

The Port and the City: legacies, continuities, and ruptures: a case study of Rio de Janeiro

O Porto e a Cidade: heranças, permanências e rupturas: um estudo do caso do Rio de Janeiro

El Puerto y la Ciudad, legados, permanencias y rupturas: un estudio de caso de Río de Janeiro

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Resumo

Este artigo trata do projeto Porto Maravilha, da cidade do Rio de Janeiro, em seu contexto, uso portuário e a volta, quando e onde heranças foram acolhidas ou condenadas, e das rupturas que causaram. Adota a perspectiva metodológica de análise em morfologia urbana para discutir as relações entre pré-existências e os projetos adicionados, em tempos distintos, que apresentaram múltiplas escalas de intervenção, em diferentes dimensões de análise. Neste trabalho, a cidade é vista enquanto lugar de interseção de processos sociais, econômicos, culturais, históricos e políticos, e revela entrelaçamentos com atributos impregnados na sua paisagem. O estudo de caso realizado ilustra essa abordagem. O exercício de análise levou em consideração o início da implantação desse grande projeto urbano, e permitiu refletir sobre os processos de transformação ocorridos, trazendo como contribuição uma avaliação dos impactos negativos não previstos e suas relações com atributos, singularidades e identidades da região.

Palavras-chave: Apropriações; Morfologia Urbana; Projeto; Escalas; Pré-existências.

Abstract

This article examines the Porto Maravilha project in Rio de Janeiro, focusing on its context, port use, and the moments and places where urban legacies were either embraced or rejected as well as the ruptures that resulted. It adopts the methodological perspective of urban morphology analysis to discuss the relationships between pre-existing structures and newly added projects developed at different times and across multiple scales of intervention and dimensions of analysis. In this study, the city is viewed as a space where social, economic, cultural, historical, and political processes intersect, revealing the interweaving of attributes embedded in its landscape. The case study conducted illustrates this approach. The analytical exercise considered the early stages of the implementation of this large urban project and enabled reflection on the transformation processes that took place, contributing with an assessment of unforeseen negative impacts and their connections with the region's attributes, uniqueness, and identities.

Keywords: Appropriations; Urban Morphology; Project; Scales; Pre-existences.

Resumen

Este artículo examina el proyecto Porto Maravilha en la ciudad de Río de Janeiro, su contexto, el uso portuario y su retorno, cuándo y dónde los proyectos heredados fueron adoptados o condenados, y las disrupciones que causaron. Adopta la perspectiva metodológica del análisis de la morfología urbana para discutir las relaciones entre las estructuras preexistentes y los proyectos añadidos en diferentes momentos, que presentaron múltiples escalas de intervención en diferentes dimensiones. En este trabajo, la ciudad es vista como un lugar de intersección de procesos sociales, económicos, culturales, históricos y políticos, revelando atributos entrelazados



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incrustados en su paisaje. El estudio de caso ilustra este enfoque. El análisis consideró la implementación temprana de este gran proyecto urbano. El estudio permitió reflexionar sobre los procesos de transformación que ocurrieron y contribuye a una evaluación de los impactos negativos imprevistos y sus relaciones con los atributos, singularidades e identidades de la región.

Palabras clave: Apropiações; Morfologia Urbana; Projeto; Escalas; Preexistências.

INTRODUCTION

Recognizing the ambiance, we move through with our senses of sight, sound, touch, and smell constitute stages in the appropriation, enjoyment, and acceptance of urban legacies as affective memory. This process awakens bonds within us that are intertwined with multiple temporal layers. Perceiving this landscape-people ensemble evokes what Thibaud (2015) calls an “environmental aesthetic sense,” emerging from both the landscape and the narratives linked to it. The city contains histories and hopes shaped by people’s imaginations, offering futures that may appeal to some but not others.

This article treats the city as a place where multiple social processes intersect, originating in different temporalities and spatial scales. It arises from two research projects — one postdoctoral and one master’s — that, developed the methodological concept of dynamic sedimentation in urban morphology and its application. From this perspective, the timescales considered begin with the everyday — the immediate events that materialize in the urban forms through which we recognize ourselves, whose alterations impact us and are easily perceived.

