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Area-based initiatives and urban dynamics. The case of the Porto city centre
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In face of the systemic character of urban problems and the uncertainty surrounding planning methodologies, the need to intervene in urban space requires a holistic and spatial-based approach, rather than simply attempting to regulate urban expansion. Such an approach has increasingly been used in restricted areas to deal with complex urban dynamics and conflicting interests. This area-based and multi-problem approach in urbanism, although not new, has gained new relevance as it is highly relevant to the urban competition between cities (and the ‘creative cities’ agenda) and is specially suited to deal with the transformation of urban areas with high regenerative potential. It is also easily associated with public–private partnership and the creation of the ‘atmospheres’ that seem to fit conveniently with the dominant expectations and interests of educated middle- and high-class residents and visitors. In this context, Porto, its city centre and its older heritage area in particular, has provided a very good basis for analysing and discussing the dynamics, intentions and results of area-based initiatives. This is particularly so given the persistence of a range of problems previously commonly found in other cities in Europe some decades which coexist with the dynamics that characterize the larger metropolis where there is a rich recent history of spatial planning in central areas. This article examines what may be described as Europeanization of Porto (and Portuguese) urban policy, and the associated different programmes, projects and plans, providing indications of the agents, processes and results, of what we see as a late and brutal process of transition from public action, or strongly regulated private action, to a dominant private, public-supported urbanism, where social objectives matter much less than aesthetics and ‘spatial-based vitality’, and urbanism seems to create new divides and increased spatial injustice.

Keywords: urbanism; urban regeneration; city centre; old town; Porto

1. Introduction: area-based initiatives, planning incertitude and the Porto city centre
During the 1960s, it was argued that modernism and functionalism were not relevant for the city’s future, so Jane Jacobs (1969) and many more led us to understand. Also the global economic crisis in the mid-1970s, helped to signal the end of optimism in planning as doubts over the virtues of planners and planning for the city’s future increased drastically. Cities had also changed, having undergone a period of intense suburbanization. But the development of new (regional) concentrations of population and the multiplication of new road networks, facilities and housing on the outskirts slowed down, and the talk of a
counter-urbanization movement (Berry 1980) was contemporary with the need to manage the existing city, instead of persisting in planning for new urban areas still to come.

This new idea of acting on what we had, and also the relationship of planning with the fight against injustice helped to underpin a Marxist-based approach, directed at urban management and social-based initiatives, and led to the contestation of planning as an exercise that served the interests of capitalism (Harvey 1985). However, as plans and rules were minimized, the market triumphed, especially where neo-liberalism emerged more intensely, and a new phase of urbanization with less effective planning meant that sprawl and a more fragmented urban area was created in Europe, even if with important national and regional differences.

The emergence of polycentric and much more extensive urban conglomerates of all types meant concepts of centre and periphery had to be revised, and old and new concepts such as conurbation (Geddes 1915), megalopolis (Munford 1938), metapolis (Ascher 1995) or mega-city regions (Hall and Pain 2006), among so many others, in a ‘lexicological inflation’ (Cluzet 2002, p. 6), merely served to show how troubled we all were when confronted with much more extended, diverse and complex urban realities, where:

(...) there will be powerful forces of decentralization, pushing and pulling people and activities out of city centres, and out of cities altogether, to suburbs and smaller towns. But there will be contrary forces of centralization, causing some activities to pack together as tightly as ever. And there will be forces of recentralization, causing some of the decentralized activities to reconcentrate in new downtowns or ‘edge cities’. (Hall and Pfiffer 2000, p. 117)

Urban planning (like planning in general) is deeply affected by uncertainty and its proven inability to predict and to decide what is best for all. Yet it needs to act and influence the future to exist, even while recognizing that we are all more focused on the present than on the future, and on more personal futures than on collective ones (Connell 2009, p. 94). But, more than simply justifying its own existence, planning is seen as being responsible for addressing the consequences of that which seems to happen in a particularly strong way where and when it was less relevant, in the form of important spatially based asymmetries and potentially dangerous socio-economic fragmentation, or in costly, inefficient land use, with vacant derelict houses in the old centre and vacant new houses in an extensively urbanized area (as is evident in Portugal and Spain).

Different planning theorists signalled a ‘turn to diversity’ in the planning of the 1980s, as experiences in North America based on a more pragmatic approach, allied with a ‘post-modern’ view of society, aimed to create the conditions for interventions that were more attentive to the complex characteristics of people’s relationship with space and development. It also sought to take account of social, economic and cultural differences that could not be captured by the still important yet too simplistic dualist perspectives of simple oppositions between poor and rich, exploiter and exploited, work and leisure, productive and non-productive, urban and rural or centre and periphery.

Even though a radical break with conventional views did not take place, giving way to a completely new attitude, nor did it occur at the same time throughout the world, there was however a notable general shift from a ‘... modernist, essentialist, materialist and developmental view of the planning project... towards an interest in diversities of identity, culture, multiple knowledge and modes of expression’ (Hillier and Healey 2008, vol. 2, p. 205).

This led to the emergence of ‘spatial planning as a king of new orthodoxy’ (Vigar 2009, p. 1571), and very interesting debates on the relationship between space and place in planning (Davoudi and Strange 2009).
Collaborative planning and a ‘learning from practice’ attitude gained general recognition and has taken on a central role in the discourse of diverse agents (and some of the practice) in various European cities and it normally includes some sort of specific (and certainly always imperfect) experience of governance, as a consequence of the lack of certainty by planners, more mindful of the ‘common citizen’s’ opinion, more conscientious of the complexities of societies and the greater relevance of the existence of a culture of development and participation over the juridical and political approval of maps and rules.

Spatial-based approaches have an important connection with this new context and attitude towards planning. Trying to capture the new urban complexities and to favour effective participation, planning tends ‘naturally’ to concentrate on small spaces, normally with a thematic perspective, as plans and initiatives have multiplied with special objectives of rehabilitation, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, increased mobility, among many others, albeit rarely referring to the same territorial limits, time schedules and agents involved.

Attempts to integrate plans and initiatives in confined areas are recent if we look at forms of cooperation between public and private interests, multi-themed and tailor-made projects, where participation really exists in efforts to conciliate conflicting interests, such as between long-range elements and immediate market needs. However, examples of attempts to integrate efforts in planning can be traced back to Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s intervention in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century. Here, architecture and engineering worked together to create water and sewage systems coherent with new streets, harmonious buildings, railway stations and markets. Furthermore, in terms of participative planning, the almost 100-year-old efforts of the Scottish biologist, Patrick Geddes, stand out, as his special concern with nature and tradition was also associated with a genuine interest in the views of local people when dealing with 50 small towns in India, after his arrival there in 1914.

