Urban regeneration experiences in Brazil: Historical preservation, tourism development and gentrification in Salvador da Bahia

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Brazil has little experience in balanced urban regeneration and historical preservation projects when compared to more mature countries such as the Europeans. However the recent experience of Salvador da Bahia seems to be worth studying. The Pelourinho historic district is a distinguished example of Portuguese Renaissance urban development, hosting colonial architecture typologies from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Since the late 19th century the area has undergone a remarkable decay process being progressively abandoned by economic activities and population. After the area was considered World Heritage by UNESCO in 1985 both municipal and state governments have taken actions to promote its regeneration.

This paper analyses this process considering its implications within the urban design framework. The first part analyses the area morphology as a result of Portugal Colonial policies. The second part assesses degradation as a result of the birth and rise of modern urban planning in Brazil and Bahia. In the next parts the actions of municipal and state authorities are considered as well as their implications considering the economic activities and existing population involved. The conclusion remarks the importance of Salvador experience, establishing its pros and cons.

Introduction

This paper analyses the urban regeneration and historical preservation processes in Salvador da Bahia, one of the most important Brazilian cities when architecture, urbanism and cultural aspects are concerned.

Although their concepts have evolved over time, urban renewal generally suggests a process of changes in the use and density of urban areas, that generally results in redevelopment and change of the physical form (Couch, 1990). On the other hand, rehabilitation implies the improvement of a deprived environment, maintaining its physical and social characteristics.

The issues of urban renewal, urban rehabilitation, urban regeneration as well as their spatial, social and economic implications seems to be of long interest to architects, planners and urban designers.

Recently, the term urban regeneration has been used to define a set of interventions to improve the environment, the image and safety of urban areas encouraging certain functions such as housing, transport, economic or entertainment activities (Frankin et al., 1991). The early 1990s witnessed a great amount of studies assessing these experiences in many cities of the world (c.f.

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They pointed out the fact of the existence of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in this process. The main beneficiaries were ‘property interests, middle-class commuters, visitors and gentrifiers’ whereas the losers were the low income, semiskilled and unskilled local residents whose legitimate demands for employment, better housing, health and education were not met (Robinson, 1989: 41).

Although recent literature has started to assess this problem in Brazilian cities on a broad basis (Arantes et al., 2000), there is a need for more research on specific case-studies.

The aim of this paper is to enhance this discussion in the Brazilian context by assessing the experience of Salvador. It evaluates this experience considering its implications within the urban design framework by analysing the area morphology, its degradation, actions of municipal and state authorities to promote its regeneration and their spatial, social and economic implications.

Salvador growth and Pelourinho urban morphology

The morphology of Latin American cities is a result of transformation through time of Iberian colonial settlement policy. However, while the Spanish American cities were planned to host the Spanish bureaucracy and population, most of Portuguese counterparts functioned as mere trading posts and fortifications to defend the coast (cf Butterworth, 1981; Hardoy, 1982).

According to Hardoy (op. cit.) the Spanish settlements followed clear and defined patterns, ie a regular gridiron arranged around squares defined by Ley das Indias, whereas the Portuguese followed no specific pattern, gradually incorporating a more regular pattern when the topography made it possible.

Unlike most of Portuguese colonial cities in Brazil, the construction of the City of São Salvador da Baía de Todos os Santos was planned and occurred at the expenses of the Portuguese Crown (Reis Filho, 1968). Founded in the year of 1549 to be the first Brazilian capital, Salvador is a major example of a planned Portuguese Colonial city (Teixeira and Valla, 1999).

According to Marx (1980) its site was carefully chosen on the top of a mountain 60 meters above the sea level in a concavity of the Todos os Santos bay due to the easiness of protection and visual control of the whole region (Figure 1). The characteristics of the foundation site lead to a two-level urbanisation (Figure 2) following the medieval and Renaissance pattern of Portuguese villages and cities that can also be found in Lisbon.

Urbanisation occurred on the hillsides where the acropolis (Cidade Alta – Uptown) grew as the administrative and residential centre for the aristocracy. Its morphology followed an orthogonal gridiron, slightly deformed in the edges of the plateau, whereas on the tiny shore strip, the port, commercial areas and the popular quarters developed into the linear Cidade Baixa (Down-town) (Figures 3 and 4).

On a triangle-shaped plaza of the acropolis, the Portuguese placed the Pelourinho (pillory), symbol of the slavery system administration, that later gave its name to the whole historic district. From the 16th to the 18th centuries whereas Salvador evolved as a prosperous commercial and bureaucratic city, the Pelourinho hosted Brazilian aristocracy concentrating numerous distinguished examples of Colonial residential, religious and military architectures.

