

## **TRADITIONAL CENTRALITIES VS NEW EMERGING CENTRALITIES. WHAT IMPACTS TO THE CITY?**

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### **Introduction**

In many cities new centralities have emerged, either spontaneously or as result of planned actions. This brings often a combination of new uses and activities for parts of the city that not existed before, in prints a new image and generates an innovative cultural and technological environment which indubitably are very good for those areas. But what happens to existing traditional centers? What are the effects on the city as a whole? In order to try to give an answer to these questions we will look at two cities in two different continents – Rio, in Brazil and Lisbon, in Portugal. If required to explore further the subject the city o São Paulo might be added.

The Lisbon CBD has grown with a dynamism that often has been higher than other parts of the city. The traditional centre of Baixa has expanded towards north, particularly after de 70's, as a need to find locations in the city that could offer better access and mobility. During the 80's and 90's this pattern has been consolidated to reach areas beyond the ring road towards the upper north periphery of the city, in a discontinuous structure that has developed without any planning. With the EXPO 98 a new centrality at the eastern part of the city is intentionally created, supported by a strong investment in metropolitan land uses and infrastructure, focused mainly on the service sector, particularly cultural and commercial. As a consequence a new spatial and functional pattern emerged, with significant impact on the traditional CBD. A pattern that is particularly characterized by great spatial-morphological permeability and discontinuity in relation to the city as a whole, and to Baixa in particular.

Rio has two main CBD's. The traditional city centre still retains the major business and cultural activity of the city, and has been subject since early 80's of a number of municipal actions focused in strengthening its centrality qualities. This CBD actually extends out through the coast reaching the boroughs of Copacabana and Ipanema with a concentration of services and commerce along its internal corridor parallel to the beach (more cars enter than leave during the morning and afternoon). The second CBD is Barra da Tijuca, a new planned borough that has been enlarging its importance in special given major infrastructure and supra-local scale uses installed, such as the yellow line (linha amarela) ring road and the location of the 2007 Olympic games site. The effects of that have been poorly discussed.

### **1. The Case of Lisbon**

#### **1.1 The town planning procedures in the last 30 years**

At the end of 70's the Master Plan of Lisbon (PD), completed in 1967, has been approved. It was the first time that a municipal plan hold a more comprehensive approach, articulating itself in several aspects with the Regional Plan (PDR) of 1963. Despite of that, when finally the Plan is reinforced it is already out of date – it took 10 years to have it prepared (from

1957 to 1967) – compromising the ordering and planning of the city and its modernization and development.

On the one hand the approval of a Plan that did not respond to the social, functional, urban and economical situation of the city has led to an ineffective planning practice unable to operate as an instrument of territorial control and development. On the other hand the lack of interest shown by the planning municipal bodies added to an increase on the bureaucratic procedures has made the city to be conformed by individual private building initiatives that were changing its shape arbitrarily and disconnected to its urban context. The centre has been densified as a result of a number of enterprises to fill existing empty spaces developed without major planning control. Those were mere real estate initiatives that did not hold any planning strategy behind able to introduce order in the existing urban system.

Developments that took place during the 80's had only contributed to deteriorate even more the urban life conditions in the city. This process has led the central area (Avenidas Novas) to a drastic lost of population and housing with an increase of the service sector, at the same time as its public space, architecture and image has been demised. In parallel there has been a growth on peripheral development around the city (Benfica and Carnide), an increase on social housing occupying available land at the east part of Lisbon city centre (Chelas) and a dismantled of the industrial uses on the port areas at the river front.

This process of city expansion and growth has resulted into a complete dispersion of Lisbon with the spread of local central of minor importance, yet Avenidas Novas still remains as a centre of key role in the city context. It is worth pointing at that during this period three new local centres have emerged: Campo de Ourique, Benfica e Belem/Restelo. Those centres assign importance to their boroughs within the larger urban context, imprinting local presence into the functional structure of the city. Baixa (the traditional CBD) seems to have recovered during the last 20 years some of its importance on the city context - due mainly to the rehabilitation of Chiado (the area that took fire at early 80's) – allowing it to recover some of its lost prestige.

During the 90's a new planning and management cycle have started in the city. The Municipality has engaged into a lively discussion on the planning strategy to be undertaken, this has culminated with the preparation of the Strategic Plan of Lisbon (Plano Estrategico de Lisboa – PEL) finalized in 1992. This document has not only represented a new planning attitude but also served as a basis for the development of a number of complementary urban instruments such as the Master Plan (Plano Director Municipal – PDM) of 1994, among many others studies and plans.