Over the years, continuous concern with some areas of certain cities is evident in planning and urban management. This is particularly the case in Europe, when it comes to the central area of the city and, especially, when focusing on spaces with ‘historical value’. Even though interest in individual monuments may traditionally go back further in time, in recent last few decades, there has been a clear rise in public interest in old urban areas, as privileged places of common access, involving usually higher rents and more specialized and diversified activities.¹

In this article, we will consider area-based initiatives for the older area of the city of Porto (also commonly known as the ‘historic centre’) and its immediate surroundings: the city’s economic and administrative centre, or ‘Baixa’,² and ‘the other side’ of the Douro River in the municipality of Vila Nova de Gaia (Figure 1).

To understand the importance of this area and the priority it has in spatial planning, it is important to emphasize the following: on the one hand, the demolitions proposed in the plan drawn up by Robert Auzelle in 1962, as well as a reaction that emerged in the 1970s, leading to the enhancement of the old morphology; and, on the other hand, the transition that took place in Portugal in the late 1970s and 1980s, in a rather particular manner compared with other countries, following the emergence of a predominantly liberal attitude within the framework of the rapid social and economic integration in Europe and in the world of a peripheral country, considerably closed off to external influences during half a century under dictatorship.

Given the particularly intense urban expansion together with the entry into the Euro and increased access to mortgage loans for housing construction or purchase, sprawl and
multi-centrality was established in the metropolitan area of Porto (by introducing changes to the accessibility network and new activity clusters). In addition, we see the formation of a territory that becomes a kind of ‘menu’ as a result of the increased supply of places of production and especially consumption, at the same time as there is an increased capacity of choice exercised by a considerable number of consumers with high purchasing power and mobility.

The areas of predominantly old streets and buildings – especially the former – which we insist on calling historic or central, became a tiny part of an exploding metropolis (Whyte 1993). In this respect, it should be noted that the area defined as the Historic Centre of Porto and World Heritage site by UNESCO/International Council on Monuments and Sites for classification purposes in 1996 has 1796 buildings, less than 1% of the 10 km radius area inhabited by a million people which is now the central nucleus of one of the two main urban areas in Portugal as identified by the National Programme for Spatial Planning Policies (PNPOT), approved in 2009. Within this small area, only 7000 people reside totally which doubles if we consider the nearest downtown area (Baixa) and the southern bank of the Douro River (in Gaia). This is of particular significance if we consider that 3.4 million people, that is, about one-third of the inhabitants in Portugal, live in the urban area defined in the PNPOT as stretching between the cities of Braga and Aveiro with a length of 100 km and an average width of 30 km.
2. Touristification

Interest in the historical dimension of cities has traditionally been related to the protection of certain buildings, mainly those with a religious or administrative function and aesthetically outstanding. At the same time, decade after decade, century after century, the ‘normal’ old city was being changed, as the result of many small and individual actions, or by public interventions directed at adapting urban space to new forms of living, where sanitation, comfort and/or the car were becoming particularly relevant. Amidst plans and rules to regulate construction works, the nineteenth-century urbanism principles were very felt present in many places, later reinforced by the CIAM movement and the ‘Athens Charter’ of 1931.

Sanitary and free-circulation objectives in Porto help to explain the Rua Nova da Alfândega, Praça do Infante and Rua Mouzinho da Silveira road axis, connecting three important symbols of the new late nineteenth-century economy: the custom house, the stock exchange and the railway station, also promoting a much better connection of the riverfront with the higher areas of the ‘Baixa’ (Figure 2). Near the railway station, a ‘central avenue’ (Avenida dos Aliados) was opened in 1916, in the context of a plan to modernize an expansive area north of the fourteenth-century wall. There, finance and retail established the basis for a new centre, while inside the ‘historic centre’ many buildings were demolished and even streets and small squares disappeared, mostly due to the need to open a new connection between the ‘Baixa’ and the D. Luis I iron bridge, inaugurated in 1886 (Avenida Vímara Peres and Avenida D. Afonso Henriques), or to create a square aimed at bolstering the monumental dimension of the cathedral and the bishop’s palace.

From this optimistic approach (or catastrophic to the city memories, others may say), planning for the ancient part of the city changed in the 1960s and 1970s, to a more

Figure 2. Major interventions in the centre from 1850 to 1950.
conservative position, much more respectful of the buildings and public spaces as well as of particular areas of the city, whose interest changed from local or national to a global scale, that in the case of Porto’s ‘historic centre’ was especially relevant as it was classified by UNESCO/International Council on Monuments and Sites as a world heritage site in 1996.

This attention increased, as a cultural approach gradually replaced the idea that old buildings and narrow and irregular streets were inadequate for the modern city. More recent and less impressive buildings than the traditional ‘monuments’ become equally important, as every construction, the people living there and the activities developed as a whole became more highly appreciated.

This change in attitude towards the old area of the city had an important relationship with tourism, although not necessarily a direct one. In the case of Porto, the action of certain architects together with political change in 1974 were decisive in forcing the public sector to start the rehabilitation of the ‘historic centre’, long before tourism had any relevance to the city’s economy. However, we have to concede that the presence of visitors has played a very important role, given the interest they have shown in the older, more neglected areas of the city, a factor that has contributed considerably to drawing greater attention to them.

The increase in purchasing power in many countries, the exponential rise in the number of flights and air connections and the general interest of people in cities, outside the traditional holiday periods, help to explain the impressive expansion of an increasing number of cities as short break destinations. Despite sporadic economic, political and public health incidents, this trend has not suffered any mid- or long-term alterations. On the contrary, like other urban places Porto has recently experienced a very important expansion in this regard, as low-cost flights operate in a comfortable airport 20 min away from the city centre by rail or motorway.

Even though tourists seek to diversify the places they visit in the city, where new cultural spaces and buildings of a ‘star-system architect’ signature are particularly attractive, the city centre, and the world heritage site, with its ‘other side of the river’, where the Port wine cellars are located, is still the absolutely ‘not to miss’ part of the city. This is perhaps due to its strong identity or character – whatever this means (Pendlebury et al. 2009) – that stands in contrast to areas where the results of some form of standardization of twentieth-century urbanism and architecture are easily perceptible.

Tourism confers a new economic value on the older parts of cities and contributes to the self-esteem of residents, particularly when cities are not capitals and are located on the periphery of Europe, as is the case of Porto. One of the consequences may be a certain form of ‘touristification’ of the city, where the choice of colours, materials and activities is biased towards appealing to the visitor. In some extreme cases, areas of the city can be transformed to such an extent that they become simulacra (Harvey 1985), more like a theme park than a ‘normal’ part of the city. The area of Pelourinho in Salvador (in Brazil) is a good example: ‘residents were transferred; buildings were restored and painted in strong colours; shops, restaurants and cultural associations survive exclusively on tourism; and streets and squares are animated by “very characteristic” cultural manifestations . . . for the tourist!’.

3. Area-based initiatives in the ‘old centre’

There are important differences in the condition of old areas from city to city, as a result of different historical processes, different spatial dimensions and diverse economic capacities and attitudes towards their renewal and rehabilitation. As in other cases, the old area
of Porto posed a huge problem in the 1970s and 1980s as the area’s general conditions were deficient, and contrasted greatly with the fact that most people came to give it much higher importance than was usual in the post–Second World War years of functionalism and modernism. Tourism played a part, but we also have to consider the emergence of a new perspective among planners and politicians who no longer regarded the old area as a burden or something to be dismissed as an obstacle to progress, but rather as the spatial materialization of a ‘past that needs to have a future’.