Its morphology followed the traditional urban settlement of Portuguese Renaissance, where townhouses were built on alignment of the plot with no setbacks, but backyards. According to Reis Filho (1970), setbacks and front gardens appeared in Brazilian housing typology only in the 19th century, when the Pelourinho was already an established city centre.

This resulted in a certain uniformity with the perimeter blocks delimited by the sobrados (multi-floor-terraced houses) whereas the main public and open areas resulted from churches forecourts (Figure 5). The houses ground floor was used for stores and workshops in the front, while animals and slaves stayed on the backyards. The upper floors hosted the houses of plantation ‘barons’, merchants, public servants and artisans (Santos Neto, 1991).
Figure 1. Plan of Salvador Metropolitan Region. Source: EMTURSA (1998), *Mapa Turístico de Salvador da Bahia*.

Figure 2. A view of the two-level urbanisation of Salvador from the sea. Source: Nobre (1998).
Salvador also hosts major examples of 16th and 17th century military architecture, with its white-washed stone fortresses. The defensive system implemented by the Portuguese consisted of a series of them that begun on the bay mouth (Forte de Santo Antônio da Barra), running along the shore through the harbour and the city until the Itapagibe peninsula (Forte de Monte Serrat).

As the first Brazilian capital, it also received many religious orders and congregations such as the Jesuits, Carmelites, Benedictines, Franciscans, etc. For this reason, the city also hosts a considerable amount of churches (around 150), examples from the 16th to 18th religious architecture, specially baroque and rococo styles.

**Figure 3.** Plan of Salvador in the 17th century. Based on Meurs (1990) and Teixeira and Valla (1999).
The discovery of gold on the heart of Brazil and the failure to repeal French, Dutch and English invasions on the Southern part of the country caused the capital to move to Rio de Janeiro in 1763, starting the process of Pelourinho urban decline. Salvador lost its position as the most important national city but continued to grow as a regional capital due to cocoa, tobacco, cattle, oil and petrochemical industries that lead to urban sprawl and metropolisation in the 20th century. By the year 2000, the Metropolitan Area reaches 3 million inhabitants, from which 2.4 live in the city of Salvador itself (IBGE, 2001).

**The Pelourinho decay process**

From the late 19th century on, the Pelourinho decay has intensified much related to real estate
pressures and to the birth and rise of Brazilian Modern Architecture and Urban Planning. The area’s physical constraints allied to a series of public works resulted in its progressive abandonment by economic activities and population.

The need to create a national identity to the newborn Brazilian republic, based on Comte’s Positivist ideas, much influenced the rise of technical professions such as engineers and areas of study such as urbanism in the country and specially in Bahia (Fernandes et al., 1999). Sanitation, beautification and circulation became the target of public engineers.

From 1900s till the mid-1930s, improvement and beautification projects took place neglecting historical heritage and ties to the colonial past as a way to affirm the new country identity. The modernisation of the port from 1906 to 1921 occurred through land reclamation and gave enough room to redesign the whole Cidade Baixa. A new business district appeared and road improvement allowed lower classes expansion towards the North of the bay.

On the other hand, the congestion of the Cidade Alta caused the construction of 7 de Setembro avenue on the ridge of the plateau in 1910 that linked it to the districts of Vitória and Barra, home of foreign merchants and forging an upper class expansion axis towards the South shore (Villaça, 1998).

Figure 5. Aerial view of Pelourinho. Source: IPAC (1995). Author: José Carlos Almeida.
By that time, circulation and road improvements became such an important issue that caused the destruction of the 15th century Sé cathedral in 1933. Its demolition opened room for a new bigger square and gave way to the creation of a tram line terminal on it (Fernandes et al., 1999).

The 1935 public workshop for the elaboration of the city plan (*Semana do Urbanismo*) consolidated modern planning influenced by American comprehensive planning techniques and Ebenezer Howard’s ideas for the urban form, leading to the creation of the office for the City of Salvador Urban Plan (EPUCS) (*ibid.*; Ottoni and Szmrecsányi, 1997).

From 1942 to 1949 the EPUCS designed the city’s master plan based on a loop and stake road system, with densities decreasing from the centre towards the periphery (Figure 6). Although the model has not been totally implemented, specially when land uses are concerned, the road system scheme was laid down.

