Project of Urban Regeneration – Rehabilitation and Revitalization of the Main Church Surroundings and Amuados Garden in the Historic Center of Loulé

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Abstract: - Historic city centers are the new focus of intervention and the city of Loulé, in Algarve, is no exception. While rehabilitating the unoccupied and degraded buildings, the city hall also wants to regenerate the public space, in order to provide quality living conditions. But the dense and consolidated historic center has several restrictions and conditions that challenge the designer’s freedom. One of those conditions is the historic value, which came to support the project. And among the historical value, there’re some other constrains that arise due to the age of the place. The process went from visits to the site, through talking to the population and the city hall technical team, to the elaboration of plans with analysis, characterization and converging to a conceptual project. This project is a contribution of how to modernize and adapt this public space, in the historical center, to new tendencies, pushing up its inherent potential, so it will offer pleasing unique life conditions.

Key-words: - Heritage, Landscape Architecture, Public Space, Urban Regeneration and Revitalization, Old town, Historic centers, Historic sites, Algarve, Loulé.

1 Introduction
Rehabilitation is nowadays the keyword of new projects and also the focus of mayors and stakeholders due, also, to the crisis that countries are going through. This fact made people change their minds and take interest in what their cities have that was being left behind and reuse it. Instead of continuing to explore outer land and consuming a unique good, the land, and all the cost inherent to it, it’s time to pay attention to the emptiness in the cities. Besides, the land is getting scarce, also the people are getting less financial power and sustainability is a goal for the future, which also involves a good management of the cityscape.

This kind of thinking is drawing attentions to the desert city centers that have been abandoned for the past decades due to migrating to the outskirts, where houses cost less and the urban morphology is oriented to the new life style dependency, the car.

It’s in this context that the Regional Operational Program PO-ALGARVE 21, funded by QREN and UE, intent to promote this kind of actions. Many cities all over the world, especially in Europe, have realized the importance that historic centers have in a city and its population. They are the birth of the city and that’s where the population heritage lies. That’s why its preservation is so important, but this preservation has two generic paths. One goes by crystalizing the entire area and make it look like it stopped in time and maintaining the original aspect, thus hoping to conserve and transmit its essence. This process relies on arranging events according to the overall context, creating, most of the times, a medieval environment, or promoting other kinds of events which transforms the historic center into a big outdoors museum. The other strategic way is to rehabilitate, renovate and regenerate the city center generating new civic life, the best way possible.

Cities like Seville (Spain), Barcelona (Spain), Zadar (Croatia), Florence (Italy), among others, have gone through this second way. These cities have done their regenerations in the 80’s and early 90’s of the last century, and are a positive example of these concepts that can be observed today.

Historic centers have such a strong sense of place that became one of the best places to live, in our days, because of its own hidden potential. To avoid getting more abandoned Loulé has realized that need to take actions upon the historic center.
With the objective of bestowing life, it needs to take strategic orientations as guidelines, which already noticed, in actions with financial programs created to help people rebuild their buildings. In the public space, since it’s for all people to use, the actions and impulse to regenerate and revitalize comes from the municipality.

2 Localization
The intervention area is located in the south of Portugal, in the Algarve region. The area belongs to the historic center of Loulé, which is the city that gives name to the county. It’s the biggest in the region, with 765 km² of area [1] and covers the 3 landmarks in this region which are, in descending order, serra, barrocal and litoral (Figure 1).

![Figure 1- Loulé localization in Algarve and its landmarks (No scale).](image)

Inside the historic center, the area occupies 3,500m² and it’s in a privileged spot, situated in a high point with 170m above the sea level (Figure 2).

![Figure 2 - Loulé historic center and intervention area (No scale).](image)

3 Historic Evolution
The city of Loulé has been inhabited since the roman period, that had established in the north side of the historic center, in the II century b.c. [2] [3]. The roman presence is barely noticeable, with very few remaining influential items in the city. On the other hand, there were two cultures that left important heritage marks in Loulé. The Muslims, that have dominated this area from the VIII century a.d., until the XIII century a.d. [3] [4] [5] and the Christians, who defeated the muslims in 1249, during the reign of king Afonso III. [6]. But it was the Arabian people the first to occupy, what we call today, the historic center [4] and there are elements that, by one reason or another, persisted through our times in the intervention area. The principal reminiscence is the site of the old mosque that is suspected to have been appropriated to implement the Christian church [7]. The present day bell tower was built on the base of the minaret [7]. There are other Arabian elements, such as the watchtower, in the south, a silo found in an excavation near the garden [8], and the base of the defense wall. After the conquest, the first Christian temple was built, which is now the main church, or Saint Clemente church, and was built in the reign of D. Dinis, in the XIII century. It is very likely that it appropriated the old plan, orientation and tower base [7] [9]. In the XVI century the church was enlarged with the occupation of the sides with the construction of several chapels. Today, there’s one missing, because it was destroyed in the 1969 earthquake (Figure 3).