In Porto the gap between hard reality and what the old area of the city should be was (and still is) particularly important, as degradation is evident, and a new value has been conferred on the area, especially after its world heritage accolade. There is also a contradiction between the way people experience an urban space that is increasingly an urban conglomeration with diffuse boundaries, several distinct fragments and different types of a growing number of centres and the idea of a unifying ‘old centre’ and ‘city centre’, as the area becomes affectively central, yet people do not want to live or do their shopping there. However, as inhabitants and regular consumers have gradually departed from the old centre, there has been an increased number of visitors, tourists and university students, among other ‘city users’ and also suburban residents, that appreciate the central city’s scenic quality and urban atmosphere. 12

Institutionally, the creation of Comissariado para a Renovação Urbana da Área de Ribeira-Barredo (CRUARB) in 1974 signalled a new attitude towards the old city and the special public attention it received. At first it was a very particular unit of the central government with a mandate for the rehabilitation of a small area of Porto’s riverfront. It then became municipality in 1982, increasing the perimeter of its geographical incidence.

CRUARB played a very important role in the rehabilitation and the general recognition of the problems (and qualities) of old Porto, even though most of its activities were related only with restoration, renovation and general or partial rehabilitation of buildings, with the fundamental objective of creating appropriate conditions for local residents. 13 There was also some limited action on the economic and social dimensions, later transferred to the Fundação para o Desenvolvimento da Zona Histórica do Porto (FDZHP), created in 1990, whose activity was directed at the most underprivileged social groups. FDZHP, constituted using public capital from the government and municipal council, created facilities (homes and day-care centres, social laundries and Internet kiosks) and developed a diversified number of actions to support children, youngsters, the elderly, the unemployed and beneficiaries of funds to fight poverty.

Even though participation was very restricted, multi-scale approaches were absent, private sector participation in investment was very limited and physical and social considerations were dominant, the work of CRUARB and FDZHP in the 1980s and 1990s may be regarded as a relevant area-based initiative in Porto. Consequently, at the turn of the century, there was a general admiration for the historical city and the work accomplished in it, although it was not enough to eliminate a perception that a significant part of this large area was ‘problematic’, in view of the departure of young and middle-class people, the continuing degradation of several buildings, where drug trafficking and addiction, prostitution and petty crime were perceived as very present and insecurity as a threat.

On the wider streets and in the riverfront squares, new bars used mainly by students, and restaurants targeted at tourists, coexisted without radically transforming the character of the old area, at the same time public action was having a visible effect on improving some of the local residents’ living conditions. However, a ‘filtering-down’ effect was strongly evident in many areas of the old city, with the increasing relevance of the elderly and poor, a popularization of the economy, where small independent food shops were dominant, and the decay of buildings continued to spread, as rates of abandonment constantly increased.
(particularly the higher flats of tall buildings), sometimes neighbouring the few that public funds had been able to recover or the very rare cases where owners had decided to restore at their own (high) cost.

A particularly interesting example of a localized initiative within the ‘historic centre’ with social and economic purposes was Projecto Piloto do Bairro da Sé, a ‘pilot-project’ approved by the European Community for a small specific area on the hill of the cathedral, completed in 1998, and self-proclaimed as ‘the first integrated operation after about 20 years of urban rehabilitation work in Porto’ (Borges 1998, p. 11). This intervention was intended to connect the ‘modern city’ with a problematic neighbourhood in the ‘old city’ and spatially concentrated public investment of around €6.2 million that included the creation of a new square, with action on buildings, infrastructure and street paving. It was a requalification effort that attempted (with mixed success) to bring to an interiorized and partially ghettoized area, new economic activities (a restaurant and cultural associations) and new people (youngsters and middle-class families), while trying to maintain residents and existing economic and social activities (Figure 3).

4. Gaia, the ‘other side of the Douro’, the ‘Baixa’ and area-based initiatives at the turn of the century

On the left bank of the Douro River, old Gaia competes with Porto to attract and retain the tourists that cross the river for a visit to the Port wine cellars, and also the increasingly
mobile suburban population, attracted by the old town atmosphere and waterfront landscape. The concentration of enterprises that govern the commerce of Port wine in a few economic groups and the establishment of new cellars in the Douro region, where the grapes are grown and wine is made (about 100 km east of Porto and Gaia), has not helped, as a significant part of the cellars has been abandoned and in the few streets where residential buildings and retail are dominant, the problems felt in the old city of Porto are also present.

To understand recent dynamics in old Gaia, at least two other elements must be considered. One is the election of Luis Filipe Menezes as Mayor in 1998, an important figure in one of the major political parties in Portugal (Partido Social Democrata included in the European Union (EU) right-wing EPP group), elected with the best national results in local elections in the most populated municipalities. The other was the combination of projects on the Douro waterfront, including a noted project that combined a pedestrian and cycling track along the river. This was part of a diverse range of actions to reinforce the connection of the old centre with the seafront, funded by POLIS, a programme launched by the government in 1999, with EU support, which aimed to improve the quality of urban life, involving interventions in the morphology and environmental dimensions of areas considered as strategic. Also important was the transformation of a sector of the Gaia riverfront, left abandoned by the closure of a port, propriety of a public enterprise (Administração dos Portos de Douro e Leixões), by means of a small-scale urban regeneration (or just ‘renaissance’?) project in line with those that reconverted old docks in Boston, London and Lisbon. It involved the construction of a shopping and dining area with 30 restaurants and 20 small shops near a new parking lot and a direct view over the river to a ‘postcard’ Porto perspective.

On the north side of the river, the area of Ribeira in Porto was also the object of a POLIS operation. This involved significant improvement of the public space and completing the requalification that had occurred near the old custom house for the Ibero-American Summit in 1998. But if both sides of the Douro were becoming more attractive, especially on the riverfront, with tourists during the day, students in the evenings and suburban populations at weekends, north of the old city, in the ‘Baixa’, the difficulties seemed to continue to grow. Thus, as much of the attention at the turn of the century was directed towards the celebration of Porto as European Capital of Culture in 2001, it was considered normal that investment should include important national funding for the requalification of the city centre. This was also a sort of compensation to the second city for the national funding of Lisbon’s Expo 98 (which included a new bridge over the Tagus River and the regeneration of 4.5 km of the capital’s riverfront).

