CHALLENGES AND TRENDS

THE TRAJECTORY OF URBAN PRESERVATION IN FLORIANÓPOLIS / SANTA CATARINA ISLAND / BRAZIL

Betina Adams

Abstract

Florianópolis is a city with a rich and diverse history. However, this island city - located off the coast of southern Brazil - currently is undergoing a far-reaching rate of growth that threatens to overwhelm nearly every aspect of the city’s historic, cultural, environmental and natural heritage. This growth, due to the increasing number of permanent residents and tourists, represents challenges and opportunities for the Institute for Urban Planning in Florianópolis (IPUF), the organization which was founded in 1977 and linked to the municipality, and whose two-pronged mandate is to oversee not only the urban planning and development of the city, but also its historic preservation.

Now, that the city has achieved the protection of some areas of historical and cultural significance, it is fundamental to begin incorporating a variety of new, but vitally important variables into its efforts to preserve the city’s dynamic past while overseeing its future growth. The important aspects which may be included are as follow: its historic heritage, the waterfront/ocean, the particular ecosystems and residents’ diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The challenge is to transform these potentials that till now have been the “virtual mainstay of the city” into instruments of lifestyle quality and balanced development. These elements are options that until now have not been seen as potentials, and therefore aren’t treated as fundamental values of the city. They have to be brought into evidence, so that the invaluable resources of Florianópolis can remain preserved and protected for an indefinite future.

Key Words: urban conservation, urban planning, integrated preservation, cultural heritage, architecture - preservation, Florianópolis

1. Introduction

Our cities are experiencing great changes. This situation, which has become a constant in urban life, can be seen either as an enormous stress or as a challenge to guarantee the quality of life. Certainly, it affects residents, has become politicized, and profoundly challenges specialists in many fields of research.

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7 Architect of IPUF – Instituto de Planejamento Urbano de Florianópolis and Counselor in the Directory of ICOMOS/ BR - International Council of Monuments and Sites / Brazil.
Located in the south of Brazil, Florianópolis¹, the capital of the state of Santa Catarina, has a growth rate that is high even by Brazilian standards. This constant growth is due to an attraction that comes from outside. People wish to live in Florianópolis. After having taken this decision, they continue to stay, despite the great difficulties that sometimes occur in the process of guaranteeing the economical necessities for their sustenance.

It is impossible to cover the total dimension of this context which overlaps many issues, especially those involving economical and cultural reasons. But, in refraining from the possible reasons for migrations observed as a worldwide phenomenon, there are interesting points to reflect upon when considering the particular attraction of Florianópolis. It is important to begin thinking about how to maintain this trend, without damaging the quality of life that was the primary point of its attraction.

2. Florianópolis: its physical and historical context

Florianópolis is located on the island of Santa Catarina, and is separated from the mainland by a narrow channel, forming the so-called north and south bay. Presently, three bridges bring all the traffic that accesses the island directly to the heart of the city. In the past, the island was accessed by water. Historically, the Santa Catarina Island had a strategic significance for navigation, and the port was active till the 1960s. Due to a decline in shipping, the port became obsolete and gradually its function of being a link in a chain of ports was transferred to a city located nearby.

¹ Florianópolis has approximately 340,000 inhabitants (IBGE), with a grow rate of almost 3.7% a year (IBGE - 1991/2000). The Island of Santa Catarina is 426.6 km² in size and is located approximately 500 meters away from the mainland. (IPUF).
There is evidence that the island has been inhabited for almost 6,000 years. Since the Sixteenth Century, just a short time after the insertion of the American continent in the
world context, there have been travelers’ accounts\textsuperscript{2} of the island. In these early descriptions, the natural beauty was one of the points that received great emphasis. There are also comments of the lack of economical richness and the consequential lack of development of the city and its surroundings. The port activity gave an impulse to the cities’ development until the beginning of the Twentieth Century. Then its growth declined and in the 1970s the port was reclaimed or filled. Additionally, the building of the Hercílio Luz iron suspension bridge in the 1920s represents the other relevant change that occurred in the process of the history of the city in the last century.

