

THE REUSE AS A FACTOR FOR THE HERITAGE BUILDINGS CONSERVATION IN RIO DE JANEIRO DOWNTOWN

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ABSTRACT

The adequacy of the historic buildings to new demands of use and technologies, without mischaracterize them, is a recurrent issue in the modernization of cultural heritage buildings. Either by the extinction of the original use or the inability of the old building respond to the new necessities of use, in re-use should always be analyzed the typological vocations of the building. Each building is related to an architectural typology and their possibilities of uses are limited. This article aims to collaborate in the debate about the choices of use in rehabilitation of the heritage buildings that must be designed to maintain the identity of the cultural heritage. We must consider that historic buildings serve as analysis 'documents' and are able to help conserve the collective memory, the testimony of history and the society that produced them.

Analyzing some modernizations of cultural heritage buildings in Rio de Janeiro downtown, we realize that they are being used in a derogatory manner, preserving only their facades while the internal physical characteristics are highly changed. This usually happens because of the new use and the economic value of the area. With base in analysis of the relationships that the building has with use program, and checking the possibilities of adapting the use in to the heritage building, we conclude that the conservation of heritage buildings depends on the choice of a compatible use with the typological vocation, to guarantee the integrity of their values and physical consistence.

Keywords: *Heritage buildings, Reuse, Typological vocation, Rio de Janeiro*

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the progressive modernization of technology and new contemporary demands of use, heritage buildings – which used to accommodate the needs of their original use in the past – became outdated with the passage of time, be it for the extinction of their original functions or because of their incapacity to respond to their current uses new demands. Thus, a question is posed regarding the built heritage preservation and its life cycle lengthening: is it possible to fully adapt the built heritage's uses to the new demands and technologies requirements, without changing its characteristics?

The built heritage reuse – or adaptation of uses – is necessary for its preservation, as the use of the building is vital for its physical permanence. That is why use adaptation depends on an adequate architectural design in order to avoid its degradation and possible abandonment. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that as we are dealing with buildings with heritage value (preserved), the built heritage reuse project must be understood as a cultural character effort. Thus, its historical, artistic, documentary and memorable aspects must be preserved as well, in order to contribute to the society's cultural identity strengthening. This article intends to help elucidating the matter of reuse and choice of use for historic buildings that belong to remnants of urban settings in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The theoretical framework is based on built cultural heritage preservation and restoration theories and regulations.

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2. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE BUILDING ADAPTATION

In western cities' history course, we observe that religious, political or ideological changes in a society may lead to the loss of the buildings' original function. One example is what occurred during the medieval era in Europe. Monuments and public buildings of the Roman period suffered major destructions caused by two main factors [1]: the first was the Christian proselytism; the clergy converted pagans to Catholicism, destroying temples and other monuments that were also considered pagans; the second factor was the loss of sense and use of Roman buildings, which generated an indifference regarding these monuments. Thus, the ancient buildings were mutilated and their parts transformed into new buildings. As compensation, many of the Roman buildings were safeguarded from destruction by clergy's incentive. For example, in the 6th century in Rome, Pope Gregory I applied a politics of reuse: transforming patrician residences into monasteries, and reception rooms into churches. However, the preservation of the remaining ancient buildings was encouraged by practical economic reasons due to the devastating economic crisis of that time and because erecting new buildings was too expensive.

The transformations occurred within the societies may have also influenced the need for reutilizing old buildings for their survival: when the building's original function is no more necessary for society, the its existence primary reason is extinguished; when the function is still the same but the architecture does not satisfy any longer the need for that use. However, society's transformation process was very slow until the beginning of the western world industrial era, when this situation changed very quickly.

2.1. New practical needs deriving from progressive societal changes

The industrial era was characterized by new building feasibility and metallurgic techniques, allowing new programming requirements. Besides the new functional programming required by society (as railroad stations, factories etc.), the use of iron in buildings embraced also traditional programs (housing, church, commerce etc.), substituting old traditional structural building techniques. Along with this change in the building technology, western society habits were also changing, due to the evolution in the health field, which caused major programmatic changes, mainly in the housing field [2].