Understanding their meaning, however, requires that these immediate facts be viewed considering longer timescales, which indicate the context in which the decisions leading to those transformations were made. For Lynch (1975, p. 1-2), this refers to “[...] the evidence of time [...] in the physical world, to how external signs adjust (or fail to adjust) to our inner experience, and to how this inner-outer relationship might become a positive one.” The author considers desirable a perceived form that emphasizes the present while highlighting its ties to both past and future. But what future? And for whom?

As Carvalho Santos and Lamounier (2014) state:

“Interpretations of the consolidated city fabric and its supposed obsolescence, as argued by some authors, generally involve a static view and an analysis carried out or idealized from an arbitrarily chosen moment. All built fabrics have always incorporated morphological elements from previous periods — embedded in



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layouts, urban structures, or buildings — and integrated into the daily life of their inhabitants” (Carvalho Santos and Lamounier, 2014, p. 4.).

Idealizations that exclude the already-built city as a physical reality — opposing a “historic city” to a “post-industrial city” as two separate and static entities — therefore fail to support an understanding of the city as lived space. The set of traces and signs that sometimes overlap, sometimes conceal or reveal one another, and that are alternately preserved, valued, or abandoned — combined with the shaping forces that generated them — constitutes the city’s heritage, what may be called the “genetic capital of the urban landscape.” This heritage is appropriated differently over various periods of sedimentation by distinct social groups, who adapt it to both new and old functions.

The process of reading these traces and shaping forces was applied to the central area chosen for study, comprising the neighborhoods of Santo Cristo, Gamboa, and Saúde — all with specific histories linked to the city’s slaveholding past. The aim of this article is to clarify the conflicts generated by the urban project known as Porto Maravilha — the subject of the research underpinning this paper — and its role in rendering that past invisible in the context of 2016, a year marked by the Olympics and the desire for global recognition of modernity.

The article analyzes the interaction between distinct spatial matrices, represented by the introduction of a new urban matrix characterized by large-scale interventions and the accelerated pace of the Porto Maravilha project, in contrast with the pre-existing urban fabric, which evolved through a slower process of consolidation on smaller scales. The analysis seeks to identify the urbanistic repercussions of this interaction, particularly concerning the form, diversity, and vitality of public spaces.

Specifically, it aims to (1) identify and characterize the spatial sedimentation matrices present; (2) identify the ruptures and continuities generated by the contemporary urban project; and (3) assess the unforeseen impacts on local singularities and identities.

To operate the method, different analytical tools were employed: a survey of historical records; collection of official materials from Porto Maravilha; targeted interviews; systematic photographic documentation; a field diary; technical maps and drawings; and an analytical-dimensions framework. These materials were produced through 20 field visits conducted over 18 months (2015-2017), complemented by annual visits until 2023 to monitor the project’s evolution.

The analytical-dimensions framework, the main tool for examining the interaction between matrices, comprises six dimensions — Morphological, Institutional, Economic, Social and Cultural, Nature, and Accessibility — each defined by specific characteristics and detailed through four spatial-shaping forces: Attraction, Aggregation, Consolidation, and Valorization.



The case study

Rio de Janeiro's Port Region was selected as a suitable area for developing the case study (Figure 1). Urban formation unfolded over four centuries of consolidation and, since the preparations for the Olympic Games, the area has undergone restructuring guided by a contemporary urban project. Among the main interventions within the area delimited by the Porto Maravilha project are the demolition of the Perimetral viaduct, which is replaced by three tunnels — freeing the surface for potential new real estate developments. The interventions also include the construction of two museums at the edges of Mauá Square, which mark the starting point of the project's territorial boundary.

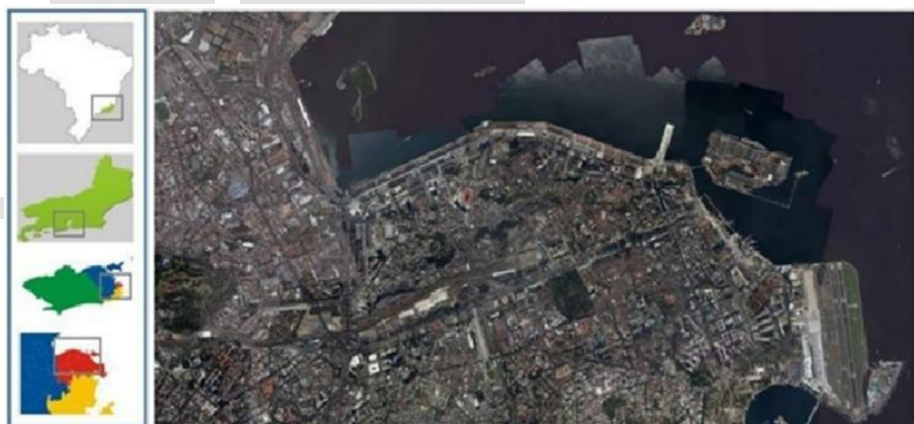


Figure 1: Location of the Port Region of Rio de Janeiro.

