

# From Used Territory to Spectacularized Territory: A case study of the historic center of the city of São Luís, Maranhão<sup>1</sup>

Do território Usado ao Território Espetacularizado: um estudo de caso do centro histórico da cidade de São Luis, Maranhao

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## ABSTRACT

The interest in cultural heritage stimulates revitalization projects in urban areas, given the social, economic and cultural opportunities. Thus, its insertion in the local/global logic is witnessed, highlighting its appropriation by tourism. The main objective of this article is to reflect on the conflicts and tensions between the social use and the tourist use of the historical heritage in the historic center of São Luís (MA). The research was characterized as a qualitative case study, using bibliographic research and documentary research. Through the survey of primary and secondary sources, an overview of the current dynamics of conservation and valorization of local heritage was obtained. The research

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adopts as initial theoretical assumption the categories used territory and spectacularized territory (Santos, 2000; Ribeiro, 2003) to problematize about the models of urban renewal or revitalization of heritage areas (Peixoto 200; Almeida, 2017) and It addresses the actions of the revitalization program and the conflicts that occur due to the gentrification process of historical-cultural heritage and social and tourist uses. It relates urban management and the imperative of development centered on the human scale as an instrument of social and territorial transformation. It concludes that urban planning and management actions in the historic center of São Luís do not contribute effectively to the sustainability of that space considering the demands of its residents and the dynamics of local tourism. It follows the need for systematic strategies for conservation and incorporation of historical heritage into contemporary life with a view to endogenous and integrated development.

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage, Territory, Preservation, Gentrification, Historic center.

## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary scenery, it is possible to observe the centrality of processes of renewal and urban revitalization, in face of the dynamic established between the public and the private sector and of the relevance of the culture as economical resource. Such circumstance has also been modified and, in some cases, has become legit, as alternative of social development, notadly in emergent countries such as Brazil.

Under such perspective, one of the main structural issues regards the role of urban entrepreneurship (Harvey, 2005) and its intervention on the strategies of appropriation and re-significance of patrimonialized urban spaces, which have been gaining particular contours given the conditions offered by the form of flexible production from capitalism. Such proposition conjugates with the perception of Peixoto (2000, p.23), to whom the patrimonial dynamic is also a result from “[...] growth and broadening of a market competition spirit between different spaces, to which the status of world heritage has become more worth it [...]”. Still, according to the author, the propositions of maintenance and revitalization of historical areas, seldom, have transformed the spaces of life in



places of attraction of private investments, heating the market competition, at the same time that community demands are unconsidered regarding their permanence in the re-qualified spaces.

Therefore, to the notion of used territory (Santos, 1996) overcomes the “territory of strategic action” (Ribeiro, 2003), molded by globalized features, homogenized, poor in experiences and insufficient in the active participation of locals in the decisions which impact their daily reality. The commodification of urban spaces has made the cities places prone to the accumulation of capital, valuing the commercial trades in detriment of their social function.

From such understanding that the historical center of the city of São Luís, Maranhão is inserted. Its importance dates back to the 17th, 18th and 19th century, periods when the city of São Luís lived a time of social-economical and cultural effervescence. *A posteriori*, with its decline, it resulted in a space which its representativity – regarding maintenance of the traditional aspects of the local culture and the preservation of the architectonic heritage – grounded to its incorporation to the tourism activity, mainly in the 90’s boosted the obtention of the title of Humanity Cultural Heritage, given by the United Nation of Education, Science and Culture [UNESCO] in 1997 (Guedes, 2001).

Due to this, one of the main factors that guided the revitalization of such urban space was the promotion of the social-economical development, mainly, through its articulation with tourism. Within such conception the historical center of São Luís has been given a new meaning through actions of preservation and has been inserted in the globalized market, with social and economical implications that have been, since then, directly affecting and worrying the locals from such territory. Therefore, to promote the cultural preservation in times of fragmentation of cities, instability and volatility of social relations, has become a challenge in face of the need to embody the subjectivity and the demands of the different social actors as marked strategies of a new development conception.



In face of such perception, the article on the screen has the central goal of reflecting on the existing conflicts and tensions between the social and the touristic use of the historical heritage in the center of São Luís, Maranhão. The considerations voiced throughout the study have as input the studies from Milton Santos (1999) and Ribeiro(2003) regarding the need to think of the territory as category that embraces the human existence, with the social practice linked to the political action and that is built on the dynamics between the horizontality and the verticality. Within such conception, the territory configures a force field and clashes between the practices of the social actors that voice the local dynamic and the hegemonic actors who impose a totaling and excluding logic.

It is also based on the ideas of Soares & Azevedo(2020), which advocates the need to boost the participative processes for the materialization of the urban sustainability. The contributions of such authors have become fundamental to think of the strategies for revitalization that directly speak to the communities and make them protagonists of the local development.

The aligned discussion is organized under sections. The problem was exposed in this introduction and conducted through methodological procedures presented in the following section of the article. As follows, the main categories of the study are contextualized and discussed, situated in the historical center of São Luís in the process of urban regeneration. Posteriorly, the results of the investigation are presented. In the Final Considerations, the system of the performed work is exposed, meanwhile some possibilities of researches to the investigators fond of the theme are pointed out.

