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Shopping Centre and Urban Regeneration: Reflections on the potential for a synergic relation

Abstract:

Shopping Centres are usually related with the process of suburban growth and urban sprawl. Key element and urban reference of the motorway cities, these semiotic symbols for the consumption's life standard, shopping centres are also considered the executioners of traditional commerce.

Urban centres on the main Portuguese cities suffer a chronicle problem of abandon and desertification, mostly related with housing prices and inefficient policies on urban regeneration, to which the local commerce abandon is collateral.

Considering the urban essence as a social happening, where public and private activities coexist in a complex and intricate structure, where the hierarchy of space and building is sewed by the common citizen necessities – shelter, food, work and leisure – it is reasonable to assume that the commercial activities which provide the software or interface for this basic requirements of contemporary urban living, may be the essential catalyst for a city vitality.

The main question on this paper is: Can shopping centres be used as the anchor for urban regeneration of consolidated metropolitan areas? If so, what might be the adequate typologies, dimensions and logistic requirements?

Not disregarding any other important factors of the urban framework, operating on the border between public and semi-public space, the anchor terminology is not innocent. The paradigms of the contemporary shopping centre stand on the basic

lexis of the traditional city - where the most iconic anchor shops relate with the squares in a similar symbolic pattern as that of the public or corporate buildings, whilst the smaller shops are placed along the "mall" streets and configure the common private blocks, as in a real city.

Here lies one key factor: the lack of authenticity of the shopping centre urban dialogue, which in this case, could be referred as authentiCITY. As an opposite example, we may refer to the importance of big department stores, in the commercial vitality of many European city centres, where shopping happens without a mimetic solution. In this case, the relation between urban street shopping and department store shopping is diffuse and disconnected.

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper is to explore the possibilities of connection between urban street shopping and the shopping (centre) urban experience, considering the potential for a synergic relation.

For this purpose two case studies, located in Lisbon, were considered,: Chiado regeneration scheme, by Architect Alvaro Siza Vieira (where stands the reconversion of the Chiado Warehouses, by Architect Eduardo Souto de Moura) and the Martim Moniz area, in which stand two small shopping centres built in the 80's.

Keywords: Commercial space, public space, urban plan, urban connection, Society, Community.

Introduction

In Portugal, regeneration has been a focus on urban and planning politics for the past decade. In this context, considering desertification as the main effect, shopping centres are usually referred as being part of the cause's group. The stereotypes of destination shopping centres, which started to be implemented by the end of the 90's, along with the degradation of the first generation shopping centres, has emphasized this feeling.

In a scenario of sustainability, considering the economical origin of this term (economical sustainability), the next generation of shopping centres should be a synergic tool for urban regeneration and social integration. This study will reflect on the potential for such a process, through the analysis of two case studies, located in Lisbon's historical centre.

Case Study #1 - Chiado Regeneration through urban and retail connection

Chiado's regeneration scheme by Architect Alvaro Siza Vieira, after the 1985 fire that burned out a significant area, comprising several commercial and housing buildings, as well as significant public area, took nearly 10 years to be completed. In an overall analysis, the area was rebuilt maintaining the image of the pre-existing buildings, keeping most of Chiado's uses from the 80's.

Not disregarding the technical complexity of rebuilding an highly damaged historical area, namely regarding the security issues and the connections with several pre-existing levels and borders, as well as the symbolic significant of this area for the city and its population, one could say that the key factors of this successful regeneration scheme, developed by the team lead by Alvaro Siza, were urban connection and retail synergies.

In terms of urban connection, looking at this plan in a broad perspective, the introduction of a new subway station nearby Chiado, in the midpoint of Baixa's typical blocks, which was built underneath the Chiado Warehouses ("Armazéns do Chiado"), is the fundamental innovation of the plan, and worked as a catalyst in the years after the reopening of this area to the city.

