

*Projects***CULTURAL CORRIDOR: A PRESERVATION DISTRICT
IN DOWNTOWN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL**AUGUSTO IVAN PINHEIRO
AND VICENTE DEL RIO

This paper concerns the first large-scale urban-design project in Brazil to deal with preservation and revitalization in the inner city. In protecting the cultural heritage while still encouraging new construction, the project has been successful in setting a new methodology for development control and in reinforcing the traditional character of a large area of downtown Rio de Janeiro. Within the framework of an overall design-review process, the project has made use of special land-use regulations, design guidelines, participatory and educational programs, and substantial tax deductions. Traditional architectural patterns and uses have been reinforced, and development pressure from large corporations has been alleviated. The project's positive results and wide community support have encouraged the city to expand the original project area to include most of the historic downtown fabric and to carry out complementary programs for beautification, restructuring of vehicular circulation, and street animation. Semi-public and private investors have begun to recycle old buildings for cultural and commercial uses, and the downtown area is experiencing a comeback.

AUGUSTO IVAN PINHEIRO is an architect who has worked in the city government of Rio for more than twenty years and who originated the Cultural Corridor project and been its executive director.

VICENTE DEL RIO is an architect, an Associate Professor of Architecture at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and currently a visiting scholar at the Center for Urban Design, University of Cincinnati.

SINCE THE FAILURE OF MODERNIST THEORIES IN MOST OF their applications to everyday life, particularly in dealing with urban situations and human/social responses, efforts have been made to deal with a fundamental dichotomy in the development process. Since development implies movement forward toward a better social situation, discussions have involved scholars and professionals in such contradictory notions as continuity and change, preservation and renewal, the traditional and the modern.¹ Such concerns have been shared by cities such as Rio de Janeiro, as they wake up — in many cases

too late — to the need to find ways of controlling development without inhibiting its benefits.

In architecture and urbanism theoretical work on the dichotomies of development has tended to fall into two major categories, involving divergent notions of the “traditional.” On the one hand, there are those theorists who fight global tendencies and defend the possibility of a pure “critical regionalism.”² They share a static notion of tradition, as if tradition could be insulated from reality and kept intact. At the end of the twentieth century, in a world that is truly a “global village,” this notion is but a sociological frenzy, and it carries a large dose of ethnocentricity, in that it derives from classical center-periphery models and rests on beliefs such as the existence of “marginal” societies.³ On the other hand, there are those theorists who point toward more interactive models for the understanding of global architectural phenomena, and who acknowledge fundamental specificities that mainly emerge from economic and political conditioning.⁴ In this case, “traditional” is not necessarily opposed by “modern”; the terms comprise complementary parts of the same reality. This was the notion of tradition that guided the city of Rio de Janeiro in its efforts to protect and revitalize areas of its downtown through the *Projeto Corredor Cultural*.

As in most Latin American cities, the center of Rio has a history that dates to the sixteenth century. Today this center still participates intensely in city life as a functional, political, social and symbolic core. As a financial and service center and a transportation node, it also serves a city population of almost six million in addition to the residents of a greater metropolitan area. And it still holds several residential districts and keeps much of its shopping and central cultural roles — both formal and informal — which are particularly important to lower-middle-income working groups. Thus, although the protection and promotion of historic connotations, such as architectural heritage, was an important objective for the Cultural Corridor project, equally important was the functional, cultural and social diversity of the area. All of these concerns were consistent with a pluralistic and traditional sense of urbanity.

In trying to keep up with and revitalize tradition, the project's planners sought to ensure that the downtown would continue to evolve both economically and socially and continue to be perceived as the center of city life. They believed no attempt should be made to insulate it from the external world. The physical and sociocultural patterns guiding this process of continuity and change gained their inspiration from all informational residues, memories, and life-styles that construct tradition and identity in a city and a society.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTAL ASPECTS OF DOWNTOWN RIO

Although the physical solutions to city problems embodied in an urban plan are generally easy to identify, a plan's underlying social repercussions are normally much harder to discover. Yet political and economic transformations must also be understood as points of reference, because a plan is always inserted into an existing structure of society. Once approved and implemented, an urban plan will always affect in some way or another the social, economic and physical relationships within an area.

There have been many such transformations imposed on the center of Rio de Janeiro, but the great reforms of Mayor Pereira Passos in the first decade of the nineteenth century stand out. The works of Passos are sometimes compared to those of Baron Von Haussman, and Passos was, in fact, a great admirer of the designer of the boulevards of Paris.

Passos was instrumental in implementing deep structural transformations in what was then the capital of Brazil. Orchestrated by the federal government, his programs and projects had wide implications. They were intended to update the image of Rio to match the current cosmopolitan, *belle époque* model of a world metropolis, and so compete with Buenos Aires in attracting investment. They were designed to make the city structure more functional to allow for new modes of production and communication, particularly in and around the port. They were needed to eradicate typhoid and other epidemics related to living conditions. And, finally, they sought to transform the morphology of the city center so as to reflect the new logic of capitalism. As part of Passos' efforts, alleys and streets were widened into avenues and boulevards, a new port was built, and old quarters and colonial buildings were torn down, giving way to an eclectic European architecture. Poor families were displaced, and the city center progressively became the locus for capital and prestige (FIG. 1).

Later, in the mid-twenties, another planning effort led to additional demolition of the old city fabric and the implementation of new building types. The “city beautiful” proposals in the master plan by French urbanist Alfred Agache called for wide avenues, *rondpoints*, setbacks, and double-height colonnades at street level. Agache's plan called for completion of the demolition of the hill where the city had been founded in order to make way for a new business quarter. This process marked the introduction of the city to the industrial era. The trend continued with the construction of the Avenida Presidente Vargas in the early forties. A strong symbolic statement by the authoritarian regime of the time, construction of this



boulevard required the demolition of hundreds of buildings in a two-block strip stretching for nearly two miles (FIG. 2).

