

INTERVENTIONS IN URBAN CENTERS: QUESTIONS ABOUT CHROMATIC (DIS)INTEGRATION

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ABSTRACT

This work aims to launch a critical perspective on the intervention actions undertaken lately in the historic center of the city of Uberaba – a medium size city in the countryside of the state Minas Gerais, Brazil. The central region of the city is made up of a set of buildings from the eclectic period that share space with modern buildings around the city's main square – Rui Barbosa Square. This square underwent several changes over time, highlighting the weaknesses in the construction of a heritage landscape in this territory, which supports collective memory. That said, we are interested in the contemporary transformations carried out in this region, which are related to both the market logic and the regulations regarding the clearing up the facades of historic buildings, such as the removal of advertising boards from stores. These reforms introduced new colors to the region, raising questions about the criteria (or lack thereof) for chromatic definition. The appeal to the use of strong colors without surveys or appropriate restoration techniques generates noise in the urban landscape. In this sense, we can ask ourselves if the advance in the promotion of heritage built by the public authorities can result in a tendency to trivialize the urban set. Specifically in this text, we will focus on the analysis of trivialization processes in urban sets of historical interest from the chromatic aspect, using comparative analyses, with structure analysis keys for the development of an initial critique of the cultural heritage in Uberaba.

Keywords

Chromatic reintegration; Urban heritage; Trivialization processes; Uberaba.

1. INTRODUCTION

The revaluation of historic centers in Brazilian cities, as a result of their real estate value, has expanded intervention actions in historic urban areas in recent years. These interventions many times respond to immediate actions related to new uses, private interests or to promote public administration. We emphasize that cultural heritage in Brazil shares a recent history, marked by conflicts, idealism and preservation.

It's necessary to contextualize the production of contemporary cities and the relation to patrimonialization processes. In this context, heritage is understood as a resource for economic exploitation. This characteristic is related to the neoliberalism rationality, where history, culture and memory can be transformed into merchandise (CHANDLER; PACE, 2020) [1]. In this sense, the urban context could represent all the conflicts inside the heritage conservation. In this text we will concentrate in the contemporary interventions that results in changes of colors and uses that do not follow scientific topics or statements of restoration principles, which has as an emblematic example in Brazil, the requalification of Pelourinho, in Salvador.

In 1990's Lina Bo Bardi went to Salvador to develop a project for the recovery of the historic center, Pelourinho. She presented a project that the methodology of intervention was focused on the maintenance of the local population. She developed two pilot projects and returned to São Paulo. With the possibility of the World Heritage classification by UNESCO, the economic values of Pelourinho were improved. For this reason, the public administration decided to change Lina's project and used expensive

materials and techniques to make this transformation, what corrupted Lina's original proposition and became responsible for one of the biggest processes of gentrification in Brazil.

Marcelo Ferraz that worked in Lina's team has a criticism about this requalification process. He emphasized the chromatic transformation, he said that the non-rigorous choice of colors created a scenery that never existed there, and the Pelourinho effect spread across the country. Another point that the author highlighted is the economic appeal of this strategy that expelled people who used to live in this area:

“A varied pastel color palette was applied to houses, something that never existed there, replacing the white or brownish ocher of the old city. With the publicity and the success of the recovery marketing, the ‘Pelourinho effect’ spread across the country, in historic cities or not, where homes began to be painted à la multi-flavors ‘ice cream parlor’. Traditional and expensive techniques and materials were used raising the value of the properties, making the possibility for the return of the residents even more remote – low-income citizens who, since the beginning of the process, were expelled from Pelourinho”. (Marcelo Ferraz, 2008 – free translate) [2].

The project of requalification of Pelourinho is still in progress. The color composition of Pelourinho attracts tourists' eyes. We can observe that the economic are the strongest value, followed by the cultural value and how they are in conflict in the sense that the economic interests are stronger than the others, reducing the heritage to a tourist attraction.

The Pelourinho effect spread across a city in another state, the city of Uberaba. It is a medium city in the countryside of Minas Gerais, with about 300.000 citizens. Uberaba is a younger city, from the mid XIX century. The text will focus on the main square of the city - Rui Barbosa Square. This place has been through some important transformations, which show us how even though this square has the commercial, historic, cultural and social importance, its consolidation is fragile. It had different uses and projects along the XX and XXI centuries. In 2018, the square passed by another transformation. In this recent transformation it had changes in pavement, a proposal of clearing up the facades by the removal and reduction of the signboards. The policy of clearing the façade tried to put the architecture in evidence, but the owners didn't have technical assistance. So after the signboards removal, the architectural problems were masked by the new painting. The colors chosen were defined to promote

brands and stores instead the concern with architectural preservation.

