

Praça dos Poveiros: A Public Space with Diversified Challenges

Praça dos Poveiros: um espaço público com desafios diferenciados

Praça dos Poveiros: un espacio público con diferenciados desafíos

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Abstract: *Praça dos Poveiros* is a challenging central square in the historic area of Oporto where the omnipresence of stone and heavy traffic on surroundings, with no public equipment, leads to its use for circulation only. The accessibility of the area, which is often unnoticed, could be improved, such as its image, its structure, and the activities on it. The main concept of this intervention proposal is to maintain the passway character and the activities already established, as promoting the most effective use of the square by people of all ages, favoring the interaction between them, making it more attractive and welcoming. It intends to keep the identity of *Praça dos Poveiros*, modernize it and give it a new atmosphere, with more soul and life.

Keywords: Urban Intervention. Urban Challenge. Urban Qualification.

Resumo: A Praça dos Poveiros é uma praça central desafiadora na área histórica da cidade do Porto, onde a onipresença da pedra e muita circulação de carros nos arredores, sem equipamentos públicos, torna-a um espaço de circulação apenas. A acessibilidade da área, frequentemente despercebida, pode ser melhorada em sua imagem, estrutura e atividades nela realizadas. O principal conceito desta proposta de intervenção é manter o caráter de passagem e as atividades já estabelecidas, bem como promover o uso mais efetivo da praça por pessoas de todas as idades, favorecendo a interação entre elas, tornando-a mais atrativa e acolhedora. Pretende-se manter a

identidade da Praça dos Poveiros, modernizando-a e dando-lhe uma nova atmosfera, com mais alma e vida.

Palavras-chave: Intervenção Urbana. Desafio Urbano. Qualificação Urbana.

Resumen: Praça dos Poveiros es una plaza central desafiante en la zona histórica de Oporto, donde la ubicuidad de la piedra y mucha circulación de coches en los alrededores, sin equipamientos públicos, la convierten únicamente en un espacio de circulación. La accesibilidad de la zona, a menudo desapercibida, se puede mejorar en su imagen, estructura y actividades realizadas en ella. El concepto principal de esta propuesta de intervención es mantener el carácter del paso y las actividades ya establecidas, así como promover el uso más eficaz de la plaza por personas de todas las edades, favoreciendo la interacción entre ellas, haciéndola más atractiva y acogedor. Su objetivo es mantener la identidad de la Praça dos Poveiros, modernizándola y dándole una nueva atmósfera, con más alma y vida.

Palabras clave: Intervención Urbana. Desafío Urbano. Calificación Urbana.

INTRODUCTION

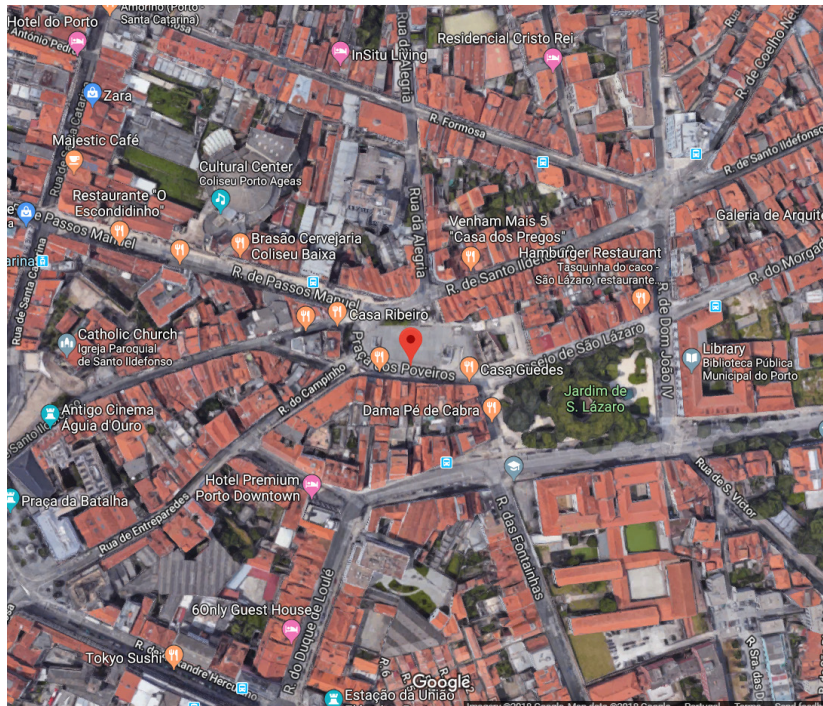
Porto is considered a medium-sized city, with all the challenges and virtues that cities of this scale bring in themselves. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a medium-sized city has 100,000 to 250,000 inhabitants, and Porto has little more than 214,000 inhabitants.

This paper intends to analyze the adequacy and adaptability of Poveiros Square nowadays, considering their use as urban public space by all, especially the elderly and children, following the European trends for public living in outdoor spaces in the near future.

The proposed work consists of the analysis, diagnosis, and evaluation of the general dimensions (physical, functional, social and cultural aspects), and human dimensions (needs, use points, meanings, management and maintenance) of the square. It was complemented by the analysis of the user's vision from interviews with the residents and merchants. After we present a proposal to improve the area.

The choice for this specific place is due to its central location in Porto (Figs. 1-2). Traditionally residential, it was considered as a degraded and delinquent zone a few times ago but recently it has been passing through a new significance, safer and more pleasant, probably due to the new shops, bars, and restaurants in the surroundings.

Figure 1. Praça dos Poveiros and surroundings, Porto.