With the expansion of industrialization in Rio from 1950 on, the automobile became a major catalyst for the next round of urban development. City officials embraced transportation planning, giving the design of roads and highways top priority. This resulted in further demolition, construction of complicated road junctions and overpasses, and additional conflicts with the urban tissue. The already-precarious spatial balance of the cityscape was disrupted, and new buildings came to be scaled based on the view from the automobile. Sidewalks were narrowed, streets continued to be widened, and old buildings were demolished to make way for new street grids and skyscrapers. Downtown Rio, like most world metropolises, started to be filled with characterless International Style architecture and governed by the logic of real-estate profitability.

We do not mean here to fully analyze the history of such urban renewal interventions. But we may point out some of the most obvious patterns. The historical aspect: renewal plans have coincided with periods of national political and social transformation. The social aspect: gentrification has involved the displacement of original activities and poorer groups by upward-moving social groups. The economic aspect: concentration of homogeneous functions has progressively been substituted for a multiplicity of urban activities and land uses. The ideological aspect: each new plan has introduced a new logic that has supposedly symbolized order and progress — as opposed to the previous logic, perceived as chaotic, unhealthy and disposable. The cultural aspect: the cyclical reconstruction of the city has demonstrated a restless search for the future and a constant denial of the past.

In the center of Rio de Janeiro such developmental proclivities have generated spatial configurations and an imagery dominated by the following elements: a restricted Central Business District where density is high (land coverage of 100 percent), and where modern tower blocks occupied mainly by large financial corporations and big businesses spread along wide



FIGURE 1. (LEFT) *The construction of Avenida Central in downtown Rio was part of a Haussmanian public-works program in the early 1900s (photo by M. Ferrez).*

FIGURE 2. (BELOW) *The public arcades along the Avenida Presidente Vargas are an example of city-beautiful urbanism from the 1920s and 1940s, which defined configurations for street corridors and building envelopes (photo by V. del Rio).*

avenues; several adjoining areas where small businesses and commercial uses still prevail in those old, eclectic buildings along narrow streets which have resisted renewal projects; and public spaces, *rondpoints* (traffic circles), and squares totally taken over by vehicle circulation and parking.

These are the features and images common in most downtowns of large cities. In many ways they represent the idealized, cross-cultural, modernist paradigm. However, as has recently been pointed out by Peter Ward, "although in a broad sense capitalist economies are driven towards convergent directions, there is ground for differences and contrasts arising from different forms of engagement with local structural matters."⁵ To a large extent, Latin American downtowns

prove this argument, and they may, in fact, be perfect for understanding different forms of engagement between macro-level and local forces. Ward also points out that recent socioeconomic and political events in Latin America suggest that inner-city development there will be increasingly different both in kind and degree from development in the U.S. and the United Kingdom.

Indeed, any observer will note important features of Latin American downtowns that set them apart from their American or European counterparts. Latin American CBDs remain the most dynamic and lively commercial districts of their respective cities; they continue to be important public transportation nodes; they have not lost population at the same rate as their U.S. or European counterparts; they contain a strong presence of the informal circuit of the economy; and most continue to be strong repositories of cultural life, carrying the symbolism of centrality. Such expressions of difference are readily apparent in downtown Rio de Janeiro. Together with the relative cumulative inertia of spatial forms, they help us to understand the apparent contradictions in inner-city urban development, giving a partial explanation for the success of the Cultural Corridor project and the possibility of a more pluralistic downtown.⁶

PROJETO CORREDOR CULTURAL: A HISTORIC PROJECT FOR THE CENTRAL AREA

Several social and political trends have given rise to a new development awareness in Rio in the last fifteen years. Toward the end of the 1970s increasing political freedom in Brazil encouraged the growth of community groups and neighborhood associations which started to demonstrate against the deteriorating quality of city life. Several citizen groups protested the excessive exploitation of land by real-estate developers and the government's overall neglect for environmental quality. These social movements were generally strong in Rio because of its notable environmental beauty and significant historical architectural heritage. On another level, the economic crisis and recession of the 1980s — named the “lost decade” by Brazilian economists — slowed down urban development and permitted an increase in thinking about cities and their cultural heritage. Finally, the end of the military regime in Brazil in the mid-eighties and the return to democracy prevented a return of the fully centralized and authoritarian urban interventions of the past.

Throughout this period community groups and the press in Rio complained about the city's increasing loss of character, while groups from within the city government began to

arrive at new ideas regarding urban planning and development. A small group of city planners first proposed the *Projeto Corredor Cultural* in 1979 in an attempt to reconcile historic preservation with the needs of economic development and various class interests. The Cultural Corridor — a name coined in the midst of city efforts in transportation planning (at a time when transit “corridors” were fashionable) — was introduced into the political arena at the right moment as an alternative methodology for dealing with development control in historic areas (FIG. 3). The project gathered important political support by responding to preservationist groups' expectations regarding the fate of some of the most traditional places in downtown Rio, and the local small-business community has also supported it as a way to avoid displacement by larger-scale interests.



FIGURE 3. Eclectic architecture of the turn of the century. Typical surviving structures in the CBD are now under the protection of the Corredor Cultural (photo by Z. Linhares).

From the social point of view, the *Projeto Corredor Cultural* proved to be sensitive to several population groups, respecting their interests and involving them in the decision-making process. From the economic point of view, it has tried to maintain the dynamics and diversity of small-scale commercial activities, valuing them against larger-scale uses and enhancing the quality of their spaces. From the ideological point of view, it has differed from the totalitarian/public-health approaches of preceding plans in that it has emphasized the symbolic value of existing buildings, spaces and activities — all of which were previously regarded as “backward.” And, from the cultural point of view, it has aimed at recapturing the symbolic role of the past, which was already being reevaluated for its ability to transform knowledge and inform future generations.