If, on the one hand, we have a set of historic buildings that resist the layers of time, on the other there is a trivialization of these spaces resulting from urban and architectural interventions. Solutions that were influenced by other emblematic examples in the country or by actions to promote the businesses located in these buildings.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the analysis of the chromatic transformation of the patrimonialized urban territory, it was developed a methodology that involves an overlapping of values over space. Specifically in this research, we will focus on the analysis of trivialization processes in urban sets of historical interest from the chromatic aspect, using comparative analyses. For that, we are using structure analysis keys for the development of an initial critique of the cultural heritage in Uberaba.

In the diagram bellow, we can see these three values - social, cultural, and economic - and some processes and characteristics related to them. In the intersection of these values, we have what I am calling a heritage atmosphere. In this heritage atmosphere we have a complex overlapping of layers and different interests. I will use this diagram to analyze the construction of territory as heritage and its visual aspects, to illustrate how the values could be related to the chromatic transformation.

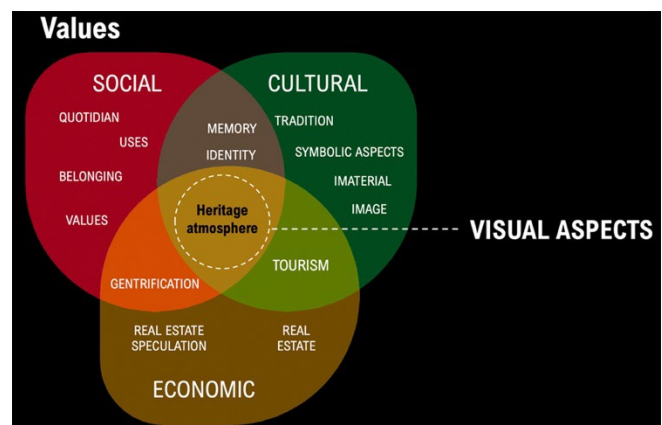


Figure 1 – Diagram of analyses.

Another important aspect for analyzing the impacts generated by chromatic changes is related to the uses and changes of buildings over time. In this sense, we

will use some reading keys to identify such transformations.

For Muñoz (2008) [3], the process of banalization of the urban is, among other aspects, related to the emptying of this space of its symbolic contents, thus being transformed into sceneries. Therefore, we will consider this perspective for the critical construction of a look at the urban landscape that surrounds Rui Barbosa Square in Uberaba.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The field survey carried out through observation and the production of photography allowed us to identify the recent changes in the buildings that make up the urban landscape of Rui Barbosa Square. Comparing the photographs with the diagram of the values that form the heritage atmosphere, we identified weaknesses and conflicts between these values, especially the valorization of aspects related to the real estate market. For a better understanding of the impact of these transformations, we have divided them as follows:

- Transformations related with new uses and replacing buildings. We highlight in these changes the needs generated by contemporary ways of life.
- Fast changes of uses and their relationship with new uses, a characteristic that is motivated by immediate needs and fragile planning.
- Non-rigorous solutions with visual appeal, what could have direct relation with the last topic. The immediatism of needs or the lack of long-time planning results in interventions that do not follow rigorous conservation and restoration methods, the only concern is the visual impact.
- Architecture in evidence, with the new policy of clearing the façade, architecture assumed a major role in the physical composition of the landscape
- Finally, the trivialization processes, which is a result of all transformations mentioned above.

3.1 Replacing buildings and uses

First, we will see one of the common transformations during the history of the square, the action of replacing buildings. We can see in the picture above new modern buildings that replaced eclectic architecture, during the process of city modernization. In the photo bellow, we can see changes in the use of the old cinema and its situation nowadays. The building is used by a candy store and the signs of the old cinema were erased.

These transformations show the power of economic value that manages to impose itself in the face of the preservation of old buildings. In this sense, there is an instability between spheres which results in a fragile heritage atmosphere.