Investment for the occasion enabled the renovation of museums and the construction of several cultural facilities, notably the €33 million Casa da Música (Music Hall) designed by Prizer award winner Rem Koolhaas, and the funding of cultural events throughout the year of the celebration. But an ‘urban regeneration’ operation that was particularly welcomed was one that sought to achieve a much publicized ‘return to the centre’, as shopping centres around the municipality of Porto were drawing an increasing share of consumer spending and the old city decline was expanding uptown. It consisted of projects for the urban requalification of many of the squares, gardens and streets of ‘Baixa’, with private investment in underground parking lots (Figure 4). There were also plans for the requalification of buildings, economic revitalization and the improvement of mobility, all discussed and approved by PORTO2001, the public company specially created to oversee the operations.

Unfortunately, the project for residential areas never found the money for an operation that had been defined as a priority intervention on rooftops and rehabilitation of groups
of buildings at particularly visible streets. Political conflicts, scarcity of public funds from the Housing Ministry and the complexity and time schedule of the project help to explain this situation, reinforced by criticism of the relevance of the theme for the celebration of culture in Europe.

The operation for economic modernization was also not implemented, although the required studies were completed and the projected investment depended on central and local government received the approval to get 40–50% support for the modernization of a total of 1141 shops, restaurants and a few small services located in the city centre and was supported under the aegis of PROCOM, an EU-funded programme designed by the Ministry of Economy for retail modernization in the city centres. Only a few months before local elections, the project was postponed. The reasons for this lay in the conflicts between the mayor, Nuno Cardoso, the PORTO2001 president, Teresa Lago, and most particularly, the defiant position of the president of the commercial association, Laura Rodrigues, whose signature on an agreement was indispensable (Fernandes 2001, Balsas 2004). However, it was approved in 2006 (then under the URBCOM programme), with the modest inclusion of less than 100 units. The inconvenience of the work in progress in practically every street in the central area of Porto (more than 30) created even more
discontent among retailers as mud and dust contributed to diverting consumers to the new, large and sophisticated ‘peripheral centres’ or to the exclusive shops in elegant and easily accessible parts of the city, such as Foz and Boavista. As a consequence, the actions for the requalification of the city centre were seen as reinforcing the shift towards a new urban retail system constructed in a very liberal context, with resistance from independent retailers confined to a small part of a previously extended area, especially to the streets of Santa Catarina and Cedofeita, where resilience was higher.

The plan for mobility favoured pedestrians and proposed the reintroduction of the tram in the city centre, in tandem with requalification projects for public spaces. But it was also very criticized, as retailers and most of the ‘public voice’ (helped by opposition to the mayor before the local elections) strongly contested the limitations on car traffic and the reduction in parking.

Thus, even though public funding invested in the central area was very important, it was much less and in fewer domains than was expected, and it was spent in such a way that the cultural celebration was seen as having favoured a right-wing turn in the elections on 16 December 2001. As a result, a few months after the elections, PORTO2001 was closed and public works either quickly finished or replaced with more conservative solutions, with culture publicly regarded as a luxury, that should never had been considered a priority.

5. Public-private partnerships and the ‘cultural turn’

With regard to the heritage area, the new political attitude stressed the idea that public funding would never be sufficient to solve all problems, and private investment was thus essential. CRUARB and FDZHP were promptly closed; this occurred at the same time as talks with the central government (also turning to the right in 2002) resulted in the creation of new solutions that could facilitate private sector participation in actions on the old centre. The law for the creation of Sociedades de Reabilitação Urbana (SRU – societies for urban rehabilitation) was approved in 2004 and in November that year, SRU Porto Vivo was constituted by central and local government, with the former providing 60% of the capital and the latter 40%. In Gaia, an SRU was also created in 2007, although unlike Porto Vivo, Cidade Gaia was fully controlled by the municipality.

Meanwhile, relations between Porto and Gaia have become enormously tense, as the mayors, although belonging to the same political party, are barely on speaking terms. Consequently, the coordination of objectives and efforts has been sadly lacking, and it has become very clear that there are different approaches, contradictory in some cases, on the two sides of the Douro River. In fact, as in Porto the classification as a world heritage site and the longevity of the rehabilitation process influenced a physically more conservative approach, in Gaia, a proposed protection zone in the old city of Porto on the left bank was never approved, and there has been a much more market-driven approach to the 152 ha area considered for rehabilitation, including marketing actions in international real-estate and tourism fairs, directed at attracting private investment.

The Socialist candidate Fernando Gomes, the former minister and the mayor of Porto at the time world heritage status was awarded to the old city, and the approval of the application as European Capital of Culture had had talks with Luis Filipe Menezes before the elections, leading to an agreement to create a single management body for the old areas on both sides of the Douro. Now, after a 2-year period with Nuno Cardoso as mayor, after a surprise victory of Rui Rio over Gomes, the geostrategic perspective of Porto has shifted, as Gaia is never mentioned and the old historical area and the ‘Baixa’ are considered as a single planning unit.
Both SRUs have (very different) master plans as simplified and strategic spatial guides for the transformation they are supposed to achieve. As politically ambitious and technically correct as they may be, they do not seem easy to implement, unless there is a huge investment from sources that could not be specified, and which were unfortunately completed without much discussion and participation, or any political dialogue between the two municipal administrations to ensure that they complemented one another.

In both cases, the SRUs have developed a ‘facilitating agent’ approach to urban regeneration, in line with that which took place in the United States back in the prosperous decades of the 1950s and 1960s, when a large part of the most important processes of urban development was achieved through public–private cooperation. There, in both waterfront and central areas, as later on in Europe in areas with similar characteristics and also in spaces of special historical value but economically devalued, public–private partnerships came to be considered as ‘good in themselves no matter what’, even if cooperation could be contentious and unbalanced, as the private sector tends to be dominant and the public part of the arrangement seems on occasions to be called upon mainly to ‘prepare the ground for capital’ (Squires 1991, p. 275).

At the turn of the century, the relevance of knowledge in the economy was being recognized and space was valued in itself as an important dimension of development, an aspect that was not normally considered by ‘Fordism’, nor by neo-positivism or by the flexible accumulation theories, although a tendency for the geographical concentration of command in the central areas of some few urban agglomerations was noted.18 In this new context, cities come to be seen as ‘the drivers of the economy’, attracting the most creative elements,19 with some of their spaces regarded as especially relevant strategically, as meeting places where buzz and relevant information can be found and creativity can emerge more easily. There, a diversity of people and activities are able to create value on a different context than that of traditional firms in technology parks and other large-scale and typically suburban or exurban combinations of research, technology and industrial production in places with institutional diversity, proximity to different cultural elements and a vast and diversified range of activities that only the ‘normal city’ can offer (Hutton 2009).

In the ‘cultural turn of economic geography’ (Barnes 2001), the city is seen as a resource and some of its parts as having a special value in a new surge of localism that seems full of (new) potentialities.20 In this context, new activities are seen as more important than the traditional retail or the long-standing tourism industry, for the revitalization of the city centre. This is particularly the case of the so-called creative industries, normally associated with the combination of a specific and historically rich cityscape, an attractive cultural environment and a modern and cosmopolitan atmosphere. Reciprocally, many of those involved in ‘knowledge-intensive work’ ‘... want to live in “quality”, “creative”, “tolerant” and “exciting” places’ (Vanolo 2008, p. 370), promoting regenerative action in some spaces, normally in central areas of large- or medium-sized cities.

