URBAN RENEWAL AND MOBILITY: THE BATATA SQUARE PROJECT

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Urban Renewal and Mobility: The Batata Square Project

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0. Introduction

1. The Batata Square

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Batata Square was a nucleus of “caipiras” and natives, where convoys of “bandeirantes” and “tropeiros” came and went, headed for the unexplored hinterland of the country.

The urbanization of the Pinheiros neighborhood (where the Batata square is located) began in the second half of the 19th century, still subjected to the floods of the nearby Pinheiros River. The process of consolidation of the neighborhood and the square as a commercial outpost (where the Municipal Market will be built in the future) began in 1909, with the creation of a streetcar line connecting it to downtown São Paulo.

From the 1960s a series of interventions on the street network, implemented by the Municipal administration, started changing the characteristic of the area, with residential growth and attraction of high income population, along with important commercial development.

In 1995 the Urban Operation (UO) Faria Lima was created by the City Administration, along and in the area of direct influence of the Faria Lima Avenue, which became one of the main and most active commercial and service hubs of the city.

At that moment, the Batata Square and its surroundings constituted a very degraded area, of small buildings, occupied by low income services and commerce, and cheap boarding houses. The square was used as a municipal and metropolitan bus terminal.

Only in 2001, still within the context of the Urban Operation, the Batata Square was merged to the Interventions Plan, with the realization of the National Public Competition for the Batata Square Urban Renewal Project.

The architect Tito Livio Frascino and his associates won the national projects competition promoted...
by the City Administration with the proposal to reorganize and extend the public spaces of the square and surrounding area, creating a large square which seeks to regain its valuable status in the city.

In 2002, the winning team was hired by the City Administration in order to develop the basic design of the development. In 2003, the contractor responsible for the execution of the construction works was hired, but the construction would only start in 2008.

2. Urban Operations in São Paulo

Urban Operations aim to promote improvements in pre-selected areas of the city, through partnerships between the Public Administration and private partners. A specific law establishes goals to be achieved in each Urban Operation area, and the mechanisms of incentive and benefit.

The perimeter of each Urban Operation area is favored by laws that assume flexibility to the defined limits established by the Zoning Law through payment of a financial counterpart. This amount is paid to the City Administration, and can only be used in urban improvement in that area.

An Urban Operation law can include non-onerous concessions, regarded as an additional encouragement to the creation of private investments in the area.

Today, there are four urban operations implemented in the city of Sao Paulo, at different stages of development:

- Urban Operation Agua Branca;
- Urban Operation Centro;
- Urban Operation Faria Lima, and
- Urban Operation Agua Espraiada.

Another three initiatives were launched, currently in design stages, in the Diagonal South sector of the Urban Master Plan:

- Urban Operation Lapa - Bras;
- Urban Operation Mooca - Vila Carioca; and

The instrument of the Urban Operation was defined by Brazilian federal law of the “Statute of the City”, as a tool of urban policy that allows the public administration, through partnership with private entrepreneurs, to generate structural transformations in selected territorial sectors, with private resources. In Sao Paulo, urban operations were suggested as a tool for urban planning in the development of the Urban Master Plan of 1985, beginning then a process that included different interpretations and forms of applications.

Some analysis and criticisms towards the Urban Operations were presented, as the following ones:

Urban Operation is an instrument of urban political intervention that marks the entry of neo-liberalism in the spatial organization of urban agglomerations. Its origins refer to the ZAC-s (Zones d'Aménagement Concerté) in France and the São Paulo experiences of "interconnected operations" outlined at the end of the 1980s, when it became widely used in area with the potential of land use intensification. The figure of the Urban Operation was legally consolidated in the "Statute of the City", enacted in 2001 (Section X).¹

The rationale of the Urban Operation is based in the hypothesis that, in strategic locations, public administrations stir up the potential of densification of the subject area through investments in additional infrastructure (street work, sanitation, removal of slums). This will allow private real estate
development to be relieved of part of the investment in the form of sale - onerous grant - of the right to build beyond the levels of density (utilization coefficient) defined by the Zoning Law of the direct area of influence of the "Operation". Private partners participate directly in the funding of the investment in urban infrastructure.²

A criticism regarding Urban Operations is that the investments of the public administration are larger than the compensated amounts. And worse, that they reduce control of land use by the public administration regarding the urban structure as a whole, and at last, of the collective interest, according to specific interests manifested by private pressure groups.³

The Urban Operation Faria Lima, where the Batata Square Renewal Project is inserted, was already well consolidated at the time of the urban intervention proposal. This intervention was an answer to some relevant aspects: the intervention area itself acted as a discontinuity within the Urban Operation because it was an area degraded by unrestricted uses and poor maintaining of public spaces; chaotic street network and public transportation focused in inadequate places; short attractiveness to private investments in the area; and absence of qualified public equipments.

