

Identification

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| <i>Nomination</i> | The Historic Centre of Oporto |
| <i>Location</i> | Northern Region |
| <i>State Party</i> | Portugal |
| <i>Date</i> | 23 October 1995 |

Justification by State Party

The historic centre of Oporto is a townscape of high aesthetic value, with evidence of urban development from the Roman, medieval, and Almadás (18th century) periods. Archaeological remains survive showing that it has been occupied since the 8th century BC.

The rich and varied civil architecture of the historic centre express the cultural values of succeeding periods - Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Neo-Classical, and modern - and is appropriate to the social and geographical setting of the town. It has a stable and coherent relationship with the surrounding urban and natural environment. The active social and institutional tissue of the town ensures its survival as a living historic centre.

Both as a city and as a human achievement the historic centre of Oporto constitutes a masterpiece of mankind's creative genius. Military, commercial, agricultural, and demographic interests converged here to shelter a population capable of building the city. The result is a unique work of art of high aesthetic value. It is a collective work, not accomplished at a particular moment but the result of successive contributions.

One of the most relevant aspects of Oporto, and in particular of its historic centre, is its scenic character, resulting from the complexity of the landform, the harmonious articulation of its roads, and the dialogue with the river. Yet, in spite of the variety of forms and materials, the historic centre of Oporto maintains a visual aesthetic unity. The town also represents a successful interaction between the social and geographical environments.

Oporto provides a valuable lesson in urban design. Planned and unplanned interventions from different periods are concentrated in this area, making it possible to study town design and urban characteristics of western European and Atlantic-Mediterranean cities from the Middle Ages to the Industrial Revolution. The narrow winding streets adapted to the topography in the Middle Ages, the straight roads and small squares of the Renaissance, the roads leading to Baroque monuments, and the intensive occupation with buildings being divided up, storeys added, and new constructions on common lands all make up this complex urban fabric.

Note The State Party does not make any proposals concerning the criteria under which the property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List in the nomination dossier.

Category of property

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Oporto is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description*History*

Archaeological excavations have revealed that there has been human occupation on the site of modern Oporto, at the mouth of the Douro river, since the 8th century BC, when there was a Phoenician trading settlement there, taking advantage of the access to the interior afforded by the river. The Romans established a town there in the 1st century BC, under the name of *Portus* (= the port).

With the arrival in the early 5th century of the barbarians, who followed the rivers in their invasions, the town became very important as an administrative and trading centre. The Visigoths established an episcopal see there. In the succeeding centuries it was the object of attacks and pillage by successive groups - Swabians, Visigoths again, Normans, and Moors. By the early 11th century, however, it was firmly established as part of the Castilian realm. The inhabitants rallied in support of Afonso Henriques in his crusade to drive the Moors out of Portugal and became part of the new kingdom. The first period of expansion came in the late 14th century, with the construction in 1374 of a new town wall protecting the two urban nuclei - the original medieval town and the hitherto extramural harbour area.

Oporto was later to lend massive support to the expeditions organized by Henry the Navigator (who was born in the town) in the early 15th century, though it drew little profit from its investment. It was not until the signing of the Treaty of Methuen in 1703 that economic expansion began, with the commercial links established between Oporto and England. English entrepreneurs invested heavily in the vineyards of the Douro valley, to supply the huge English market, and Oporto, as the port for the export of these wines, benefited greatly, as the wealth of Baroque buildings in the town attests. The citizens reacted strongly against Pombal's creation of the *Companhia do Alto Douro*, designed to end the English monopoly, and restored the *status quo* by burning down the company's headquarters in the *Revolta dos Barrachos* (Revolt of the Drunkards).

Oporto was the birthplace of the "Liberal Revolution" in 1820, which led to the adoption by the monarchy of the seminal Constitution of 1822. During the attempt by Miguel I to reimpose autocracy, Oporto rose against him and its trade suffered badly during a long blockade in 1832. The town played an important role in the expulsion of the monarchy in 1910, and also in the 1974 revolution that led to the return of democracy to Portugal.

During the 19th century the town centre moved from the banks of the river to the new developments around the Praça da Liberdade. It was at this time that Gustav Eiffel designed the railway bridge across the river (1875), and many new buildings were constructed. In the course of the 20th century Oporto has progressively changed from a primarily industrial town to one whose economic basis is the service industries.

Description

The part of the modern town proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List is that enclosed within the enceinte of the 14th century Fernandine walls, together with some smaller areas that retain their medieval characteristics. This area conserves to a large extent the medieval town plan and urban fabric, with some later monumental insertions.

Remains of the earlier *ramparts* survive in places; these are most probably date to the early 12th century, but are likely to have been erected on Roman foundations. Two of the four original gates are still visible. The *Torre da Cidade* (Town Tower) is a rectangular medieval structure, discovered when demolition work was carried out near the Cathedral in the 1940s. Only two sections of the *Fernandine walls*, initiated by Dom Afonso IV in 1336 but named after his successor, Dom Fernando, in whose reign they were completed in 1376, are still standing. The massive crenellated stone walls stand to a height of 10 m and were strengthened with many bastions and square towers.