The subway station faces Baixa's lower level, in an axial relation with Vitória Street, giving straight access to all adjacent streets and just next the lower entrance of "Armazéns do Chiado". This station also works as public connector, opened to public going to the upper area of Chiado and "Bairro Alto". This public vertical connection, layered independently from the subway line, developed underground along Garret

Street, the main street on the plot, allows users to easily access the higher level of the street through the use of several mechanical escalators.

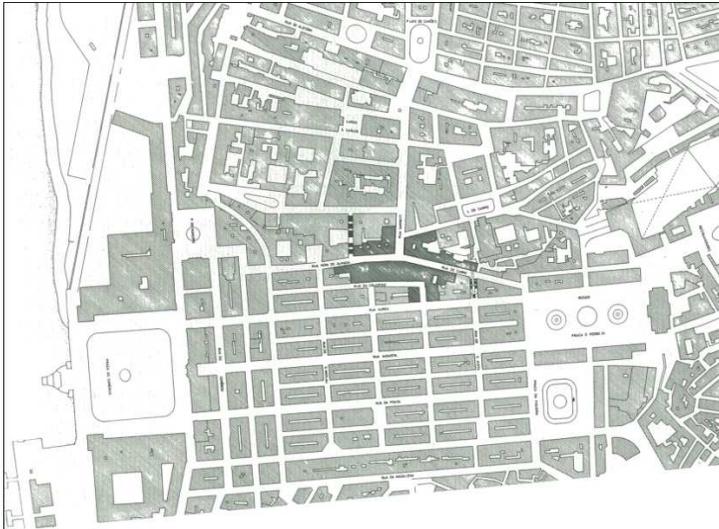


FIG. 1 Chiado - Urban fabric before the 1985 fire. Source: El chiado. Lisboa. Alvaro Siza y la estrategia de la memoria (p.117)

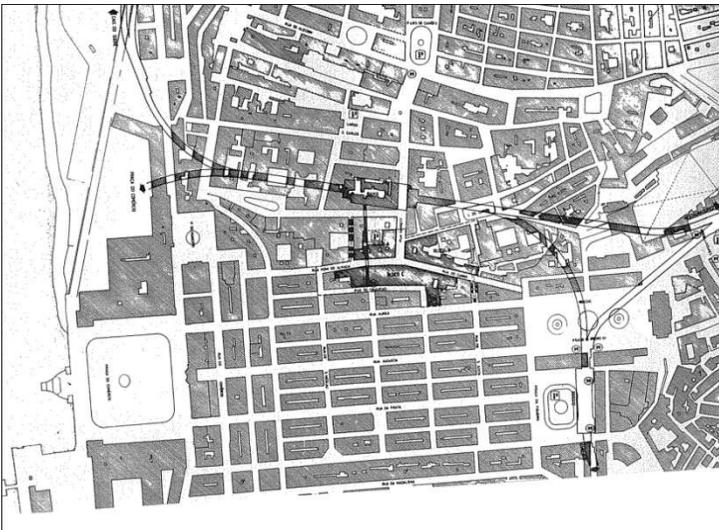


FIG. 2 Chiado - Proposal for the damaged area, with subway line and parking areas. Source: El chiado. Lisboa. Alvaro Siza y la estrategia de la memoria (p.119)

As for retail Synergies, it is fundamental to understand that this area was not developed around a specific public space, and Chiado's Warehouses, as well as Grandella's Warehouses were the most significant references in the burned area. These traditional flagship shops were reconverted in updated shopping units, to ensure the rebirth of downtown's commercial nature, which was suppose to be a main feature in the regeneration strategy. Chiado's Warehouse (which kept the original name "Armazéns do Chiado"), was rebuilt as a shopping centre, with 10.500m² of Gross Leasable Area (GLA), including a set of anchor shops and a foodcourt. Grandella's Warehouse, which was initially reconverted has a department store (Printemps, in the first years), accommodates nowadays a large H&M's store, with some office levels on top.

These shopping units have allowed the connection of Baixa's lower area to the upper levels of Chiado's plot, working as urban connectors and retail anchors, creating a strong synergy with smaller street shops and restaurants. Nowadays, Chiado as recovered its historical use as the city's most symbolic street shopping area, creating also a positive dynamics in the regeneration of the nearby areas, such as Baixa's lower plot and the upper areas connecting with "Bairro Alto".