Source: Prepared by the authors, cropped from a satellite image (Google Earth), 09/2016.

Because this research addresses the interaction between new interventions and the consolidated urban fabric, the characterization of the study area sought — through an evolutionary understanding of the formation of the urban fabric — to identify cycles of expansion and contraction, as well as ruptures in the making of this mesh. These were understood as factors with repercussions on the urban fabric, capable of producing significant changes in its rhythms, processes, and constituent elements — in other words, in its overall formation.

Rabha (1984) classifies the construction of the Port Quay in the first decade of the 20th century as a moment of rupture in the urban and social fabric of the city's Port Region and as the starting point of the degradation that characterized it, especially in the second half of the 20th century. The quay's construction was accompanied by landfilling, the introduction of new port technologies, and the monopolization of port management and of the newly created plots. These developments pushed the shoreline outward, altering urban relations with the existing spatial configuration and, in the past, demarcating a clash between urbanization matrices with distinct rhythms of consolidation and the production of urban structures. A new pattern of occupation was imposed on what already existed, with little concern for integration. The new streets, plots, and buildings produced on the



filled land had few connections with the streets, plots, and buildings that made up the previous urban fabric (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Photograph of the Port Quay, illustrating the insertion of a new spatial configuration after the port works in the first decade of the 20th century. Image: Port Quay. Photographer: Augusto Malta (1864–1957); date: c. 1925; Collection: Instituto Moreira Salles. Source: brasilianafotografica.bn.gov.br, accessed on 07/27/2025.

Application of the method in the port area

The case study involved applying methodological tools of urban analysis grounded in the theoretical perspectives of Lynch (1975) and Prak (1977) as well as in the analytical scope and stages of urban morphology proposed by Carvalho Santos (2010), the first author of this article. The study offered an interpretation of the formation and consolidation of the urban fabric, focusing on its compositional elements, the city's constant process of evolution and adaptation to new uses and experiences expressed through appropriation, and the interaction between existing spatial matrices and their repercussions on public space.