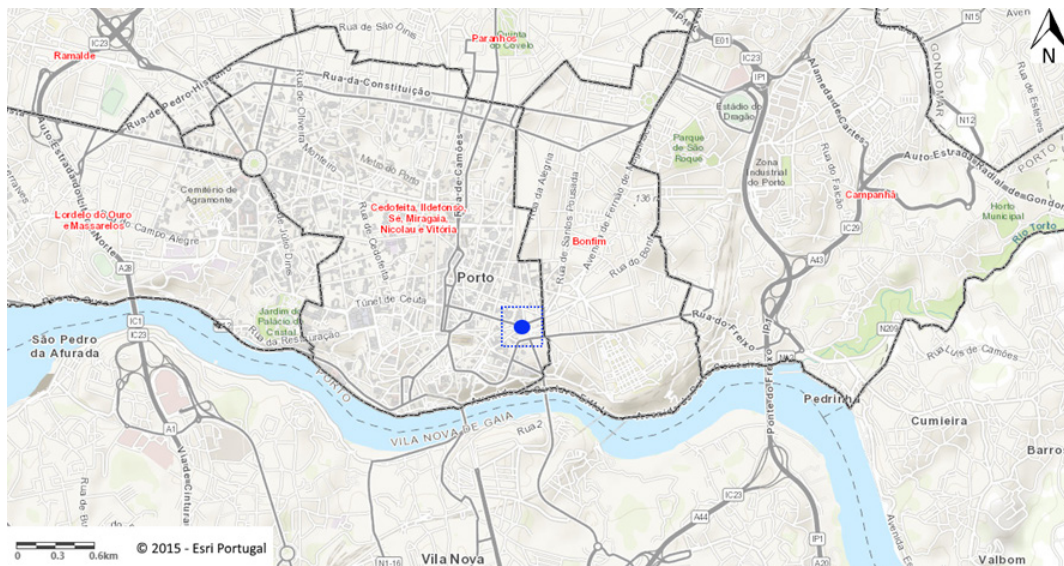


Source: <https://www.google.com/maps>, 2018.

Praça dos Poveiros is in Santo Ildefonso Parish just over 500 meters from the Ribeira do Douro River. It is at the intersection among the streets Passos Manuel, Santo Ildefonso, Alegria, and Campinho, and *Jardim São Lázaro* Garden. Its limits are given by these streets and just an old building separates the square from *Largo Ramadinha*, another public space.

For most people, at first, the square does not attract attention, so it is easily unnoticed. Nevertheless, it is one of the most recognizable squares in the heart of Porto, hence being our choice for this analysis.

Figure 2. Location of *Praça dos Poveiros* in the urban tissue of Porto.



Source: <https://www.google.com/maps>, 2018.

ANALYSIS

1. Local History

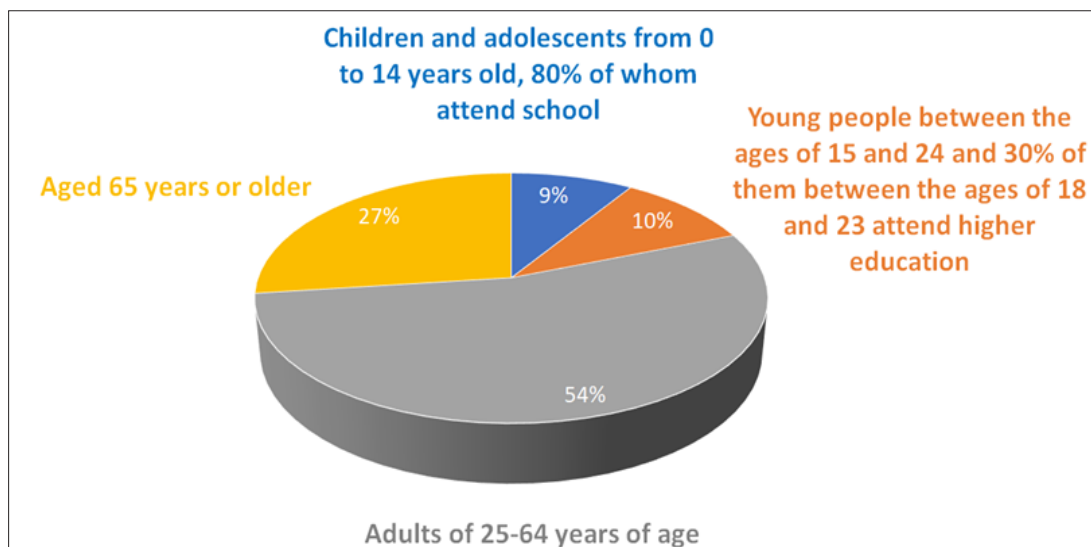
Two hundred years ago, *Praça dos Poveiros* was formerly known as Largo de Santo André, honoring the Holy Martyrs André and Estêvão and the market *Feira da Erva* and *Mercado das Hortaliças* took place there. In the twentieth century, following a series of urban changes at the surrounding area, the autarchy changed the name to the current designation as a tribute to a group of fishermen from *Póvoa de Varzim*, at that time residents in Brazil but that refused to abdicate Portuguese nationality by working there. Today, the area is occupied by restaurants, bustling bars, the nearby public garden *Jardim de São Lázaro*, and *Coliseu do Porto* Cultural Center.

2. Statistic Data about Santo Ildefonso Parish

The resident population of the parish is 9,029 inhabitants (4,104 men and 4,925 women) though the total population is slightly larger (9,888 individuals - 4,559 men and 5,329 women). In approximately 1,240 km² there are 2,713 buildings that contain 7,221 houses and 4,636 families. The population density of the region is, therefore, 137.34 inhabitants / m².

