

KEYWORDS

Coimbra, Heritage, University, European Capital of Culture, Culture, Urban Renewal

ABSTRACT

Part of a broader work that simulates a candidacy of Coimbra to European Capital of Culture 2027, this essay seeks to draft an urban renewal plan for the main University of Coimbra's hub, which holds a symbolic and functional side of cultural/artistic production currently underused, because ignored. The construction of new buildings is hardly possible - because of the site's physical situation and the constraints brought by the UNESCO status - but above all unnecessary, given the spatial and functional characteristics of the ensemble, both in the interior and exterior domains. Overall it's about requalifying and regenerating public space, which includes interventions in Largo D. Dinis, Largo da Feira and Pátio das Escolas, key places in articulating the spaces and rhythms of the university's oldest and central hub.

There is a contradiction between this spatial variety and the monofunctionality that characterizes the urban development of this zone in the last century (especially the campus), which reflects a tendency for the institution's sprawl over the city, and the denial of densification. This issue is closely related to the discussion of heritage, a fundamental theme here, even though implicit, and the position it takes is one of effort and stimulus for an active and productive heritage, as opposed to one that is numb, profitable and frozen in time. The concepts of plan and process become thus essential, guiding the work's thinking and its decisions, that prioritize long-term planning, able to satisfy both temporary moments and the permanent everyday (twice as fruitful), essential to ensure a city's development which is autonomous, and thus not influenced by moments and trends that this kind of initiatives really are.

Analysis and proposal intermingle - both in the work process and the final result - but it is possible to tell apart two moments in the overall structure. A first one of reading and interpretation of relevant documents, as to understand the history of this particular initiative in terms of its objectives, methods and approach to issues similar to the ones dealt with here, and tracing of a cultural portrait of the city - that generates this virtual context, which frames the work and makes it relevant. A second one of spatial and functional analysis of the university's main hub, of the structures and infrastructures that directly and indirectly relate themselves with it, in order to estimate the characteristics, capacities and suitability of the place and its surrounding environment, while proposals are constantly presented throughout, concerning diverse themes and intervention levels.