In the 1960s, a series of public works based on the EPUCS model provided the city with ‘a more efficient’ road infrastructure, constructing a series of expressways on the valleys, allowing urban sprawl.

In the 1970s, decentralising policies opened room for land speculation in new growing districts as the state government invested in the creation of a new State Administrative Centre, CAB – Centro Administrativo da Bahia, close to the international airport in the city outskirts (Santos Neto, *op. cit.*).

Planned by Lúcio Costa, the planner of Brasília, and hosting a series of monumental administrative buildings designed by João Filgueiras Lima,

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**Figure 6.** Urban model proposed by EPUCS. Source: Ottoni and Szmrecsányi (1997).
another famous Brazilian Modern architect, the construction of CAB enhanced the Pelourinho decay that lost its importance as the State administration moved from it.

The urban regeneration process

By the 1980s most of Pelourinho constructions have arrived to a greater process of decay and degradation, with the casario (a row of terraced-houses) tumbling down (Figure 7). The only buildings that remained in a fair condition were some churches that continued to attract tourists. The Pelourinho however was perceived as a dirty and dangerous place, home of people and activities marginal to society such as prostitution and drug traffic.

In 1985 Pelourinho was considered World Heritage by UNESCO. A bigger awareness of its historic importance and pressure from Soteropolitano (from the city of Salvador) intellectual groups caused politicians and public administrators to carry through a series of actions aiming to revert the degradation process (Simões, 1988).

The municipal administration called Lina Bó Bardi, a famous Italian architect settled in São Paulo that once lived in Salvador, to develop a rehabilitation project for the area (Instituto Lina Bo and P. M. Bardi, 1993). Much influenced by Brazilian vernacular architecture, Lina’s idea was to keep existing social roots, reinforcing the cultural aspects of Salvador and its strong ties to Africa as most of Soteropolitanos descend from Africans.

From 1986 to 1989 she developed a series of projects including Belvedere da Sé (a small square with a panorama of the bay), Barroquinha (a complex of small cinemas, theatre, cafés, church and social housing), Benin House (cultural representation, museum and typical restaurant of the African country of Benin), Olodum House (house of the famous African-Brazilian band) and Pierre

Figure 7. Deteriorated Pelourinho in the 1980s. Source: Instituto Lina Bo e P. M. Bardi (1993).
Verger Foundation (French ethnologist settled in Salvador).

In Ladeira da Misericórdia (a slope behind the complex Igreja da Misericórdia e Santa Casa), a bunch of deteriorated casarões was restored for the existing population low-income residential use. The houses were whitewashed, walls and roofs restored, windows, doors and wood frames varnished. Concrete sidewalls were built to reinforce structural stability of the remaining houses and a typical restaurant was built (Figures 8 and 9).

What is remarkable in all Lina’s projects is the diversity of uses proposed that find an echo on the Pelourinho’s context. By promoting a mix of social housing, informal commerce and cultural uses she tried to avoid the removal of lower income groups, so characteristic of renewal projects, keeping their social and cultural ties.

Ladeira da Misericórdia was intended to be the pilot project for the restoration of the whole Pelourinho. However, the regeneration process changed direction when the Bahia State administration decided to intervene heavily on the Historic Centre.

Aware of its tourism potential, the government launched a chart of reference on historical preservation of Pelourinho. The 1991 white paper defined the State goals for the area (IPAC – Instituto do Patrimônio Artístico e Cultural da Bahia, 1995):
- to promote the physical rehabilitation and restoration considering the area economic potential for the city and the metropolitan region;
- to provide the conditions for a sustainable preservation through the development of economic activities.

Public works were carried out to improve infrastructure (energy, telecommunications, sanitation, water supply, fire combat). The buildings were repaired, facades painted, woodwork and roofs restored, backyards opened by destruction of irregular existing buildings. Churches, monasteries and other religious buildings were also refurbished.

As in the 1970s Bologna experience (cf Cervelatti et al., 1977), the block was considered the basic intervention unit for physical restoration that should be financed by the State. The choice to intervene on the block rather than in isolated buildings arose from a 35% reduction in costs.

The intervention strategies were restoration, structural recuperation, re-building, conservation and they varied according to the buildings...
characteristics. Historical buildings that preserved their original attributes were restored and their inner space preserved. Buildings not so important from a historical point of view underwent a spatial restructuring, preserving important architectonic details. Deteriorated and destroyed buildings were re-built with a new spatial distribution but facades followed original architectonic details seen in drawings. Preserved buildings underwent a conservation process.