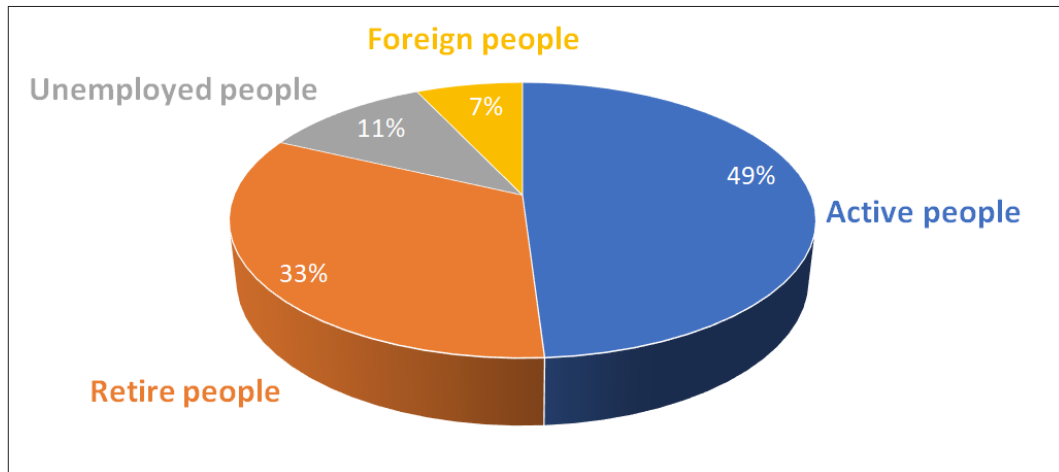
In the last 40 years, the population in Santo Ildefonso decreased at near half, with great loss of resident families. In addition, currently, it is the parish with the largest number of single-parent families (47% of the total). Among the total number of residents in Santo Ildefonso (Figs. 3-4), most of all are adults (81%), employed (49%) or retired (33%). These data demonstrate an aging local population, at the same time increasingly alone, which indicates a growing need to establish policies for their social inclusion.

Figure 3. Santo Ildefonso's population data: age



Source: the authors.

Figure 4. Santo Ildefonso's population data: occupancy.

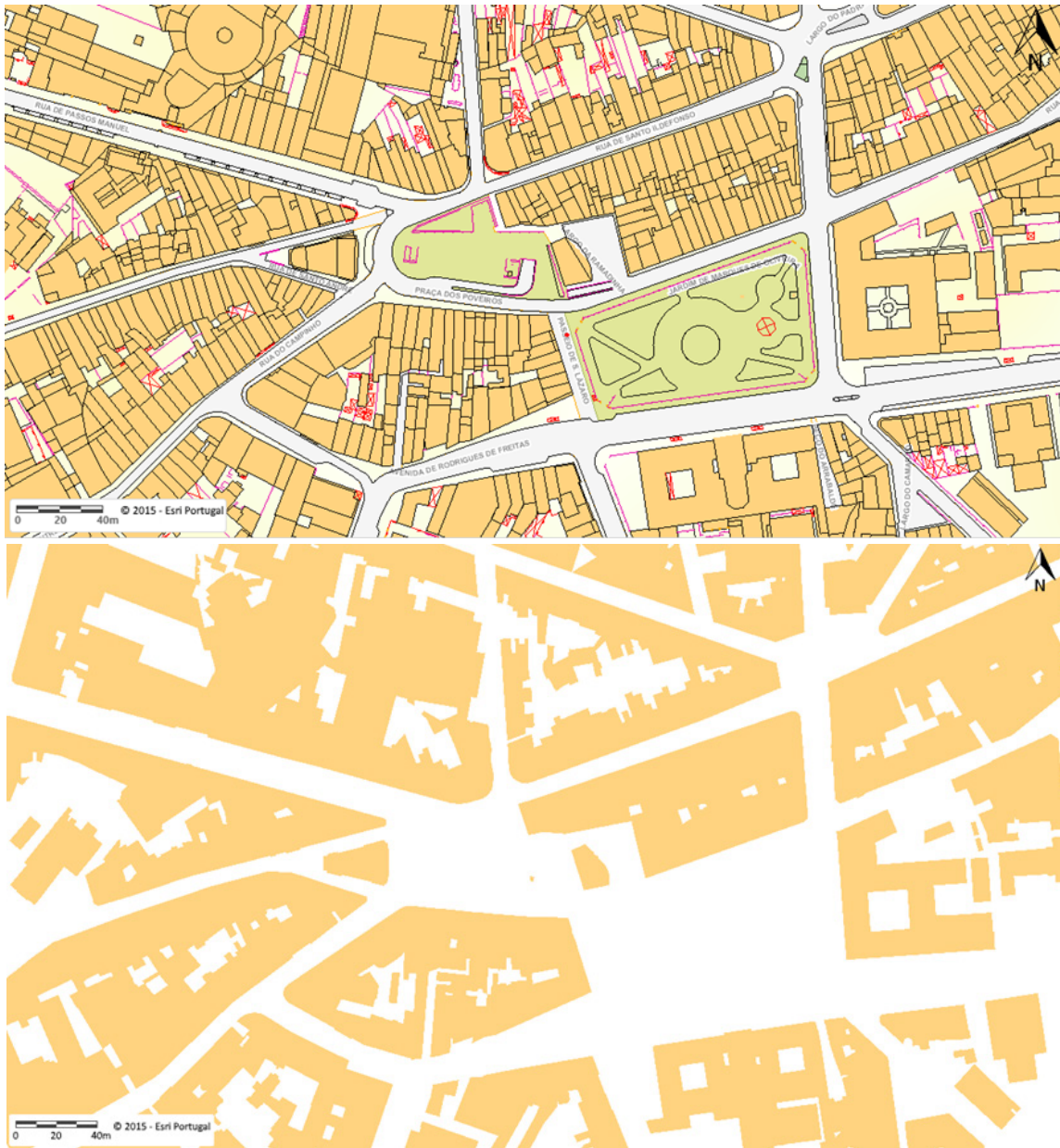


Source: the authors.

3. General Urbanism

When we look at Fig. 5, we can see this area has a dense urban fabric, mainly with a residential function. There are some abandoned buildings that offer possibilities to think and to create intervention projects for its spaces.

Figure 5. Proportion of empty/full spaces surrounding the study area.



Source: the authors.

Relating to the ground urbanization, the *Praça dos Poveiros* is among “Area de Frente Urbana Contínua Consolidada” in dark red in Fig. 6.