This way, it is intended to contribute to an increase of the debates about urban planning, from a critical and reflexive point of view on the human actions that embody new rationalities in the ways of organization, production and consumption of the spaces in the contemporary scenery.



## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

### Processes of urban regeneration: the culture as strategic resource

The cities build an integrated and complex system of ruptures and continuity, changes and transformations (Lefebvre, 2000; Santos, 2006). According to Carlos (2018, p.121): “the urban space of stage of the human activity starts to be analyzed as the historical and social product, uneven and contradictory, privileged place of class struggle and social movements.” In the theory about the city, Lefebvre(2013) approaches the triad lived/perceived/conceived space as intrinsic dimensions of the urban, searching from it the understanding about the complexity of the urban dynamic, in terms of dialectic movement and of the existing tensions between such spaces. It is highlighted the Marxist and dialectic look by examining the complexity of the city, which brings us important reflections regarding the social division of work, the contradictions and inequalities that are inherent to the forms of use, appropriation and occupation of spaces.

[...] El espacio es un *producto social*. No se plantea pues como mero hecho de la naturaleza modificada ni como resultado de una cultura, sino del *producto* de una segunda naturaleza (la sociedad urbana) que es y a la nuestra – y como producto no hace referencia a un simple objeto o cosa, sino a un conjunto de relaciones (Lefebvre, 2013, p.47).

In a dialogue with Milton Santos (1999), it is understood that the space of formed by material and symbolic objects, being the result of human actions and their result of historical and social processes. It is about, therefore, a space that is practiced, lived and dynamic, molded from the interests and from intentions of the several social actors.



Thus, the category territory, in the author's view, constitutes an arena, "a battle field, a place with exercise of power, dialectics and contradictions between the vertical and the horizontal, between the State and the market, between the economical and social use of resources" (Santos, 1999,p.19). As a category of geographic analysis, the territory is multidimensional and dialectic, having at sight its different uses and meanings. In addition to the horizontality and verticality, the territory is assumed as *lócus* of praxis and of political action, of the power exercise, such as guided by Ribeiro(2003).

This way, and, based on the conceptions of geographic space and territory aligned by Santos (2018), the historical centers present fixed, steady elements, which form the landscape and the urban ambiance – monuments, urban equipment, structures of goods and services and furniture, once, through those constant flows of social and cultural relations, circulation of symbolic goods, traffic of visitors and cultural manifestations are observed. Such group of elements live dialectically, making the urban space dynamic and polyssemic.

Therefore, it is understood as cultural heritage not only as summary of social and cultural processes, of remainder traces from a shared past by the social group, but as a revealing symbol of daily practices, of popular harmony and of the entanglement of collective livings, parties, rituals, power relations, strength, traditions and contradictions.

It is highlighted that it also materializes the strategies of valuation of a certain memory and of the affirmation of the identity in permanent process of transformation. As a force field, the cultural heritage inserts itself in the dialectic game in which the community livings, the existences materialized in the territories, interacting with the global structures and with the new social-spatial relations imposed by the State, by the companies and by other social hegemonic actors, which produce new territorialities, new forms of existence and of resistance. Such proposition is associated to Peixoto (2000, p.23), to whom the heritagedynamic is also a result from "[...] the growth and



broadening of a market's competition spirit in different spaces, regarding to whom the world heritage status is more worth it".

Such fact is determined, for example, in the strategies of restoration and revitalization of the architectonic archives present in the initial urban nucleus of several historical cities and that aim at rescue and it safeguards from a historical past, impressed under the sign of authenticity and of the local or national identity. The heritage policies determine the senses that will circulate in the urban spaces, in which it becomes highlighted the tourism as social and economical practice that boosts new uses to the cultural assets and the production of new territoriality. Following the dialogue between cultural heritage and tourism, a process of valuation of the historical areas is seen under the perspective of urban development and valuation of heritage, territories and communities.

We have today, a tense territory, where new objects aim at expelling or replacing the old objects and where vertical pragmatic orders are imposed on the horizontal orders of the culture, where the changes are quick and the value is unstable. In such territory, there is a concentration of values in certain points and a deprivation in others, one territory distributes values, but from a command that does not have relation with the national will (Santos[s.d.],p.05).

In such scenery, the culture is seen as a resource (Yúdice, 2006), fact that unravels the entanglement between the cultural heritage and the market of symbolic assets. According to Vivant (2012, p.19), "the culture is used in the board of urban policies as valuation tool of the space" and turns into the central axis of the proposals of economical development and of quality of life to the locals of historical centers.

The strategies for urban renewal and of revitalization constitute a mechanism of preservation of the cultural heritage that reflects on the production of new scenarios, or new landscapes, as the articulation between the tradition and the modernity, preservation and change. Associated to the economical globalization and to the new technologies of information and





communication, the increase in the competition between the cities results on the transformation of cultural neighborhoods and of heritage spaces into territories or entertainment, leisure hubs and cultural consumption.