2 - A view of the Port of Florianópolis - 1908

In former days, the main function of the Island of Santa Catarina, and its small village which was at that time called Nossa Senhora do Desterro, was the defense of the Portuguese territory in the south of the continent. The Treaty of Tordesilhas, signed in 1494, divided “the known and unknown world” at the time between Spain and Portugal. The imaginary border of that Treaty passed just below the island.\textsuperscript{3} For this reason, in the XVIII century there was built a complex of fortresses that was meant to defend the island, its city and the two bays.

3. The preservation process: historical, architectural and cultural structures inserted in urban planning

The preservation process in Florianópolis was made possible because of the forward-thinking municipal preservation law (1974). This legislation represents one of the first initiatives of protection at a local level in Brazil (Adams, 2000, p. 47). This law made it possible to protect the cultural and natural heritage through individual acts undertaken by the mayor. The law was complemented in the 1980s by a second urban preservation law, whose components allowed for the preserved structures and monuments to be seen not in isolation, but as a whole part of the overall urban context, in accordance with the international principles of conservation. The efforts towards an interaction

\textsuperscript{2} Berger made the compilation of some of these texts.

\textsuperscript{3} The borderline of the Treaty of Tordesilhas passed through the city of Laguna.
among the different structures – on social, political and economical levels – advanced the process of guaranteeing the maintenance of the preserved heritage.

However, it is possible to identify gaps that have occurred in the process which make it difficult to get the best results and a greater fluidity in the dynamics of urban conservation. Preservation is much more than protecting constructed structures at a legal level. Its importance has to be measured by public awareness. If preservation is not perceived as in the mutual interest of the people, the process will transform itself into a “nightmare” of bureaucracy, with the resultant losses of protected heritage.

The problem is that we live in a period of transition. At the worldwide level, awareness of the importance of preservation is gradually changing. But, in Brazil, the Market reality has yet to follow this trend. Therefore, losses of cultural heritage can be due to the inconformity of owners, whose feelings are that preservation equates to punishment and not an increase in the value of their properties. This can result either in disputes at a legal level, or in practical actions that bypass the established norms. As an awareness of the need for preservation gains more and more importance, there are owners who in public show themselves to be concerned with preservation, but in fact cause damage to protected substances. Another serious factor is that architects, engineers and construction workers often do not know how to utilize conservation work, and as the result, the historic heritage is at an even worse level than before the so-called “restoration”.

The municipal government has until now been the leading force of the preservation process. Other agents have been only occasionally engaged. There is presently an urgent need to make a turning point. Therefore, the main question is as follows: how to manage preservation by means of which the city continues to be attractive while its cultural heritage is maintained and even greater economic prosperity is attained? On one hand, the answers have to be searched for in the profound significance of this heritage and its consequent values; while on the other hand, investigations must be made into practical strategies to achieve the goals we are all looking for.

4. Potential Variables - hidden clues that support the dynamics of the place

Over different periods, the Island of Santa Catarina has attracted a variety of people. Initially prehistoric inhabitants occupied the island, and later on it was a very important Portuguese landmark near the Spanish border, whose port was a support for navigation until the Twentieth Century.

What were the possible reasons for that preference? Identifying the reasons for the continuous attraction for the island during different periods of time could provide a fundamental approach toward a better understanding of its preservation.
In the case of the Island of Santa Catarina, geographical and physical reasons certainly were fundamental, such as its strategic location, very good harbor conditions, and a diverse and extremely beautiful landscape. This leads to a first important value that can be used: the particular ecosystem. Apart from its special condition of being an island, Florianópolis hosts a great number of different ecosystems ranging from dunes, swamps, flatlands, hills, bays, lagoons, and sandy as well as rocky shores. Due to the continuous rate of growth that is now taking place on the island, nearly all of these ecosystems are threatened. Although protected by law, immediate attention must be paid to how best these natural treasures can be preserved in a sustainable way into the future.