Figure 6. *Praça dos Poveiros* ground urbanization. Red- private property; Grey- public buildings; Green - public green spaces



Source: the authors.

4. Architecture and Urban Culture

Praça dos Poveiros presents the modern architecture, characterized by colorless colors as grey and brown, sometimes white, and some orange of the roofs.

Concerning the frontage, we can observe heterogeneity for the decoration: some are with typical tiles, other with just paint. The size of the frontage depends on the size of the building, the height of them varying from one to another.

One of the most curious aspects that characterize the square is the presence of several buildings that are completely closed to the outside and dirtied by graffiti. Every facade of each building occupies a short space, arranged side by side, like a heterogeneous patchwork. Some buildings support a lot of street art (Fig. 7).

The square is used for some festivals as the *Festival Internacional de Circo do Porto* in October and for some concerts (for example in September). This is also an area for temporary marketplaces and fairs. Due to its bars, restaurants and snacks, people spend some time eating, chatting, relaxing. For tourists, there are some restaurants with typical Portuguese food¹.

1 A praça do Porto onde se petisca à portuguesa. Retrieved from: <https://www.evasoes.pt/ar-livre/praca-dos-poveiros/>, on 16 Oct. 2018.

Figure 7. Facades and graffiti in *Praça dos Poveiros*, Porto.

Source: the authors.

5. Public Space and Urban Image

Regarding the aesthetic point of view, this square does not make a good first impression so concrete and asphalt are omnipresence in the completely flat area, free from elements (Fig. 8). The cars are dominant, and one can have the feeling of just an empty space. Besides, the waste thrown on the pavement attracts seagulls and pigeons. There is no visual focus, not a particular element that draws the attention of a possible viewer except by two accesses to the parking lot underneath it. Motorbikes are within the square, even their parking is not allowed there. Finally, there is a little lawn area and a fountain, both difficult to notice, used by homeless people² who can rest without being bothered by anyone. Some mattresses and blankets are constantly next to one of the accesses to the parking lot. It would seem that no one manages or oversees maintaining this space.

The square is used mainly as a transit path once it allows people to cross it in whatever direction. Probably the number of seats put in sequence along a straight lateral line in the square is just enough to satisfy the flow of people who use it. This line breaks and creates a sort of bay, all made by stone, in which a unique tree is present in its center. This narrow band is completely hit by the sun during the morning and completely shadowed during the late afternoon, limiting the people's choice between sun or shade while sitting. As there is no tree or shelter that can protect from the sun or rain, nobody takes a break in the very center of the square. During the daytime, there are several users in the square but at night most of the users are drunk men and in evening/night this area does not seem safe due to the lack of visibility, the homeless, and the abandoned buildings.

2 Sem-abrigo morre na rua em pleno centro do Porto. Retrieved from: https://www.jn.pt/local/noticias/porto/porto/interior/sem-abrigo-morre-na-rua-em-pleno-centro-do-porto-10001225.html?target=conteudo_fechado&fbclid=IwAR1bQrCtI42qy2Ablqw9G0kfWOOEZxmcGv_Gm1Nrv5NF5foKCzxhnT1igs0, on 16 Oct. 2018.

Figure 8. *Praça dos Poveiros* view: one parking lot access in the forefront, and lined seats to the right.



Source: the authors.

6. Traffic, Transport, and Mobility

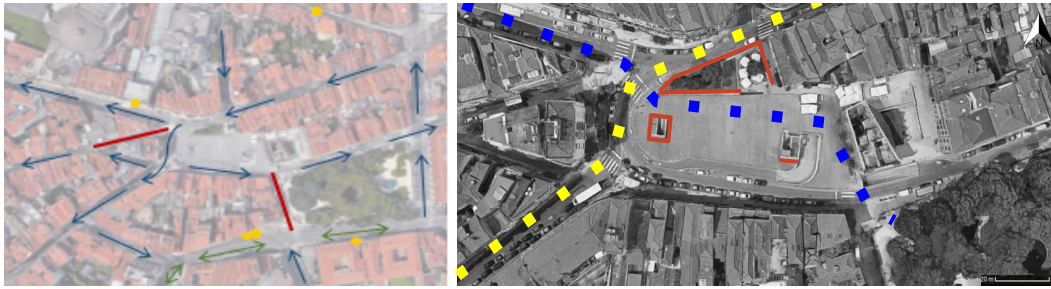
Praça dos Poveiros is located in the old part of the city and as normally happens in historical cities around the world, during the day many people concentrate in central areas creating high traffic during the so-called peak-hours.

The streets surrounding *Praça dos Poveiros* support cars, buses, trucks, motorcycles, and bicycles. The coexistence of all these modes of transport and narrow sidewalks frequently results in slow flux and traffic jams. Also, the parking lot underneath the square increases traffic around the square as well as people's circulation.

Public transportation in the vicinities is quite diverse and numerous but the square itself is not part of any public transportation route. Although *Praça dos Poveiros* central location, the closest metro stop (24 de Agosto) is a 600-meter walk from the square, and the second nearest metro stop (Bolhão) is 1-kilometer walk far. Once the surrounding streets have heavy traffic and are width undersized, it would not be adequate to insert bus stops in such a congested area.

Evaluating the square in terms of access and linkages, what clearly stands out is the fact that the square consists somehow in two different areas that coexist (Fig. 9). A portion of the square acts as a pedestrian crossing zone, always occupied by people moving on from one point to another with specific purposes and objectives that, as at a first impression, are not leisure activities. The square is easily accessible from all parts of the surroundings although crossing the streets into the square may not always be as easy and secure due to the heavy traffic.

Figure 9. Main flows of vehicles (left), and people (right) in *Praça dos Poveiros*. Parking lot entrances are marked in red.



Source: Google Maps (adapt.)