Although England was the nest of the industrial dawn, some arts' theoreticians attempted to stay more linked to the tradition and to the past, as they understood that historic landmarks should be preserved, and should not be condemned by the "march of history" and the "progress" of cities. The risks of losing tradition and architectural heritage, caused by the new requirements brought by the industrial revolution, are presented by the British John Ruskin in his 1849 book: "The Seven Lamps of Architecture". Ruskin affirms, for example, "millions, in the future, may regret or be harmed by destruction of buildings we flightily throw away, in the name of our current appropriateness" [3].

Czech theoretician Max Dvořák [4], as Ruskin, perceived new industrialization needs as one of the origins of the risks that threatened heritage, which he defined as: "the wrong ideas regarding progress and demands of the present". According to Dvořák the presumed opposition between progress and old monuments is absurd; he stands that, in the name of the "new times" and "progress" of a city, old monuments are destroyed because they are considered inappropriate, and stress that "presumed requirements of the present" and "technologic novelties worship" lead us to believe these new utilities are necessary to daily life; and supposedly justify the sacrifice of monuments and entire cities. The author states that it is not totally untrue that old houses become uncomfortable, even unhealthy, however:

Clearly, it is neither inevitable nor intelligent to tear them down [the old houses] one after the other for this reason, as, without much sacrifice, it is possible to adapt them to the necessary comfort and health requirements. [...] They can be maintained once the necessary adaptations are carried out. What is valid for a house is also valid for the entire city [5].

When the author discusses on the value incorporated to old monuments, he affirms that the industrial advances, with all the material novelties and necessities that emerge for the convenience of life, are not capable of satisfying all the necessary aspects of human well being. The sentiments and impressions that old buildings may provoke on people are "beyond the daily materialistic concerns and efforts". Any person sensitive to the spiritual pleasures may achieve the satisfaction that come from old monuments, independently if they are unique monuments, with major artistic value, or simpler monuments, for the fact that they "are the live translation of our entire spiritual life" [6].

New use demands continued arising even after the industrial revolution. In contemporary times, novelties remain constant in various fields: building industry, computing, engineering, and communications, among many other areas that also affect the daily needs of people's lives. The novelties multiply in such a speed that today's necessary equipment for human life will soon become obsolete, and new

ones will emerge to substitute them. With new equipment, new necessities of use arise, as well as the need for adapting the use of old buildings for their survival. However, until when should we – or can we – change the authenticity of old historic buildings in favor of these new demands of contemporary life that do not cease to appear?

3. VALUES AND BUILT HERITAGE USE GUIDELINES

According to Riegl [7], contemporary value – that includes use value – is the building’s capacity of satisfying our senses (use value) and/or our spirit (art value). Riegl states that the absence of use may put at risk the building’s integrity as well as its user’s and that “physical life is the primary condition of psychic life”, thus the necessity of repairing the building damages that may put human life and health at risk. Riegl emphasizes the struggle between antiquity value and use value, by exposing how disturbing is the sensation of watching a building in use turning into an unused space, which gives an impression of “violent destruction”. Conversely, buildings that we have known as already unused, like ruins, do not disturb us as much. He affirms that with regard with the monuments that are inadequate to any practical use, the antiquity value prevails, and the use value should not be considered in this case, as the enchantment of these ruined buildings is precisely the antiquity value. The antiquity value approach by Riegl lead us to Ruskin’s theory, that is, the reverence one must have toward the monument, honoring its time marks, as well as its degradation that will lead it eventually to its “death”. Nevertheless, Riegl affirms that monuments with antiquity value that can be still utilized will satisfy our pleasure when they do not present the contemporaneity value we often embrace, that is, we must take into account the use and antiquity values, with prevalence of the latter.

Riegl says that the conflict between antiquity value and historic value, that emerges from the fact that pleasure derived from a monument’s contemplation, is not uniquely linked to its antiquity value (its ancient aspect). It also leads us to knowledge, the monument’s history; a pleasure that is not immediate as the pleasure of contemplating the antiquity value. It is a pleasure that originates from a further knowledge, reflective and scientific. The historic value of a monument allows, an even imposes, the monument’s conservation in its current state, and requires that “human intervention halts the evolution course and the normal progress of its decomposition by natural agents”. The cult to historic value totally recognizes the documental value of the monument in its original state (original meaning the current state in the present moment); and therefore requires its conservation as a document, which is the historic and artistic monument itself. As there is this need for the conservation of the monument with historical value, Riegl affirms “the historic value will adapt more easily to the demands of use value”. Riegl makes this statement on the necessity of preserving the building, but one should not make concessions to the use value we hold nowadays.