The project aims to make up with the need to create new urban centralities in sectors with the necessary potentiality, as is the case of the center of the Pinheiros neighborhood, in megalopolis as São Paulo.

3. The Initial Project

The group of actions addressed to the Batata Square is unprecedented, relevant and is inserted in the chapter of the greater questions of urbanism in Sao Paulo. Neighborhood centers, when valued and induced, are natural elements of polarization, diffusion, equilibrium and sustainability, be it in terms of tradition and history as the case addressed, or in recent developments.

Therefore, the main goal of this intervention will be the improvement, expansion and qualitative appreciation of public spaces.

In this perspective, besides the proposition of necessary equipments to the materialization of this idea, the following factors were identified:

- Impact resulting from the radical alteration of the transportation system and the new relation between the metro system and buses, and as a consequence, the reorganization of spaces and the flow of vehicles and people;
- Rearrangement and "stitching" of the to the urbane Faria Lima axis to the street network;
- Real estate densification extensive and generic allowed by the Urban Operation Faria Lima;
- Reaffirmation of the commercial vocation, east and west of the avenue, which should coexist with new uses introduced by the Urban Operation; and
- Utilization of existing potentialities in general, particularly unproductive real estate and land for urban equipments, as well as the search for public space continuity.

Public transportation and urban circulation were the main motivating and structuring elements of the Urban Operation Faria Lima. The creation of the new Faria Lima Station of the Metro Line 4 - Yellow, as well as the passing through bus lines, amplified the accessibility to several service and commercial corridors in the neighborhood.

On the other hand, the transfer of the existing bus terminal in Batata Square to a site 1,0km away from the current area, allowed the creation of a node of intermodal integration in the metropolitan transportation network, involving all types of transport, public and individual: metro (line 4), commuter train (line 9), city and metropolitan bus, automobile, bicycle and on-feet trips (nearby).
Such situation has maximized mobility of residents in the area of influence of public transportation, allowing them to access any point of interest in the metropolitan area.

The proposal of the project and interventions, shown in Figure 1, comprises 3 distinct areas, that are presented, not necessarily in the chronological order of implementation, but in order of prevalence:

- Promenade (Area 1);
- Bus Terminal (Area 2); and
- Connecting street network between both areas (Area 3).

### 3.1 Promenade (Area 1)

The displacement of the axis of Faria Lima Avenue, in a smooth curve, associated to expropriation of real estate due to the work of the new Metro line, allows the creation of 24,000m² of free area.

In this area were expected:

- Multi purpose building (total area 25,000m²);
- Parking lot for 960 vehicles;
- Landscaped open promenade for diversified business (total area 5,500m²);
- Center for events and culture (total area 4,200m²);
- Auditorium for 750 people (total area 1,600m²)

Additionally, the creation of 500 meters of pedestrian walkway was proposed, on streets with intense commercial activity along to the square.

Beside the Batata Square will be the Pinheiros Square, its traditional church and nearby streets should be remodeled with the focus on preserving their identity and vocation of small commerce. Such intervention will be made mainly by creating pedestrian streets and renovating urban facilities.

Still in this area, the building formerly occupied by the Meridional Iron Factory, now empty and not in use, will be incorporated to the intervention set, housing public assistance equipments (public service entities, among others)

The existing bus terminal will be transferred to a new site (Area 2) and integrated to the Pinheiros Station of the Metro (Line 4) and to the CPTM commuter train (Line 9).

Only passing-through bus lines will remain in the area, since they are able to integrate in the Metro station.

### 3.2 Bus Terminal (Area 2)

The Batata Square housed, in 2002, an open aired bus terminal with precarious operational conditions, used as a final stop by 34 city and metropolitan bus lines, and 80 other passing-through bus lines, moving an estimated 150 thousand passengers per day.

In the process of reorganization of the public transport system in the area, bus lines were relocated to other terminals, including Butanta and Pinheiros and in the future, Vila Sonia, all along Line 4.

The reurbanization proposal was to transfer the terminal to a new site, 1.0km away from Batata Square, integrated to the Metro Line 4 and the commuter train system Line 9.
3.3 Connecting Street Network (Area 3)

As explained previously, the central points of reurbanization were: the new outline of Brigadeiro Faria Lima Avenue, which allowed the creation of a promenade on its east side; and the removal of the bus parking terminal on Batata Square through the creation of a new bus terminal in the vicinity of Capri Street and Gilberto Sabino Street.

The connecting street network between these two areas (Promenade and Pinheiro Terminal) was also studied facing two other challenges: facilitate circulation in the area for its development and mitigate the impact of existing passing traffic.