The political changes from the early 90's were focus on the rehabilitation of Lisbon. Following the joining the EU and the opening to the European free market the municipality has assigned priority to the need of placing Lisbon as an important European metropolitan region. To perform this role it was required that the city acquired competitively face the European macro economy and thus was able to offer quality standards able to compete with the major european network of cities. The planning documents at this time – PEL and PDM – had reflected this concern, strengthening the need to environmentally upgrade the city, an aim that was not present in previous plans. This has taken shape in revitalization initiatives taken to improve life conditions of areas of the city that were rundown. Those initiatives aimed at improving the overall image and quality of life of Lisbon as a form to reassure it as the “Atlantic capital of Europe”.

The PDM (1994) has allowed refining strategies to face important challenges Lisbon had to face in order to develop and modernize. The first was its promotion as the European Capital of Culture (1994); and the second, more ambitious, was to support the last International Exhibition of the last century (EXPO'98). The city planning bodies had clear that to fulfil those two objectives were a condition to implement the re-qualification of run down areas.

The implementation of some urban studies and detailed plans at different scales<sup>1</sup>, in different areas of the city lacking public spaces or in areas that required connections between different urban fabrics, had also an influence on the dispersion of the centrality by poles of local importance.

The new centrality of Parque das Nacoes is emerging as a new pole that is competing with the established area of Avenidas Novas. This is a process in course since the area is still receiving new enterprises, particularly telecommunication, and banking companies, with a lot of available office space.

## 1.2. Centrality Trends in Lisbon

Since the 50's Lisbon was a multi nuclear city formed by two strong poles that were connected by a structural axis. The first of these poles was Baixa, the downtown traditional district at the south of the city. It is an area of patrimonial significance with a very compact XVIII century urban grid – the Pombalin grid – where the more traditional services and commerce of the city is located. This area stands along the river front with port and prestige institutional uses. The second pole, up north, is known as Avenidas Novas and is formed by two sub-systems. The first, a XIX century grid, with mainly four to five storey high middle class building, was essentially residential. The other, at west, is structured along a main longitudinal axis that starts at Baixa (Almirante Reis) is occupied by low middle class.

Through time the morphological pole of Baixa has been densified and has become more compact and short, confined almost to the Pombalin historical grid, losing its river front extensions of Cais Sodre/S.Paulo. This is partially due to the migration of some prestigious uses from the traditional CBD and the deterioration of its accessibility conditions. The second pole of Avenidas Novas emerges during this period merged into a single system by the occupation of empty areas gaining stronger importance.

This centrality pattern is consolidated during the 60's by some key infrastructure works – the construction of Av. General Norton de Matos (Sd. Ring road), the extension of Av. Estados Unidos da America, the opening of Av. de Berna and Antonio Augusto de Aguiar – that were gradually been occupied with buildings and have extended the grid up north and towards the new social housing developments at east (Olivais). In the 70's this process continue and the CBD extends to include more areas towards North and East. The lack of continuity between those different grids built without much planning control has damaged the overall functioning and accessibility of the city structure.

As referred before, the city at the 80's has had little planning. Its centrality pattern has not changed significantly with some increase on the density of Avenidas Novas by the replacement of 4/5 storey XIX century residential buildings by 9/10 storey office buildings. As a result of that quality of live in the area has deteriorated.

During recent years the city periphery has grown, in particular by the grid extension up north of the General Norton de Matos Avenue (Sd. Ringroad) – where the occupation of empty land has made the urban structure of the peripheral ring (Coroa Periferica) denser – and by the densification of Chelas Valley at the east of the expanded CBD of Avenidas Novas. The CBD has also expanded into two different directions. The first in the river front, as a consequence of the EXPO'98. The second, resulted from the peripheral development, has defined new structural axis.

The expansion of the CBD in the river direction had a positive impact changing existing derelict industrial and port land into spaces of quality, improving the image and identity of the

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<sup>1</sup> - Detail Plans.

city. But another effect of those changes was a dispersal of the centrality structure, with its spread into poles of local importance. Despite general centrality dispersal, two areas have particularly concentrated a more significative number of axis. The first in Avenidas Novas and the second in the EXPO'98 area – known now as Parque das Nacoes. The concentration of centrality in local axis at the eastern part of the city represents a good opportunity to introduce more stability to the area by consolidating its urban fabric and establishing a hierarchical structure of open public spaces. But an observation on the morphological changes introduced by that shows that there was an impact on the centrality structure with the new centre been located peripherically in relation to the overall city structure.