Consequently, even if the existence of a creative cluster is a matter of debate (Van Heur 2009), it is possible to observe new activities and a new surge of life in the central cities of vast urban conglomerations and especially in spaces located within their economic and/or historical centre(s). The role these urban spaces are called upon to fulfil is now clearly more than simply providing scenery for tourists, or a combination of more or less well-conserved deposits of what the past has left by intention or chance. Space is now seen as a dimension of development,21 associated with a new role for knowledge in general development, which leads many planning efforts to be directed at a ‘culture-led regeneration ( . . . ) now seen as a key strategy by the planning authorities in every political stripe in almost every country’ (Sudjic 2007, p. 32).
The old city and in general the central area, sometimes seen as a tourist theme park or the hollow part of an urban doughnut, are back at the centre of planning. A scenic approach to the central area has been practically abandoned, with active measures being adopted to try to bring culture closer to economic development, mobilizing wide-ranging and internationally recognized plans and projects (such as in Bilbao); in other cases with several, small and very different actions, in the context of a relatively well-coordinated effort of ‘regeneration governance’ (such as in Guimarães). Generally, in both cases, with the emergence of a mosaic of different places for different people, at different times of the day, of the week and the year, in the context of an intra- and inter-city geographical competition for being ‘fashionable’ and considered as ‘creative class friendly’.

6. The SRU and the continuing priority of physical regeneration

In Porto, planning at the beginning of the twenty-first century was still highly centred on what seemed to be common sense in the 1980s and 1990s elsewhere. The end of CRUARB and FDZHP, together with attention to collective housing built by the state in the 1960s and 1970s, led to a clear disregard for the social dimension of the problems in the older part of the city. In addition, economic activity has somehow been forgotten in policies, as the market, however, deregulated, is seen as sacred and only the private sector is considered as having legitimacy to intervene there.

This incomplete approach is similar to that which has taken place in the central areas of many other cities, including most of the Portuguese ones. One of the reasons, apart from those mentioned previously, is that public funding for housing maintenance is not available. This also occurs with the Parcerias para a Regeneração Urbana (PRU), an instrument of the National Strategic Reference Framework that is central to national urban policy and has two projects for the old area of Porto and two other for the Gaia riverfront with a combined public investment of approximately €50 million. Public funds from other sources for housing are especially scarce, which is a problem as it is clear that the housing rehabilitation market in old city areas is not attractive to private enterprise, unless it is oriented to strata with high purchasing power. Hence, a certain persistence in a ‘public pavement policy’, with changes to street profiles and pavements on both sides of the valley occupied by Rua de Mouzinho da Silveira, in line with the works accomplished for the European Capital of Culture, or above stations when the metro system was introduced, in spite of the rather doubtful interest such works had in reanimating the city.

Although urban regeneration is understood as being based on three pillars (spatial, economic and social) and PRU projects foresee investments in various domains, there is a trend in Porto and Gaia bolstering the prolonged victory of architecture over social and economic geography, favouring interventions of urban qualification, both in the horizontal public area (streets, squares, pedestrian thoroughfares, urban furniture and so on) and in the vertical public–private area of intermediation, under several different solutions of a questionable façadism. Examples of this are the transformations underway in the old Convento dos Lóios located in Praça da Liberdade (former bank and future hotel), the recovery (or reconstruction?) of several buildings for gentrifier housing in Praça de Carlos Alberto, the condominium planned for the block delimited by Rua do Bonjardim, Praça de D. João I and Rua Formosa or plans for some Port wine cellars to be rehabilitated/transformed for residential use.

In the search for private investment, without guidelines that have been clearly discussed and politically assumed about who wins and who loses in different options, we see the proliferation of ‘charming hotels’ (one was recently inaugurated, another is under construction
and yet another is being expanded) while some new ‘cosmopolitan’ residents are brought in, and some new shops open in the most attractive streets.

However, little consideration seems to be taken of the priorities of the majority of residents, and the overall coherence of the action is highly debatable, since the social and economic dimensions of urban policy cannot be achieved only by ‘embellishment’. On the other hand, ‘it is naive to expect a “morally aware” private sector to effect the revitalization of run-down areas. Private sector investment decisions are founded largely upon self-interest and not philanthropy’ (Pacione 2009, p. 10). Therefore, in addition to an inconsequential innovation and spatial development policy, there is also a serious risk of reinforcing the construction of a dual city, not only between the west and east of Porto and Gaia, or the old centre and the so-called new centralities, but also within what we call the historic centre and ‘Baixa’ (Fernandes 2005), because ‘the privatization of urban development inevitably means accepting a policy of triage and concentration on areas of greatest economic potential – with adverse consequences for other areas’ (Pacione 2009, p. 10).

Thus, buildings along recently requalified streets and squares or those with future interventions scheduled within the framework of requalification or regeneration processes, including private or nearby parking space, are especially interesting for private investment and embrace apartments and establishments targeted at the distinct and educated middle and upper class, the ‘bo-bo’ according to the suggestive abbreviation of the French term ‘bourgeois-bohème’ (or ‘bourgeois bohemians’). They are also directed to meet a concentrated demand at night (as is the case of the Eliseo de Melo area next to the University chancellery), with a few new bars and historical cafés leading to a territorial specialization that has intensified and expanded spatially very intensely in the last couple of years. Meanwhile, in nearby places, although in the ‘backyards’, most of the buildings facing narrow streets and alleys that cannot be accessed by car have housing in poor condition and continue to be abandoned. There, year-after-year, places for purchasing goods and services disappear and jobs are lost, as well as what remains of the self-esteem of those who are left behind, leading to the creation of ghettos and emphasizing their disreputable reputation as ‘dangerous territories’.

Along with recognizing that the existence of asymmetries, at various levels, is imminent to the city and that gentrification and Public-private partnerships (PPP) can even be an opportunity, must be noted the signs of a potential dangerous and contrasting separation between ‘islands of comfort’ in spaces that are more attractive to private investment, and ‘areas of abandonment and despair’, in less attractive, neglected areas of the city.