In integrating all these aspects, and in order to be successful, the *Projeto Corredor Cultural* had to be more than a simple project; it had to be an ongoing process, combining a collection of city programs around a unifying idea. Thus, although it was principally an instrument for preservation, it was not limited by nostalgic and static views emphasizing protection of old architectural structures; nobody wanted the area transformed into a museum. Rather, it focused on the possibility of applying a contemporary planning approach to old problems. This strategy became vital, because the project combined apparently contradictory — but really complementary — developmental patterns. The project's basic assumption was to reconcile the need for preservation with the demand for development — the latter conditioned to the former in order to maintain the fragile balance of the central city. For this, the *Corredor Cultural* relied heavily on the implementation of area-specific design guidelines for both new construction, the restoration of old buildings, and the design of quality public spaces. Contrary to design guidelines elsewhere, however, these regulations were not regarded as mere instruments for aesthetic control, but as a means of reinforcing tradition and identity.⁷

Since preservation alone would guarantee neither the survival nor the vitality of Rio's remaining historic areas, the project also sought to revitalize the public image of these areas by improving and beautifying public spaces, creating new building opportunities for vacant land, and promoting complementary cultural events. In particular, events such as street theater and concerts were seen as a way to call attention to the scenographic aspects and aesthetic quality of city architecture. Last but not least, the project supported the maintenance and expansion of traditional commercial uses, such as small-scale repair shops and variety stores.

LEGISLATION AND URBAN DESIGN FOR DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

The area of the Cultural Corridor lies on the fringe of the dense CBD, sometimes overlapping it, and spreads out along two major axes (FIG. 4). One axis begins at Lapa, passes through Passeio Público, Cinelândia and Carioca, and extends to SAARA and Praça da República. The other axis begins at Largo da Carioca and stretches towards the bayfront and the old quay line through Praça XV and its surroundings. The project encompasses a relatively large area, particularly if considered in relation to the CBD, and it includes a very significant collection of buildings of historic and cultural importance.

The Brazilian constitution guarantees that urban development control be the sole responsibility of municipal govern-

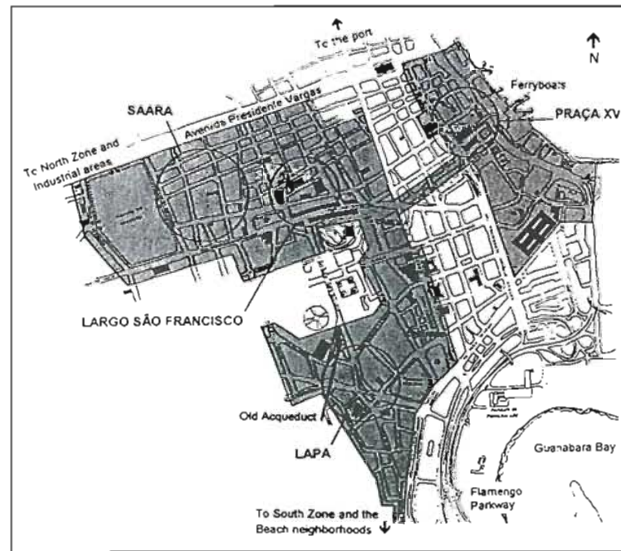


FIGURE 4. The area of the Corredor Cultural. Buildings listed in the national, state and municipal registers of historic places are shown in black.

ments. Over the years the Rio city executive has exercised power primarily through land-use zoning and land-subdivision controls. These tools have defined the utilization of land and the urban character of buildings based on such typical determinants as land use, lot coverage, setbacks, and parking requirements. As complementary instruments for development control, the city has used *Projetos de Alinhamento* (PAs) concerning alignment projects and requirements along specific street corridors (refer to FIG. 2), and *Projetos de Parcelamento* (PALS) concerning subdivision projects and requirements for specific areas. Through a combination of these instruments, it was possible to implement the *Corredor Cultural* and to guarantee the preservation of the historic architectural heritage and the compatibility between the historic architecture and new development.

Legislation establishing and implementing the *Corredor Cultural* project was issued in two successive stages. First, in July 1983 a decree by the mayor of Rio modified the existing PAs (street alignment projects) and PALS (plot configurations and subdivision projects) in the areas affecting the Corridor. Boundaries were fixed for an Environmental and Landscape Conservation Zone, protecting all areas of historic architectural interest downtown. In the second stage, the mayor submitted a decree to the city council, which was voted on and enacted as legislation in January 1984. This two-step process solidified prospects for overall implementation of the project, since it created a situation where modifications would need approval at both the executive and legislative levels.

Three primary land-use categories were defined in the *Corredor* legislation: preservation, reconstitution and renewal. If a building were classified under the preservation category, most of its original architectural characteristics had to remain intact. Renovation and adaptive reuse of such buildings would have to follow strict design guidelines for both facade and interior layout. Almost 1,300 buildings were listed in this category. The practical effect was similar to historic registration.

The second category applied to buildings which were damaged but whose original architectural elements could be reconstituted. Guidelines were adopted requiring reconstitution of historic elements in any new design, particularly in relation to the exterior.

The third category, renewal, covered vacant sites, recent buildings, and buildings which were deemed beyond historic reconstruction. Largely discretionary guidelines were adopted to govern design in this category, indicating allowable building envelopes and suggesting clues for “contextual” infillings.

As a further area of restriction, city legislation was approved in 1985 defining design controls for billboards and architectural signage in the *Corredor Cultural*. Such constructions were seen as having a strong negative effect on historic architecture, causing “visual pollution” in the public realm (FIG. 5A,B).