The central area of Avenidas Novas is at the present more confined and limited by recent border developments, yet its connection north of the Sd. Ring road remains unstructured waiting the completion of a large residential development (Alta de Lisboa). The historical CBD of Baixa remains confined to the limits defined during the 80's that is structured around the main axis of the Pombalin grid where the commerce is placed. Through time area has lost its importance and prestige.

This centrality extension of recent years linked to the developments at the eastern parts of the city (in particular those promoted by the EXPO'98) has produced an overall improvement of the centre accessibility and on the degree of its grid connectivity due to the newly created streets, providing grid coherence to areas that had remained during years segregated.

## 2. The Case of Rio

Centrality is a trend that relies in a number of conditions to exist. In the case of Rio this was based on its political, economical, cultural and population importance built along almost three centuries – the city was capital for over 200 years. Since the end of the XIX century the country Constitution stated changing it to elsewhere. Those conditions have been fast eroded since the 20's, with exception of Vargas presidency periods (1930-45 and 1951-54), when a number of important state corporations have been erected in the city – BNDE (the national bank of development), Petrobras (the national oil company). In this scenery, São Paulo emerges as the only city able to compete with Rio in economic, population and political terms. From then onwards São Paulo steadily assumes the role of representing the country as a modern, liberal and entrepreneur nation, overcoming the image of joy and beauty – a tropical paradise - that Rio de Janeiro stands for (Magalhães, S. UFRJ – PROURB, 2003).

Similar to other cities in Latin America the traditional city centre of Rio de Janeiro retains an important record of historical buildings and monuments. Those buildings were inherited as part of its major role in the history of the country since the XVI century. During the 50's however the city have been facing a number of changes that have contributed to weaken its importance - the lost for Brasilia of its capital status in 1956, followed in the 70's for an intense process of urbanization and demolition of its heritage, and in the 80's and 90's by an economical crisis with a number of companies, particularly in the financial sector, changing to S. Paulo culminating at the end of the 90's with the stock market headquarter. In a process that started a long time the Port activity with all the naval industry has also lost importance to the Santos Port in Sao Paulo Estate, and after a period of inactivity recently it shows signs of reviving.

In spite of that, Sao Paulo did not have the necessary geo-political and urban conditions to become capital. Brasilia stands up as a new symbol to demonstrate the modernity of the country, serving as the best representation of its political and administrative powers – the state bureaucracy. As a consequence of that throughout the 70's and 80's most of the buildings in Rio de Janeiro that were occupied by those activities are emptied, and nowadays

most of the activities connected with the role of a capital had been transferred to Brasilia – governmental bodies, embassies, federal representations, etc.

During the last ten years those buildings have become Cultural Centers or were assigned with less important bureaucratic services. The few ones that have resisted holding their original functions were the ones connected with the cultural sector such as the Municipal Theatre, the National Library and the Beaux Art National Museum.

The traditional CBD is fast losing his historical role of a national and regional pole, particularly given the lost of political and financial importance. In recent years however as a result of municipal policies there is an increase on the range of cultural (theatres, museums, cultural centers, cinemas, bookshops, concert halls, dance clubs, etc), leisure and commercial activity and a general improvement of the quality of public spaces.

The idea of installing a Guggenheim Museum designed by Jean Nouvel at the old dock area, inspired by Bilbao, was part of this police. After substantial municipal investment the project has been halted by popular action. It is worth pointing that the situation here seems very different from Bilbao, since there it was accompanied by important investments in improving international and national accessibility to the city that included a new airport and the extension of the metro line. In Rio this accessibility has been drastically been reduced, specially because most international flights do a stop in Sao Paulo in their way to Rio and international airport traffic to the city has been decreasing in recent years.

Those changes nevertheless represent basically strengthen of the traditional CBD local centrality. However, its importance as a national and regional centre has been lost with no signs of recover. Recent estimates reveal that around 5000 office spaces are vacant. An action that did not took place but could have helped to counteract that was an investment on the traditional CBD role as a metropolitan centre, taking advantage of its mass transportation system to house, for instance, bodies of the Regional State bureaucracy. A timid initiative in this direction started in the 60's with the development of "Cidade Nova"- an area of 1, 2 million square meters at the north end of the traditional CBD reclaimed through the demolition of almost 5000 buildings - to create an extension of the centre with offices and housing. The first building, inaugurated in 1982, housed the local authority board. Followed by few other ones (the Post headquarters and a modern office building called Teleporto) the area still remains pretty empty. Recently the municipality has built a crèche for employees and a Convention Centre is planned.