Dvořák, along his entire work, discusses the recognition of values and, primarily, defends against the destruction of monuments, from the most significant to the simplest houses that are also capable of providing us with sentiments as significant as the former. However, besides condemning monuments’ destruction, he also focus on the necessity of restoration for the monuments’ continuing use, in this sense understanding that the necessity of restoration for its function permanence must be considered as a means and not as a final objective of the restoration process. The last chapter of his book reinforces Dvořák’s positions [8], and creates some general guidelines, suggesting two postulates regarding monuments: “(1) to preserve the monuments with their **original functions and environments**, as far as possible; (2) to conserve their **form and aspects unchanged** in the same manner”. The author, through these principles – which are intimately linked to the monument’s authenticity honoring regarding its function, including its original environments, and its form and aspects (image and materiality) – defines some criteria in order to deal with the different types of actions in different types of monuments. Among them, three are worth mentioning: preservation of old buildings still in use; large scale old buildings transformation and restoration; and rural and urban landscape.

The first case is related to the maintenance of the building for its preservation and use lengthening. He reassures that the continuous assistance – maintenance and conservation – is vital to avoid restoring the old building. In the second case, the buildings themselves are the ones that need major interventions to embrace its function – practical reasons – or the ones that are in bad conditions. “It is essential in this case to seek guidance with a specialist” for these works that interfere “with the substance and form of the monument”. And as the interventions in the building itself, a qualified professional in heritage preservation and restoration must develop its extensions and annexes, be it churches, residences or castles. And, as a final advice regarding practical requirements (use): “even if

the practical requirements are considered, such projects must avoid damages to the old structure as far as possible, and must take into account the general effect of the old building in its surroundings” [9]. In the third case, the author says, “in major transforming cities, where their future aspects are at play, it is considered an obvious obligation that this reform is not done haphazardly, submitted only to material interests or to arbitrary criteria by building companies or administrative agencies” [10].

Almost a hundred years after Dvořák’s book publication, we perceive that many Brazilian cities were highly transformed in the name of “progress” and “modernity”. Unfortunately, the measures taken were not always in accordance with Dvořák’s recommendation, thus being a major and regrettable loss of part of the nation’s cultural heritage. However, some urban settings managed to survive to these transformations. Today, these settings are protected by federal (IPHAN) or state agencies, or they are simply preserved by special regulations. Now we need to pay a special attention to these urban historic buildings settings, because, as stated by Dvořák: “things of minor importance usually demand greater attention than the more significant ones” [11].

4. BUILT REUSE HERITAGE IN RIO DE JANEIRO

The city of Rio de Janeiro has gone through various remodeling processes in name of progress and modernity, since the end of the 19th century to mid 20th century. An example of devastation in the city, in the beginning of the 20th century, was the urban remodeling with hygienist and plastic intents, namely “*Embelezamento e Saneamento da Cidade*” (Embellishment and Sanitation of the City). This renovation deeply changed of downtown urban and architectonic shape, with the intention of transforming the *carioca* capital according to the European modernity in the dawn of the century. It tried to symbolize progress, denying in turn its Portuguese colonial past. Nevertheless, some regions in downtown Rio managed to survive the constant transformations and remodeling. The motive, thus, was not the recognition of the historic value of these regions. On the contrary, the survival was due to devaluation of the city’s central area, practically abandoned.

The historic buildings that managed to survive the devastation that occurred in the city should be recognized as “places of architectural memory”. According to Pierre Nora concept [12], they are “sets built by time, and they take their meaning out of their elements complex relations: mirrors of the world or of an era”. The Brazilian historian Sandra Pesavento [13] discusses the city’s history rescue through its “representations”, and understands the urban phenomenon as a collection of cultural assets: “considering culture as a socially established network of meanings, the city is the space for the creation of these meanings, expressed in cultural assets [their representations]”. We believe the relationship between identity and meanings is even more evident, through real representations (old buildings) within a historic urban setting. Not only because they were built in remote times, but also because they are constantly being transformed by society in the various “present times” that enacted, and still enact, on them. They become places where the memories of past periods crystalize, as well as places with a continuing flow of meanings assigned to them. The search for the past through “places of architectural memories” finds a almost inexhaustible source on those historic urban settings, with multiple meanings and cultures, through which many of the society’s cultural identities may be strengthened. That is why we need to preserve them.