To implement the new restrictions, city legislation mandated a design-review process specific to the area where any new construction would be located. Each design would first need to be analyzed and approved by a quasi-public agency attached to the Municipal Secretariat for Culture.⁸ This agency’s basic operational structure consisted of an executive board and a technical staff of nine people, six of whom were architects. Agency staff members were charged with insuring that guidelines were followed by inspecting construction sites and assisting owners and their architects find proper design solutions on a case-by-case basis. Approval of building plans became contingent upon approval by the agency, even for projects within the renewal category. The agency was also charged with developing urban-design proposals and helping other city departments and agencies implement these through planning legislation and actual redesign of public areas.

Public education and dissemination of information was a further important ingredient of the Cultural Corridor project. A 1985 manual directed at the general public was important in this regard, telling the history and objectives of the project, describing the design guidelines with examples, and presenting the existing legislation in appendices.⁹ Other similar marketing initiatives have been encouraged and have in-

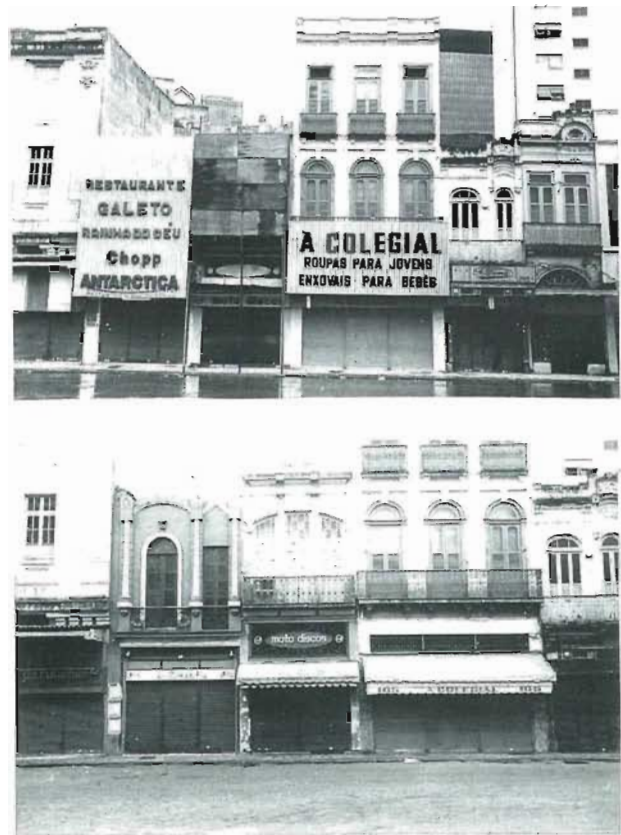


FIGURE 5A,B. Buildings before and after restoration show the impact of the design guidelines (photos by Z. Linhares).

cluded the publication of historical guides with walking tours, a book on the history and use of color in building facades, posters, and special collections of postcards with thematic photo-captions of the area.

Perhaps the most important single step towards guaranteeing implementation, however, was the alteration of the city tributary code in December 1984. New conditional exemptions in real-estate property taxes and building fees in the *Corredor Cultural* now encourage owners to preserve old architecture and follow the design guidelines. This is particularly important because there is no special funding mechanism for improvements to private property.

DESIGNING THE HISTORICAL DISTRICT

Alignment (PA) and subdivision (PAL) projects are urban design instruments which have been utilized by the city since 1903 to define building envelopes and standards for land subdivision. The PAs originated in the “city-beautiful” era to allow for the progressive implementation of new configura-

tions for street corridors. As opposed to simple expropriation, these instruments require that all new construction respond to a set of standards: building lines and setbacks, height allowances, and public rights-of-way. However, over the years PAS became extremely simplistic, dedicated mainly to allowing roads to be widened without the burden of mandatory acquisition or expropriation. PAS and PALS are legally instituted by the city government as executive decrees, with the corresponding sets of drawings and plans on aerial-cartographic maps. They exist throughout the city and are street- or "place-" specific, sometimes colliding with — but always prevailing over — requirements from land-use zoning regulations. More recently, some zoning restrictions have been incorporated into the legal framework of the PAS, specifically in relation to the preservation of facades in historic areas such as the Cultural Corridor.

According to the old PAS, almost all streets downtown were to have wider rights-of-way, either for the implementation of a more "efficient" vehicle circulation system or for permitting the construction of high-rise buildings to mandated standards. Evidently, these concepts followed the modernist tradition; however, paradoxically, one of the reasons for the survival of much nineteenth-century historic architecture downtown was that the rights-of-way imposed by these PAS left so little buildable land on individual plots that new constructions became economically unfeasible except through incorporating surrounding plots. Without a helping hand from the city — such as through urban renewal plans — development ventures which could support such new land configurations were extremely rare. Potential developers either could never reach agreements with owners of adjoining buildings, or, most commonly, leases for properties were so old and intricate that they prevented development. Much land has been passed on over the years to a myriad of lessees, even though it ultimately belongs to religious orders or public agencies, or else it has been compromised by never-ending disputes among heirs.

One of the first stages of the project was to identify all the PAS and PALS which applied to the project area so that they could be reviewed, integrated and reissued according to the project's objectives and guidelines. Thus, street widening and mandatory setbacks gave way to guidelines to recuperate the old street corridor typology and the building lines of historic facades. These changes were obtained only after much discussion with city traffic engineers, and were greatly facilitated by the concurrent oil crisis and the completion of the Rio subway system, which alleviated vehicular traffic downtown. Additionally, many of the streets with significant groups of historic buildings had already been converted to pedestrian use without

any major collapse in the traffic system, thus removing the major justification for street widening.

Because of their effectiveness and site specificity, these urban-design legal instruments have been fundamental for the implementation of the Cultural Corridor project. The new PALS now regulate plot dimensions, and the PAS define the conditions for street corridors and public areas, as well as regulating design according to the three major land use categories discussed above. The following examples help illustrate how the redevelopment process has proceeded.