Case Study #2 - Martim Moniz and the anonymous Shopping Centres

Martim Moniz is the biggest of the four public spaces in Baixa's urban structure (Restauradores, Rossio, Figueira Square and Martim Moniz), excluding Commerce Square ("Praça do Comércio"). It is not a traditional square, in the sense that it is not aggregated to significant public buildings, working mostly as a decompress chamber for the valley which runs along "Almirante Reis" Avenue (similar to configuration of Restauradores Square and the valley running along Liberty Avenue, on the opposite side), it stands next to the hill of the City's Castle ("Castelo de S. Jorge) and is the main gateway to Baixa, coming from the Northeast side of Lisbon.

It is a space with significant historical meaning, being quite relevant its topological relation with the castle, once throughout the middle age, this area was of great importance for the Moorish and the defensive set of the city. Not disregarding this space's historical evolution and context, for the purpose of this study the focus will be on the urban developments of the site, during the last three decades.

The public space is a long rectangle, defined by a central platform wrapped in a ring road, containing an underground parking. The upper side of the square is cut through one of the city's main streets, coming from uptown. Its lower side is closed by a four

stars hotel (“Hotel Mundial”), built during the late 50’s and object of several refurbishments, demolitions and additions throughout the 90’s, being the last refurbishment of 2004. The square’s longer sides are defined by two slopes which contain historic neighbourhoods (such as “Campo Mártires da Pátria” on the west side and “Mouraria” on the east side), on the west side a municipal housing development which started in 2001 and is nowadays near completion, after more than 10 years. On the top of each side the space is “embraced” by two anonymous shopping centres built in the 80’s.

The two buildings (Martim Moniz Shopping Centre, on the west side, and Mouraria Shopping Centre, on the opposite side) are identified and well known in the city. In this case, the word “anonymous” is used to express the fact that these shopping centres have a weak connection with the public space, and are mostly used by the local communities, despite their central location.



FIG. 3 Martim Moniz - Aerial photo with site limits. Source: google maps, compiled by the author.

The public space itself, which was object of major renovation in the 90’s, is developed through a series of platforms, following the street’s rake and creating different typologies of exterior hardscape. The project included kiosks, which were specifically designed for this space, but had low demand on the past two decades. An underground parking was built in this process.

Even though Martim Moniz is a central area, nearby the city centre and it’s most significant historical attractions, it has been a place with degrading activity and low

use by the inhabitants of the city through the 90's, which may have led to an emerging abandon that started taking place in the past years. This urban and social decline can be explained in three operational levels:

- a) First, the lack of integrated planning, expressed by unsuccessful and asynchrony urban projects and developments, which has a clear expression in the disintegrated construction of Martim Moniz Shopping Centre and the housing development on the west slope, without an effective project or strategic plan for the public space;
- b) Secondly, the typology of the buildings itself, once these were first generation shopping centres, with diffuse and compressed fitting, without a clear and efficient retail purpose. Specifically at this level, the conceptual structure of those shopping centres - mostly turned to their insides, emphasizes the cut between city and community.
- c) Thirdly and last, regarding the sociological and community framework of this area, once it is located nearby many immigrant communities, mainly from the Middle East, North Africa and Asia, which may tend to result in a segregation process, in which these working and well settled communities turn to themselves and the rest of the inhabitants do not seek to discover and mingle with new cultures.

The first and second levels may be self explained by looking at the overall plan of the site and the typology of the two buildings, which have contributed for the poor development and degradation of the surrounding area during the 90's and beginning of the 21st century.

Regarding the social and community issues, even though there may be a straight relation between shape, use and the users themselves, it seems that the social framework was conditioned from start by the previous ones, once the public space and the shopping centres could (should) have been a strong catalyst to open these communities cultural diversity and activities to the rest of the city.