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Local	Dimensões		Forças			
	Nomenclatura	Caracterização das Dimensões	Atração Polarização / Singualidade e atrativa (qualificar o que atrai)	Agregação (o que agrega)	Consolidação (tempo e feição)	Valorização (indicadores)
Praça Mauá	Morfológica	Formas largas, praças e rótulas	Praça	Amplios espaços, convergência de vias.	Desenho urbano reestruturado recentemente.	Localização das âncoras culturais do Porto Maravilha.
		Margens edificadas e alinhamento	Margens edificadas em 3 faces da praça, e a Baía de Guanabara.	Atividades culturais e comerciais.	Abrija edificações de diversas épocas.	Museu do Amanhã/ Museu de Arte/ RB1/ Marinha e Touring Clube.
		Largura das ruas, vias e passeios	Convergência das principais vias da região.	Facilidade de acesso a Região Central da cidade.	Vias consolidadas em diferentes épocas.	Estrutura urbana.
		Topografia	Plana, em contato com a baía, grandes espaços livres, paisagem cênica.	Facilidade de deslocamento de pedestres, polo com a Praça da Harmonia.	Manutenção do contato com o mar e da topografia plana.	Comércio móvel, interligação entre museus e o Boulevard Olímpico.
	Institucional	Dominialidade do território	Museus e Marinha.	Usos e atividades institucionais, culturais e lazer.	Uso contínuo das atividades.	Localização das âncoras culturais do Porto Maravilha.
		Representações do poder público	Marinha, agentes da guarda municipal e Polícia Militar.	Conservação e monitoramento.	Localização estratégica, terrenos de propriedade pública.	Localização estratégica.
		Regras de uso	Acesso público.	Interação e diversidade.	Uso público e investimentos de distintas épocas.	Atratividade de pessoas pelo uso público.
	Econômica	Comércio	Atividades comerciais, turísticas, culturais e lazer	Suporte complementar as atividades culturais e de lazer da praça, e as atividades de moradia e negócios do entorno.	Museu MAR e do Amanhã. Instalações efêmeras - Barracas e "foodtrucks".	Atração de usuário para as atividades de turismo, cultura e lazer.
		Agências financeiras	Existente no edifício RB1.	Existência indica agregação.	Positivo para consolidação.	Positivo para Valorização.
		caixa multibanco	Existente no edifício RB1.	Existência indica agregação.	Positivo para consolidação.	Positivo para Valorização.
	Social e Cultural	Feiras	Centralidade, transporte, infra e usuários.	Museus e galpões da Orla Conde.	Museus e galpões da Orla Conde.	Divulgação, espaços amplos, infraestrutura de acesso.
		Encontros e atividades	Amplios espaços, museus.	Vitalidade.	Acessibilidade, diversidade de espaços.	Divulgação, espaços amplos, infraestrutura de acesso.
		Estar e contemplar	Baía de Guanabara, amplos espaços, gramados e mobiliários.	Diversidade de usuários.	Manutenção, diversidade de espaços e paisagem natural.	Paisagem natural.
		Imagem e identidade	Museus, Cais do Porto e Baía de Guanabara.	Turismo, lazer cultural.	Distintos investimentos ao longo do tempo.	Permanência, novos investimentos e divulgação.
	Natureza	Exposição solar	Amplios espaços, gramados e mobiliários.	Lazer ativo.	Práticas de atividades esportivas.	Atração de usuários.
		Ventos	Proximidade com a Baía.	Permanência.	Permanência e lazer contemplativo.	Atração de usuários.
		Arborização	Incipiente, em fase de crescimento.	Permanência e lazer contemplativo.	Permanência e lazer contemplativo.	Atração de usuários.
		Paisagem de contemplação	Baía de Guanabara.	Lazer contemplativo.	Manutenção da paisagem.	Atração de usuários.
	Acessibilidade	Transporte público	Ônibus e estação de VLT.	Facilidade de deslocamento de pedestres.	Intervenção recente, em estágio de avaliação.	Atração de atividades complementares.
		Parada de carros	Permitido em 1 margem (MAR)	Facilidade de deslocamento de pedestres.	Intervenção recente, em estágio de avaliação.	Reforço ao deslocamento peatonal ou transporte público.
		Estacionamentos	Existente no edifício RB1.	Existente e seletivo pelo preço.	Intervenção recente, em estágio de avaliação.	Reforço ao deslocamento peatonal ou transporte público.

Table 1: Analytical Dimensions — Example of the use of analytical tools for public space, applied to Mauá Square.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The evolutionary understanding of the Port Region's urban fabric — supported by this methodological approach — presents the study area considering the rhythms of expansion and contraction defined by the forces of attraction, aggregation,



consolidation, and valorization that shaped its urban development. This area forms part of the urban intervention project known as Porto Maravilha.

This section presents reflections derived from applying the above-mentioned analytical tools to Rio de Janeiro's Port Region, as outlined in Table 1. It highlights the transformative shaping forces of the area's morphology across different temporalities through six dimensions: morphological, institutional, economic, social and cultural, nature, and accessibility. The analysis explores the formation and consolidation of the urban fabric, examining its compositional elements and its continuous processes of evolution and adaptation, aiming to understand reference matrices of certain urbanization processes, to document their interactions, and to identify their likely repercussions on the use of public space. The application and analyses were conducted during one of the authors' research projects between 2015 and 2017, with follow-up and updates until 2023.

The physical boundaries of the case study were determined through the identification of urban matrices, the definition of analytical scales, and direct engagement with public-space users and stakeholders. Graphic, photographic, and descriptive records complemented the formal identification of the urban space and the characterization of use and occupation patterns within public spaces.

Carvalho Santos (2010) proposes adopting different levels of resolution in approaching urban space, aiming to identify networks of pathways connecting various established centers of activity, produced across multiple temporalities, while also recognizing latent or emerging centralities understood as potentially attractive singularities. Her method emphasizes six analytical dimensions — morphological, institutional, economic, environmental, sociocultural, and accessibility — as the core categories of analysis.