Preserving Historic Buildings

For blocks where the majority of buildings had kept their original historic features, the project called for the protection of the whole set of buildings, especially facade and roof-design elements. The PAS designate these blocks preservation areas. In cases where the original character of buildings had already been lost beyond repair, or where there were empty lots, the PAS established a renovation area. Here new construction and infilling were permitted as long as new features respected the surrounding architecture in terms of both average building height and facade design (FIGS. 6,7). Some of the buildings within preservation areas had experienced much alteration. Nevertheless, in cases where original features could still be restored, maintenance of these features was mandated, and new additions were required to adopt a "respectful" contemporary expression.

After the approval of the alignment project for the *Corredor Cultural*, further city requirements were passed. Among other things, these restricted the design and positioning of store signs, protected existing cultural and recreational land uses, prohibited parking garages and similar structures, and exempted new construction in the historical district from parking requirements.

Combining New and Old Morphologies

Certain parts of the *Corredor Cultural* are areas of transition between the old historic downtown and renovated districts (FIG. 8). These areas have generally come to be located around road junctions or along important traffic corridors. Here the old zoning and building codes permitted buildings of up to 25 or 30 stories, with 100 percent site coverage and consequently windowless side facades. As there is a significant amount of vacant land in and around these areas, the project called for "fringe" development that might play a role in diminishing

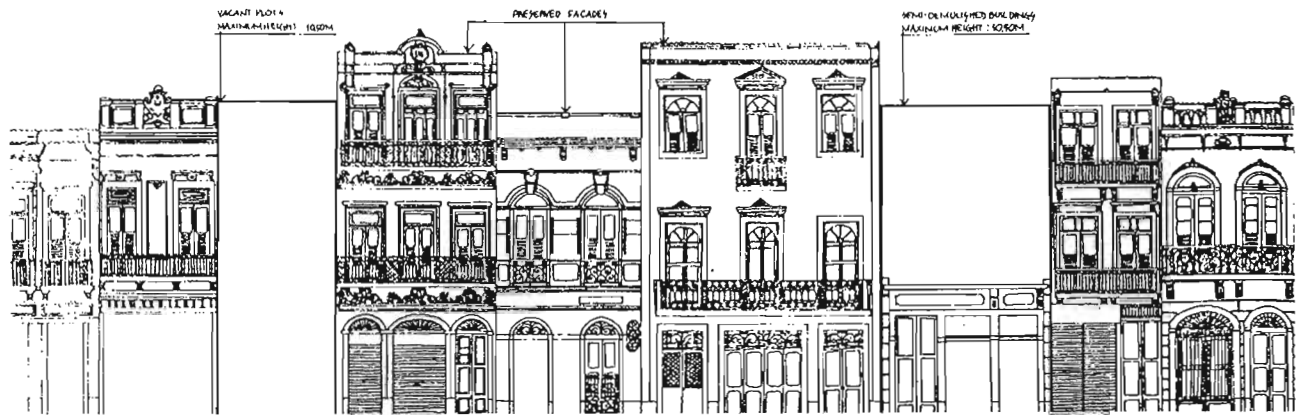


FIGURE 6. (ABOVE) Possibilities for preservation and renovation: recommended heights in a street facade. Source: Prefeitura da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, Como Recuperar, Construir ou Preservar o seu Imóvel no Corredor Cultural (How to Upgrade, Build or Preserve your Building in the Cultural Corridor) (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto de Planejamento Municipal/Instituto Municipal de Arte e Cultura, 1985).

FIGURE 7. (RIGHT) In replacing the original building destroyed by a fire, this 1986 design followed the guidelines with successful contextualism. Modern elements were used, the internal heights was subdivided into an extra story, and the date of construction was shown as the top of the cornice (photo by V. del Rio).

FIGURE 8. (RIGHT, BELOW) A block at the corner of Rua Uruguiana and Avenida Presidente Vargas where the guidelines led to a combination of new and old morphologies.

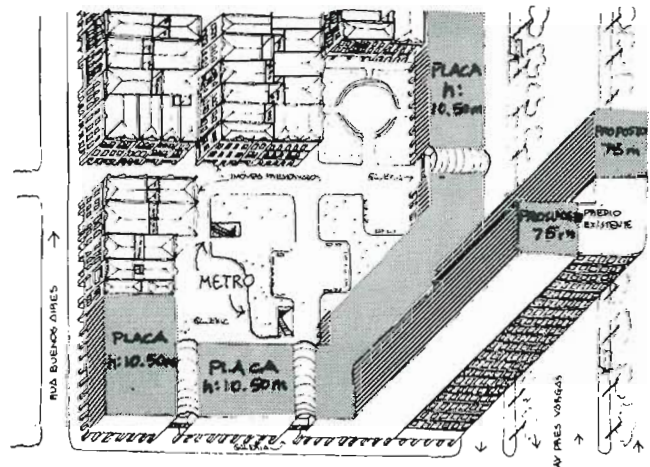


the impact of these high-rise structures whose “blank” sides faced onto the historic architecture.

Wherever possible, simulation studies were used to help determine the best design guidelines for integrating the two types of architecture, particularly in providing a transition in scale and alleviating the visual impact of the larger buildings on their historic surroundings. Although far from ideal, such solutions have allowed for a more harmonious coexistence of the two types, while allowing each to keep its individual expression.

Recycling Deteriorated Areas

This type of intervention was used for a large block adjacent to the most traditional and active commercial area of downtown, the SAARA (Refer to FIG. 4). Having suffered from “planning blight” in the 1970s due to large-scale state expropriations for the subway system, the majority of buildings on this block had either deteriorated or were in ruins. Several vacant plots and the block’s central core were primarily used for “marginal” uses such as storage and parking. This pattern



differed greatly from the small-grain property pattern common throughout the area.