An important fact has changed the situation of downtown Rio de Janeiro historic region’s decay, which was again being threatened of total destruction in name of progress and modernization: in 1979 the City implemented the Corridor Cultural Project, recognizing the historic value of the urban settings, and aiming preservation, renovation and revitalization of these degraded historic areas, protecting the architectonic setting through specific legislation and regulations. Since the 1980s, various buildings of these settings were reutilized. In 1985, the Technical Office of the project published the book “*Como recuperar, reformar ou construir seu imóvel no Corredor Cultural*” (how to recuperate, remodel or build your property in the Cultural Corridor). This book serves as a tutorial for the landowner, and presents “the general rules and the best way to deal with the many problems they face, not intending to provide exhaustive technical knowledge” [14]. This publication is limited to the preservation of façades and rooftops recovering, and the interior spaces modernization is stimulated, with the protection of the envelope. This type of procedure is known as “façadism”.

According to Brazilian historian Cristina Meneguello [15], preserved buildings are important in the search for establishing the marks of the past, but, the past may not be kept on itself, it needs a historic reference that is linked to it. It is not enough “a simple recovery of buildings and façades”. According to Françoise Choay [16] it is difficult to assure that the reutilization of a historic building is profitable

without damaging its functionality, many times only an “empty crust” of its content is left, such process being named ‘curettage’, “an intolerable procedure that is limited to the sacrifice of structures and interior spaces of a building”. She also affirms that the reuse of a historic building is important. Nevertheless it is a daring and difficult way of valuing the architectural heritage and “the monument is thus safeguarded from the abandonment risks to be exposed to waste and use encroachment: it is a difficult and complex task to give it a new destination”.

In turn, monuments and historic heritage acquire a double function – as buildings that provide knowledge and pleasure, are made available to everyone; but also as cultural products, manufactured, packed and distributed to be consumed. The metamorphosis of their use value in economic value occurs thanks to the “cultural engineering”, large public and private enterprise [...]. Its task consists in exploring monuments by all means, aiming the indefinite multiplication of the number of visitors [17].



Fig. 1 Example of façadism: building located in the Cultural Corridor protection area

One of the major problems related to Rio de Janeiro’s current cultural heritage preservation that we constantly occurs in the above mentioned preserved areas, happens to be exactly what Choay condemns: the built environment exploration justified by its economic value, which transforms most of the historic buildings in old “packages” with a totally new and “modernized” content. This procedure named “curettage”, or façadism, became a common practice in the city’s cultural value buildings. One example, among many existing ones and belonging to the Cultural Corridor protection area, is the building located at *Avenida Mem de Sá, 70* (Fig. 1). The reuse project – bar and restaurant – restored the façade and altered the entire interior of the building, in order to increase the number of floors. This would expand the number of clients and consequently the return of the investment. Usually, as in this case, metallic structures are used for being different from the original materials of the building, thus trying to explain the intervention with the theory of distinguishability of the new materials added. But this interventions are neither irreversible, nor they respect the historic, memory and documented characteristics of the properties. The entire building’s interior was wasted to provide “efficiency” and to adapt to the new “needs” of use. We observe that the reuse of the built environment that belongs to historic urban settings is usually distorted of the building’s added values, especially by the transformation of the use value in economic value. The Brazilian researcher Beatriz Kühl raises the point that it is necessary to value and reveal all building’s parts, which consist of historic data; and that interior and exterior are not disconnected parts:

The preservation of a building means revealing and valuing the whole and its parts, which are intimately connected, honoring each composing elements. They are documents that interest humanities and natural sciences. With regard to architecture, the examination of applied materials, the way of the composition, location, decoration and distribution of spaces, and their relation to the whole, allows the enjoyment of the work, the understanding of the building techniques, its various phases until achieving its final form; and understanding the succeeding uses of the spaces. If the building is not preserved as a whole, – interior and exterior that are not disconnected matters – we lose it all. Relevant historic data is destroyed and the work is emptied of its capacity of functioning as an effective material structure of knowledge and memory [18].

For the true preservation of these buildings it is necessary that the reuse and the choice of the new use are always assessed through its appropriateness to the use typological vocations:

As architectural typology is a result of the use that motivated it, which explains the fact that houses, churches, markets and industries of distinguishing themselves, by its formal expression, we conclude that the original function ultimately determines the building, conferring it character. [...] Each building belongs, though, to an architectonic family where each member has common aspects that identify a vocation line. Besides, each building has its own history and a specific relation with community where it belongs; such factors are usually conditions for the choice of a new function [19].