In order to compensate public funding and works, a negotiation between the State and Soteropolitano elite landowners happened. Considering the property status, four choices were given to owners of properties: sale, expropriation, usufruct transfer, real estate or floor area exchange (Wipfli, 2001).

Purchase happened whenever the owner did not want to keep the property, whereas expropriation was used in extreme cases when the parts did not reach a term. In the cases where the State and owners reached an agreement, the first would have the property usufruct from a period ranging from 5 to 10 years or could exchange the restored buildings for floor area, other buildings and real estates in or out of the Historic District.

The works started in 1992 and in the completion of the 6th stage in 1999, they have consumed US$ 76 453 088.00 restoring 1350 houses, churches, monuments and museums (Wipfli, op. cit.) (Figure 10).

By that time the State owned 432 buildings and have the usufruct of another 133, representing respectively, 32 and 10% of the total as shown in Table 1. The 58% left remained in the hand of the owners. By 2000, the State returned the usufruct to the owners of buildings restored in the 1st stage.

**Tourism industry development and gentrification**

After the sobrados restoration, they were let for rent based on a pre-established mix. A series of activities and uses related to tourism and entertainment industries took place.
While the ground floor of smaller houses remained specially for commercial uses – typical products/souvenir shops, restaurants and pubs – bigger housing typologies were converted for cultural and entertainment uses such as local art galleries, museums, playhouses, small ateliers, school of traditional music, dance, arts and crafts as in Solar do Ferrão (art gallery and museum), Miguel Santana and XVIII theaters, Museu da Cidade (city museum), Fundação Casa de Jorge Amado (museum of the famous Bahia novelist) amongst many others (Figures 11–14).

Some churches and fortress were also converted into museums. The Convento de Santa Tereza, a 17th century monastery, is now occupied by the religious art museum (Museu de Arte Sacra) managed by Bahia Federal University – UFBa. It hosts one of the most important South American religious art collection, whereas the Forte de São João da Barra (a 16th century fortress built in a rock in the entrance of the bay) hosts the naval museum with relics of boats and armoury from Colonial times.

The 19th century customs house, Mercado Modelo, has functioned as an artisan market since 1971. After a fire in the 1980s it has been restored to be a great centre for artistic and cultural animation where artistic presentations of caipira (typical slave street fight) takes place besides restaurants and the market (Projeto Editores Associados, 1990).

Recently, the regeneration process continued with the rehabilitation of some public spaces such as Praça da Sé and the creation of plazas in inner courts inside the blocks such as Passagem Pedro Arcanjo, Praça Tereza Batista, Praça Quincas Berro D’Água, Praça do Reggae and Quadrado Cultural (Projeto Editores Associados, 1999; Wolf, 2000). These courts host tourism and entertainment activities such as pubs, restaurants, shows, presentation of local groups and music.

The urban regeneration strategy promoted by the State had great impacts on land use. According to Wipfli (2001), the great majority of properties were converted for commercial use whereas just 16% for residential, as seen from Table 2.

Tourism and entertainment development in Pelourinho reveals part of Bahia State strategy to promote economic development. Although it is quite difficult to estimate the impacts of Pelourinho restoration on these industries, it is a fact that they have grown considerably since the 1980s reflecting State investments on the area.

Table 1 Property condition by 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State owned</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State usufruct</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landowners</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hotel occupation in Salvador have risen from approximately 210,000 to 340,000 of guests annually from 1981 to 1997, representing a 62% increase (SEI, 1998). In the same period, international guests tripled, going from almost 20,000 to 62,000. From 1984 to 1995, arriving passengers in the international airport almost doubled, going from 500,000 to 945,000 roughly (ibid.).

However, this urban regeneration process has caused a series of negative impacts on the area, specially when existing population and social ties were concerned. Differently from Bologna’s experience, the State worked with the relocation of existing tenant population. Tenants could choose between being relocated to a restored house or to receive financial compensation.

By 1995, 85% of living families (around 1000) received almost US$900,000 as a compensation for being displaced (IPAC, 1995). Considering that the average familial monthly income is less than US$100, it not surprising that the majority of the families decided to move away.

Due to displacement, the living population of the Historic Centre as well as its surroundings showed a clear reduction as seen in the 1980 and 2000 Census (IBGE, 1982, 2001). Table 3 shows that this reduction is sharply felt on the Historic Centre (Sé and Passo Districts), that has lost 67% of its population, with densities decreasing from 216 to 71 inhabitants/ha, whereas the Surroundings (Districts of Nazaré, Santana and São Pedro) have lost 33%, decreasing from 253 to 169 inhabitants/ha.