Moudon (2015) defines four levels of resolution for constructing a morphological analysis: the interaction between the local and regional levels; the relationship between the local area and the city; the connection between street and block; and, finally, the relationship between building and plot at close range.

In this study, three levels of resolution were adopted, represented by drawing scales used as graphic references for methodological application and the systematization of findings. The relationship between the local scale and the city was represented by the 1:10,000 scale, which identified interactions with the immediate surroundings, accessibility, road structure, geomorphological features, and the main facilities and uses in the region. The second level, at a reference scale of 1:5,000, allowed the examination of a specific section, enabling detailed investigation of interrelations among public spaces and their pathways, particularly in the formation of streets and blocks. The third level, at a 1:1,000 scale, segmented the analysis into smaller urban portions, zooming into the microscale to examine the relationships between plots and buildings and to capture the



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possible complexity and multiplicity of uses within public spaces. This closer scale made it possible to record vitality as expressed through human interactions in public areas.

The study area was delimited by prioritizing public spaces, their edges, adjoining streets, and the pathways connecting complementary spaces. The selection of these spaces and routes was defined during three reconnaissance visits, conducted alongside preliminary studies on the region's urban history. The Port Region of Rio de Janeiro covers approximately 5,000,000 m²; therefore, selecting a smaller section enabled the analysis to focus on a representative urban microscale that reflects both the area's historical and urban evolution while encompassing the various identified urban matrices.

The analytical procedure was grounded in direct observation and lived experience, carried out over 20 technical visits during an 18-month period between 2015 and 2017. After the third visit, the public spaces and their physical interconnections were defined for analysis at the 1:5,000 and 1:1,000 scales, respectively. Two perpendicular axes were identified (Figure 3): the first, Eixo Sacadura Cabral, stretches between Mauá Square and da Harmonia Square; the second, Eixo Camerino, links the Port Quay (Cais do Porto) to the present-day Presidente Vargas Avenue. Jornal do Comércio Square, originally the site of Valongo Quay and later Imperatriz Quay, is where the two axes intersect (Figure 4).

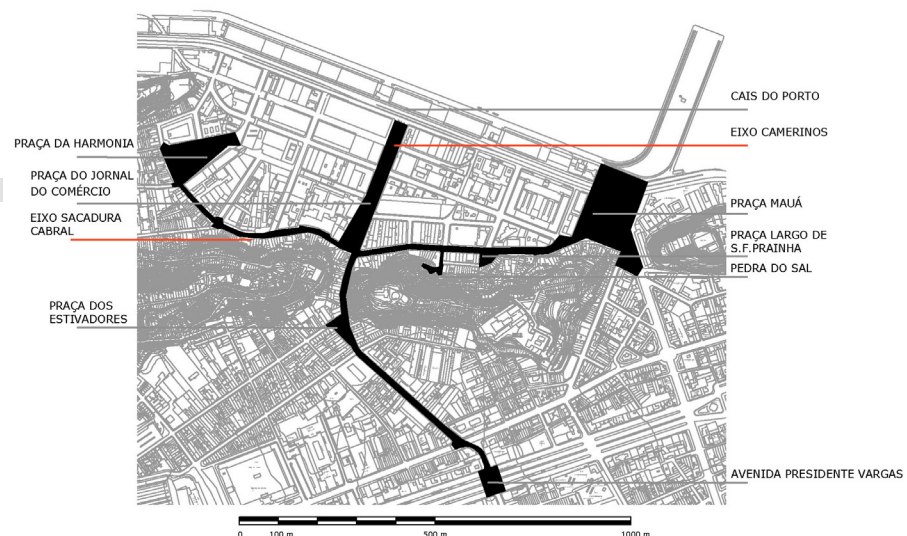


Figure 3: Map showing the identified analysis axes and public spaces.
Source: Prepared by the authors (2017).

Subsequent visits tested the application of the urban reading method across the defined scales. The 1:1,000 scale was particularly valuable for typological analysis of buildings, documentation of public-space activities, observation of daily and occasional practices, and identification of existing uses and functions. These data



were systematized into plans, photographs, texts, and analytical-dimension tables for each public space and defined axis.