7. Hybridism, governance and collaborative planning

The SRU ‘Porto Vivo’ (with a new board since 2008 that includes the former Director of CRUARBO) has struggled with several large and minor issues, not only in relation to the already noted gap between expectations and resources. With a view to attracting public and private investment, it also seeks to leave room for negotiation that allows the public interest to be protected (whatever that means!), in a trend worth following, towards a more open policy and a greater awareness of the complexity necessarily associated with urban intervention, especially when this requires considering the long-term process of transformation. The other side of the River Douro, ‘CidadeGaia’ (whose manager came from the central housing services), has an identical problem, although with total dependence on the local administration, less financial capacity and consequently is even more open to private sector demands.
If physical and economic dimensions are still a problem, it is within a solid response to the challenge of social mixture that the success of the old city will largely reside. This is despite the fact that there is no certainty as to how to proceed or what percentage of the different type of people there should be or how to take account of their purchasing power, lifestyle, ethnicity, age and nationality, among many other forms of differentiation. This mixture, regardless of the ‘blend’, should boost flexibility and allow for a better adaptation to future challenges, thus considering time in the long run and a continuous process of adaptation to – and anticipation of, if possible – the desires and expectations of people, without losing the references that are considered as the best to project our time in the future. In other words, the approach to historical centres should consider that not all the past is transportable to the future. It is also necessary, as has always been the case, to build today what in the future will be seen as the past corresponding to a time which for us is the present. Because ‘the richer, subtler, more effective version of urbanism is the kind that allows cities to mutate and change as time passes, rather than the type that freezes a neighbourhood into a particular form’ (Sudjic 2007, p. 47) or promotes major works, with a ‘signature’ or not, at the expense of significant parts of the past.\(^{28}\)

Furthermore, at a time marked by the overall decline of the importance of borders, it is also essential to consider the powerful interaction between different scales, with regard to the overlap and the continuity of territories, even though it does not seem less important than in the past, the notion of city and the strength of the name we assign to spaces we take as places, or even (despite all else) the continuous importance of administrative boundaries. Therefore, understanding the historic centre implies a deeper awareness of the city region, of which it is a small yet important part, and that strategy, urban planning and actions must consider at least the relevance of the internationalization of cities, the multi-municipal dimension marking the paces of the everyday life of those who live there or visit it, and, obviously, continuities at the border. These aspects in the case of Porto are especially valuable, since the city is more and more internationally connected, inter-related with national and regional dynamics and the borders of the oldest fabric assume the continuity with another very important part of the city (the ‘Baixa’), and extends to the south, east and west of the historical tissue along both banks of a river which unites more than it divides.

The triumph of hybridism and complexity in the contemporary city is not limited to social presence, or to space and scale superposition and continuity. It is also felt in the way time (in the short-, medium- and long-terms) is mixed up, as in the economic fabric, for example, with combinations of bookstore-café-places for cultural events, which like so many other solutions breathe life into the old city, as do the many new establishments, set up in old houses, in some cases selling old products. Hybridism has also more and more (perhaps too much!) a functional nature\(^ {29}\) and has also triumphed on esplanades, where the chair and table in public spaces is being exploited by private parties, besides other situations of semi-private and collective use that, among a growing number of cases, cut across dichotomous views, nowadays too poor to embrace the wealth of the city and society.

In relation to the public–private combinations as the case of Thames Gateway (Brownhill and Carpenter 2009), or the region of Paris (Nappi-Choulet 2006) seem to demonstrate, while recognizing the advantage of partnerships, arrangements and results may be very different according to the forms of governance adopted. Last, but not least, there is the need to articulate ever-better planning and management, with an effective practice of collaborative, participated planning which has to be understood, accepted and desired by a significant part of inhabitants, city users and visitors.
8. Conclusion: agents, opportunities and horizons

Overall, we can draw a wide range of conclusions from the recent intervention experiences in the central area of Porto over the last decade. But first of all we must consider that this area can be differentiated into three major spaces, with different development processes and distinct ‘identities’ recognized by their inhabitants or visitors: an older fabric between two hills (Sé and Vitória) and the Douro River, the ‘historic centre’; an area seen to be central, where the City Hall and main shopping streets are located in a higher level from the riverfront; and an urban waterfront on the left bank of Douro which is situated in the municipality of Vila Nova de Gaia.

Next, it is possible to talk of a lag between the time in which certain processes occurred in North America or Northern Europe and when they took place in Porto. This is especially visible in the process of suburbanization and sprawl, the depopulation (and social filtration) of the oldest part and devitalization of the centre, as well as in the enhancement of culture and knowledge in planning or in efforts of governance and collaborative planning.

In addition, it must be stressed the importance of those elected to office (mayors), both in the way in which each one believes planning and intervention should be conducted in such highly sensitive areas of a large metropolitan area and in the type of relationship they establish with each other.

Equally important is the meaning of opportunities, as conditioning urban policy. The celebration of the European Capital of Culture in 2001 is an especially good example of how, in a rushed manner due to the establishment of deadlines, and in a restricted manner due to lack of social and economic integration, it is nevertheless possible to significantly transform some places in the city centre.

Even if the concept of area-based initiative is diffuse and can be seen as having a long-standing history, it is indubitable that the central area of Porto has been a place of many experiences. The CRUARB, FDZH and SRU Porto Vivo are the main institutions that have taken action in this area, in a transition from mostly public action to one where public funds are still available, yet the priority seems to have been transferred to the attraction of private investments, as can especially be noted in the case of Vila Nova de Gaia.

It is also essential to consider the very important influence public policies have had on the evolution of thought and action, particularly in the transition to more integrated operations. In the European context, mechanisms such as Urban Audit and ESPON, documents such as the European Spatial Development Perspective and the Leipzig Charter, and initiatives such as URBAN or ‘Pilot Projects’ have not only promoted guidelines, but above all learning processes which are reflected in concrete actions, leading to a certain ‘Europeanization’ of policies and, in particular, of urban regeneration strategies (Hamedinger et al. 2008). At national level, the initiatives to modernize commerce and public space in city centres within the framework of the PROCOM and URBCOM programmes defined by the Ministry of Economy, played a leading role, but undoubtedly the most remarkable was POLIS, as PRU will be in the forthcoming years, trying to combine the experiences of Italy, much more dominated by the architectural dimension and privately led local developments, with those of France and the United Kingdom, where the priority was to address social exclusion (Mangen 2004, Verhage 2005, Lawless 2010).

Without much conviction about how, for whom and even why there should be an agenda for the sustainable city (dense and compact) and the city of knowledge (where history, culture and innovation are essential), the central area of the city gains new importance, as its role in the global effort to engender a more inclusive and compassionate society can never be forgotten.
In the case of Porto, there is the perception of many challenges, among which we point out: the need to seek cohesion (at various scales), fighting fragmentation and increased asymmetries; the importance of responsible, cooperative and participation, boosting specificity, but open to external knowledge and collective learning; and the intersection of global, European and/or national opportunities in the conception and implementation of specifically designed operations which encourage mixed use, flexibility and hybridism.

With regard to the first point, it seems Porto is more focused on itself than on the surrounding areas, so it is important to emphasize ‘the need to reflect upon the ways form-making and site-specific physical interventions interact with the economic dynamism of urban agglomeration and its capacity to generate creativity, innovation and economic development. The interaction here must be made to work effectively in both directions’ (Soja and Kanai 2007, p. 69). In addition, in the tension between visitors and inhabitants, gentrifiers and long-term residents, nearby facilities, particularly good schools and health services, must be taken as essential in securing and promoting the creation of families (Mace et al. 2007), as well as in preventing the disappearance of children from the city centres, which would result from the increasing presence of double income no kids, and that of young and elderly people living alone.