In face of the crescent articulation between the process of globalization, the dynamic of the cities and the strategies to maintain the reproduction of capital, Almeida (2017) emphasizes that the heritage of the cities guided to the market neglects the resolution of local problems and turns itself to the global gear of reproduction of the capitalist system once

[...] The interventions and the infrastructure in the city are built under the pretext of re-qualification, making it more attractive to investment of capital, searching to value it economically. Such processes are inserted in a context of urban policies that behave each day more as economical agents, by applying methods of the financial market and tools from Strategic Marketing and City Marketing, tools similar as the ones in companies (Almeida, 2017, p. 83-84, highlight from the author).

The models for urban renewal or for revitalization of heritage areas adopted in the so called underdeveloped countries are enhanced from the 1990's decade on, and attend a neoliberal eager founded in the traditional concept of economical predominant development, escaping the benefits and social opportunities in an equal form to the communities that live in locations attached to the periphery area, as approached by Milton Santos (2000), submitted to the neoliberal perspectives.

The worsening of the competition and of the competitiveness are extended from the countries and companies and starts to approach the places. Consequently, new forms of planning and urban management appear with the denomination of strategic planning focused on the demands of the globalized market to the *city marketing*, which culminate in the elaboration of plans, programs and projects that involve processes of gentrification of degraded areas, under the speech of local development. However, in





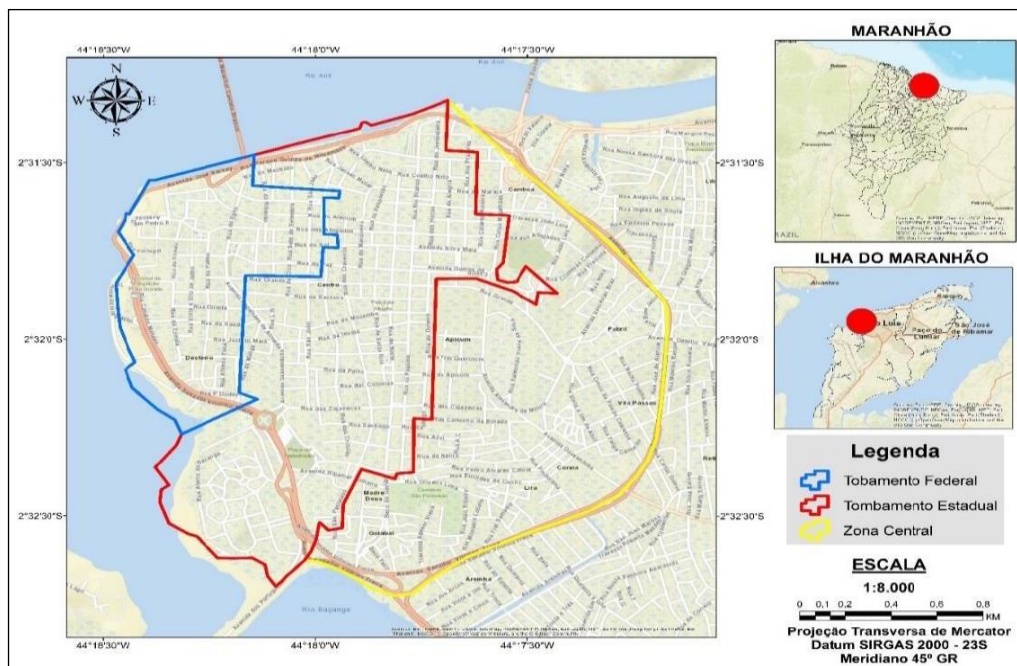
practice, such projects transform the places and the territories in products with purposes of attracting businessmen, investors and of tourists/visitors interested in experiences based on the cultural legacy (Vainer, 2000; Peixoto, 2000; Lima, 2014).

As follows, the axis of reflection are directed to the historical center of the city of São Luís, Maranhão, with purposes of analyzing the positive and negative interference of the program of revitalization of the Historical and Cultural revitalization of the Heritage.

### **THE PROGRAM OF PRESERVATION OF THE HISTORICAL CENTER OF SÃO LUÍS (MA)**

With an area of approximately 220 hectares, the historical center of São Luís is located in the Northeast of the Island of São Luís, in the border plateau to the mouth of the rivers Anil and Bacanga. Its formation dates to the first quarter of the 17th century and for the constructions that were built form the urban expansion of the city throughout the 18th, 19th and early 20th century (Andres, 1998). Currently, it is formed by eleven neighborhoods – Praia Grande, Desterro, Center, Madre Deus, Goiabal, Lira, Apicum, Coréia, Vila Passos, Fabril, Diamante and Camboa -, being inserted in preservation zones at federal and state level. The group is under preservation oder formed by around 5,607 real states, being 978 located in the 60 hectares of the area of federal protection and 4,629 real state in the area of state production with 160 hectares (Andres,1998) (Figure1).





**Figure1.** Areas of Protection of the Historical Center of Sao Luis.  
Source: Sombra, Masullo, Lopes (202, p.1923).

Its importance goes back to the 17th., 18th. And 19th. Century, periods in which the city lived a period of social-economical and cultural effervescence. With its later decline, it resulted in the space where the representativity – in terms of maintenance of the traditional aspects of the local culture and preservation of the architectonic archive – guided the conception and operationalization of a revitalization program for the Historical Center of São Luís and, more recently, also incorporating markedly touristic objects (Guedes,2001).

