

PORTUGAL

Historic Centre of Oporto

Brief description

The city of Oporto, built along the hillsides overlooking the mouth of the Douro river, is an outstanding urban landscape with a 1,000-year history. Its continuous growth, linked to the sea (the Romans gave it the name Portus, or port), can be seen in the many and varied monuments, from the cathedral with its Romanesque choir, to the neoclassical Stock Exchange and the typically Portuguese Manueline-style Church of Santa Clara.

1. Introduction

Year of Inscription

1996

Agency responsible for site management

- Comissão Nacional da UNESCO
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2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria

C (iv)

Justification provided by the State Party

The classification of the Historic Centre of Oporto as mankind's cultural heritage is essentially justified for the following reasons

- It is a stabilized urban tissue of high aesthetic value.

- It is an area of superimposition of urbanistic projects from such diverse epochs as the Roman, the Medieval and the Almedas period (18th century).

- The Historic Centre of Oporto contains important archaeological values which demonstrate human presence in the 9th century BC.

- Oporto's Historic Centre has a set of monuments and buildings that represent by themselves cultural values from the Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and Neoclassical art, as well as more recent pieces of work with an important architectural meaning.

- A typical, rich and varied civil architecture suitable for the social and geographic conditions of the site with both a scholarly and a traditional aspect.

- A stable and coherent relation to the surrounding urban and natural environment.

- An active social and institutional tissue that makes of this area a living and healthy Historic Centre in Oporto.

- This Centre is supported by a recovery operation based on the principles of the preservation of social and patrimonial values.

Thus it is a question of classifying rather a whole - or better, a system - than a sum of streets and monuments

Actually, the Historic Centre of Oporto as a patrimony has to be regarded as a live body whose preservation depends on the vitality of its functions. This subjects the Centre to continuous transformations and to constant attention to the rehabilitation of buildings and urban spaces.

Basically, Oporto's Historic Centre today includes the purposes for which it was created and developed, namely housing, trade, management, associations, worship, etc.

As it is seen by the city nowadays, the Historic Centre of Oporto comprises a large area of about 90 ha and approximately 20,000 inhabitants. Therefore, what we propose for classification is something that includes streets and houses, pavements, stairs, quays, railways, tunnels, palaces, churches, a cathedral! Its essential value lies there: in the fact that it is a whole resulting from a historic process of construction, destruction and reconstruction that has lasted for thousands of years and still goes on.

The two walls left their obvious marks on the urban shape. The over occupation imposed by the Industrial Revolution also left a profound and visible trace in routes and buildings. Started 15 years ago, the rehabilitation of the Historic Centre has introduced a high added value, revealing hidden aspects, preventing the degradation of buildings, revitalizing public spaces and allowing this area to be intensely experienced by its own population and by the whole city.

We are before an example of a relevant human settlement which is fragile by nature and was made vulnerable by the impact of socio-cultural, economic, functional, geographic and landscape changes.

Both as a city and as a human achievement, the Historic Centre of Oporto constitutes masterpiece of mankind's creative genius. Here there was a convergence of military, commercial, agricultural and demographic interests, settling a population that was capable of building the city, more spontaneously in certain periods and in a more planned manner in others. The resultant city is thus a unique work of art of high aesthetic value. It is a collective piece of work, a social piece of work that was not accomplished at a given moment, but is a consequence of successive contributions. That does not deprive it neither of value nor of quality; it is rather a actor of unity and aesthetic diversity.

One of the most relevant aspects of the city of Oporto, and particularly of its Historic Centre, is its scenic character. It is transmitted to us by the complexity of the relief, the happy articulation of the routes and the dialogue with the river, as well as by the implantation and the impressive greatness of the main buildings.

In spite of the variety of shapes and materials used, the Historic Centre of Oporto maintains a visible aesthetic unity. The sensations offered by the urban routes give us precisely the same scenic ambiguity. Either you walk in narrow streets, where your attention is caught by detail and the visitor continually finds new perspectives of the urban tissue, or you reach wide ralleys, where the city appears as a great set, full of historic and landscape meaning.

Last, whether by day or during the year, the city successively renovates itself through light and shadow, its hazes and the reflections of its own materials.

Resulting from a millenary process of consolidation of the urban tissue in the appropriate site, the Historic Centre gave rise to a very old and singular

cultural event, which makes of it an extremely rare case of intercommunication between the social and the geographic environments.

The origins of Oporto's Historic Centre that were identified until now take us to threshold of the Bronze Age. Their evolution may bring us to the present, at the moment when this Historic Centre is the object of a profound intervention aimed at its safeguard

The Historic Centre of Oporto is an important lesson of urbanism. Since spontaneous and planned interventions from different periods are concentrated in this area, it is possible to study the conceptions of city and the urban characteristics of West European and Atlantic- Mediterranean cities from the Middle Ages to the Industrial Revolution, with plenty of examples and details:

The narrow winding streets adapted to the topography in the Middle Ages, the straight routes and the small squares of the Renaissance, the roads leading to Baroque monuments, the great occupation with the division of buildings, addition of storeys and constructions in the common lands of the Industrial Revolution...

For the study and understanding of Western urbanism, this is an invaluable example, not only because of being a meaningful memory, but also due to its practical value for the teaching (and learning) of urbanism by the present and future generations.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

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.