Fig. 4 Martim Moniz – Lack of connection between Shopping Centres and public space. Source: author.

Urban Regeneration and Connections

Both case studies have been playing a significant role on Lisbon's historical centre regeneration. Nevertheless, as it is understood in the description given for each example, the context and sequence of events the turned each site in a critical spot for urban development and regeneration is quite different.

In Chiado's case, the timeline and context of the regeneration process is well defined and organized, relating to the 80's fire and the subsequent plan, allowing a more precise analysis on the cause-effect relation. On the other hand, Martim Moniz regeneration process is not related to specific event in time, being a result of urban politics (or the lack of them) and specific projects without an integrated objective. In both cases, as it usually happens, the city inhabitants tend to adapt their needs and activities to the urban offers, following transportation interfaces and the availability of needed services or activities.



FIG. 5 and 6 Chiado – Chiado’s Warehouse main entrance: view from Garrett Street, the plot main axis. Chiado – Chiado’s Warehouse “rear” façade and subway entrance from Baixa’s lower level. Source: author.

Despite both places have a central location and are equally well served with public transportation, and parking facilities, in its essence these spaces contain different nature, symbolic and context, which naturally leads to different or specific use and appropriation. Nevertheless there is common denominator for both areas – connection is a key factor in the regeneration processes.

Chiado’s regeneration scheme was implemented through the connection of pedestrian flow, bringing closer different levels of the surrounding city and creating an effective synergy between street shopping and shopping centres. The strategy of using the main public transportation infrastructure as an innovative feature in vertical connection to the plot and the nearby areas, in articulation with the connection of “shopping flow” between bigger shopping units and small street shops, proved to be very efficient and sustainable, working as magnet to attract users in the years after the construction and to keep an uprising flow of people in long term.

Hierarchy plays an important role in the dynamic of each place. In Chiado, strategically placed retail anchor have been relevant both to emphasize the importance of public squares and to bring an added value to areas kept aside the main axis. This can be observed in the placement of strong anchor shops in the lower levels of Chiado’s Warehouse, with direct connection to the street and next to small delivery areas, creating and hybrid between traditional shopping centre and common department store. This units along with Grandella’s department store create a relevant magnet towards the axis along Garret Street.

Martim Moniz case, demonstrates how the lack of an integrated strategy and planning may result in a process of abandon, at a physical, economical and social level. Eventhough the public space itself is not the subject of clear degrafation, more than 10 years of ongoing construction site have damaged the overall image of the

place, which is emphasized by the lack of connection of the shopping centres, not only in form or typology, but also on the symbolic and effective lack of connection with public space, resulting in systematic gap between space, society and local community. Obviously the tools to operate in such process are significantly different, considering the fact that Chiado's regeneration was held after a disaster of great proportions, which led to the possibility of developing an integrated plan. However, when considering the tools, one may observe that such instruments may also be implemented in a common planning process, which did not apply to Martim Moniz case, and it is has not been applied in many similar situations, mostly due to lack of vision and political agenda.

In fact, there isn't a parallel between the two case studies themselves, considering the substantial differences separating both of them, in a topographic and topological approach, as well as in a symbolic and social analysis. The parallel lies in importance of connection, as a fundamental in urban regeneration processes, specifically regarding the potential relevance of shopping centres as anchors for urban regeneration in consolidated metropolitan areas.

In both cases, connection is a step to authenticity in terms of shopping experience. In Chiado's case, through the interaction of traditional shopping centre with street shopping, in a flowing process, using the proper mechanical devices (escalators and elevators) to create a symbiotic experience, without needing to mimic the formal image of the city, inside the shopping centre itself. As for Martim Moniz, authenticity was not achieved or desired, through a conceptual design, which could have happened if those shopping centres had been conceived as gateways to the multicultural universe they stand for.