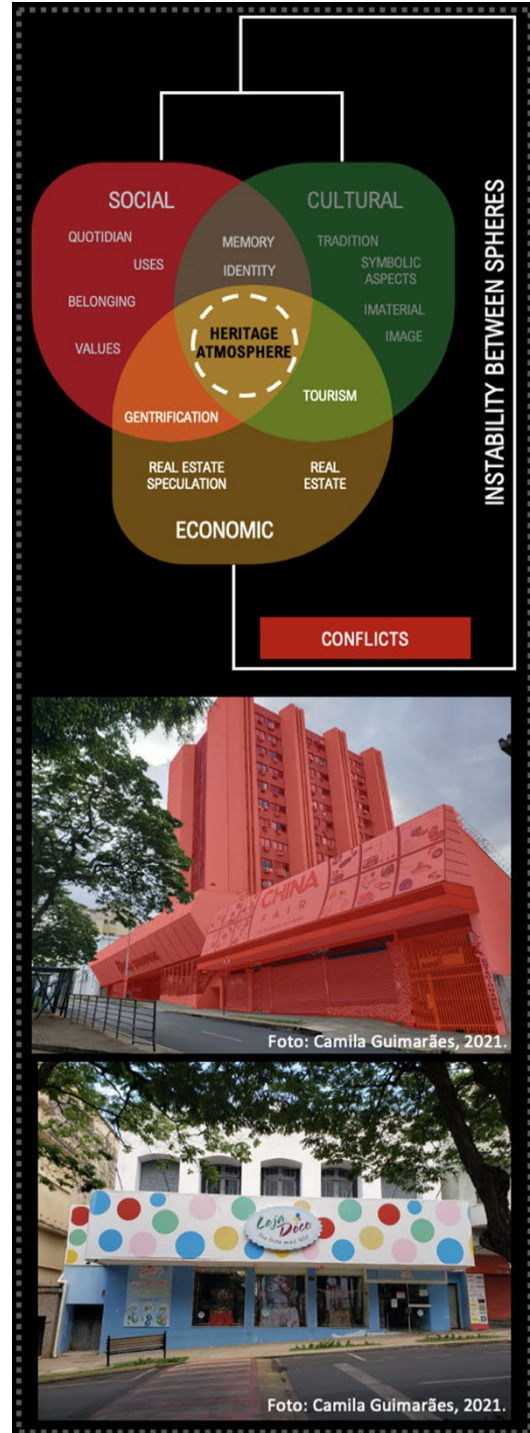


Figure 2 – Assembly made with diagram of analyses and photos of buildings transformation in Uberaba-MG. 2021.

3.2 Fast changes of uses – colors related with uses

Another change that was observed is related to the fast changes in use and how colors are used to highlight the transformation. These two photos were taken in an interval of two years, and we can see the use of color to show the new use. Nowadays the building is used by a beauty salon, so they chose pink to represent the new use. The constant transformations in the city center are consequence of instability of the market and the valorization of the area, which imposes a permanent dispute over the territory. In this case there isn't any concern about restoration criteria. Once again, the economic value is decisive in the consolidation of the heritage atmosphere.

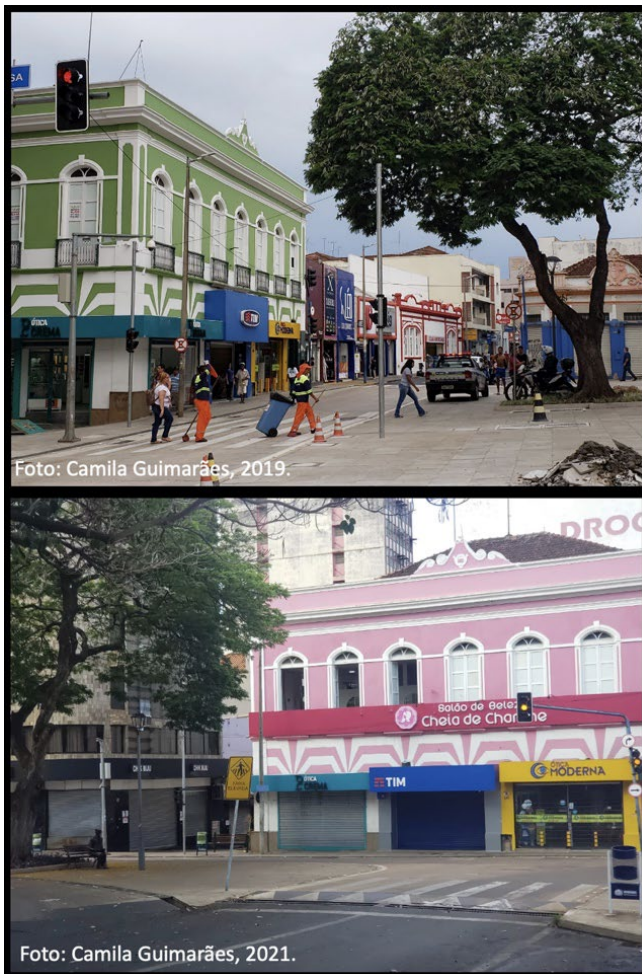


Figure 3 – Assembly made with two photos of buildings transformation in Uberaba-MG. 2019.2021.