In 1981 the *Corredor Cultural* proposed a halt to land expropriations — and the legal battles that accompanied them. As a way to start recycling affected areas, it proposed selling government property — both land and buildings — back into commercial and entertainment use. Because the block near

the SAARA is very large, the project envisaged dividing it into four smaller areas, which would facilitate a more diversified pattern of pedestrian usage. Existing vacant plots allowed access from surrounding streets to these internal routes, and the underutilized core area was reorganized into a second row of plots around a central “pocket plaza.” The guidelines allow the new internal plots to be developed with buildings that may reach the surrounding average height of 16.5 meters.

REDESIGNING PUBLIC AREAS

Although the Cultural Corridor project originally proposed specific physical improvements for several public areas, the city administrative structure determined responsibility for actual design should fall on other agencies. The detailing and implementation of designs for new public spaces, therefore, depended on recommendations from specific city departments — for instance, relative to squares, sidewalks, streets and vehicular traffic. Despite this limitation, many of the important proposals that were part of the project have been implemented, such as the closing to vehicular traffic of all streets where studies indicated a natural pedestrian route, an intense shopping use, and/or limited vehicular flow.

Because of the relation between the scale of the historic architecture and the narrow width of the downtown streets (from 6 to 8 meters), areas within the project boundaries have adapted well to pedestrian use. Shops, in particular, have benefitted, as strollers are now no longer limited to old, narrow sidewalks and can view storefronts without the visual impedance of curb-side parking. Such interventions have complemented the existing pedestrian precinct of downtown and contributed daily to the comfort of an estimated two million people. Complementary projects were undertaken to beautify the streets with new paving, street furniture, and public lighting appropriate to the historic architecture (FIG. 9).

Specific historic areas have merited special treatment, either to enhance their potential for tourism or simply to increase enjoyment of them. In some cases intervention has been extremely complicated, as many of parts of them were heavily committed to vehicular traffic, bus stops, and terminals. Nevertheless, because of their historic importance, and because of the need for an enhancement of the overall environmental quality, the *Corredor Cultural* proposed new designs for these important spaces. Some of these, described below, have already been implemented.



FIGURE 9. Facades along Rua Uruguaiana, where a modern subway line runs, have already been restored according to the guidelines, and the street was recently beautified (photo by Z. Linhares)

Praça XV

This is the oldest area in the city, and it still holds landscape and architectural features from the era of colonial splendor: the recently restored Paço Imperial (the old seat of the Portuguese court); the Praça XV Square (the original front yard of the old cathedral); the old docks and the bayfront (reminders of the old port); and the Ferryboat Station (dating from the turn of this century) and its surrounding alleyways which date to the 1700s (FIG. 10).

Unfortunately, in the 1960s this area was disrupted by construction of an elevated freeway along the bayfront. The project proposed restoring the relationships of Praça XV, the surrounding architecture, and the bayfront through the overall reintegration of spaces. Major alterations were proposed for vehicular circulation, including pedestrianization and two new bus terminals — one at either end of the precinct. This meant interrupting through-traffic between the Paço Imperial and the Ferryboat Station and connecting the square to the bay, thus reducing the disruption caused by the elevated freeway. These recommendations are presently being reviewed, although through-traffic for buses might be maintained.

Largo de Sao Francisco

This square was an important area during the expansion of the city in the eighteenth century. Today it is important both because it is surrounded by historic buildings (of which two are listed in the National Register: the old Polytechnic School and the church of Sao Francisco de Paula), and because its



special configuration results in an inviting spatial enclosure in the middle of downtown. However, over the years the Largo was taken up as a terminus for more than twenty bus lines (meaning that buses remained parked there for long periods of time), and most of the rest of its space was used for car parking.

Presently, the central square has already been redesigned as part of a larger plan to transform all the Largo into a pedestrian precinct. The idea is that this large open space, surrounded as it is by outstanding architectural features, may be used for public events such as concerts, fairs, and street theatrical performances. The final environment may be further enlivened if the many surrounding bars and restaurants are permitted to extend their sitting areas onto the sidewalks (FIG. 11).

Lapa

In recent years this traditional bohemian district has recovered its role as a center for entertainment and cultural activities. The area had previously been the victim of poor traffic engineering and intrusive modernistic planning during the early seventies, interventions which left morphological scars such as meaningless space and vacant areas around traffic junctions. The district's prime location, its remaining historic architecture, and the imposing *Arcos da Lapa* — the double-arched structure that was originally a colonial aqueduct — justified intervention to upgrade the district's character.

As a first step, new vitality has been injected into the precinct through private initiatives such as ballrooms, dance schools,

FIGURE 10. (ABOVE LEFT) *Beco do Comércio*, an alley leading from the traditional *Praça XV*, retains its historic architectural characteristics and some of its traditional commercial uses (photo by V. del Rio).

FIGURE 11. (ABOVE RIGHT) The new pedestrian precinct at *Largo de São Francisco* takes full advantage of the inviting enclosure of the square and the surrounding historic architecture (photo by Z. Linhares).

FIGURE 12. (BELOW) The remnants of the old iron-casting factory *Fundação Progresso* by the old aqueduct at *Lapa* in the early 1980s. The building has now been recycled and expanded as a multimedia cultural center (photo courtesy of Circo Voador).

and nightclubs. These followed the successful example in the early 1980s of the alternative performing-art space, the *Circo Voador*, and the ongoing adaptive recycling/expansion of the old factory *Fundação Progresso* into a multimedia entertainment center (FIG. 12).¹⁰ The state government has also restored the Cecilia Meireles concert hall and added a new room



for *camera* music. The academic and performing activities at the old National Music School have similarly reinforced public usage of the area.

The second stage in revitalizing the Lapa district called for the restructuring of public space to support these uses and enhance surrounding architecture — primarily the old aqueduct — with major street beautification, landscaping, and a new open-air amphitheater that could take advantage of the aqueduct as a background. Redesign also imposed significant restrictions on vehicular circulation and surface parking, widening all pedestrian areas, despite city administrative problems that ultimately prevented the construction of an underground garage (FIG. 13).