The interior characteristics of a historic building must be respected on its reutilization. The internal subdivision and its paths, the applied building methods, the decoration, after all, all the singularities that shaped the construction of a building according to its original function, define its character. We should honor this character by analyzing the tendencies the building have to changing of use, as well as the possibilities of giving it a new use, honoring its authenticity. The recognition and study of the “architectonic families” contribute to the understanding of the buildings vocations, considering that each building has its own characteristics that must also be analyzed, because a textbook does not exist, and it cannot exist, with new uses that can be applied for each architectonic family.



Fig. 2 Example of inappropriate use in relation to the building’s typological vocation: located at Rua do Ouvidor, 158-162, within the Cultural Corridor protection area

Nevertheless, use vocations are assessed not always – or almost never – when reutilizing buildings that are not individually protected, and only belong to preserved historic urban settings in Rio de Janeiro. For example, the standardization required in a inauguration of a new department store (Fig. 2), has specific requirements and demands of use: architectural patterns related to the façades, window, layout, etc. Regarding the layout, these stores normally need large spaces to accommodate various selling sections, which should not differ from the pattern of other branches, because they would be deprived of the chain's characteristic “image”, or concept. Some historic buildings that belong to historic urban areas, usually the small ones, do not carry the tendencies for this type of use, as the buildings were usually very subdivided internally. How is it possible, thus, to adapt the use of a department store that needs large spaces, to a subdivided historic building? The answer, unfortunately, does not agree with a true cultural preservation effort: “façadism”. The costumer walking through the department store, may not perceive that he is within a historic building, as the whole building's historic aspects, that used to be embedded in history and memories, were erased. The only reference for the costumer that this building represents part of our past, or represented it, lays in the façade, but as he passes through the door, its mind connects to other memories. The “place of memory”, which would help the linking to our city's past, to our cultural identity, was erased in the name of modernization and contemporary needs. This new uses, even unsuitable, usually are accepted with the intention of “valorizing” the area, attracting new visitors and consumers to the region for the importance of the brand's name that is located there. According to Choay [20], the word “valorization” is normally used as a way of deceiving the destruction of the heritage, with the pretext of modernizing and “restoring”, often under political pressures by the government and public institutions, as well as to make the building profitable. She also affirms that the concentrated power in the hands of only one person – mayor, architect, heritage's manager, among others – may alter the fate of the architectonic and urban heritage; and this happens too often.

CONCLUSIONS

After observing the design practices usually applied in the reuse of buildings that belong to preserved urban settings in Rio de Janeiro, our conclusion is that there exists a theoretical incoherence in the interventions' modes and an inexistence of critical and theoretical thinking regarding the documental character of the buildings. Additionally, there is an excessive permissiveness in relation to the economic issues. We cannot accept historic buildings to be emptied of its history. Preserved buildings are not a mere “packages” that must be maintained solely to preserve the historic image of the urban settings, making them, in fact, scenographic settings.

We must understand that these historic buildings are “places of memory”; they contribute to the strengthening of our collective identity; they are places fulfilled with cultural meanings. Besides the crystalized memory of the building, it is also a document, consisting of important parts that serve as data and information sources present in its physical aspects. Its setting contributes to the comprehension of history that we unveil through the employed materials, the building methods, decoration, the internal layout of spaces and paths, and finally, its spatial and physical configuration, setting which defines that architecture in particular.

The choice of a new use, or adaptation of the current use, must always be compatible with the preserved building and, thus, the buildings' typological vocations studies are essential to its preservation. The development of a program and adaptation of use project must always respect its aesthetical and historic values, its documental physical aspects, its spatial and physical shape, its various time layers and its typological vocation. It is important to remember that each intervention in the built heritage – including the adaptation of use – must be considered and analyzed as a restoration work; that is why authenticity, minimal intervention, reversibility and distinguishability are also criteria for the adaptation of use. If we do not take into account this principles and theories, actions in old buildings that belong to preserved urban settings will continue to be dictated by pragmatic use reasons, and thus, Rio de Janeiro society's memory and history will be condemned to the ephemeral needs of contemporary life.

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