Among the first initiatives of heritage preservation, it can be highlighted the state protection of the urban area with 160 ha in the year of 1968; in 1974, the federal protection occurred, benefiting an area of 60 ha. In the year of 1979, the First National Convention of Praia Grande occurred, event in which “specialists from all over the country got together to debate the proposal of revitalization of the Historical Center elaborated by the architect John Gisiger” (Andrés, 1998, p. 105).

The Program of Preservation and Revitalization of the Historical Center of São Luís (PPRCH/SL), called To Relive Project, initiated its activities in the late 80's, approaching the neighborhoods of Praia Grande and Desterro, once those areas presented themselves very deteriorated and degraded, with severe problems of traffic jam, under living, prostitution and violence.

The project encompassed the performance of pavement work, in addition to the revitalization of historical houses, in the sense of aggregating value to the local heritage, reintegrating it to the social dynamic of the community. It still boosted the location and spacial concentration of the management functions of the governs at federal, state and city level, implying that the proximity with the commercial center of the town would make an intense retail commerce viable and a demand for parking spaces.

The guidelines that emerged from such meeting predominantly emphasized the preservation of the historical, artistic and cultural heritage that would determine the different expectations regarding such area; they aimed at promoting the diversification of the existing activities and benefiting the local population by adopting as strategy to maintain the more singular characteristics of the space as possible, which would implicate to keep the daily living of the locals.

According to such propositions, there would be an uncentered and shared management of the historical center with the rest of the city and would diminish the force of real state speculation. The goal was still boosting the small and middle-sized tourism activities; to ensure the commitment of the public administration; and to reinforce the guidelines through the fiscal litigation (Maranhão,1981).

The maintenance of such urban space become one of the booster elements of tourism, which promotes the cultural heritage as one of the city's singularities with the purpose of attracting visitors interested in knowing the cultural legacy. Consequently, an "urban entrepreneurship" is highlighted



(Harvey, 2005) in the scope of heritage policies, which, not seldom, transform spaces of life into places of attraction for private investment, market competition, at the same time that do not consider the community demands regarding its presence in the re-qualified spaces:

In such conception, the city acquires the form of merchandise, city-object, company and as it is such, it has explicit purposes: to compete for the investment of capital, technology and management competence; to attract new industries and businesses; to acquire competition in terms of price and quality of the services and to have potential of capture and retention of a properly qualified workforce.

Following such direction “[...] The public-private partnership will assure that signs and interests of the market will be properly presented, represented, in the process of planning and of the decision” (Vainer, 2007, p. 87). Therefore, in practice, the interventions that follows make the places and the territories into products for attraction purposes of businessmen, investors and tourists/visitors interested in the experiences that the city-company may provide.

Still, according to the authors, the concepts of the public power and the city are re-defined, once that the city transforms itself into an economical subject/actor, denying its condition of political space; its dynamics start to operate in a new rationality due to the association with private business groups, with the exception of the “segments of scarce strategic relevance”, in such case, the locals of revitalized regions.

Arantes (2007) observes that such processes are characterized by symbolic uneven exchanges, such as the manipulation of symbolic languages of exclusion and living (*entitlement*, the promise of jobs and business promoted by the ability of the “*place entrepreneurs*” and the alliance with the Third Sector. In the majority of the urban regeneration models with cultural basis, the disfavored population are kept apart from the process, being relocated to other places as sanitation measures of the spaces.



It is promoted, this way, a spacial segregation and remarking of areas for the amuse of use of certain social groups. In addition to the valuation of the visual and aesthetic aspect of neighborhoods and re-qualified zones, phenomenon called gentrification or ennobling, it is highlight as integrator part of such process the raise of real state speculation.

In such direction, it is inferred, based on the considerations by Harvey (2006) on the acceleration of time-space and the gathering of capital on the territories, that the managers of the contemporary cities promote urban projects with the purpose of disseminating a positive image in the market; the architecture assumes a spectacle character with the purpose of attracting capital and people:

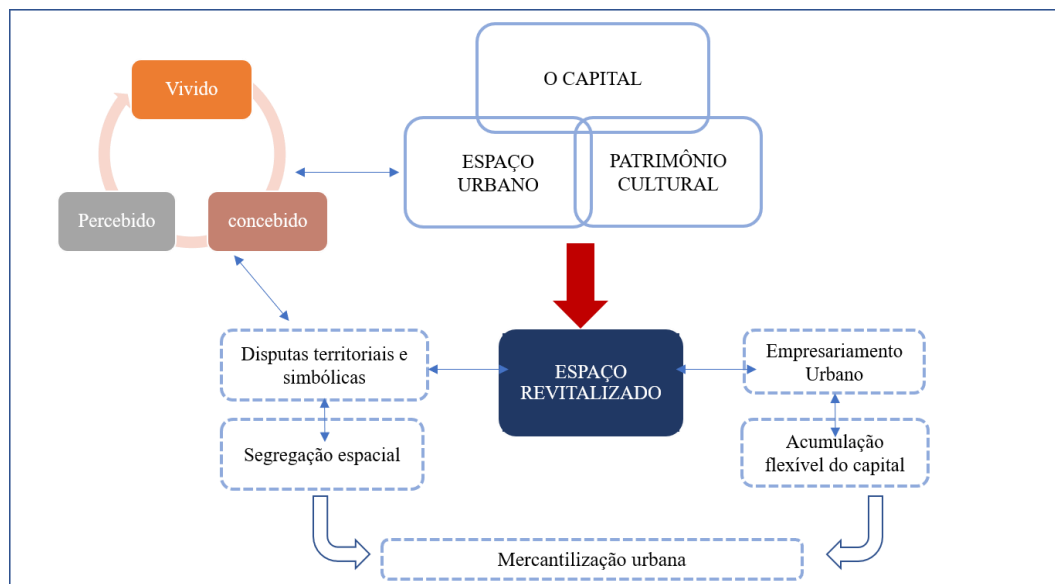
The result, naturally, is to give the impression that the city from the future will be a city of only control and command activities, an international city, a post-industrial city, where the export of services (financial, information, production of knowledge) becomes the economical basis for the urban survival (Harvey, 2006, p.177).