In this study, the two axes were understood as representative of a transitional zone between distinct spatial-formation matrices, embodied by Camerino and Sacadura Cabral Streets. According to the reference map, Camerino Street represents a vertical axis of transition between matrices. Originating from the earliest access routes to the region, it historically played a structuring role throughout the port area's urbanization phases. Its section closest to the sea — now Barão de Tefé Avenue — was established after the early-20th-century landfill for the Port Quay and now hosts the first architectural examples of the Porto Maravilha high-rise typology. Sacadura Cabral Street, in turn, functions as a horizontal axis of transition, marking the boundary between matrices along its edges. Its formation traces the city's coastal limit up to the 19th century on one side and the landfill for the Port Quay on the other, consolidating a new zone of occupation. Sacadura Cabral Street is within the SAGAS project area, enjoys legal urban protection, and marks sectors with extra construction potential under Porto Maravilha.



Figure 4: Photograph of the intersection of Camerino and Sacadura Cabral Streets, view toward Conceição Hill from the meeting point of the study axes at Comércio Square.

Source: Research archive (2017).

These streets were included in the first phase of Porto Maravilha, characterized primarily by the renewal of urban and road infrastructure and pavement restoration. Beyond their physical boundaries, both axes serve as connectors within the region's urban network. Sacadura Cabral Street links the Saúde and Gamboa neighborhoods, connecting directly to key routes toward downtown, including Camerino Street, Rio Branco Avenue, and do Acre Street. It functions as a binary corridor between Saúde and Gamboa neighborhoods in conjunction with Venezuela Avenue. The Camerino/Barão de Tefé axis connects the Port Quay to Presidente Vargas Avenue at the height of Passos Avenue, continuing toward



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República do Paraguai Avenue and forming a line linking the Port Quay to Lapa, with access to Aterro do Flamengo through Glória neighborhood. This axis thus provides a direct connection between the port and the city's South Zone.

The urban fabric along these two axes displays a rich diversity of public spaces with distinctive shapes, ambiances, functions, and meanings — each shaped by multiple histories, motivations, and modes of occupation. Within this set of public spaces are Mauá, da Harmonia, do Jornal do Comércio/Barão de Tefé, and Estivadores Squares, Hanging Garden of Valongo, the churchyard of São Francisco, and the squares of São Francisco da Prainha, São Domingos, and João da Baiana (Pedra do Sal), along with the most recent addition, Conde Waterfront — also known as the Boulevard Olímpico.

Reflections

The temporal span of the research (2015-2017) made it possible to record the rapid transformations brought about by Porto Maravilha, characterizing the project's intervention matrix and its accelerated capacity to impose changes on the study area. Experiencing this accelerated pace revealed other, distinct rhythms within the city's ongoing transformation — changes that are far slower and more subtle.

We identified attributes that, across different temporal layers, attracted uses and spatial appropriations consolidated into nodes of aggregation and networks of movement, based on the analytical dimensions — morphological, institutional, economic, social and cultural, nature and accessibility — defined in the adopted method. In the specific case of Rio de Janeiro's Port Region, the separation between matrices remains visible. More precisely, in the portion investigated here — covering Saúde and part of Gamboa neighborhoods — the former shoreline, now represented by Sacadura Cabral Street, constitutes a kind of edge: a marked boundary that does not mediate a transition of genesis, form, or vitality between the two areas. In short, it is our “toolbox” in action (Table 1).

Porto Maravilha, in some respects, reinforces this division by concentrating on the areas earmarked for redesign of the urban layout, land readjustment, and revision of urban indices that regulate built occupation within the filled-land zone, while preserving the protected built environment without proposing changes. The matrices identified in the study interact and reverberate across the area delimited by the Sacadura Cabral and Camerino axes. As transitional lines, Camerino/Avenida Barão de Tefé Streets produce a vertical transition because it is polarized: one end represents the new model under development; on the other, an urban fabric historically consolidated by different models and regulatory parameters. Sacadura Cabral Street produces a horizontal transition: the differentiation of spatial matrices occurs across the street's two sides—on one, the Port Quay/Porto Maravilha interventions; on the other, the traditional urban fabric. Sacadura Cabral Street also provides an internal traffic connection within the Port Region.