Another portion of the square is used as a leisure-aimed space where you can easily find a café, a bar, a restaurant or lay down for a while in the little garden plot right next to the water fountain (Fig. 10). This part of the square is very easy to access except for the fact that there is an old uninhabited house causing a visual disturbance and creating difficulties in the capacity for the users to have a global perspective of all parts of the square from there.

Figure 10. Small cafeteria as a leisure-aimed space in *Praça dos Poveiros*.



Source: the authors.

7. Image

We interviewed 20 people in *Praça dos Poveiros*, among them passers-by, users, owners and employees of the surrounding bars and cafes. Most of the users are young women who live in other parishes, far from the square, and are just passing through. The residents of the region, including the elderly and families with children, use the very close *Jardim de São Lázaro* for their leisure time. This is mainly because the square does not offer many options for activities or living spaces, except bars. The presence of the homeless is

also cited as something that bothers users. Despite the bad impression that they cause, most people feel safe in the square and find the place pleasant. Even so, they cannot tell what is good at *Praça dos Poveiros* or what is lacking in order to improve it.

SUMMARIZING USES, ACTIVITIES, AND COMFORT

At first sight, the *Praça dos Poveiros* form does not promote many uses and activities. There are no activities or entertainment, what means that some parts of the square become a place for homeless to stay, others become a terrace where the surrounding bars put their tables, others became a motorcycle parking, and the rest of the space act just like way of passage, as the square is used formerly as a transit path.

A crucial place in the middle of the square is taken over by the access to the underneath parking lot and at the other side of the place, a square of stone that delimits the entry of the parking accentuate the highlight the separation between the square and surroundings.

The urban furniture is very limited. There are few places to sit, not very attractive and apparently not so comfortable, nor gathering points. It's arid, with few points of shadow and shelter, and there are no trails and paths: almost all the square is a paved ground. The only tiny plot of land in this square is used by homeless people when it is covered by the buildings' close-by shade.

Despite that, in a deeper review, it's possible to notice that the space is not empty nor congested, and many different activities occur at the same time: some kids play soccer, a lady reads a book, a man relaxes at a bench, a couple contemplates the movement, some groups have a meal at the bars' tables, many people walk and pass by the square. However, these activities are isolated from each other and there aren't focal points. The square is used by a range of ages, most of them alone or in small groups. The north and east sides of the square, which are more protected from traffic by benches and low walls, closer to the main streets, are more alive and used than the south and west parts, occupied by the parking lot access. It's easy to go from one part to another, but the overall design doesn't induce people to use more spaces available.

There are not obvious choices of things to do. As it is an open space, with few activities, entertainment, places to sit and gathering points, the possibilities are up to the user. But, because of its arid and open aspect, it is a good place for bigger events, and there are many of them that take place or are scheduled at the square: art festivals, concerts, marches. Most of them are public and free, organized by artistic or class entities.

There are no public services in *Praça dos Poveiros* as public restrooms, irrigation systems, nor the diversity of urban equipment. What stands out most in the square is the ramp and the elevator to access the private parking lot. In the surroundings, there are several bars and restaurants, and many of them use the esplanade of the square to dispose of tables and chairs.

No setting place is present in the center and this fact keeps the population out of it or at least at its limits – this is another impact that restricts the use of the place. Indeed,

the square is firstly a transit path. People cross the area easily throughout its empty center, mainly to go to *Jardim São Lázaro*. Walking across the square is not very safe and/or comfortable at night, although the whole square could be easily seen wherever you were with small exceptions;

Transition to and from the square is extremely efficient as you have plenty of options to way and the links satisfy people's needs. There is no public transport stops at the square, but there are many of them just nearby.

DISCUSSION

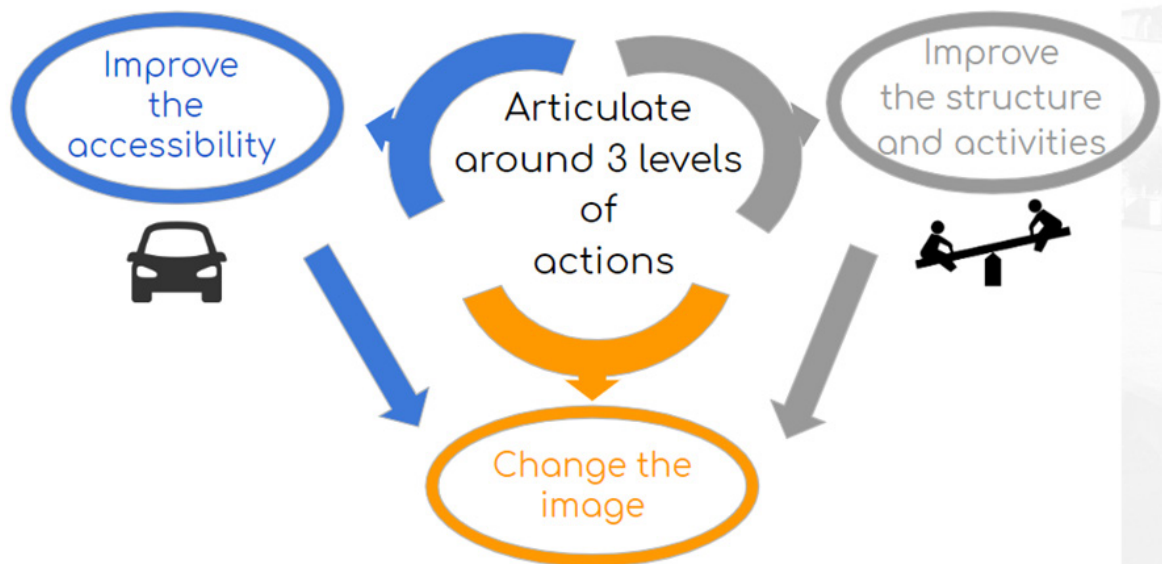
After the analysis of all these aspects, the main guidelines for the intervention proposal were established. Although many people consider the square pleasant and have good structure, as a matter of fact, it is very arid, and some soulless.