![Figure 3 – Main church of Loulé and Amuados garden in the XIX century.](image)

Leaning to the medieval wall, in the second half of the XVII century, 3 chapels were built in 3 of the 5 entrances to the city. One of them was build covering the Faro door. This chapel, named Ermida de Nossa Senhora do Pilar, forced another opening in the wall to allow access since this chapel was located in the primitive village entrance. In the west side of the area, the space where the garden is today, was from 1835 to 1850, the old cemetery [10] that gave place to this green space, existing today, of which plantations started in 1890.
In 1924 the church was classified as a national monument [9]. In the outside public space, the notorious fact was the asphalted pavement applied in all the area, replacing the limestone, in the first half of the XX century, except for a few sidewalks and the garden.

Figure 4 - Intervention area with its heritage elements.

4 Analyze and Diagnose

The best way to know an urban place is by walking through and interacting with it. By walking through, it means roaming around the streets, going into shops, talking to the people, visiting and using the space like a regular inhabitant or tourist. During this process the team found a special character in this place. The old and picturesque characteristics form a unique environment full of history and meaning. Such potential was identified in the people gathering and conviviality in the garden; the presence of symbolic and cultural heritage; recreational activities and leisure quality; contemplation points; the cultural vegetation; and the events that are created to remind does past times. But this place has also some problems that need to be resolved. The principal problem is the appropriation by the car over pedestrians and monuments. Other problems were encountered such as, the lack of residing people; the lack of respect for the cultural heritage; the insecurity; the garbage and rain water that goes to the terraces below the wall; the degradation of the view, with the new buildings nearby; the quality of the pavements; and some bad smells coming from the litter.

The entire city center and particularly the intervention area is characterized by its calm and tranquility which contrast with the rest of the town. But this sense of character is also transmitted through the historical presence that remains strong with the presence of certain elements, such as, the main church, the castle and the defense wall, from the early times. Posterior transformations in the urban morphology are also visible, when walking through the small and sinuous streets; when observing to the renewal of buildings that maintain the original design; the presence of old trees and the several kinds of pavements.

What keeps this center away from the height constructions and total decharacterization, are the national laws and city hall orientation that preserve and protect this historic place.

After the field work, came the second phase, with a more technical approach, consisting in transforming the notes on the public space and their influences into perceptual and organized information. This approach required the establishment of a border which goes a little beyond the intervention area to understand the closest influences. These notes were then settled in plans that synthetize the work and are described in the next chapter.

4.1 Analyze Plans

4.1.1 Buildings

The urban morphology, due to the topography, has a north/south orientation and has a sinuous organization with several construction sedimentation epochs. Most of the buildings have 1 or 2 floors, but there’s one feature element and that’s the main church. Besides having 1 floor it reaches 15m high and the tower is 23m high.

Figure 5 – Buildings fabric.

Most of these buildings have a residential use, except for the only restaurant in the area and the heritage and religious elements. There’s also the division of rehabilitation services of the city hall near the church. About the physical aspects it was noticed that there are 3 uninhabited and degraded buildings facing the area. Also the facades of all the buildings interacting with the area were captured.
These volumes project shadows to the outside public space, influencing its comfort. From the buildings it was registered one large shadow which is cast by the church and its tower.

### 4.1.2 Exterior Public Space

The simplification of the public space can be divided into two distinctive parts. One is the garden, with its own character, being only for pedestrians and with a viewpoint that is a hallmark and an element of attraction. The other is the rest of the area, which is used to park cars and to their circulation. The people are left to second place, because they don’t have their own space and the monuments are disrespected, especially in weekdays and market day (Sunday morning). This is a strong aspect that causes visual pollution and impact in this area.

These two parts are well divided by a physical barrier, in iron, that needs to be open to enter the garden. It was a necessity, because of the high rate of insecurity because, in urban morphology, the garden is presented as a dead end (Figure 6).

The offering in the garden is very different from the rest of the space, creating a very pleasant place for relaxation and to enjoy outside activities. In contrast, the other part is barely used for activities, except the punctual events created by the municipality.

The traffic circulation was facilitated with the application of asphalt pavement around the church and in both squares. Some sidewalks were left with the limestone cubes (Figure 6).