On the second point, difficulties related to participation should be emphasized, whether arising from the strong presence of social, economic and political elites with a greater capacity to argue and defend their interests or from the conflict between collective and individual objectives. These should not, however, minimize the active search for involvement, always taking into account what are considered to be the interests of the under-protected and the need to avoid that regeneration processes become a technically sophisticated activity that runs the risk of increasing the gulf between the planner and the common citizen. In the case of Porto, participation and governance are very poor and seem to be present just in some speeches and technical documents as well as restricted meetings.

In relation to the third point, when multiplying hotels and repaving squares, streets and pedestrian thoroughfares, it is important to recall that ‘too many cities spend too much time mimicking “silver bullet” projects and solutions, and too little time fixing the basics – good schools, safe streets, competitive taxes, efficient services – so that markets can flourish, families can succeed and cities once again can be home to the middle classes’ (Katz and Altman 2007, p. 101). Therefore, the public sector needs to continue playing a crucial role, ‘...levering investment based on the risk-return profile of regeneration projects’ (Nappi-Choulet 2006, p. 1534). Hence, there is also the need to develop the specific design of each intervention, taking into account the participation of various public, private and third sector parties, as well as the spectrum of actions to be taken at different times and in diverse dimensions, which naturally gives rise to difficulties, ‘... in the contemporary governance landscape; (as well as in defining) to whom and on what might focuses on integration be directed’ (Vigar 2009, p. 1572).

And what about area-based initiatives in general? Well, we need to remember that ‘in the 1990s, large mixed-use urban projects were launched in almost every metropolitan region in Europe, but it is still rare to find positive results regarding the innovative integration of the economic, social and sustainable objectives’ (Salet 2008, p. 2343). Thus, a ‘... new paradigm of urban policies shows the characteristics of a discourse that is not based on research and on empirical facts, but that develops its own momentum from shared beliefs regarding the nature of urban problems and the appropriate policy responses’ (Musterd and Osrendorf 2008, p. 78), however it brings some oxygen and some enthusiasm to planning, in times of incertitude which ‘... emphasize adaptation and mitigation rather than confidence and control, managing processes and designing livable cities rather...
than planning for the public interest, difference and diversity rather than commonality and unity’ (Connell 2009, p. 95).

In the eternal reconstruction of the POLIS, it is up to us (and not the other’s fault nor his or our single responsibility) as planner, politician or citizen to try to find the way to make a better place of any (and all) urban space. The need to face complexity means a need to make (difficult) options, and certainly the risk of making mistakes, but must not necessarily signal the retreat of state and a blind acceptance of what the markets wish. Yes, politics are back: with us all.

Notes
1. Several works analyse this evolution in planning for city centres in Europe and the United States, as well as from a Portuguese perspective (Fernandes et al. 2000, Balsas 2002), whereas others deal with the matter from a national perspective, such as for Holland (Musterd and Osrendorf 2008). There is also a significant number of studies on planning for a particular city centre, such as in the case of Manchester’s recovery following the IRA bombing in 1996 (Williams 2003).
2. ‘Baixa’ is equivalent to the concept of ‘downtown’ and it is used to identify the area of Lisbon near the Tagus River which was reconstructed after the 1755 earthquake under the government of the Marquis de Pombal. Contrary to Lisbon, in Porto the ‘Baixa’ emerged as the main centre in a much higher area than the riverfront, or Ribeira, and a less planned, ‘natural’ eighteenth- and nineteenth-century extensions of the city.
3. Even though history covers all territories and time periods and it is not possible to clearly define the time limit or number of buildings and other urban elements, by which a given area is old enough in terms of occupation and the importance of the landmarks man left behind, to be called ‘historic’.
4. If ‘new centralities’ are asserted by economic specialization and the increased accessibility and symbolism of new areas in the enlarged and fragmented metropolis, the ‘old’ centre is also no longer seen as unique (even if in many cases it never was!) and can even seen as having become ‘peripheral’, in a process which François Ascher (1998) called of ‘inversion of centralities’.
7. Note that in many cases, besides the natural difference between the most dynamic cities and other cities that have become somewhat stagnant, even in the oldest streets, buildings dating from the nineteenth to twentieth century are often more numerous than the older buildings from the eighteenth century, as a result of small yet many actions of renewal, as is the case of the streets of Sant’Ana, Escura or Mercadores.
8. Nowadays, incidentally, this axis is with low usage by car traffic, as a result of the metro installed on the upper deck of the bridge.
9. One must also consider the many substitutions of buildings and several projects that were not implemented due to lack of economic and political capacity, such as those that provided for the opening of wide streets in the place of Rua da Bainharia and crossing the Barredo, linking the riverside road which comes from Gondomar (Av. Paiva Couceiro and Av. Gustavo Eiffel) with the road leading to the west side of the city (Rua Nova da Alfândega).
10. Relevant examples of recent elements in Porto that attract many visitors due to their architecture and cultural dimension are Casa da Música (projected by Rem Koolhas) and the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art (by Alvaro Siza Vieira), among several cultural spaces and other architectonic works by the same architect (and also Souto Moura).
11. The central freguesias (parishes) of S. Nicolau, Sé, Miragaia and Vitoria totalled 37,793 inhabitants in 1960, 27,961 in 1981 and just 13,218 in 2001, and recent estimates confirm the trend. Diverse causes have to be considered in this depopulation but it is essential to note that the negative values of the migratory balance between emigration and immigration has to be combined with the difference between birth rate (very low) and mortality rate (very high) in a group with an important segment of elderly people.
12. This relationship of many with a parcel of the city in which they were not born nor where they work or purchase goods or services is undoubtedly tied to the quest for complementarity, whether of homogenized land areas on the city outskirts, or places from where visitors come from, being that they are also citizens with a multi-territorial status (Haesbaert 2004).

13. This action was reinforced with national funds from the RECRIA programme, directed at the conservation and rehabilitation of buildings with residential use.

14. This programme aims to meet two of the three major objectives of the European Spatial Development Policy, focusing on urban requalification, with a view to reinforcing competitiveness, and on environmental enhancement, taking sustainability into account. The programme supported 28 major projects in circumscribed areas, normally central waterfront areas in urban centres, which were considered to play an important role in the national urban system structure (http://www.polis.mao.tr.gov.pt).

15. Retail Urbanism projects under the PROCOM and URBCOM programmes made diverse yet globally important contributions to the viability and vitality of independent commerce in all major cities of Portugal and several small cities in Portugal, with investment in shops and their management (60% of the total of the project), public space requalification (30%) and animation and promotion of the city centre (10%) (Fernandes et al. 2000).

16. Shopping centres that normally include a hypermarket and a cinema multiplex are open every day of the week and every day of the year from 10.00 am to 11.00 pm, and shops, restaurants and diverse services benefit from legal changes facilitating flexible and temporary working contracts, at low wages and normally easy recruitment. It should be noted that there is access to shopping centres by car and to two of them also by light rail, that car parking is free, and that some have won international prizes for their architecture and environmental solutions, and also for animation programmes and their relation with local communities.