There are many important ecclesiastical buildings in the designated area. The Romanesque core of the *Cathedral (Sé)* dates from the 12th century, but it has undergone many changes over the intervening centuries. The nave is three-aisled, each of the aisles being of five bays; it is separated from the choir by a simple transept. The facade, with its two towers, has a 14th century rose-window. The west door was reconstructed in 1722, when the towers were given new upper structures. There are two cloisters adjoining the cathedral, one medieval and the other Gothic. Nearby is the *Bishop's Palace*, also medieval in origin and completely remodelled in the 18th century.

Among the many fine churches are *São Francisco* (Gothic, 14th century), *São Lourenço dos Grillos* (in the 16th/17th century Mannerist style), *Santa Clara* (Gothic Manueline style with later classical Renaissance elements), *Nossa Senhora da Vitória* (16th century), the *Igreja da Misericórdia* (early Baroque), and the *Igreja dos Clérigos* (Baroque, the work of Niccolò Nazzoni)

Oporto also has a number of outstanding public buildings. These include a group of late 18th century buildings, such as the *São João Theatre*, the *Palácio da Batalha*, the *Palácio das Sereias*, and the former prison *Da Relação*. Among the important later structures are the Neo-Palladian *Hospital Santo António*, the imposing *Alfândega* (Custom House), from the second half of the 19th century, the *Palácio da Bolsa* (Stock Exchange) in Neo-Classical style, the *Ferreira Borges Market* (1885), the *São Bento railway station* (1900), and the *Paços do Concelho* (City Hall: 1920-1957).

Several impressive early private houses, such as the early 14th century *Beco dos Redemoinhos*, have also been preserved. Oporto also has a number of monumental open spaces, including the *Praça da Batalha*, the site of many important events in the history of the town, and the 18th century *Praça da Liberdade* with its fine gardens.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Development in the Historic Centre of Oporto is controlled by Decree No 116/84 of the Oporto City Council, which created the City Project for the Urban Renewal of the Historic Centre of Oporto.

Eighteen properties are statutorily protected as National Monuments, and a further 43 are classified as being of Public Interest.

Management

Ownership of the properties that make up the Historic Centre of Oporto is vested in a variety of public and private bodies.

The City Council assumed responsibility in 1982 for the work of the Commission for the Urban Renewal of the Ribeira and Barredo Areas (CRUARB), a Government agency set up jointly in 1974 by the Ministries of Internal Administration and of Social Equipment and the Environment. The work of CRUARB is based on the following premises:

- The existing heritage and urban fabric must be maintained.
- The cultural heritage of Oporto should be regarded as comprising not only the older and more monumental structures but also smaller buildings of less aesthetic merit whose value lies in their contribution to the overall urban fabric.
- New and modern constructions will not be excluded but will be subjected to rigorous scrutiny in so far as their impact on the existing townscape is concerned.
- It is essential to maintain the multi-functional character of the Historic Centre to maintain its authenticity and its relationship with its environment.
- All available technical resources will be used and a range of approaches will be applied, from simple restoration to reconstruction, depending upon individual situations.
- The existing inhabitants are full partners in the rehabilitation process and must be integrated into all projects.
- Major projects involving demolition or construction on vacant spaces will only be approved if they are based on functional requirements.

These principles underlie the management plan being applied by CRUARB in its work in the historic centre of Oporto. It should be stressed that the Urban Development Plan according to which CRUARB is carrying out its work has as its primary objective the rehabilitation of the historic centre of a city that had been deteriorating over many years and improvement of the living conditions of its inhabitants. It aims to reintegrate the historic centre with the larger metropolitan area, but without adversely affecting the ambience of the former. To this end there are controls over all kinds of intervention, including the painting of facades and the use of ground-floor spaces. This has involved a detailed building survey and inventory, as well as scientific archaeological excavations at key points, such as the vicinity of the Cathedral.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

There was no concerted effort aimed at conservation in Oporto until the foundation of CRUARB in 1974. There was a grave danger of collapse in many buildings due to neglect. Since many buildings shared party walls, neglect in one building often resulted in damage to those adjoining it.

The work of CRUARB since it began has already ensured the preservation of some 50% of the buildings in the Ribeira and Barredo areas, and it is now working throughout the entire historic centre.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the urban fabric of Oporto is absolute, since it is a reflection of over a thousand years of continuous settlement, with successive interventions each leaving their imprints. Individual buildings, such as the rich stock of ecclesiastical properties, are similarly illustrative of their history. Some restoration work earlier in the present century is not in accordance with current thinking on authenticity, but the programmes of CRUARB ensure that this will not be repeated in the future.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

ICOMOS consulted its International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages on the cultural significance of the site. An ICOMOS expert mission visited Oporto in February 1996.

Qualities

The historic centre of Oporto preserves to a considerable extent the evidence of a long and continuous history over a millennium in its urban fabric and component structures. Its townscape is of outstanding quality, in terms of both its homogeneity and its harmonious relationship with its river and hills.

