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UNESCO's Historic Centre of Porto: Rehabilitation and Sustainability

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Abstract

The Historic Centre of Porto was classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1996. Given the many specificities and constraints in this area, an entity (Porto Vivo – SRU) was created in November of 2004, aiming at promoting the rehabilitation of Porto's downtown and of its Historic Centre.

While safeguarding the built heritage and respecting the environment, both local and global, the rehabilitation process aims at caring for the people, its identity, culture, health and way of life; regulating the functions in order to have a suitable mix of activities; promoting contemporary comfort conditions in buildings; and managing all mobility associated issues, bearing in mind the energy uses and their impact.

The success of the results observed so far encourages the promotion and expansion of their share among the concerned Communities of city leaders, building renovation actors and citizens in general.

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1. Introduction

The Historic Centre of Porto, classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1996, covers a territory of 50 ha of dense urban fabric. The municipality undertook some rehabilitation in the area between 1974 and 2014, but it then decided to create a new entity, in November of 2004, jointly with the National Housing Institute, called Porto Vivo - SRU (Society for Urban Rehabilitation), aiming at promoting the rehabilitation of Porto's downtown, in particular of its Historic Centre, and changing the paradigm, prioritizing the private investment above the public actions. Since July 2012, Porto Vivo, a public company, has been the managing authority of the Urban Rehabilitation Area of the Historic Centre, representing the municipality in terms of the urban licensing procedures, conducting integrated programs, as well as motivating and supporting owners and investors as the main parties responsible for interventions in small and large buildings (which in some cases can be entire blocks).

Porto Vivo is directly or indirectly responsible for all renovation processes, either by managing them directly or in close proximity with private promoters. In this role, it aims at developing durable and strategic projects while also:

- safeguarding the built heritage;
- promoting contemporary comfort conditions in buildings built many centuries ago;
- respecting the environment, both local and global;
- caring for people, its identity, its culture, its way of life and its health;
- regulating functions in order to have a suitable mix of activities.

With these concerns in mind, energy sufficiency and efficiency ends up having a crucial and determinant role in the rehabilitation of the Historic Centre of Porto. Despite dealing with very old structures and buildings, as a World Heritage Site, there is a definite need to promote their rehabilitation, namely creating dwellings for the 21st century.

Sharing all these concerns, Porto Vivo – SRU together with Porto's Energy Agency, the Faculty of Engineering, University of Porto, and the Regional Culture Directorate, developed a *vademecum* showing how best to implement rehabilitation in the Historic Centre, maximizing comfort through energy sufficiency and efficiency actions, and published as the “Guide of Terms of Reference for Buildings' Energy and Environment Performance” (Porto Vivo, 2010).

2. World heritage site

The Historic Centre of Porto (Figure 1) is a territory with 50 ha, including 83 blocks and 1.976 buildings (32% of which in a bad state of conservation), and houses around 5,000 people. Its center today corresponds to the city's medieval section and is surrounded by a wall dating from the 13th and 14th centuries, known as the “Fernandina” wall.



Figure 1 – Overview of UNESCO's World Heritage Site (over the Douro river)

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