17. The theme of commercial resilience in Porto is the object of research in the REPLACIS project, where a comparative approach on the aegis of Urban Networks was conducted on the resilience of urban retail systems, considered in the internal report as ‘the ability of different types of retailing, at different scales, to adapt to changes, crises or shocks, challenging the system’s equilibrium, without failing to perform their functions in a sustainable way’.

18. Saskia Sassen (1991) was especially noted for the relationship she established between changes experienced by the global economy and the increased importance of a limited number of ‘global cities’.

19. The idea is particularly widespread through the works of Landry and Bianchini (1995) and especially with Richard Florida’s best seller (2003), emphasizing the competitive advantage of cities that attract a ‘creative class’.

20. The relationship between the conditions of an area and development has long been the object of study, but it was revived after Jacob’s pioneering work (1961), with subsequent dissemination of texts by many geographers, economists and sociologists, some of them especially remarkable, such as Peter Hall’s Cities in Civilization (1998) and Edward Soja’s Postmetropolis (2000).

21. It should be noted that some authors claim there could be a certain exaggeration in the appreciation of the role of space in development, presenting evidence that shows that most people and companies of certain ‘creative industries’ establish their contacts and get information and connections outside the city where they are based, and thus it seems ‘... it is the need for proximity to consumer knowledge that seems important’ (Amin and Thrift 2002, p. 63). Many other authors stress the exaggeration of the idea that ‘bohemian’ and ‘creative’ communities could be the driving force in the new economy and desirable environments should be based on a selective policy that improves speculative real-estate development, gentrification and landmarks designed by renowned artists (Glaeser 2004, Peck 2005). Others insist that nations, not cities, generate economic growth (Taylor 2006, Polèse 2006), and claim that there is no such thing as ‘cities creating wealth’ (Polèse 2006, p. 1637).

22. Old house rents are very low, as increases fixed by law do not allow for normal updating after remaining untouched for decades; the consequence is that owners do not receive enough money and maintenance is not done. Old rents on retail meant that in the 1980s and 1990s it was much easier to open a shop at a new shopping centre than having to pay a huge amount to replace another retailer in the city centre. Labour laws are another problem, as old workers have significant rights and firing is almost impossible, in contrast with temporary work formulas who are adopted by the more recent units.
23. PRU or Partnerships for Urban Regeneration is an integrated tool in National Strategic Reference Framework and consequent with the urban national policy POLIS XXI, which aims to promote well-planned and well-governed areas of innovation and competitiveness, citizenship and social cohesion, quality of life and environment. The municipalities may have access to PRU funding for urban interventions through applications, presenting integrated operations that can benefit from 70% to 80% of financial aid over the total value of investments, for interventions in various domains in a restricted urban space, forcing the creation of partnerships and the adoption of monitoring and assessment systems.

24. This occurred, for example, in the ‘normalization’ of the area formed by Praça da Liberdade, Avenida dos Aliados and Praça General Humberto Delgado, an intervention that led to a form of dememorization of the old place Nova das Hortas and later D. Pedro IV, where the Municipal Council was located until 1916 (currently Praça da Liberdade), that is now mixed indistinctly with the ‘city’s avenue’ (currently Avenida dos Aliados) ripped off of its stone tracery and flowerbeds, characteristic of the most noble spaces created in early twentieth-century cities, and with the ‘square of the power’ adjacent to the City Hall (Praça do General Humberto Delgado). Dememorization can also be associated with the consequences of the ‘cleaning’ operation of the romantic garden in Cordoaria (officially named João Chagas), next to the front area of Cadeia da Relação, both currently inhospitable. It is also worth noting the unusual case of retro-urbanism that took place in Praça de Carlos Alberto, redone ‘a little better than it was before’, after being dissected for the construction of a parking lot and a contemporary intervention was halted amid public protest.

25. On ‘embellishment urbanism’, it is worth revisiting the text by Peter Hall on ‘City Beautiful Movement’ (Hall 2002).

26. On the widely discussed topic of gentrification, it is worth considering the difficulty of establishing the appropriate size of areas to be scanned or intervened, as disparities between blocks, for example, may be seen as a ‘good mix’ on the scale of the neighbourhood, and homogeneous neighbourhoods potentially considered correct when seen in the context of the global urban area (Atkinson 2008, Freeman 2009). It is in no way easier to establish the classification of the various types of gentrification according to social, economic and cultural strata, at different times and places, considering that it is already ‘...a multi-class phenomenon and that the accommodation offered is often in apartment blocks that differ considerably in quality, prestige and view’ (Bounds and Morris 2006, p. 99).

27. It is particularly interesting to note a diversified approach, with examples of cooperation between all property owners coordinated by Porto Vivo for the recovery of a block located between Rua das Flores, Rua Mouzinho da Silveira and Rua Trindade Coelho; integration of public actions (university residence to be managed by the private sector) that promote social mingling within the hidden mesh, and interventions with huge gaps (as in the tunnel under the Morro da Vitória), and monitoring of large private investments (as in Cardosas).

28. On the disappeared city, as a result of anxious and always unfinished renovation, or due to untouchable stagnation, see Calvino (2002). About the continued need for several small interventions and the advantage of being suspicious of megalomania, see Piano (2003).

29. Meaning, in this and other dimensions, a clear opposition to the determinations of zoning and the principles of ‘machine and radiant city’ that marked mid-century European urbanism, presented in the General Urbanization of Porto in 1962, and that, despite regulations not being approved yet, still helps to understand the city that was built in the following decades (from central and industrial areas to green parks in the East and West and fast lanes, tunnels and viaducts).

30. In the texts of POLIS XXI and PRU it is also especially noted the evolution mentioned for France and the Netherlands to a ‘project-led approach, to allow diversity of urban problems (social, economic, environmental, mobility) to be addressed in a comprehensive way’ (Verhage 2005, p. 131).

31. There is a vast amount of literature on planning and urban policies and projects in Portugal. Even though it does not include references to recently created PRU, the analysis by Breda-Vasquez et al. (2009) of urban regeneration programmes in their relation with a ‘governance culture’ is of special interest.

32. Perspectives of ‘excessive’ urbanization and a ‘back to the compact European city’ ideal (connected with the Smart City and New Urbanism movements) is object of intense controversy, and sound reflections seem to be relatively rare (Geyer 2009).
33. It should be noticed that the expression ‘cities of knowledge’ adds nothing very relevant to the understanding of the city or of knowledge origins and causes, since cities have always been the main place of knowledge.

34. It is also important to remember ‘it is not true that the growth of metropolitan regions and their economic interpenetration have made the borders of major cities irrelevant. Quite the contrary: city borders remain decisive in the design of metropolitan policy’ (Frug 2007, p. 300).

35. We should not forget the lessons of Dresden and consider the advantages of a ‘shrinking city’ approach to some cities (Wiechmann 2008), rather than that of total ‘touristification’, or the apparently unlimited use of public funds to make people stay against their will.

References


