

URBAN REGENERATION IN HISTORICAL CENTRES: A SOCIAL-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract *The historical centre of Porto city (Portugal) has gone through increasing gentrification and real estate pressure. In its typical “islands” – characterized by aligned ranks of four or more short houses that occupy lots sharing the same door number that were built since the beginning of the XIX century, and aimed at lodging the working classes attracted by the industrialization revolution - currently live 10 400 residents. Considering these dwelling nuclei (8 265 at all), the social deprivation of their inhabitants, and the commitment of local councillors with their citizens in order to preserve the intrinsic social, economic, historical and cultural characteristics of their city, this article reports the goals, methodologies, results and conclusions of a consultancy report developed for Porto Municipality. A specific policy – that embraces environmental sustainability, social cohesion and economic feasibility - is proposed in order to rehabilitate these “islands”. This policy is anchored in the concern of providing better housing conditions to underprivileged families that have traditionally lived there. A case study is carried out for the “islands” located in the urban rehabilitation area of Santos Pousada.*

This study was first pursued through surveys and interviews to population. This subjective qualitative information was then complemented with the local collection of data concerning, namely, the physical, social, economic and demographic characteristics of the “islands”, dwellings and families. Taking into account that each family has three people on average, 56.9% of the “islands” is effectively occupied, and each dwelling has a liveable space of about 35 square meters, herein is proposed a rehabilitation intervention in order to almost double this area, assuring as far as possible that most families are kept in the “islands” where they currently belong to. The anticipated costs and revenues of the intervention were then assessed, considering the prevailing legislation and instruments, in order to pinpoint funding sources and respective amounts. Some suggestions are finally presented, aimed at involving current residents, and preserving the cultural heritage of the inner city in its overall dimensions.

This study clearly shows how urban rehabilitation interventions anchor social integration and cohesion, resorting simultaneously to financial instruments that enable to get back at least part of the involved costs. So this conveys a compromise solution between the welfare state and the market competitive forces, providing conditions for a balanced sustainability, taking into account the increasing financial bounds currently faced by municipalities that restrain the achievement of their social goals.