Being an island, the waterfront acquires a special significance. As observed previously, this is strongly linked to its history and the primary reason of its existence in the world of the XVII-XIX centuries. The sea represents perhaps the most captivating element of the city’s repertoire. However, there are few significant means to evaluate this special characteristic. It could be possible to increase the range and explore it in several ways, such as means of transportation, leisure, and economic resources. Complementary to the public transport system, navigation could be an efficient instrument: sail and motorboats, ranging from local to international origins are a reality in the context of the island. Besides helping transport issues, they could be more and more used for leisure and tourist objectives. Last but not least, it is very important to remember that
waterfronts, due to their singularity and beauty, are unique elements of relaxation for both the young and old.

Another important characteristic is its historical settlement process and the close relation which the island has with the Azorean Islands from which came the first significant mass of settlers in the Eighteenth Century. Although in constant contact where the outside world due to its port activities, the Island of Santa Catarina was partially isolated, as far as its interior is concerned. This factor maintained till the 1970s much of the traditional architecture with its strong Portuguese influence. At the same time, the relative isolation of the island allowed for the maintenance of several cultural traditions, such as dances (boi-de-mamão, pau-de-fita), handicrafts (lace and boat making) and religious events (festa do Divino Espírito Santo) (Adams & Araujo, 2001, p.696).

It is important to emphasize that, although there was a strong migration coming from the Azorean Islands, the architecture of the Island of Santa Catarina is of Portuguese influence. On the other hand, the traditions of an intangible dimension have a significant Azorean “touch”.
Contemporary residents have diverse ethnic backgrounds. Because of its growth, the population of Florianópolis is becoming more diverse day by day. Each newcomer brings his or her own history, which often includes skills, knowledge and talents that could be shared together. That very special potential, present in an ever-growing form since the 1970s, reinforces the historical trend of its settlement process. Combined with the natural resources and the traditional cultural heritage, this resource should be seen as a unique means of the continuous construction of the island’s identity.

The challenge is to transform these potentials that till now have been the “virtual sources of the city” into instruments of quality of life and balanced development. These elements are sources that till now have been ignored as potentials, and therefore have not been treated as fundamental values of the city. They have to be brought into evidence so that the invaluable resources of Florianópolis can remain preserved and protected on into the indefinite future. As the majority of the population is unaware of these essential elements, they have to be brought to the forefront to ensure their sustenance.

5. Regarding future: transforming potentials into reality

Having identified these possibly “hidden”, but “pressing” values, there has to be defined a strategy regarding the attainment of a turning point in the preservation process.

The way dealing with cities has adapted itself over time and has resulted in big changes. The beginning of the XX century saw the “cleaned up city” being substituted by the modernist view – with clearly defined functions. The 1970s brought the environmental approach and in the 1990s there emerged a great concern for democratic participation. Through Strategic Planning, punctual interventions were made in some previously selected points of the city. These experiences were important contributions, but none of them represent a final solution in regard to the subject: the urban process needs to be continuously constructed.

Over the past years, two topics have been largely discussed: “values” and “sustainable urban development”. In this respect, “values do change regardless of the inertia they may possess”, but the guarantee of transmission of the information through generations has to be “fixed” in physical material support. And, in regard to “projects of sustainable urban development - economical and political sustainability is also necessary” (Zanchetti & Lacerda, 2002 p. 10-11). So, the constructed substance has to be maintained, and must be economically and politically supported.

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5 Reflections introducing the results of the 2nd. International Seminar, “Conservation and urban sustainable development: a theoretical framework”, which occurred between 5 and 8 October 1998 in Recife, Brazil.
The updated contribution for the urban conservation process concerning the management of cities could be linked to meanings: the rescue of traditional meanings which have been "reconstructed" from their original functions, and inserted in today's uses. For this reason, the conditions which have maintained a continuous flow of immigrants are seen as clues of the hidden values of the place. These values were the reason for the existence of the site. The evaluation of the physical structures that have remained throughout the historical process, and a determination of physical evidence of that process are keys to distinguishing the identity of the city.