Housing is perhaps the major unresolved issue. Staff members were unsuccessful in changing old zoning regulations prohibiting new housing downtown — particularly in the CBD. Conservative sectors of the city administration still hold strongly to modernist biases against integrating housing in the CBD. Some planners have also defended this limitation on grounds that it helps prevent residential gentrification of the old quarters. On the other hand, the project staff believes new residents in the area would help consolidate a more lively downtown cultural and social environment. They believe residential gentrification is unlikely to occur in downtown Rio, unlike in the inner cities of the U.S. and Europe, because of local market and social factors."



SOME PROBLEMATIC ISSUES

The *Corredor Cultural* effort is now more than twelve years old, and we can say that it has reached many of its objectives. Obviously, implementation has not been without problems, and the process of redevelopment remains troublesome. Political and administrative negotiations are long and painstaking, and often the project staff has to agree to compromise solutions.

FIGURE 13. Recent renovation of the traditional bohemian districts of Lapa complemented several cultural attractions housed in surrounding historic buildings. Redevelopment included a new street pattern, beautification, and a coherent design integrating a new park and open-air amphitheater by the old aqueduct (photo by Z. Linhares).

It is not within the scope of this paper to provide a thorough evaluation of the *Corredor Cultural*. But we would like to close by looking briefly at some of the most problematic issues so far.

Difficulties Convincing Owners

Because of the relative novelty of the project and the very specific nature of the regulations, negotiations with owners and their architects have often been time consuming. Particularly in the beginning of the project it was hard to convince owners that investment in the restoration of their buildings according to the guidelines would eventually pay off in terms of tax deductions, increases in property value, and increased business revenue. This problem has significantly diminished now that the project is well underway.

Finding Adequate Design Solutions for New Buildings

This was a difficult issue particularly in cases where buildings had lost most of their original architectural character. The project recommended that such buildings not mock an artificial "historic" solution, but that they acknowledge the contemporary nature of the present intervention through the use of modern materials, architectural elements, etc.

The project did specify that elements which had been imposed over the original architecture had to be removed, as in the case of concrete overhangs for which canvas awnings could be substituted. Such a solution was appropriate because it did not disrupt fundamental facade elements, while still providing protection for shop windows and pedestrians.

Replacing Original Architectural Elements

A typical case here might concern an original door frame at ground level that had been removed to allow for wider shop windows and entrances. Early recommendations by project staff members that such elements be reconstructed faced much resistance from store owners, as this was already a well-consolidated commercial and cultural practice. Design guidelines now permit shops to maintain wide window bays on the ground floor if they do not threaten the integrity of the facade as a whole. Only in very special cases does the project now recommend reconstruction of these elements, such as when the ground-floor commercial activity does not rely on wide openings (as with bars and food stores), or when only small parts of the original facade have been removed.

New Construction on Vacant Plots in Preservation Areas

Careful analysis of building plans during the permit application process is the method by which project staff have tried to

improve upon those designs that do not adequately harmonize with the surrounding architectural language. Adequate design is generally a matter of recognizing existing rhythms of facade elements, window and door proportions, and solid/void relationships. Few recommendations as far as building materials have been made, but "pastiche" has been discouraged on the grounds that new construction should respond to contemporary design requirements.

At times, entire buildings have been renovated inside an existing shell, so that internal volumes are subdivided into new floors. But this solution has been accepted only as long as new floor slabs permit access to the original windows, thus preventing existing facades being transformed into mere stage sets with no architectonic validity.

Exterior Painting

This issue has been discussed at length, and existing guidelines are largely discretionary. It was suggested at first that only original colors should be used in renovations, but later studies concluded that these were difficult to pin down. Since colors have varied over time according to architectural and social issues, in certain areas bright colors have been adopted, while in others plain and uniform colors have prevailed. Technical and cultural patterns had to be respected by widening owners' choices.

Despite these uncertainties, mandatory guidelines have been established concerning the relationship between colors and tones in facades (walls have to be darker than ornaments, and railings must be darker than window and door frames). The overall principle is that painting must help in the perception of facade elements and architectural quality. A special booklet was published to help clarify this issue.

Design and Placement of Signage and Advertisement

This is an important and difficult issue for architectural preservation. When shops compete for costumers, they usually make excessive use of street-front advertisements. Over the years many facades came to be completely hidden by oversized aluminum and neon light panels and the like. As existing signage obviously had a significant cost, store owners were naturally unwilling to follow restrictive new design controls. However, guidelines for advertisement still had to be very strict regarding positioning, dimensions, color, lighting and facade visibility. These issues were of great importance to overall preservation objectives.

FINAL REMARKS AND EVALUATION

In spite of the above design difficulties, and others related to the political/economic context, the revitalization and restoration of historic architectural and cultural traditions is well underway in downtown Rio. This is a lengthy but rewarding process that requires much political mediation and that involves significant public and private commitment. But the results have been highly satisfactory.

On the one hand, development control has been harnessed to a much-studied and specially designed set of procedures, guidelines and regulations — all major inducements to the general improvement of the built environment. Technical staff have usually become closely involved with property owners in each project implementation, devising the best design solutions and cooperating with owners and their representatives in solving problems that arise during construction. This participatory process has greatly contributed to the refinement of both technical and methodological procedures. Since implementation of the *Corredor Cultural* objectives is also an educational process, the project has fostered a new understanding of the cultural importance of the built environment on the part of property owners and the community at large. It has also encouraged the public to have a more personal and affective relationship with the downtown buildings and their architectural qualities, thus reinforcing preservation ideals as a whole. Support from community groups, small-businesses associations, and the press has been fundamental in fostering acceptance of the project's objectives and helping ensure its success. Political support has been obtained at both city-administration and city-council levels.