Comparative analysis

The evolutionary trajectory of Oporto, sited on the Atlantic edge of Europe in a country that has largely remained outside the mainstream of European social and economic development, has resulted in an urban ensemble that cannot easily be compared directly with other European cities, especially those elsewhere on the Iberian peninsula. The nearest comparable cities are probably Lisbon, Bordeaux, and Bristol. Lisbon underwent drastic changes in urban fabric following the 1755 earthquake and has lost the specific qualities that distinguish Oporto. Bordeaux and Bristol developed within a different social and economic matrix in the 19th and 20th centuries, and Bristol suffered grievously from aerial bombardment in World War II.

ICOMOS comments and recommendations

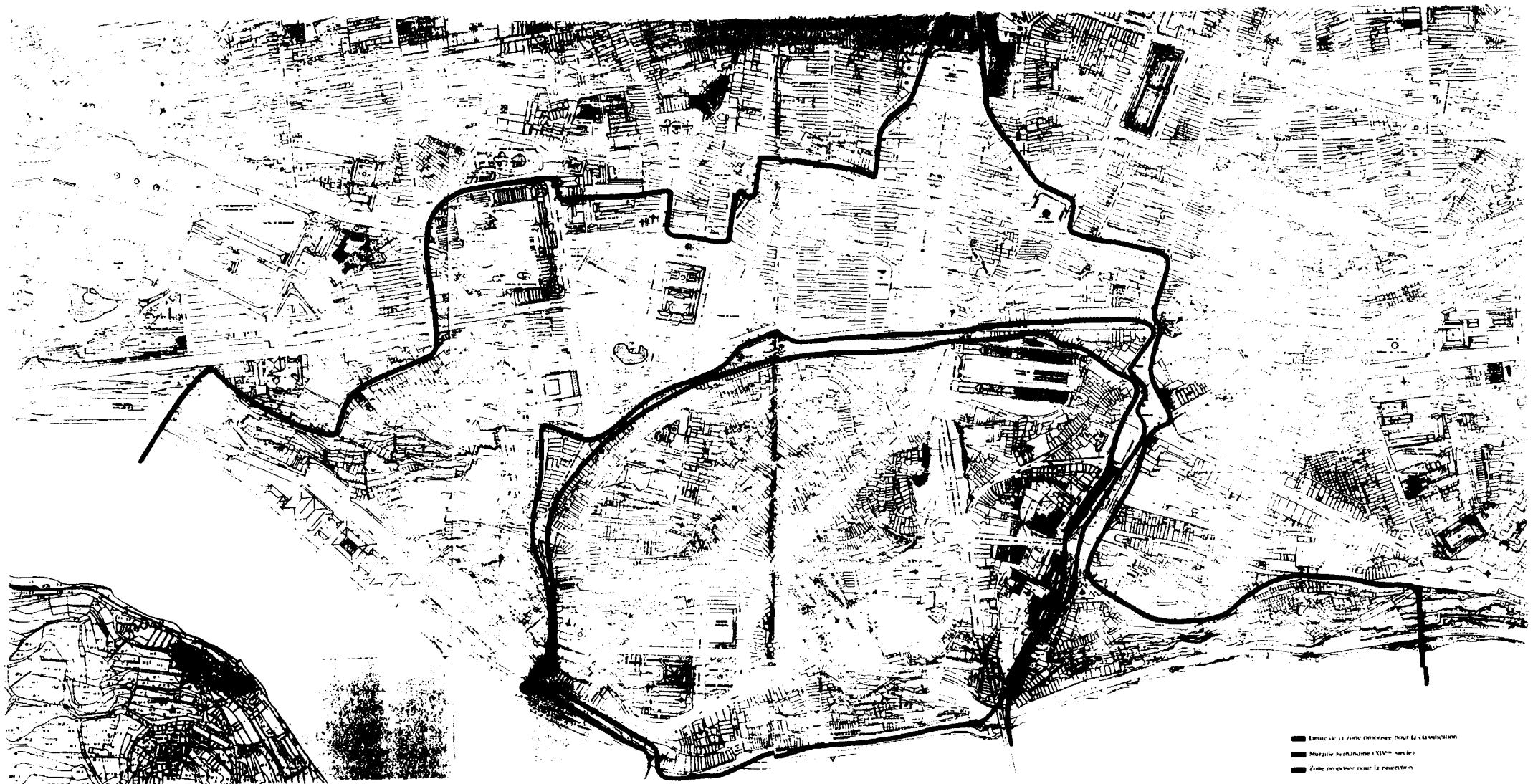
A proposal made by the ICOMOS expert mission for an extension of the buffer zone on the south side to include the port wine warehouses on the opposite bank of the Douro river, so as to protect the view in this direction from the nominated area, was accepted by the responsible authorities.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *critterion iv*:

The Historic Centre of Oporto preserves in its urban fabric and its many historic buildings remarkable testimony of the development over the past thousand years of a European city that looks outwards to the west for its cultural and commercial links.

ICOMOS, October 1996



Porto : plan de délimitation du bien et de la zone-tampon
Oporto : map of the nominated property and buffer zone



Porto : vue d'ensemble depuis la rivière
Oporto : general view from the river