The acceleration of time is operated through public and private investments in certain factors of production – urban infrastructure, allocation of cultural and leisure equipment, among others – that make the appropriation of spaces and the creation of an environment that generates value to the distributed in the market possible. By discussing the process of heritage and cultural mercantilization of the city of Ouro Preto (MG), Ferreira & Teixeira da Silva (2023) pointed out that the historical cities are guided as symbolic assets by the State and by the capital, undergoing the business logic of production of urban spaces with market purposes.

According to the authors, the association between strategic planning and urban policies reveal a neoliberal management of the territory, resulting in land inequalities and boosting the social-spacial contradictions. The return to the past, propagated by the institutional and touristic marketing, the replacement of the poor population which lives in such areas to further locations and the



possibility of maintenance of the *status quo* of those who transit in the renewed space are some of the factors which collaborate to the business logic that culminates in the mercantilization of the spaces. Such relations were described in the following scheme:



**Figure 2.** Dynamic of the gentrified space.

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2023).

Therefore, to the notion of the used territory (Santos, 1996), overlaps the notion of the “strategic territory of action” (Ribeiro, 2003), molded by the globalized features, homogenized, poor in experiences and by the active participation of locals in the decisions that impact their daily reality. The marketing of urban spaces transforms the cities in places prone to the accumulation of capital, valuating the commercial trades of symbolic assets (the popular art, the parties and the traditions that emerge from the territories), in detriment of its social use, which is supported by bonds of solidarity, affection and by the feeling of belonging.

The dialectic between the local/global, present in the strategies of revitalization of the historical centers is crossed by conflicts due to the gentrification of the historical-cultural heritage and their uses and daily

appropriations by locals. As example of such scenario, the dynamics that occur in the historical center of São Luís are highlighted. As follows, the methodology of the research is presented and some appointments that emerge from the initial reflections on the main challenges presents in the policies of the local heritage.

## **METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES**

The research is fit int he qualitative approach which, according to Sampieri *et. al* (2013), has the purpose of deepening of the information on a certain phenomenon, aiming at understanding the opinions, ideas, meanings and experiences. Such focus may also be applied when the theme is still little explored or presents a limited repertoire of information in order for the researcher, in an exploratory path, can raise hypothesis and establish relations and provisional inferences.

The study of the qualitative case was the proper method to the purposes of this research, once it was intended to draw a reflection on the certain phenomenon – the effects of the revitalization on the uses of the historical heritage in the contemporary context – which allowed the investigators to draw “a holistic perspective of the real world” (Yin, 2015, p. 4). The operationalization of a single case study assumes a detailed and deep gathered, involving multiple sources of information, whose result consists on a detailed-holistic or embodied description (approaches a specific aspect of the case) and themes of the case (Creswell, 2014).

For this study, the research held bibliographic research and documented research, complemented by direct observation in the neighborhoods of Praia Grande and Desterro, chosen by having a greater touristic movement in the historical center. In the elaboration of the theoretical board, initially, the bibliographic research in the data bases of Scielo and in the Journal Portal from





Capes identified the bibliography which had the greater adherence to the theme, at the same time that enabled the comprehension of the main concepts of the study. In the process of bibliographic raise, the following terms were used: “historical heritage”, “revitalization”, “historical center”, “community”, “cultural tourism” and “impacts”.

Particularly, the territory emerges as a guiding category of discussion and analysis, based on the theoretical contributions of Santos (2000) and Ribeiro (2003), when the authors approached the concepts of used territory and spectacle territory. To such categories, the category of heritage, in the perspective of Almeida (2017) and of gentrification, theoretically supported by Peixoto (2000) and Lima (2014).