The only permeable areas are in the garden with several forms defining the design of the garden. There are plantations with grass, shrubs and trees. Those trees are centenary, which constitute a living patrimony and heritage of the city. The species are essential palm trees (*Phoenix canariensis*), mediterranean hackberry (*Celtis australis*), glossy privet (*Ligustrum* spp.), norfolk island pine (*Araucaria heterophyla*) and thuja (*Thuja* spp.).

From the 10 palm trees, 5 have recently died because of the dissemination, in 2010, by a beetle named Red Weevil (*Rincophorus ferrugineus*). The biggest shrubs are oleander (*Nerium olander*) and there are several other herbaceous surrounded by grass that isn’t used. All this vegetation creates the largest patch of shadow in the area, that it’s not been taken the proper vantage. And this is due also to the boundary in brick surrounding the vegetated parts, which left confined corridors to the circulation of people and it’s pavement is in concrete slabs.

The area is all surrounded by buildings, except from two sides. One of the sides is the viewpoint in the garden which is an open space to the landscape, with a high location, and that’s why it’s an entering to the winds coming from the west and southwest and it’s the biggest open to the surroundings. On the other side are the streets, connecting to other parts of the city, channeling the winds through, especially the north winds.

All the area suffers from a lack of urban furniture and quality. The elements punctuated along the space are scarce and don’t fulfill their obligation due to the fact they are misallocated. The garden is the only place with benches and the litters are far from the passing ways. At night the area is very poorly illuminated, with weak bulbs and two projectors hanging on the buildings incident on the church.

For the overall perception a plan was made which was called Human Comfort. This was a sensitive plan gathering information referring to the conflict pedestrians/cars; sun exposure; wind exposure; insecurity; pavements (heat and irregularity); urban furniture (quality and quantity); and the overall aspect of the surroundings.

### 5 Proposal

#### 5.1 Strategy

The past and close relationship, between the old church, the church square, the garden and the landscape ahead, is to be reestablished as an important potential of this place. The other strategic orientation concerns the strong car presence, and the intention passes by returning the public space to pedestrians, without completely eradicating the cars. But what concerns to the organization of the space, is to use the principal element of heritage in this place as a pivot, specially its ground plan (Figure 7).

For the uses, the intention is to increasing the feeling of leisure and relaxation and also for social
activities, rescuing this inherent potential, without
ignoring the actual functions and activities.

Figure 7 – Diagram with the strategy intentions.

5.1 Concept
Reinventing the public space, with the quote “the
place of history, the history of place”, is the
philosophy behind this project. Throughout history
the formulation of this place has been well-marked
and now this place is going to be reformulated by
these markers. This means that the origin of this
formulation had to go to the foundations of this
place.

5.2 Conception
After the necessary studies and orientations, the
ideas for the project were gathered and simplified in
drawings to best communicate the intentions.
To help understanding the feelings, the intentions
and the needs of this place, meetings with the city
hall services were taken and a questioner was made
to the people encountered using the place. The
reflections, which are described in the chapter 4,
were one of the starting points to get to this
proposal, which helped in the decisions. Another
working axle was the sense of place that was
dysfunctional and needed to be reencountered. The
sense of place, in this case, is camouflage by the
modern unconscious uses, which had almost erased
the truly sense inherent in the heritage. This place
has a special character because it constitutes the
origins of the city, where its principal religious
building is located and it’s classified as a national
monument, and is surrounded by other heritage
elements. This important cultural manifestation of
the roots of this people is the base of their
identification to this region. The devaluation of this
site, will only devaluate its own people. But not
only is the heritage constituted by buildings. The
living elements, such as the centenary trees, the
habits and the traditions are also an inherent part of
this heritage.

With this important burden from the past, arises a
challenge that is blending this sense of place with
today’s lifestyle. Thus the spatial organization
started from the foundations of the main church by
means of bringing out its base plan. One of the
oldest part of the temple is the nave [11], the main
body of the church. The spatial organization was
then based on its proportions. The process
began/started by bringing out its measurements in
order to represent the churchyard and, thus,
strengthen it. Then its replication through all the
area forming a mesh that also encompassed the
garden (Figure 8). This mesh forming the pavement
is made in limestone from the region with slabs and
irregular traditional Portuguese sidewalk, inspired in
the previous pavement. This was a process that
integrates the heritage importance as the protagonist
of this project. The intention is also to break the
existing separation between the garden and the
square. And it is intended to be done by merging the
two spaces together (Figure 7 and 8). For this
purpose, the project consists of removing the grating
and opening the garden to the public, day and night.
The important issue of safety was contemplated, by
invoking passive safety as a solution. To make this
happen, the building of a cafeteria with esplanade
was planned for the north side of the garden. So, to
make this happen, it was plan to build a cafeteria
with esplanade in the north side of the garden,
which constitutes a key element to bind people to
the place (Figure 8 and 11). This construction will
also include the new restrooms and the small
storehouse for the gardener. Other attractive
elements such as the viewpoint, provided by the
insertion of the mesh, and the tip that is folded to the
wall, both in plastic recycled deck (right part of
Figure 10), are distinctive parts that generate
curiosity; the insertion of the water element is “in
addition to its decorative value and cheery space, is
especially vital for the existence of any garden, as a
space built with living material” [12] (Figure 12)
and so plays an important role enhancing the place.