Both axes are significant and structuring elements of the area's urban weave, especially regarding accessibility, linkage, interaction, and integration — sustained by the diversity present along segments of the two distinct areas. In the analyzed axes, the area shaped by the gradual consolidation of the urban fabric displays greater diversity of uses and occupations; it corresponds to the residential zone. Its land-tenure structure and buildings tend toward small and medium scales, which facilitates a variety of enterprises and individual initiatives and, in turn, fosters local diversity. In general, buildings are configured for ground floor commercial activities. Commerce is varied and supports a wide range of needs and activities. As a result, public-space vitality is more pronounced. By contrast, the area associated with the Filled-Land/Porto Maravilha pattern is characterized by institutional and industrial uses in transition to commercial-touristic functions, with a significant presence of consolidated public institutions. Land parcels are generally large and concentrated among a few public and private owners. This configuration enables the allocation of extensive tracts to limited uses, producing monotonous areas with low public-space vitality. Although new housing projects were mentioned as an intention in the original plan, they became feasible only 10 years later, with the first residential development inaugurated in 2024 near the analyzed area.

From its earliest phases, Porto Maravilha left urban marks through new buildings, restructured road systems, museum construction, and upgrades to urban infrastructure. These investments affected vitality in parts of the region. At Mauá Square, vitality increased significantly between 10:00 and 18:00. However, the interventions did not generate a comparable effect across the entire study area; impacts remained spatially concentrated. Under Porto Maravilha regulations, new buildings exhibit a distinct architectural language characterized by setbacks, site coverage ratios, height limits, parking ratios, and stylistic choices. In certain segments, for example, new height limits can reach up to 90 meters, in stark contrast to the eclectic buildings along the study axes, which range from 5 to 15 meters, and even to some modern examples that reach 60 meters.

The stylistic language of recently constructed buildings aligns with a contemporary “international style.” It does not engage with the architecture of its immediate context. These structures are essentially towers clad in mirrored glass, with minor geometric variations to distinguish them (Figure 5). Even with the establishment of the Mixed-Use Zone in the Port Region — which allows commercial, industrial, and residential uses, including within a single building or lot — other urban-design parameters in the Porto Maravilha regulations can negatively affect sociability and public-space vitality. Among the morphological parameters with adverse effects are incentives for building setbacks from lot boundaries, the production of front setbacks from the street line, the prohibition of subdividing lots below 1,000 m², and incentives for lot consolidation producing parcels larger than 1,500 m².





Figure 5: Early stage of construction of the new Porto Maravilha towers along the Camerino axis, near the Boulevard Olímpico. The immediate surroundings include architectural examples characteristic of distinct urbanization phases.

Source: Research archive (2016).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The adopted methodology of urban analysis made it possible to read a portion of the city marked by the coexistence of spatial matrices from distinct temporalities — also multiple in scale and use — whose points of comparison are their respective evolutionary rhythms. The investigation was conducted from singular public spaces, from their urban network of connections, and from the effort to identify how constitutive spatial characteristics are reflected in the vitality, uses, and occupations of public spaces.

The successive transformations in streets and squares have, in some cases, erased the landscape-references that generated them and sustained their singularity and identity. Here, contextual landscape is understood as the landscape created by spatializing relationships among people, forces of action, things, and territory which, by virtue of the identity relation thus constructed, is itself also generative. It is the territory where uses and customs are inscribed as marks of a society's ways of seeing and living. Interventions that seek to “modernize” these spaces by eliminating such content — indifferent to the contexts with which they relate — run serious risks of provoking rejection and abandonment, with consequent degradation of the territory, of the networks of use and exchange that rely on it,



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and of those who derive their livelihood from them. Deprived of these attributes, public spaces — streets, squares, promenades, and edges — seem, in such cases, to lose much of the original purposes that engendered them, whether ritual, social-commercial, or cultural-identitarian.

In the case studied, public-sector interventions aimed at modernization, regardless of the particular notion of “the modern” applied, at times erased the marks of origin entirely, and at other times restored traditional features of the urban fabric as attractions for “touristic consumption,” with possible gentrifying effects — though these were not the direct object of the research supporting this article. In both scenarios, the interventions produced marked impacts that were not always positive in the areas where they were implemented. Such initiatives often appear to disregard and undermine the symbolic and functional relations that those spaces contain and foster with residents, users, neighbors, and adjacent communities, both near and far.

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