Some of the potentials of Santa Catarina Island – ecosystem, waterfront, its historical migration process and the diversity of its citizenry – are gradually being given their due attention, and some of this work is already in process. However, it has to gain greater public awareness and be objectively directed to maintain sustainable development.

Bringing these topics together - "significance and meaning" and "strategies for an integrated urban conservation process", encompassing economic and political support - there are some basic political actions that could guarantee the continuity of a preservation policy:

- The primary and fundamental action has to deal with "meaning and significance": Till now, the potential variables described in item 4 have been hypotheses upheld by the author. Their accuracy has to be checked, in a democratic level, and the city has to decide to adopt them. The continuity of a proposal based on meaning and memory has to be done together by those whom it concerns. It has to be constructed by all of the actors of the process.

- Giving access to all types of information: Information has to be at hand. Libraries have to be equipped, flyers distributed, technical reports published, educators have to be assisted (ranging from primary schools, technical establishments, and universities), and documentation visualized in the media, so that the history of the place, and the expression of different values, ideas and suggestions, including the ways of doing things are made available for the sake of greater public awareness.

- Stimulating exchanges at all levels: In the context of the great immigration that is occurring in the Island of Santa Catarina, it is fundamental to promote contact between the people who live there and the newcomers. That integration should not be viewed only in terms of urban conservation. It has to include the city life in general. It should permit mutual exchanges in arts, sports, politics, and so forth.

At the technical level, there has to be integration between administrative levels and the work areas. The specialists working at different administrative levels ranging from city, state and federal units have to interact horizontally in-between the administrations and vertically at the inter-levels. Similar attention must be given to other topics, such as specialists in urban conservation, planning, environmental affairs, electricity, history, administration, etc. Such integration could be achieved by the creation of counsels with
the tasks of dealing with specific objectives. These councils have to be given responsibilities and their advice has to be heard at the level of policy-makers.

In Florianópolis since the 1970s the accomplishments of the council on preservation matters (COTESPHAN) has been fundamental in the preservation process in the city. In the beginning, it was responsible for the execution of the preservation policy because there were no technicians in the municipality. Later on, when the administrative structure was functioning, due to the diversity of its composition, which was formed by different institutions, COTESPHAN began an institutional interaction that resulted in the basis of the conceptual framework that was necessary for the development of the first actions of urban conservation in the city. These concepts and their results also had influence at the state level and with other municipalities (Adams, 2002 p. 48-49 and 62-63).

- Giving a contemporary use to the protected historical structures: The traditional destination of old structures was their use as museums. These are important facilities, not only to maintain objects and ideas, but also to induce a leading process in bridging the past to the future.

8 - The Cruz and Sousa Palace - headquarters of the Historical Museum of Santa Catarina

Given that the city is a living structure, other uses have to be identified which will allow for the recycling of these buildings and their appreciation in a contemporary way. The use of these structures as leisure and tourist facilities (such as hotels, restaurants, cinemas, cultural stores, etc.) certainly gives dynamism to the economic life of the city. But different and interesting solutions also could be discovered, such as the example of an old hostel, formerly used for receiving immigrants, which was transformed into the local Tourism Office. Therefore, the building’s primary function of “receiving settlers”

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6 The COTESPHAN – Comissão Técnica do Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico, Artístico e Natural do Município was created in 1974.
has been maintained in a contemporary version of “welcoming visitors” (Old Immigrants Hostel).  

- Adapting historic structures to the nowadays necessities: There is the urgent need for solutions, especially regarding the matter of accessibility. The heritage has to be inserted in contemporary necessities, including public transport, parking possibilities and virtual ways of communication. A very important issue, which is a great challenge and demands due attention, is the necessity to adapt historic structures for access by physically disabled persons.