Social Integration or Community Integration

Chiado's area, along with Rossio's surrounding area, which is usually defined as "Baixa Pombalina", may be considered as the symbolic centre of Lisbon Historical Plot. This kind of perception is usually attached to a specific social relevance and acceptance, providing a positive dynamic regarding the flow of people, economy and cultural activities. Even though soil value may be a segregation factor, if the costs for housing, offices or even commerce are too high, the social framework of people visiting and using this kind of areas will be wide.

This may be confirmed in Chiado's regeneration scheme, considering the real estate costs, namely regarding housing and office. However, in this particular successful

case, again urban connection plays a relevant role – the upper areas around “Bairro Alto”, which earned a much greater public accessibility with the subway’s upper level connection, are working as counterweight in the social and economical diversity.



FIG. 7 Chiado – Chiado’s Warehouse main entrance facing Carmo St., which connects with Rossio. Source: author.

Regarding Martim Moniz, its proximity with the referred city centre should be a magnet for the city users’ flow visiting or passing by the downtown. Nevertheless, probably due to its lack of integrated offer in commerce and retail anchors, and its connection with the surrounding neighbourhoods, the social perception seems to result in a lower general acceptance and a catalyst to segregation of immigrant communities and specific users.

Despite all that has been written in this paper about the lack of urban connection, disintegrated solutions and incorrect urban politics to which the site as been subjected, the communities who live and work around Martim Moniz have been giving this district a new and vibrant breath. Cultural and commercial activities are hitting the public space, emphasizing the multicultural identity of the area, giving this place a lively feeling and creating a true regeneration process made by the people and the community.

Lisbon municipality has started to play an important role, with cultural agendas and local programmes for community development. Martim Moniz is now being the stage of a multicultural boom which is giving Lisbon inhabitants, the opportunity to discover traditions, food and references from many different places such as China,

India or other cultures from North Africa.



FIG. 8, 9 and 10 Martim Moniz – Summer Fair with Kiosks and street events. Source: author.

In fact, community actions are doing what 30 years of planning could not achieve. This process of social integration through the local communities is creating positive synergies with the surrounding neighbourhoods, like the nearby area around “Intendente” Square, which had been subjected to deep social and urban degradation through the two past decades, with serious issues on crime, prostitution and drugs.

Conclusion - Shopping Space, Public Space

Urban life is social in its essence. Cities are supposed to provide the basic needs of its citizens, such as shelter, food, work and leisure.

Social acceptance is one of the main underlying aspects on urban regeneration. To find acceptance, outside the realm of strong symbolic space, such as historical city, one must seek the needs of the inhabitants and users for each specific plot, creating a set of destination purposes.

These basic principles, which can easily be observed in this paper’s case studies, can be applied in the complex universe of urban planning and design, specifically in urban regeneration schemes or processes, having in mind the social framework of each place, to implement the activities which will work as a catalyst to regenerate. At this level, one must remember that since Classical Antiquity commerce has been the most vibrant activity on urban settlements.

Regarding the shopping centres, typology, dimensioning and logistics are collateral issues, which should be relevant in a more detailed level. Questions regarding the language and morphology of retail buildings are too diverse and could not be embraced in the context of this paper. Nevertheless, the underlying principles to this

analysis would be connection and hierarchy. Considering this building operate in the border between public and semi-public space, connection with public space and functions, working as a catalyst to street shopping, aggregating reference anchor shops or interact with flagship department stores should be key options.

Public space may not be a shopping space - however, when considering the need to regenerate and fight desertification, not disregarding the specific functional needs of each site (residential, workplace or industrial), shopping and culture (leisure) may be the adequate catalyst to implement such a process - in this cases, shopping space can and should relate with public space, without mimic or artificiality, operating as a natural interface for true connectivity.



FIG. 11 Chiado - Chiado's Warehouse "rear" façade, H&M department store and subway entrance: view from Baixa's lower level. (photo by the author)

In conclusion, shopping centres may be the catalyst for urban regeneration, focusing on the connection with the surrounding environment, both on a functional and social level. Social acceptance may be implemented by the significance of the place itself (loccus) or improved through community or specific group synergies, depending on the identity of each place. Identity plays a crucial role, considering the need for authenticity.

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