Regarding accessibility, it is easy to reach Praça dos Poveiros, but the traffic around the square is not safe and concerns pedestrians. It is important to maintain the cross pass, as it is important to create new opportunities.

The intervention proposal, then, is based on the articulation of the square in three different levels of actions (Fig. 11):

- Improve accessibility;
- Improve the structure and activities;
- Change the image.

Figure 11. Proposal's guidelines scheme.



Source: the authors.

PROPOSAL

The main objective of the proposal (Figs. 12-13) is to improve the quality of the square and change its image. Today, it is predominantly a passageway, with occasional events (Fig. 14). The proposal's general concept is to maintain this character and these activities already established, but also promote a most effective use of *Praça dos Poveiros* by people of all ages, favoring the interaction among them, making it more attractive and welcoming, connected with the city, the parish, and the surroundings (Fig. 15).

Figure 12. General view of the project



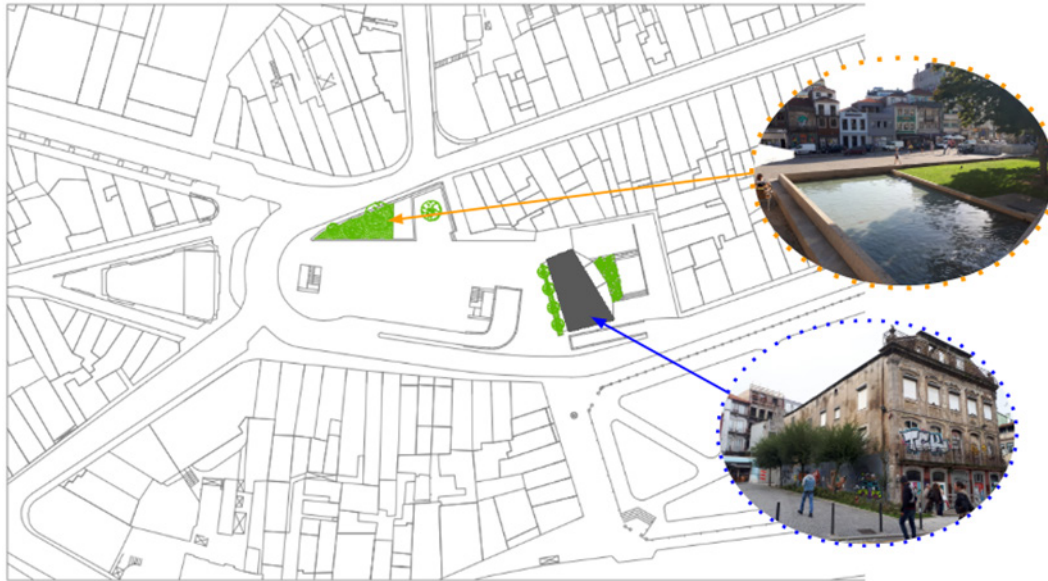
Source: the authors.

Figure 13. Proposal 3D model video



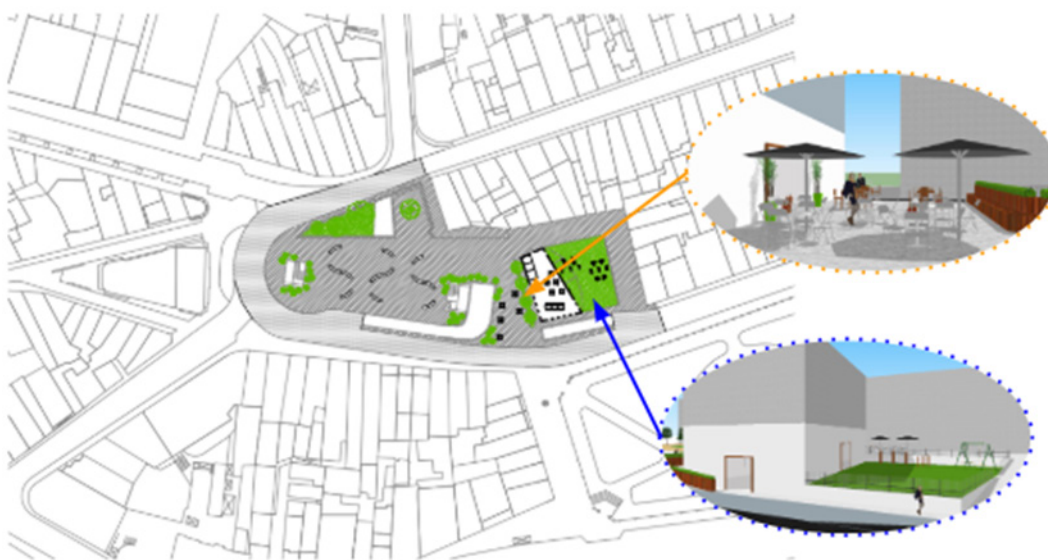
Source: the authors.

Figure 14. *Praça dos Poveiros* today (before the proposed intervention).



Source: the authors.

Figure 15. *Praça dos Poveiros* after the proposed intervention.