- Being aware of the environmental insertion: In a world of changes, the environment is a fundamental issue. In the case of Florianópolis it can be used with great economic advantages.

But, the historical context has to be observed. The disruption of the city borders due to shoreline reclamation in the 1970s has caused damage to the comprehension of its historical insertion. For example, the old Santa Barbara Fort was strategically located beside the city, over a small peninsula almost inside the bay to guarantee the old city’s defense in regard of possible dangers coming from the sea. At that time, the fort was

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7 The old “Hospedaria dos Imigrantes”, where today is the Secretaria Municipal de Turismo, was constructed in the XIX century by the public administration, in order to be a receiving point for immigrants, particularly Germans and Italians, on their way to their definitive settling in the interior of the State of Santa Catarina.
almost totally surrounded by water, whereas now it has streets, cars, buses and administrative buildings as its immediate neighbors.

- Forming a team of specialists capable of dealing with the conservation process. That means not only those who are working for the public administration, but all specialties dealing with urban conservation and planning, also at the private level, such as: architects, engineers, designers, archeologists, historians, sociologists, etc. Thus, all sorts of academic and educational institutions have to be inserted in a serious undertaking in regard to the support of the conservation process.

- Contributing through physical interventions with the purpose of development or the increase of specially predefined areas: That includes the rehabilitation processes of degraded areas, or directed interventions to stimulate changes of use to revitalize areas.

- Monitoring the process: Perhaps at a technical level this is the most important issue. There has to be feedback in order to increase the gains and correct the problems. This process has to be done in conjunction with the object of the intervention and the actors at all levels of the process. Specially designated functions inside the administration have to be created to guarantee the continuity of the process.

- Returning the process itself to the population: It is necessary to make constant reflections, at the working level - inside the working team, and at the public level - through seminars. This is fundamental not only for establishing credibility, but for permitting the “philosophical” feedback of the process: it guarantees the maintenance of the cycle of change.

As a result of these actions, probably the necessity of inspection and control will decrease. Till now, a lot of the energy of the public administration has been invested in this topic, and regrettfully, the results have not been reflected in the efforts made. Authority sometimes leads people to act like children who need to be controlled or “called to attention”. As an example of this topic, during the process of the Visual Pollution Clean Up Program (“Programa de Despoluição Visual”), which has been an ongoing project since initiated in 1999 in the Historic Center, business owners were aware of the necessity of the adaptation of their signs and even agreed with this new policy. But they waited till the last moment to make the changes. That meant specifically that public inspectors had to visit at least twice each of the almost 1,000 establishments.

Laws cannot be only written words used as documentation to be showed off, as proof that things are being done. They have to be implemented in a very serious way. They are basic topics upon which has to be built a consensus. In a mature society, there should be no need for inspections. Having the consensus of the people would improve the situation because they would be sure that it is the best way and their mutual interest, and they will be assured that the “others” are involved as partners in the process.
Therefore, efforts must be made to build a mature society through a democratic process.

**Final remarks**

The management of cities is a challenge which demands attention in identifying what is to be put on the agenda, all of which involves fine tuning, sensibility and creativity. There are innumerable elements that can be used in the development of cities, among which the focus on urban conservation is a dynamic possibility. Life means constant changes, and is reflected directly in one’s surroundings.

In regard to urban conservation, the conscious use of elements of the past in order to “recycle” their former meaning to today’s context could be an interesting approach toward the renewal of traditional concepts.

The proposal is to create a new cycle of how to evaluate preservation: On one hand, relate natural resources to the history of the place, while on the other, use the memory of the inhabitants in order to achieve harmonic goals for the future. These are strong elements that could be the driving forces of the contemporary preservation process.

Until now, these have been primarily ideas based on contributions made at a worldwide level, but which are now a part of our day-to-day life. The preservation process involves a continuous change of values which adapts itself to each period. These changes have to be transformed into reality. This is a moment of change, so let’s make the most of it!

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