This reflects problems on regeneration strategies based only on economic activities, neglecting the housing potential of the area with disregard to contemporary urban design theory that since Jane Jacobs have considered high densities and mixed uses as an important way to promote sustainable development (cf Jacobs, 1961; Bentley et al., 1985; Elkin et al., 1991; Haughton and Hunter, 1994).

Besides promoting surveillance, maximising the infrastructure use and reducing the need for urban sprawl, this combination promotes local development as concentration of consumers make...
economic activities feasible, also encouraging pedestrian use.

In Brazil, the debate about ‘ideal’ densities is still very limited and inconclusive, ranging from 200 to 500 inhabitants/ha (cf Ferrari, 1979; Mascaro, 1986; Rodrigues, 1986). Rodrigues (op. cit.) consider densities under 100 inhabitants/ha as inappropriate to make services and infrastructure feasible. Mascaro (op. cit.) recommends around 100–120 families/ha (ie from 379 to 455 inhabitants/ha) considering maintenance energy, infrastructure and construction costs. Anyway densities of the Historic Centre is under 100 inhabitants/ha, very low for Brazilian standards.

Apart from densities reduction, the process have had another negative impact. Figures show that part of population reduction is caused by a gentrification process where lower income groups are expelled, being replaced by higher income groups, as seen from Table 4. Although lower income groups (from 0 to 5 minimum wages monthly) still represent the great majority of the Historic Centre population, their participation has fallen from 90 to 80% from 1991 to 2000, whereas higher income groups (above 10 minimum wages) increased from 2 to 6%.

On the other hand, the income of surrounding population has presented little difference, showing that gentrification occurred only in the Historic Centre. This reflects a land speculation process that started with relocation.

**Conclusion**

Since the 1980s consciousness of the potential of historical sites and natural landscape have resulted in strategies of many Brazilian States, specially in the Northeast, to promote tourism as a way to economic development. The Pelourinho experience followed this idea and has much influenced the urban regeneration of many Northeast cities. Similar projects have taken place in Recife and São Luiz, recently expanding to other regions of Brazil.
Figure 13. City Museum and Jorge Amado Foundation in the Pelourinho Triangle. Source: Nobre (1998).

Figure 14. Restored casarões with commercial use on the ground floor. Source: Nobre (1998).
In this aspect, Salvador seems to be very emblematic of what is happening now in Brazil: whereas local authorities have tried to promote development for existing population, State governments have undermined this process, injecting a great sum of money to attract tourists.

This can be seen in the recent experience of the Amazon city of Belem, where the municipality recovered and ordered informal commerce in Ver-O-Peso market while the State government restored the early 20th century docks for Estação das Docas food thematic shopping mall just two blocks away.

Besides political ideologies of local and state governments, this can be partly explained by the fact that the State benefits most from economic development as it receives the majority of ICMS revenues (a sort of VAT) whereas local authorities experience more the pressures of poor local groups for housing and jobs.

Table 2  Land use in Pelourinho buildings by 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial – apparel, jewels,</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>craftwork and souvenirs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial – restaurants, pubs</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and cafeterias</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government and NGOs</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches and museums</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1082</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3  Evolution of living population and densities (inhabitants/ha)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>Density</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>Density</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Salvador</td>
<td>1,501,981</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>2,428,388</td>
<td>77.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic Centre</td>
<td>9853</td>
<td>216.2</td>
<td>3,235</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surroundings</td>
<td>54,624</td>
<td>252.7</td>
<td>36,481</td>
<td>168.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 4  Percentage of living population according to income of household chief in minimum wages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>0–5</th>
<th>5–10</th>
<th>10–20</th>
<th>+20</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>0–5</th>
<th>5–10</th>
<th>10–20</th>
<th>+20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City of Salvador</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic Centre</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surroundings</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

enormous potential to host the population that work on these activities such as vendors, tourism guides, musicians and artists.

This could also help to safeguard the area. Presently, Pelourinho is a very well guarded area by a policeman in every block, but a police strike happened two years ago let the whole city in a state of war. Considering the surveillance aspect, the creation of entertainment inner courts should also be reviewed as they compete with the streets, taking public animation out of them.

Anyway one can conclude that to achieve a better and balanced urban regeneration in Brazilian cities, public authorities and private enterprise must consider the context of intervention, its social and economic aspects as well as the cultural condition and the real needs of the population involved.

References