In parallel with that the city has also lost industrial importance – in the last two decades the participation of its local industry to the GDP has been reduced to half, a situation that has been partially counterbalanced by an increase on the service sector – 40% of its GDP in 1980 came from the industries whereas in 2000 over 80% of its GDP resulted from services (SMC, 2000, S.E.) and with the emergence of the oil industry – very concentrated in the north part of the Rio de Janeiro State. Overall federal public expenditure in the State has also been reduced.

Since the late 60's as part of a new planned expansion area at the western part of the city a new centrality has been emerging. Rio now has two main CBDs. The traditional city centre that still retains all business connected with banking, the law and cultural activity of the city, and the second CBD of Barra da Tijuca - away 35 km from downtown. Still of local nature, but enlarging its importance, in special given by major infrastructure and supra-local scale uses installed, such as linha amarela and the 2007 Pan American games site, Barra da Tijuca has polarized most of the new developments by the private sector that have been taking place in the city in recent years.

This area, originally planned by Lucio Costa in the 60's to be a metropolitan centre with buildings up to 70 storey height - to house up to the year 2000 a population that could reach

between 963.000 to almost 3 million inhabitants and the transference from the traditional CBD of all the political centrality, has been over the last 40 years concentrating a significant number of public investments in infrastructure. As a consequence of that important corporations have migrated from the traditional CBD to this area, a trend that has been particularly strong in the recent years. Well known companies like Esso, Amil, Michelin, and the National Confederation of Football have moved away. Availability of parking, modern infrastructure, free space, lower office space price and good accessibility, mainly improved by the construction eight years ago of a freeway called 'yellow line' (i.e. linha amarela), offering easy connection to the metropolitan region of Rio, are some of the reasons that explains that, followed by an ever increasing labour offer.



Barra da Tijuca is one of the few boroughs of Rio that has a steadily growth of population, with an HDI (human development index) of 0,959 at the 8<sup>th</sup> position within the 126 existing in the city. Statistical projections indicate that the population will triplicate in 2020 growing from 185.403 inhabitants today to over 500.000, an increase of 173%. Moving down from its present 13th position of more populated area of Rio to the 3<sup>rd</sup>, been amongst the few areas to increase in population, yet of very low density. All major large entertainment and commercial centres are there located.

Meanwhile the traditional CBD has been losing population – from its present 37.926 inhabitants it is foreseen to decrease in 2020 to just below 20.000 and a HDI of 0,894 in the 32 ranking. And yet the traditional CBD has never hold much of residential use, increasing the offer of residential activity might be a good strategy. The municipality has promoted recently some low income housing, but this is still insignificant to promote an effective change. An opportunity might be to use vacant infill land available, often in use as parking. Also the promotion of educational and sports facilities might help to support the development of residential use in the area – five university campus and a sport complex are already operating there.

By choosing Barra da Tijuca to install some of the major facilities for the 2007 Pan American Games, its centrality, especially as an important leisure destination for the city has been emphasized, neglecting the opportunity to install some of the facilities in or around the traditional CBD. Among those are the construction in an area of 300 square meters nearby the existing Autodrome of a Gymnasium, an Aquatic Park, a Stadium, a Velodrome and an Olympic Village with over 1000 individual apartments and 4000 rooms for an estimated number of 13000 athletes.

Works for the PAN did not include any improvement on supra local transportation or accessibility connections, most are only improvement on local road accessibility. Yet there were a number of propositions with this nature that have not been implemented – a metro link of 38,5 km with the two airports interconnecting also with the train network, or a surface train line of 32 km connecting with the International Airport and beyond to the neighbor industrial municipality of Duque de Caxias.

Cidade da Musica, another large cultural equipment has also a designated site and a project designed by French architect Christian de Potzamparc in the borough. Those complement important existing centralities like the Projac (an area occupied by the TV Channel and Cinema Production – Globo – for its media productions), the Autodrome and the Rio Centro (a complex to house large fairs and events) that are there to express the metropolitan role of the area.

This has been followed by a policy of increasing the number of hotels – it is foreseen an increase of 2000 hotel rooms up to 2007, yet this seems no sense since the area lack two of the essential conditions that support tourism – a mass transportation system and the presence of most well known icons – the Christ, the Sugar Loaf, the Bay, Copacabana and Ipanema beaches - that are not even visible from Barra da Tijuca.