In this area, the axis of Cardeal Arcoverde Street was for a long time a congested alternative route to the troubled Rebouças Avenue, connecting Paulista Avenue and Dr. Arnaldo Avenue to Eusebio Matoso Avenue and Marginal Pinheiros.

To eliminate this problem, the opening of a new crossing to Faria Lima Avenue was proposed, in the direction of Sumidouro Street, connecting Cardeal Arcoverde Street directly to Marginal Pinheiros, reducing a lot of traffic at the crossing of Cardeal Arcoverde Street and Faria Lima Avenue.

Additionally, the original crossing of Cardeal Arcoverde Street on FariaLima Avenue is closed, removing the impact of its traffic on Batata Square, directing it to Baltazar Carrasco Street and Sumidouro Street.

To improve the internal circulation in the neighborhood and also to reduce traffic jams at the crossing of Paes Leme Street and Butanta Street, an opening is created connecting Butanta Street and Padre Carvalho Street, as well as the change of direction of Padre Carvalho Street.

A microsimulation study of traffic showed that there would be a redistribution of traffic, removing part of the vehicle flow from crossings and streets already saturated to paths less congested, as well as increasing accessibility and circulation in the intervention area. Show next, Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the new arrangement of circulation proposed.

4. Implemented Project

The resuming of the project and the beginning of the construction works, after approximately 5 years of stoppage, also entailed the introduction of important modifications and adaptations to the original project, such as:

- Promenade (Area 1) (Figure 4)
  - Elimination of the multi-use commercial building, the event and culture center and the parking lot. In their place is foreseen the construction of a new mall, to be built and operated by a private entrepreneur, since the city administration withdrew its support for the events and culture center, an integral part of the original project and landmark of the urban renewal, claiming management difficulties in equipments of this nature;
  - Changes in the street network interventions due to the difficulty in expropriation of real estate. Such modifications involved the reduction of street capacity, with little impact in the overall design.
- Bus Terminal (Area 2) (Figure 5)
  - The area destined to the bus terminal was maintained, introducing an underground level parking lot for 415 vehicles and 81 motorcycles;
  - A bicycle parking lot, with 35 spaces, was also included;
  - Accessibility conditions were improved, specially on the West access, with the addition of a "kiss and ride" lane;
  - Pedestrian routes between the bus terminal, train station and metro station designed on underground levels were kept surface level (level of the bus platforms).

- Connecting Street Network (Area 3)
  - Inversion of traffic direction on Fernao Dias Street and its direct connection to Cardeal Arcovearde Street on the remaining stretch, allowing vehicles destined to Eusebio Matoso Avenue to use this street, instead of being directed to Faria Lima Avenue.

5. Main Problems

Construction works, planned to end in 2010, will only end at the beginning of 2013. The main reasons for the delay of the whole project were:

- Lack of rapport between municipal and state agents involved, which delayed approval of projects;
- Difficulty to execute expropriations of several buildings, which delayed the beginning of the construction works, and in some cases impaired its continuity;
- Shutdown of construction work for a period of 3 months for rescue of archaeological site, according to directives of the responsible environmental agency; and
- Exhaustion of financial resources of the contract, which led to the need for a new bidding for the conclusion of construction work, generating a stoppage of 1 year (2011).

6. Conclusions

The long period of 11 years for the implementation of the project (2002-2013), from the selection of the winning proposal to the end of construction work, reflects the small Brazilian expertise on urban renewal projects of high complexity.

Additionally, other factors, not all of them of technical nature, intervened in the project, causing delays and sluggishness, such as:

- a new elected mayor of São Paulo, in January 2004, paralyzed the project. Later, after the resumption of the construction work, in 2008, important alterations were introduced;
- Difficulty in the dialog between municipal and state agents when dealing with the interface between projects, with one side (São Paulo Metro, invariably), imposing their conditions and decisions;
- Problems within the city administration itself, where lack of dialogue between administration agents involved caused delays in the approval of projects; shyness of the municipal administration regarding the planned expropriations. In some cases, these were not carried out, generating the need for adjustments on the design;
- Implementation of the proposals for circulation and street adequacy eliminated several conflict points, and in general, improved accessibility in the area; and

- The Pinheiros Station (metro and commuter train) and Faria Lima Station move daily 120 thousand an 40 thousand passenger daily, respectively. These stations, associated to the new bus terminal meet the goals of the project, which is to consolidate a new intermodal integration hub and increase mobility in the area and in all metropolitan region.

References


Figura 1 - Renewal Project
Figure 4 – The Pinheiros Intermodal Terminal

Figure 5 – The Batata Square Urban Renewal Project