

Waterfronts: Regenerating the "Ribeira das Naus" in Lisbon

Memory and Regeneration

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The new column "Memory and Regeneration" aims to initiate a discussion with a Chinese public about ways in which contemporary architecture can contribute to enhance the relation between memory, cultural identity, and place in today's processes of city-making. It does so by exploring exemplary operations of urban regeneration in Europe.

After many years marked by a structural crisis related to the process of deindustrialization, European cities grow again according to a process of inner regeneration and qualitative metamorphosis. This word - "regeneration" - belongs to the vocabulary of biological disciplines: it is used to indicate an action of reparation after loss or damage, especially regarding animal or plant tissue. We prefer this word to "reconstruction", which has been used for instance by Joseph Paul Kleihues in the 1980s to address the "critical reconstruction" of Berlin during the International Architecture Exhibition (IBA, 1984-87). "Reconstruction" somehow implies that it might be sufficient to replace what has been demolished and entails a rather nostalgic vision of the historical city. We prefer to consider the city as a "tissue" proper rather than an aesthetic object: a complex network of physical and social relations that is waiting for a dynamic regeneration. "Memory" also has a dynamic connotation. In contemporary urban design, we like to consider memory not only as a storage of information, but as a necessary tool for stimulating a sense of belonging and identity in the challenging urban contexts of today.

The projects presented in this column aim to stimulate architects and urban planners in China to some critical reflection urgently required due to the social vacuity and lack of civic identity often left behind by an excessively rapid urban growth. This might inspire urban design practices to be more attentive to the specificity of places, whose memory should not be erased but enhanced. What should be emphasised in this case is a dialogic quality of the architecture and urban design; a quality which can offer a concrete optimism for the future. We start with a theme widely discussed in Europe as one of the most powerful tools for regeneration: urban waterfronts. By the request of WA, we now launch the column with a paper written by ourselves, while we will invite international experts to contribute to the coming issues.



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1 Porto Antico, Genova, Italy (Renzo Piano, 1992)

2 Moll de la Fusta, Barcelona, Spain (Manuel de Solà Morales, 1992)



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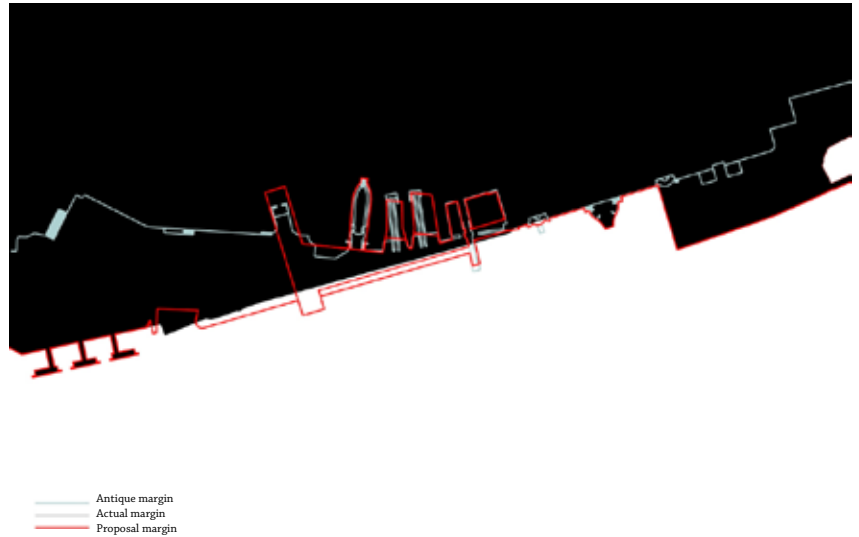
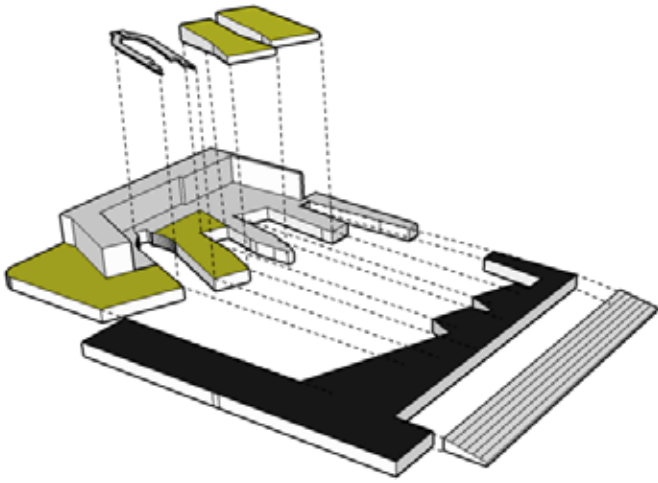


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3 Historical drawing of Lisbon from the sea (the part on the left is where the project is)

4 Plan of the waterfront from 1911

5 Plan (PROAP与GLOBAL事务所绘制/Drawing by PROAP and GLOBAL)



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In many European cities over the past three decades, the disposal of industrial sites, whose production has been directly linked to water, has left large abandoned areas along maritime coasts and river banks. This has happened to the extent that "rediscovering the sea" (or the river) has become one of the most beloved slogans among mayors all over Europe. It has also become one of the most challenging exercises for architects. Several strategies have alternated: in Barcelona, the Moll de la Fusta (Manuel de Solà Morales, 1992) converted a problem of viability (the passage of the new ring road close to the old town) into a possibility of

creating a new public space overlooking the harbour; in Genoa, the regeneration of the Porto Antico (Renzo Piano, 1992) provided an opportunity to solve the problem of the elevated motorway that divided the city from the sea; in Spain, the seafront of Benidorm (Carlos Ferrater, 2008) was articulated in section to maximize the relationship between the level of the city and the coast; in Hamburg and Amsterdam, the disposal of large dock areas became an opportunity to build entire neighborhoods, basing the quality of public life on the relationship with the water.

The project of the "Ribeira das Naus" in Lisbon,

developed by PROAP (João Ferreira Nunes) and GLOBAL (João Gomes da Silva), brings some innovations in comparison to these scenarios. Also intended to reinvent the connection between the city and the water – in place of a busy road and port activities – the project no longer relates to the memory of its industrial past (see the reference to the crane both in the Moll de la Fusta and in the Porto Antico) but on a stratification of memories. This stratification becomes literally the founding concept of the project. "Ribeira das Naus is a mythical space in the national and local identity, partly produced by the collective imaginary, partly

6 Axonometric diagram

7 Analysis drawing

(6, 7 PROAP GLOBAL Drawing by PROAP and GLOBAL)

8-10 Waterfront (Photos: Stefano Serventi/ GLOBAL)



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by official culture", the landscape architects explain, as if to say that in a place so symbolically important, it was inevitable that urban regeneration would become inextricably tied up with memory. Here, on the Tagus River was the place where the ships were built to explore distant regions as an example of early globalization of which Portugal has been a protagonist. A new pavement of black basalt regularizes the waterfront on one side, while on the other, one detects the broken line of the ancient shoreline which housed the shipyards. The height difference created over the time between the current city and the previous one creates some negative

excavations that make the public space more complex by revealing the different temporal layers. What is the result? The architects tell us about a wholly new experience: "We could now descend in the river, or even walk on the beach, cyclically revealed by the tides, until going up the staircase between the columns to suddenly encounter the monumental square of Praça do Comercio with its Castle raised up against the sky." Working with the existing without demolitions and through delicate design actions, a completely new piece of the city was born.