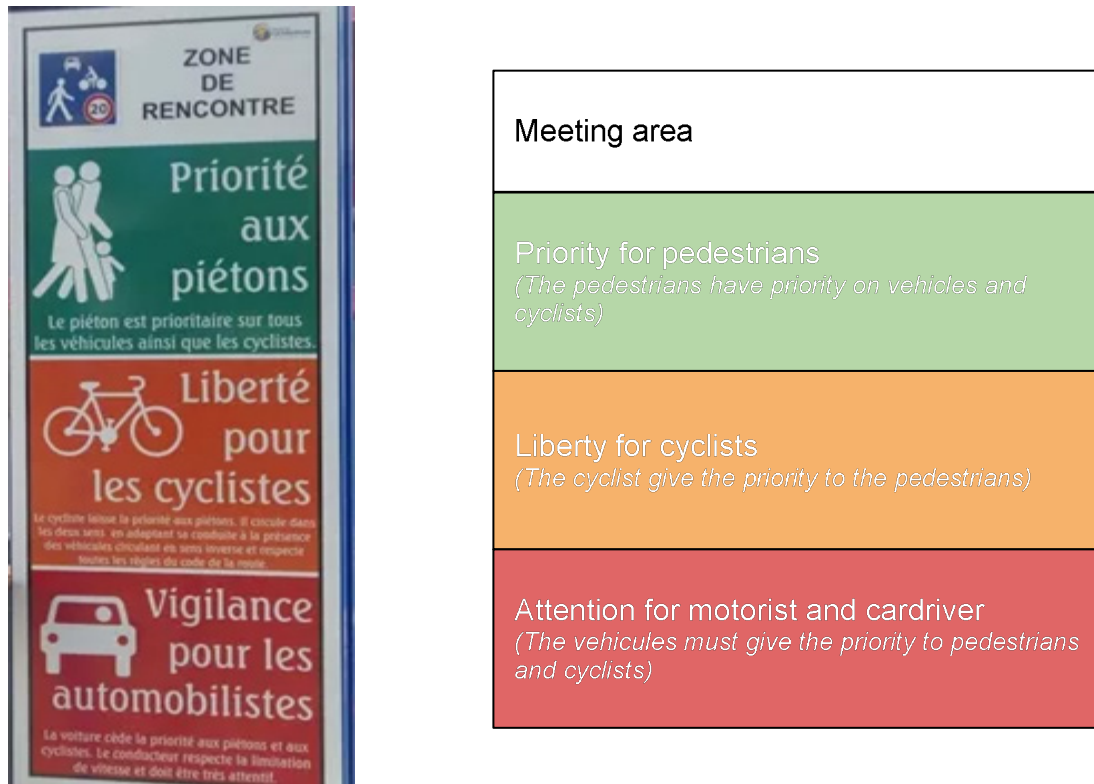


Source: the authors.

ACCESSIBILITY

To make *Praça dos Poveiros* a better square regarding accessibility, the intervention proposal considers improving the information and signalization with symbols and bigger writings that make them more legible and help to connect it to other parts of the city center (Figs. 16-17).

Figure 16. Examples of new signs.



Source: <https://www.direct-signaletique.com>, 2018.

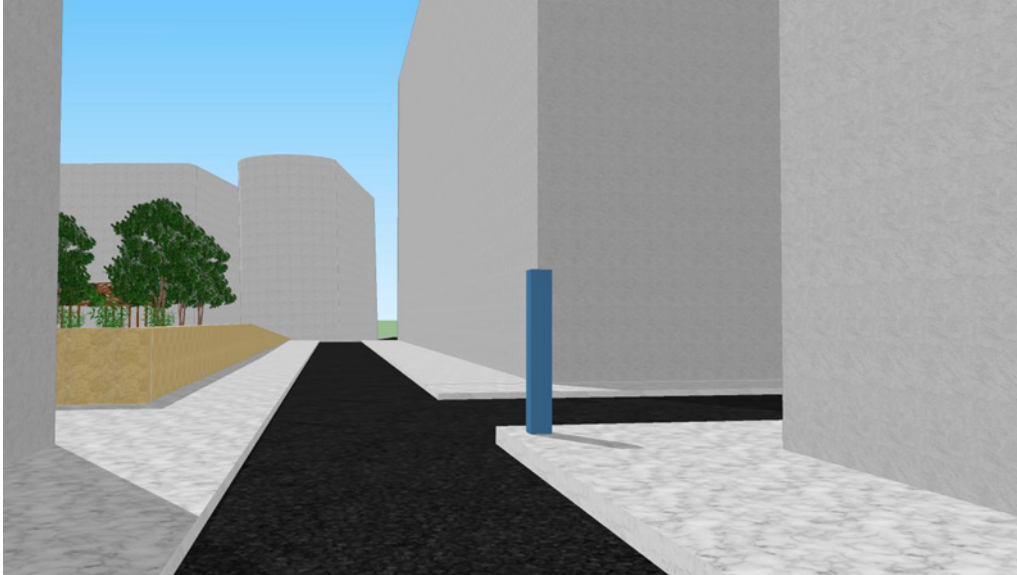
In order to reduce the impact of cars and make the square safer and more attractive for pedestrians, the proposed solution is to create a pedestrian area around the square, not banishing cars, but changing its circulation, reducing its speed and creating an area where pedestrians have priority, like a 'meeting area' (Fig. 18).

Figure 17. Example of a road sign for the meeting area: the pedestrians and cyclists have priority on motorized vehicles, which must drive less than 20km/h.



Source: <https://www.direct-signaletique.com>, 2018.

Figure 18. Entrance to the meeting area.

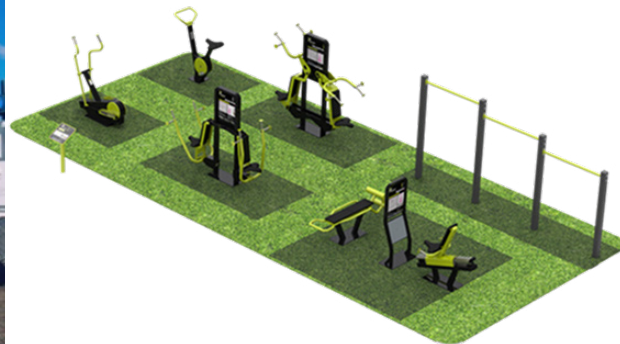


Source: the authors.

SPORT ACTIVITIES

In order to encourage the interaction between people, the proposal considers installing gym equipment for the elderly next to the playground for children at *Largo da Ramadinha* (Fig. 19), and integrate them to *Praça dos Poveiros* through the new use of the abandoned building that today separate both.

Figure 19. Sports equipment for the elders.



Sources: <https://www.ausleisure.com.au/>; <http://www.tgogc.com>, 2018.