Regarding the scope of the documental research, the Program of Preservation and Revitalization of the Historical Center of SãoLuís [PPRCH/SL] was analyzed, in terms of goals, strategies and performed actions, according to the phases in which the referred programs has been materialized, aiming at measuring the effects of the policies in the uses of the historical heritage through direct and systematic observations, performed in the month of July 2022. A systematic script of observation was used based on the guidelines of the Program of Revitalization of the Historical Center, from which the following aspects were observed: social uses of the historical heritage; diversification of the activities, conservation of the archive and social-economical and cultural impacts. The dialogue between the empiric evidences and the adopted theoretical reference in the study helped understanding the current dynamic of the historical center and the characterization of the challenges of the revitalization process.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Notably, the preservation of the architectonic group of the city as place for concentration of activities and people is a relation that involves factors and



political, economical and social conflicts, and it becomes evident in the definition of city as “space of confrontation of varied and multiple interests” (Serra, 1991, p. 74). In such interim, the proposal of revitalization of the historical center of São Luís gained not only a reformulation in the physical structure of the location, but also a re-organization in the way of life of the traditional locals. The reforms and restorations in the colonial edification carry within themselves a proposal of reconfiguration in which was anchored under the sign of civility and sanitation, inserted in an ideologically political and business dimension.

A preliminary analysis of the documents that grounded the Program of Preservation and Revitalization of the Historical Center of São Luís revealed the importance given by official members of the heritage to the tangible or material dimension of the architectonic archive, expressed by decrees, preservation, recuperation of real state and actions of inspection of the edified monuments.

The heritage worked, initially, as a mechanism of symbolic construction of affirmation of a local identity that does not imply the cultural plurality, configuring itself as a resource to create a unilateral idea of collective unity. It was noticed the importance given to some areas and the neglect that other areas are treated, since that both have been protected by the legislation; this occurs due to the political, economical and mainly touristic interest, that cities like São Luís receive.

By acquiring the grant of heritage city, São Luís has become an important receptor center of tourists, since that in it aspects that make the city unique, original may be identified: the typo-logical characteristics, the styles of constructions, the gastronomic particularities and the local cultural manifestations. The promotion of activities of tourism focus that followed the project Relive have made the insertion of such territory in the tourism market with expansion purposes tense, meanwhile the alternative to reduce the process of economical recession and the relative abandon of the area, stimulating, therefore, the renovation of the urban space through tourism.



As result of the process of tourism valuation, the area has been suffering a process of ennobling or gentrification looking at its insertion in the logic of consumption in the tourism globalized market, in which some locations have become attractions, notably to high money power foreigners. It was noticed the valuation of certain heritage assets in strategic places, the movement of the local population to further places, far from the area considered touristic – the neighborhood of Praia Grande, just as the attempt to provide a smoke screen of the social and economical interperes present in the surroundings of the cultural assets. In the vision of Choay (2001), such strategy unleashes a *mise-en-scène*, which implies, in such case, in an exacerbated image, implicitly with make up on and, therefore, styled of the cultural heritage.

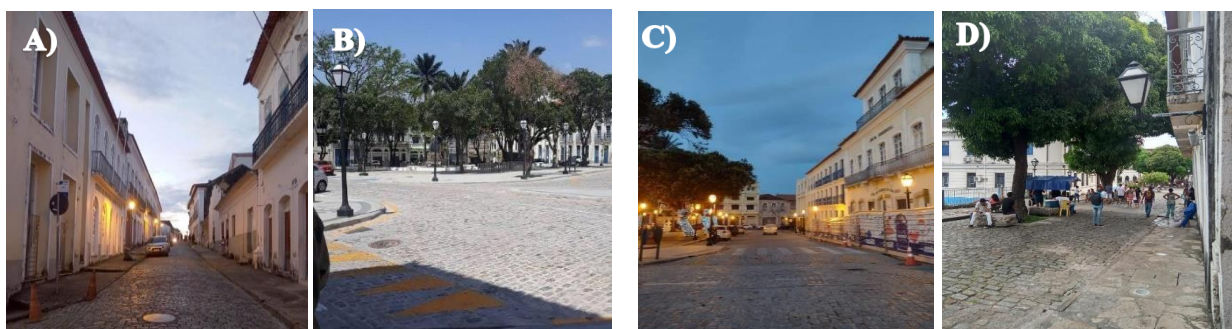
The implantation of such intervention models provides new uses to the spaces, in addition to leading to the gentrification, once the phenomenon of valuation elevates the prices of several services, transforming the area in an important commercial segment in detriment of its habitation use (Santos, Marques & Leite, 2022).

The transference of the traditional population to other areas of the historical center emphasizes the touristic character attributed to the location, with the formality in the commercial relations involving businessmen and tourism groups, in addition to verifying the intense policing in the location. Such aspects contrast with the elements of social living, which are predominant in the other locations of tourism interest in the city. Great part of the colonial real state have become locations for state and city public administration offices, or have been re-funcioned, becoming places to store equipment related to tourism, such as travelagencies, culture houses and museums, bars, restaurants, arts and crafts *souvernirs* stores, reducing their social and recreational use.

Another aspect that shows how an inarticulate management of the historical heritage may lead to negative interference to the locals refers to the



prioritization of repairs and improvements which are made in the facades and on the streets, leaving aside the interior of the houses and the farther away locations from the touristic visitations. The symbolic reconstruction of the space and of the time in the revitalized area is a contradiction from the situation in which the majority of the traditional locals live, who do not have necessary resources to maintain the preservation of the heritage, contributing to reduce the quality of live in the community (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** A) Rua do Giz; B) Praça Benedito Leite; C) Praça João Lisboa D) Rua Portugal.