The main aim of the project has been to reinforce both the pluralistic cultural traditions and the architectural identity of downtown through a continuous redevelopment process in which both preservation and revitalization play major roles. Thus, tradition, as a subjective concept, is seen as evolving with society as a collective process, from production to consumption and interpretation.¹²

As an isolated initiative, the *Corredor Cultural* cannot take full credit for the movement of life back to Rio's city center, but it certainly has been an important catalyst to this process. Since its inception there has been a rebirth of the symbolic and cultural role of downtown. Many public areas have been redesigned, several buildings have been restored, and new construction has occurred with both private and public funds. Besides direct city investment in public works, public and quasi-public initiatives have also led to half a dozen old buildings being successfully adapted to new uses as cultural

centers — for example, the early-twentieth-century headquarters of Banco do Brasil, and the seventeenth-century neo-classical customs house (now the *Casa França-Brasil*) (FIG. 14). The post office has also restored an old deposit and turned it into a philatelic center, and the city recently acquired and started work on renovating the traditional Carlos Gomes theater, abandoned for years.

In terms of the private sector, new investments in the Lapa district have included a popular new ballroom, a nightclub, art galleries, shops, fitness centers, restaurants and bars. Many of these establishments stay open during "happy-hour" and the early evening. Together with the public initiatives, they have helped attract more users to the downtown, called attention to its cultural heritage, and injected new vitality. Traditional commercial activities have also consolidated themselves, and several shops are coming back to the most important commercial streets (FIG. 15).



FIGURE 14. (TOP) Recently renovated, the old customs house (built in the 1820s) is now the Casa França-Brasil cultural center for exhibits, educational courses, and theatrical presentations (photo by V. del Rio).

FIGURE 15. (BOTTOM) Commercial revitalization, protection, and consolidation of small and traditional businesses like this food store has been a major factor in generating public support for the Corredor Cultural (photo by Z. Linhares).

The success of the project has encouraged the city to study application of a similar approach to other areas, and the originality of this methodology in the Brazilian context has been a source of inspiration to other cities. The case of the *Corredor Cultural* leads to two major conclusions: first, that architectural preservation and the maintenance of urban cultural traditions are not incompatible with the other pressing development issues of a large Third World metropolis like Rio de Janeiro; second, that these traditions involve complementary types of public-realm, participatory, and piecemeal development, which may go together to create a more pluralistic environment.

REFERENCE NOTES

This is a revised and enlarged version of a paper presented at the International Symposium on Design Review, University of Cincinnati, October 1992.

1. Pioneer work on urban preservation, such as Kevin Lynch's *What Time is this Place?* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1972), laid the path toward addressing the dichotomy between tradition and modernity in cities as a major theoretical concern. Such a body of literature is now prolific, and IASTE's international conferences have helped expand it.
2. See K. Frampton, "Modern Architecture and the Critical Present," *Architectural Design* 52 (July/August, 1982), and *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 3rd. ed., 1992).
3. This question is pursued in V. del Rio and A. Farias, "Winds of Change in Stone and Concrete: A Critical Evaluation of Contemporary Brazilian Architecture," in N. Nardi, ed., *Architecture: Bridging the New World* (forthcoming, 1993).
4. See our own point of view in del Rio and Farias, "Winds of Change." See also A. Colquhoun, "Regionalism and Technology," in *Modernism and the Classical Language: Architectural Essays 1980-87* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1989). The writings of the Cuban architectural theorist Roberto Segre are also important in this area.
5. P. Ward, "The Latin American Inner City: Differences of Degree or of Kind?" in *Environment and Planning A*, special issue, "Dialogue on the Americas" (1993).
6. These are important concepts that characterize much of the work in the *Corredor*. For a further exploration of the issue of complementary patterns of inner-city redevelopment, see Ward, "The Latin American Inner City"; and V. del Rio, "Restructuring of Inner-City Areas in Rio de Janeiro: The Cultural Corridor Project and Possibilities of the Port Area," paper presented to the Workshop on Urban Restructuring in Brazil, UIAS/LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin, November 1992.
7. See, for instance, the majority of cases reported at the International Symposium on Design Review, University of Cincinnati, October 1992.
8. Implementation is carried out by the Escritório Técnico do Corredor Cultural (Technical Office of the Cultural Corridor) of the Instituto Municipal de Arte e Cultura — RIOARTE (Municipal Institute for the Arts and Culture).
9. Prefeitura da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, *Como Recuperar, Construir ou Preservar o seu Imóvel no Corredor Cultural (How to Upgrade, Build or Preserve your Building in the Cultural Corridor)* (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto de Planejamento Municipal/Instituto Municipal de Arte e Cultura, 1985).
10. The *Circo Voador* (literally, the "flying circus") was originally a temporary initiative run by a small group of artists and art promoters. It consisted of a circus-like structure built on derelict public land and used for musical and theatrical performances, and for community services such as day care. After receiving permission to remain on the site, the group led a community movement to save the remnants of a nineteenth-century iron-casting industry across the street, and obtained a lease to it from the state government. The group has since been successful in recycling and expanding this old building into a multimedia entertainment center. One of their strategies has been to attract investments from private corporations through an innovative system of "time-sharing" in the use of the new facilities such as exhibition spaces and auditoriums.
11. Four major aspects could be identified here: locational (downtown is relatively close to the better-off residential neighborhoods); social (where you live is a key factor in determining status and maintaining social relationships); cultural (living downtown is not perceived as *chique*); and psychological (downtown is perceived as dangerous place to live). See Ward, "The Latin American Inner City"; and del Rio, "Restructuring of Inner-City Areas."
12. See J. Abu-Lughod, "Disappearing Dichotomies," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* Vol.3 No.2 (Spring 1992).