3.3 Non-rigorous solutions – visual appeal

Another situation observed in the analysis of the chromatic changes in the buildings that make up the Square is related to the lack of rigor of the solutions adopted and how the bright colors were chosen to highlight the buildings, in a wrong way, and to hide architectural problems such as infiltrations.

We can see the color transformation of this house (Figure 4), influenced by the transformation of the other commercial and public buildings in the square. This represents the visual appeal with non-rigorous solutions. In this example we can see how the choices are made by particular intentions rather than technical actions.

The assembly below with three versions of the same picture illustrates the importance of chromatic composition in shaping the urban landscape, as well as for strengthening (or weakening) the perception of the building as a support of collective memory.

In the first picture we have the original landscape, without digital manipulation. We can see how the orange building stands out in the landscape. In the second picture we left only the orange building with color. In the third photo, we have the removal of the color of the building, resulting in a more homogeneous landscape of the set of buildings.

Another problem of these interventions is related with the documentation of the processes of intervention. As stated by Camilo Boito (2008) [4], it is necessary to document the entire intervention process. In this sense, we realize that changes in the colors of buildings are not addressed by the government with the necessary relevance to understand the building – in its entirety – as a historical document.

For this reason, it's important to understand that some choices are necessary in the process of building restoration. As Viñas (2021) [5] observes, it is impossible to maintain the original aspect related to aesthetic characteristics while respecting the layers of time. In this sense, it is necessary that all decisions consider the relationship between the community and the values associated with the building, as a way of enhancing the preservation and conservation of the local heritage.



Figure 4 – Assembly made with three photos of a building color change in Uberaba-MG. 2021.

3.4 Architecture in evidence

The policy of clearing up the facade is an important instrument for valuing the passage of time in buildings as well as for the architecture revaluation. In Figure 5 we can see the pedestrian street near the square after and before the last intervention. The clearing up of the facades improved the visibility of the architecture and the cultural aspects related to the past. These photos show how important the intervention is. Now we can see the architecture structure.

The problem of this intervention is related to the lack of assistance, which results in the use of bright colors to promote brands and masked the architecture problems. The poor maintenance highlighting problems with infiltration, the concert just with the facade, could left the rest of the building in worse condition.



Figure 5 – Assembly made with diagram of analyses and photos of the pedestrian street near the Rui Barbosa Square (actual situation and before the clearing up the façades). 2021. Fonte: The second photo in the right side: Google Maps, 2017.

3.5 Trivialization/Banalization processes

The selection examples located in the Rui Barbosa Square are a fragment of what is happening with urban historic centers in cities in Brazil, especially those one that aren't big or metropolitan cities.

The transformations we have seen in this research illustrate the current process of heritage trivialization. This specific process is conditioned by the pressure of real marketing and fragility of public policy.

The concern only with the urban scenery constituted by historic buildings reinforces practices that exclude symbolic values linked to material goods. In this sense, the changes generated by disputes between commercial establishments to stand out in the territory reinforce the practice of actions without scientific rigor about chromatic interventions.

According to Delgado (2020) [6], some renovations of historic centers are based on the perspective of selling an image of the city. An image that is simplified insofar as it is used as a brand logo or just to get the attention of tourists. This situation places heritage in the field of disputes between the trivialization of urban space and the representation of symbolic values that are associated with the local population.

Another relevant point for the process of trivializing of the heritage territory is related to current demands and the lack of long-term planning, which result in actions without justification for immediate solutions.

We can see in the Figure 6 the demolition of a building preserving only the facade. This building used to have medical clinics next to a traditional hospital. The new use after the demolition was a parking lot. We see the erasure of historic buildings for new immediate uses. This example is the maximum limit of the trivialization of the urban landscape.



Figure 6 – Building with only the façade preserved – near Rui Barbosa Square. 2019.

4. CONCLUSIONS

We have some conclusions about this analysis. The contemporary uses of heritage buildings are related to economic values and visual appeal instead of cultural

and social values, which weakens the population's perception of their cultural heritage. The process of trivialization of the historic center is related with transformation of culture in merchandise, a characteristic of neoliberalization of city production.

So, we have a new landscape, with new color composition, that is more related to economic concerns than the architecture history, without any technique of restoration even in the protected buildings.

The non-rigorous uses of color could weaken heritage as a support of collective memory, privileging its commercial value. Which shows us an important challenge on how to understand our recent heritage and how to preserve it for future generations.

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