characteristics and their identity to the population. The practice of a quality reuse should also consider its surroundings and, mainly, the users who will use these spaces, since the population's appropriation and appreciation of the heritage asset is the key to its sustainability in cities.

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