LEISURE ACTIVITIES

The new urban furniture proposed and the rearrangement of the spaces and the connections among them will give new possibilities for leisure activities in the square

(Fig. 20). *Praça dos Poveiros* is used for many events such as concerts, festivals and markets, so the urban furniture in the middle of the square must be movable in order to make it polyvalent and allow all kind of uses: it can welcome future events, but also work as a pleasant space to stay in the rest of the time.

To offer users shade options on summer hot and sunny days and also shelter on cold and rainy days, the proposal provides mobile pergolas with banks and potted vegetation, especially around the entrances of the underground parking and next to the mobile urban furniture, making the space more cozy and pleasant.

Figure 20. Drawings of the meeting area.

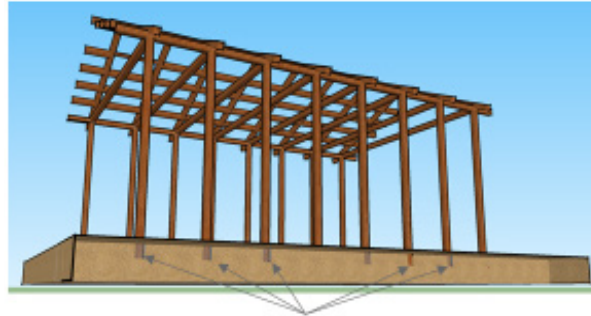


Source: the authors.

The pergola, such as all urban furniture in the middle of the square, is designed to be taken off when there is an event and will be made by wood, that is a lighter matter and

can be moved easier (Fig. 21). The wood, besides being light and easily relocatable, helps in this cozy atmosphere and, if well treated, is very weather resistant.

Figure 21. Proposal of the pergola in the meeting area.



Posts are put in the ground but not fixed in.

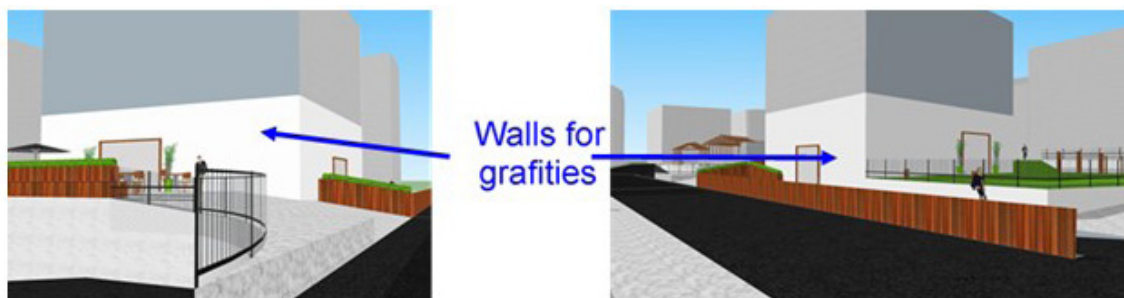
Source: the authors.

IMAGE

In order to give *Praça dos Poveiros* a new image, the abandoned building which separate the square from Largo da Ramadinha will be renovated and reused to create a stronger connection between the two places, decreasing its projection area in the back of the square and widening the passage area that connects the two sides (Fig. 22). This measure brings more comfort to pedestrians, and even allows skaters who already use this space could continue there. To further enhance this connection, the tables that are currently placed there by the surrounding bars will be relocated to the terrace of *Praça dos Poveiros*, between the revitalized building and the ramp to access the parking lot, strengthening the connection between the building and the square, and bringing even more life to the spaces.

The building will be opened on the ground floor, with as many doors as it is possible in all sides, installing inside some support equipment for the local community, such as restroom, a small cafeteria and a coworking space. To keep the identity of *Praça dos Poveiros*, the walls of the first floor will be dedicated to free expression and graffiti. This place will be managed by a community association, which can organize events to link elderly people and the young one.

Figure 22. Drawing of the Community Building in the meeting area.



Source: the authors.

To improve the square, especially regarding the impact of this building, the design of its frontage will be more colored to 'bring life' to this area. Other abandoned buildings can be reused by shops and tourists' accommodations.

CONCLUSION

Praça dos Poveiros is a challenging square where there is the omnipresence of stone and a lot of car circulation in the surroundings.

To identify the area's main characteristics, features and problems, informal interviews were done in order to provide the view of inhabitants and passer-by people, their feelings and sensations. In addition, field visits were made at different times and days of the week, allowing a broader observation and a deeper analysis.

Concerning the problems found, the accessibility of the area could be improved, such as the image, the structure of the square and the activities on it. The proposal deals with all these items and its main concept is to maintain the passway character and the activities already established, but promoting the most effective use of *Praça dos Poveiros* by people of all ages, favoring the interaction between them, making it more attractive and welcoming, giving soul and identity to the space, which is often unnoticed, and connecting the users, the city, the parish, and the surroundings.

To create and strength a link between generations, some gym equipment for the elderly and playground for children will be installed in *Largo do Raminha* on a green ground. With this project, we keep the identity of *Praça dos Poveiros*, modernize it and give it a new atmosphere, with more soul and life.

A meeting area will be put on the surrounding streets to reduce car's speed and give a bigger importance to the pedestrian, improving also their safety. To change the image of the square and break off with the stone image, the green areas will be increased and there will be more vegetation. Moreover, the existing abandoned building will be renovated and reused as a free expression place, a coworking space, with a cafeteria and public restroom.

As *Praça dos Poveiros* welcome concerts, markets and other events during the year, the new structure deals with this by putting urban furniture which can be moved during these events. Although the proposal faces a new structure for *Praça dos Poveiros*, the cleaning and maintenance of the square need to be more frequent. It can be assured by the association that will manage the building in its middle. The useless fountain will give rise to an enlargement of the garden, increasing the green area of the square and improving its pleasantness. To conclude, the authorities must solve the homeless situation.

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Data de aceite: 27/ ago./ 2019