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 criterion 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.

Committee Decision

Bureau (June 1996): The Bureau recommended the Committee to inscribe the nominated property on the basis of criterion (iv) considering that the site is of outstanding universal value as the urban fabric and its many historic buildings bears remarkable testimony to the development over the past thousand years of a European city that looks outward to the west for its cultural and commercial links.

Session (1996): The Committee decided to inscribe the nominated property on the basis of cultural criterion (iv) considering that the site is of outstanding universal value as the urban fabric and its many historic buildings bear remarkable testimony to the development over the past thousand years of a European city that looks outward to the west for its cultural and commercial links.

- Statement of Significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site
- No need to seek a decision from the Committee on changes to the statement of significance
- Proposal for revised text has not been made by State Party

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone has been defined, and is adequate

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- City Council Master Plan recently reviewed and approved, which regulates the interventions in the historic areas; regulation of Advertising and other uses of the public space; regulation about Fences and Shipyards of workmanship's within the Historic Centre of Oporto
- Protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

Actions taken/proposed

- The Municipal Division of Cultural Heritage is doing a systematic inventory of the building heritage

- Legislative measures that produce more effectiveness of the administrative impositions to the restoration of the buildings

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Urban centre

Management/Administrative Body

- No steering group
- No site manager/coordinator, is not needed
- Levels of public authority primarily involved with the management of the site: national and local
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

Actions proposed

- In the scope of the communitarian Project Atlante the definition of a Management Plan is currently in elaboration

5. Management Plan

- No management plan, but preparation will be completed in 12/2008
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Oporto City Council - Municipal Division of Conservation of the Historical Centre

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- Funding provided by: State Budget; Municipal Budget; Communitarian Projects; Owners
- Private-Public Partnerships
- European Community Funds
- The fact of the Historic Centre of Oporto having the status of World Heritage has contributed that the Site became a shelter centre of events of great importance that involved significant investments
- Funding is insufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: not provided

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Average: conservation, management, promotion, interpretation, education, visitor management

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- Professional training in distinct areas: management, conservation and restoration, legislation, inventory, computer sciences
- Participation of the technicians in Congresses, Seminars, other specific meetings

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 996,615 in 2004 (186,230 tourists entered the Tourism Offices)
- Visitor facilities: four cultural circuits; information and documentation at Tourism Offices and through Internet; guided visits
- Visitor needs: none

10. Scientific Studies

- Risk assessment, studies related to the value of the site, monitoring exercises, condition surveys, impact of World Heritage designation, archaeological surveys, visitor management, transportation studies, characterization of the enterprises of the Historic Centre
- Following the risk assessment studies the Oporto City Hall has conceived a geotechnical chart for the characterisation of the ground and subsoil; the inventory work of the natural resources, geologic heritage, and natural risk areas are included in the chart
- Several projects have been carried out to support the tourists by creating programmes, personalized visits, cultural walks and more spreading of the value of the cultural heritage
- In the scope of the Communitarian Project Equal a bigger increment was given to the commerce, its modernization and creation of new activities

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- An adequate number of signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage site among visitors, local communities, businesses and local authorities
- Permanent and temporary exhibitions, films, publications of monographies about the History of Oporto, its monuments and cultural heritage and expert meetings

- Two web sites: www.cm-porto.pt and www.portoturismo.pt
- Involvement of local population

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- World Heritage Bureau sessions: 22nd (1998)
- World Heritage Committee sessions: 22nd (1998)

Conservation interventions

- Some interventions were made at the urbanistic level. There was considerable improvement of the infrastructures, creation of collective equipments, valorisation of the monuments and of the cultural heritage, dynamisation of the commerce and services and great concern for the increment of the cultural activities
- Present state of conservation: patchy

Threats and Risks to site

- Desertification of the Historic Centre with the exit of the current resident population; degradation of the built heritage; accessibility problems and parking; difficulties of adequate lodging; safety problems

Measures taken/proposed

- With the creation of "SRU Porto Vivo S. A." were defined as major aims: the urban requalification, the economic revitalization, social resetting, the modernization of the infrastructures and correct management of the Historic Centre

13. Monitoring

- No formal monitoring programme
- The Site management authority projects, in a short time, will establish key indicators to obtain a better control of the maintenance of the exceptional value of the Historic Centre of Oporto

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, social, economic, management, valorisation of the city itself
- Strengths of management: After the inscription there were deep interventions on the following levels: urbanistic; requalification of

infrastructures and collective equipments; restoration of monuments and of classified monuments; high number of archaeological excavations in buildings that are being rehabilitated and in the public space; rehabilitation of several buildings for housing, commerce and services; rehabilitation of façades of 106 private buildings; strong investment and modernization of commerce and services; special care towards cultural activities, including the revitalizations of some spaces and creation of new ones; actions in order to promote and support tourism

- Weaknesses of management: lack of financial resources for intervention in the urban regeneration of the site; weak receptivity of the private initiative in participating in the public-private partnerships; current legislation and programmes are deficient not giving incentives to the owners/lodgers to rehabilitate and maintain the heritage; the economy itself is in restraint and the real estate market in a huge crisis
- There is an urgent need to implement a new urban culture with modern process of management, protection and valorisation, architecture, archaeology and sociology, respecting the pre-existence of values and the character of the historic city but giving important advantages for the future