Source: Field research (2022).

In such mechanism of attractiveness, the urban space is remodeled to fulfill the needs of the touristic demand. The embezzlement and the sanitation of the location, common in areas that have suffered processes of revitalization, contribute to accentuate the privatization of the urban cultural heritage. It also occurs upon the social groups that present characteristics which do not fit the new functions of the valued historical centers, as for example, informal or street vendors and *hippies*.

These suffer constant lawsuits for inspection of their activities by the city hall office and, in some cases, they are extracted or transferred to other areas, in order to avoid greater problems for tourists and visitors (Silva, 2009). It occurs a delimitation of the urban space for the practice of tourism activities, with the

concentration of activities, products and cultural services and the selection of monuments and heritage assets that may become objects for the visitor's view.

Although in the scope of the Preservation and Revitalization Program of the Historical Center [PPRCH] the social-educational actions and of social inclusion were predicted, the interventions performed during such period were limited to the restoration of historical buildings; the proposals for the community sensibilization and of heritage education, when performed, were punctual actions that needed a greater system, just as a shared management between the public organs, the business-people and the local community, aiming at conservation and maintenance of the integrity of the cultural heritage of São Luís. Regarding the need of insertion in the community of the management mechanisms of the revitalized heritage assets, the absence of an effective participation of the community concerns the established practices of preservation to the architectonic archive by the residents.

Despite the guidelines of the Program of Revitalization included important aspects regarding the promotion of the local social-economical development the efficiency has not been reached: the living issue, one of the components of the revitalization programs, has not been solved yet (Guedes, 2001). It becomes even more expressive the number of beggars and of families living in deteriorated and buildings and under degrading conditions. It was noticed, through performed observations, the existence of degraded real state, abandoned by old locals and that could have been revitalized through an urban policy of social, touristic and cultural purposes, with positive repercussions for the revaluation of such urban space (Figure 4).





**Figure 4.** Real state in situation of deterioration

Fonte: Source: Field research (2022).

It is highlighted that in the year of 2019 the Program Our Center was instituted by the State Govern of Maranhão, according to the Decree nº 34.959, of June 26th, whose goal was to make the “Historical Center of São Luís reference in renewal and sustainable development, preserving its historical and cultural value at the same time that promotes the center of the city of São Luís as democratic space” (Maranhão, 2019). Among the projects inserted in such program, it can be highlighted the “Living Downtown”, instituted by the State Law nº10.997, of March 29th, 2019, with the purpose of promoting the social living in the downtown region of the city of São Luís, as well as promoting improvements of the already existing real states.

This way and, returning to the analysis of the production of urban spaces in Milton Santos (1996), an association can be made between the heritage policies in São Luís and the construction of luminous spaces and opaque spaces. The former would be spaces created by the logic of the global capitalism, they are spaces of the consensus, homogeneous, of production and capitalistic production. The latter regards the space of conflicts, close, appropriated creatively by the community and that obey other rationality, the one of social action, drew by the dense experiences of the social actors with



the urban space. It represents the possibility of resistance, of new uses and occupations of the space re-signifying it, since in it coexist the diversity, the community synergies and with those, the processes of social transformation:

It is necessary to extract other everyday, not the one masked in the spectacle, whose explicit function is to empty it and to expose its own emptiness. The totality should be searched for in the forms that the poverty has produced, there lives the possibility of enrichment of the daily life. The everyday that prepares the revolution is closed in the comfort, in the duties, in everything that destroys the imagination (Velloso, 2016, p.3).

Such revolution, occurs, for example, in the artistic occupations of the existence collective in the historic downtown and that favors the exercise of creativity and of citizenship (Figure 5); in the projects performed by the association of locals that value the memory of the city through actions of heritage education and social inclusion. It reverberates in the rhythm of the players of the Creole Drum, African oriented cultural manifestation and that has in such territory a space of identity affirmation, among other initiatives.



**Figure 5.** Workshop performed by the collective The Circus is On the Street. Source: Facebook (2022).

In such direction, Ribeiro & Balsan (2023) highlight the importance of heritage education as didactic-pedagogical tool that allows the recognition



of the importance and the consequent appropriation of the cultural heritage by locals. The interface between heritage education and pedagogical tourism also appears as an important strategy that reveals the senses and the meanings of the heritage spaces, in addition to contributing to a citizen formation.

In the path of such reflection, Ramos (2019), discusses the barriers of the rehabilitation of the historical center of Penedo (AL), approaching the process of heritage activation as strategy that aligns the touristic uses and the sustainability of the cultural heritage through the conjugation of efforts between the public management and the local community. According to the authors, the interpretation of heritage assets consists on a strategy of exhibiting the meanings of the cultural heritage in a way to promote feelings and conservationist attitudes. The importance of interpretative and integrated planning of the cultural heritage is capable of promoting the feelings of belonging to the community and significant livings to tourists, broadening the possibilities of a sustainable development in the long run.