The whole process of development of Barra da Tijuca is very characteristic of the way most Brazilian cities have been developed, with the estate providing most of the heavy infrastructure investment upfront – roads, sanitation, drainage, waste, and sewage - in order to attract the private capital, which benefits with the increase on land and property value, and then the estate and the private capital together continue to provide it once the demand is installed. This policy, often not explicitly stated, unfortunately does not include any strategically long term planning vision for the city, has contributed to the lost of importance of the traditional CBD as metropolitan entity, bringing clear disadvantages for the city in the national and international scenery, particularly because Barra da Tijuca will not be able to perform this role. Nevertheless it is eventually S. Paulo that will, particularly regarding business, leaving to Rio merely solely its tourist vocation. In addition to that since public investment was unable to cope with the demand for infrastructure, as it is often the case, natural resources and the landscape are seriously under threat.

## Conclusions

Along with a process of loosing importance on the national and regional context described in this paper, Rio unfortunately has been unable in recent years to improve its conditions as a global city (i.e. housing international corporations headquarters, international/multinational organizations, industries of the new economy - knowledge and technology – and highly specialized services), particularly if compared with Sao Paulo. Sassen in her ranking of four levels Global cities (Global Networks – Linked Cities, edited by Saskia Sassen, Routledge, 2002) places Rio as a strong candidate to become a Global city. Rio still holds the second major concentration of people in the country and the fourth in Latin America with a metropolitan economy that overcomes the GDP of most countries in the continent.

Municipal action has strongly emphasized investments on cultural and sport icons using tourism and leisure as the main economic anchors to raise global importance to the city. The

city has also gained some economic dynamism through the Petroleum sector cluster – six out of the ten larger companies housed in the city are connected to petroleum<sup>2</sup>.

Lisbon has assisted during the 90's the emergence of a new urban mentality, reflected in a new form of viewing the city. Strategic aims towards sustainable development had been established, with a concern with the humanization of the peripheries by promoting the improvement of their public spaces and by providing major equity on the service and social facilities for leisure and recreation. The decade has been marked by the rebirth of the interest by the quality of public space. Public areas of the city had been improved and redesigned with infrastructure to support new types of public uses, improving their social attractiveness. This represented the recognition of planning as an important instrument to enable public space to respond to social changes and the dynamism of peoples needs. Growth of Lisbon, in the last 50 years, had been strongly associated to its topographical conditions. More accessible areas (smoother topography) have been used to expand the city whereas the hilly traditional historical central areas had been left behind. This resulted into functional and spatial segregation of downtown historical districts compromising their economical, social and environmental structures, as well as, in a permanent lack of coordination between management and planning processes.

The city centre expansion towards north, particularly from the 70's resulted from the need to solve internal mobility problems and its connection to the periphery, as well as, a requirement for modernization. The difficulty in establishing a hierarchy on the vehicular system has compromised the sustainability of the traditional CDB (Baixa) at the same time that consolidated the Avenidas Novas as the key central pole of economical and activity development. During the 80's real estate development had followed an unsustainable urban pattern that caused a gradual desertification of this area of Avenidas Novas and the substitution of residential use by services and commerce.

The last ten years the city had intensively occupied vacant urban land in the periphery bringing a new increase on the city centre boundaries, for the first time towards the periphery. The new centrality of Parque das Nacoes generated a new economical, environmental and social dynamic on the city centrality patterns, and as a result of that has contributed to morphologically stabilise the eastern part of the city. The morphological qualities of its grid had entitled the area to acquire their own identity without affecting the overall configurational structure of Lisbon. This has led to a good density of use of the newly good quality designed public spaces (daily there are around 120.000 people using those spaces). The Parque das Nacoes area conformed a new centrality in the city, reorienting city expansion towards the eastern periphery.

The analysis of the cases of Rio and Lisbon have shown how centrality has evolved over the years indicating that to a larger or lesser extent in both cities the impacts of the process of emerging new centres has not been fully anticipated by planning authorities with little control and management mechanisms developed to deal with the phenomena. The result is that although they might represent a success story if looked from the point of view of the area in question, on the other hand they paradoxically represent a real threat to traditional centres. This seems to indicate that a long term more holistic vision of the city is required supported by: (a) strong political leadership and participation; (b) sustained multi-dimensional long term actions at city level; (c) private-public engagement with strong market involvement.

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<sup>2</sup> Ranking of companies: 1. Petrobras, 2. Petrobras Distribution; 3. Shell; Furnas; Ypiranga Petroleum; Embratel, Esso, Texaco, CVRD and CSH.