Another way to keep this place safe is by cleaning
the visual obstacles to avoid hideouts. For that
purpose, some shrubs were substituted with smaller
ones and the rest of the project was formulated with
safety thoughts.

Providing pleasant conditions for people to stay will
have this effect too. The capacity of the garden is
increased permitting the installation of benches of
different kinds and in different positions; tables to
play cards or use the computer; micro modulation
cover with grass, to the most informal kind of sitting
and laydown that is extended into a plain lawn. This way the garden gains extra space to be used and can gather people of different ages and still be a stimulating, relaxing and leisurely place.

The history has an important role in this site, so the communication of the historic events occurred here is essential. This way is purposed to be engraved, in the tip of the deck, some important historic events are planned to be engraved at the tip of the deck to remind and to inform.

It is also important to know the living heritage and the local vegetation. An object was thus designed to put in front of each tree, containing the tree identification and a light directing to it giving a much deserved importance.

The traffic circulation was reduced to the minimum, while ensuring the access to the existing garages. Seven parking lots were created with one handicap spot, one for the priest and another for load/unload services. This last one integrating a timetable period to be converted to resident park, when it’s not been used. The rest of the spots are for residents only. If the city hall realizes that there are few, the churchyard, or part of it, can be opened for that use. For services and ceremonies, the churchyard provides the space to this specific traffic.

The circulation will be confined with bollards to avoid steps and this way cleared and facilitates the pedestrian circulation. Removable bollards will be used for this confining to permit the existing cultural events.

4 Conclusion

The rehabilitation of historic centers is always a challenge. Besides the reconstruction of degraded buildings, the most difficult part is to attract people to settle in this kind of neighborhood. Its preservative conditions and terms are difficult to adapt to today’s lifestyle. But the cultural importance leads into one of two situations: either this part of the town becomes one big museum with few inhabitants, crystalized in time, for tourist use only; or it catches up with the present time, keeping and attracting residents on the way to a social sustainable future. The public space has an important role on this, because it’s the most flexible part of the historic center, and it can be adapted to attract new residents and provide better quality of life to the old residents.

The main goal of this project is to give a better quality life to the residents and give the tourists conditions to appreciate the cultural value inherent in this place. This intervention has organized the public space in a way that can be clear, legible, functional, communicated, with a better space usage and multifunctional activities. Also, the pleasant character was appropriated and augmented, giving good leisure conditions and provoking social interactivity. All this was achieved with the cultural interest supporting it. The cultural elements were integrated in the design of the project, structuring the space and by this mean giving visibility and importance to them. These heritage elements were made part of the project incorporated in some solutions. For example, the principal historical aspects that had occurred in the city and especially in this site are communicated through the project and visible to who visits.

A space that had been taken from the pedestrians is this way given back for a better usage. To have a better quality life, the population needs to use the public space the best way they can and the best way offered. This way the pedestrians are the principal actor in this project that offers tranquility, and interactivity, is bioclimatic pleasant and also a gathering place.

This is a project that exemplifies that it is possible to intervene in a historical site without disrespecting the culture and history. To make an intervention responding to nowadays needs and todays interpretation of the public space doesn’t mean that it can’t modernize it. This intervention shows that it’s possible to regenerate and revitalize an important cultural and historical place with contemporary language and can become a lively neighborhood.

References:

Figure 8 – Master Plan.

1- Main church
1a- Medieval wall (outside the area)
1b- Watch tower (Arab origin)
1c- Hermitage of Nª Srª of Pilar
2- Amuados Garden
2a- Cafeteria
2b- Micro modulation with grass
2c- Viewpoint
2d- Water feature
2e- Pic-nic and games area
3- Batalhão Sapadores do Caminho de Ferro square
3a- Prof. Cabrita da Silva square
4- Churchyard

Figure 9 – Birds eye view.
CUT SECTIONS

Figure 10 – Cut south side with detail of historic information engraved on the deck.

Figure 11 – Cut north side.
Figure 12 – Perspective from the garden to the church.

Figure 13 – perspective from the church to the garden.