It is defender, therefore, the use of the territory, used, practiced, experienced by locals as an essential component for the development of the local, cultural and natural base, under the aegis of the cooperation, solidarity, struggles, and the political resistance, in the way described by Santos (2018). Following the same guidance, Seixas & Costa (2011,p.78) argument that the alternative/emergent spaces are appropriated by social classes and characterized by an elevated differentiation, as the craftsmen and immigrants, living in "interstitial/spectator spaces of the institutional and urban city, with low incomes".

The revitalization does not only refer to the maintenance of architectonic groups, in a way to maintain their physical integrity, but it acts on the ability to insert them in the urban dynamic, coating them with new values. In the vision of Fonseca (2017, p. 34), the preservation policies need to go beyond the technical conception, since



[...] They necessarily approach a greater scope than a group of activities directed to the protection of assets. It is indispensable to go beyond and to question the process of production of such universe, that constitutes a heritage, the criteria of selection of assets and justify their protection; to identify the involved actors in such process and the purposes that are alleged to legit their work; to define the position of the State regarding such social practice and to investigate the degree of involvement of the society. It is about a less visible dimension, but not less significant, of the preservation policies.

In such bias, the tourism activity, with its multiple interfaces, may collaborate in the embodiment of locals in the local instances of power, engaging with the precepts of a democratic society and of the daily practice, idea from the concept of development with a local base, which grounds the referential from a reading and to the territory, with its own contradictions, relations of power, class struggles, ideology, symbolism and political manifestations.

The goal consists on valuing the different heritage and the symbolic content to them associated to, “that may be the urban architectonic structures, projects, activities, but always existing within a current and live net of relations between the social groups” (Gonçalves, 2007 p. 153). Implicit in such process resigns the need to make the right to the memory and the preservation of heritage of specific social group democratic; to value the sacred and profane spaces, recognized by the community as inherited legacy spaces, which announce present and past memories, relevant to have been built in spaces of cultural citizenship. Places where the memories and the stories up to then silenced, find mechanisms of legit in the proposals of protection and valuation of the cultural heritage.

In contrast to the economical perspective centered on the competition and the globalized consumption in the cities, a more human and politically critical alternative appears of constructing proposals of participative management, which prioritizes the social-spacial relations of the social actors. Under the perspective of Bertacchini (2011, p.73) “[...] the greatest challenge,



as it is expected, is to find balance between the *top-down* and *bottom-up* approaches, between exploring preexisting germs of cultural vitality and introducing in the urban ecology new promising seeds, although still not adapted”.

Such reflections meet new paradigms of development focused on the human scale and that search for the formation of the human and social capital, the productive development of the territory and a participative management in their inter-dependencies and complementarities in the search of a common project. The local development is a process of mobilization and articulation of the political. The local development is a process of mobilization and articulation of the political, social, economical and environmental structures of a certain territory (country or region) from its potentialities and community synergies, with purposes of reaching certain goals, such as equality, growth and sustainability.

The development at local scale attends the interests and expectations of social actors, at the same time that it boosts the characteristics of the territory and the relations of reciprocity in a counter-hegemonic or solidarity slope, in which the movement, process, change and liberation are related. For the touristic activity to bring benefits, not only to the tourist/visitor, but for the local population, it is necessary there a good planning occurs, not only of the activities themselves, but one that ensures forms of access to the spaces destined to such activities.

It follows the understanding of Harvey (2012), who emphasizes that when we think about the type of city that we want, this cannot be separated from social bonds, the relation with nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values. With this, the authors reiterates that the right to the city is based on the collectivity, on the social participation and on the citizenship.

This way and, considering the urban space as a functional system gifted with organicity, it is understood that the actions of planning and urban



management in the historical center of São Luís implies in the use of efficient alternatives to promote the integrality of the cultural heritage, making them compatible with the contemporary demands, with the purpose of formulating and implanting viable alternatives to promote the endogenous and integrated long-term development.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present article constituted in an analytical effort to think about urban spaces in face of the new relations engendered by the way of capitalistic production. It was discussed, from the case study of the historical center of São Luís, Maranhão, the existing conflicts between the need to preserve the historical heritage in a way to attend the community demands, and the new dynamics caused by the touristic dynamic.

As results from such processes, it is highlighted that the urban business attracts investments to the maintenance of historical centers, transforming the cities into spaces of expositions, spectacle-cities or merchandise-cities. The performed research still brings a brief reflection on the current impacts of the interventions in the historical center of São Luís, notably the conflicts between the different uses and the appropriations of such space.

In the core of planning and urban management, the revitalization refers to a group of actions and strategies of refresh and search for the vitality of the urban areas, encompassing social, economical, cultural and physical-territorial aspects, through varied control and mechanisms of promotion form the urban processes. Therefore, such themes may be focus of studies in the sense of moving forward in the debates and in the reflections regarding the processes of urban renewal.

Considering the time dimension of the field research, this was restricted to the raise and analysis of secondary data on the process of heritage of the historical center of São Luís. Due to this, information with the representative of



the heritage and culture organs and from locals that live the tourism dynamic in the historical center were not obtained.

For future researches, studies focused on the perception of public and private managers on the strategies of revitalization, the participation of locals in the process of planning and urban management of the historical center of the city are suggested, as well as the construction of touristic territories in heritage areas.

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