

Escala Hotel Conservation Plan

Its Impact on the Regeneration of the Nova Luz District – Sao Paulo

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Figure 1: Escala Hotel

Abstract

The conservation and management plan of the former Escala Hotel in the city centre of Sao Paulo, has a relevant impact on the overall development of the neighbouring land, and the regeneration programme for the Nova Luz district. This paper is the synthesis of a multidisciplinary approach to the rehabilitation of the Escala Hotel, its financial feasibility and development potential, in the light of the present urban legislation. It influences conservation plans for similar buildings in the area and represents a basic model to be considered for replication in other cases within the Nova Luz district.

Introduction

The former Escala Hotel is located in the Cathedral district of the city centre of Sao Paulo on the corner of Triunfo and Gusmoes streets. The neighbourhood was developed after the construction of the Luz (1901) and Julio Prestes (1926) railway station. The Triunfo street is named after the success of the war against Paraguay in 1870. Since mid 20th century, this area of the city is referred to as the “quadrilateral of sin”: comprising the land between the Duque de Caxias, São Joao, Maua and Ipiranga streets, which historically has held prostitution other unsolicitous activities and danger.

..... It is hard to believe that in the 70's, a small block of Victoria Street was one of the greatest centers of the film production of Brazil. Together with drunken men, transvestites and prostitutes, you can still find characters who helped write a chapter of magical history in Brazilian film industry. Currently, apart from a kid smoking crack, it is possible to find Ozualdo Candeias, Anibal Massaini, Claudio Portioli Indio and Jose Lopes, chatting.... The vicinity around the Luz and Julio Prestes railway station, became the transit place for people and products, because of the strategic location, many distributors of foreign films did settle in this area. By 1920 and 1930, well known companies such as Paramount, Fox and Metro (MGM) settled there. Decades later, the Triunfo Street has become a redoubt of cinema:

utilities, factories, specialized equipment, technical maintenance, services, and companies of the film industry. It was common to see men pulling carts loaded with cans of films through the streets. In the late 60s, the meeting point for students, actors and directors in the film industry, was the Costa del Sol Restaurant, at the 7 de Abril street. However, to be closer to exhibitors and distributors, they ended up moving to the Triunfo Street. The next fashionable restaurant was the Sovereign - which still exists, with a different name: the Triumpho´s... The first producer to be settled in Rua Triunfo was Osvaldo Massaini, in 1949, with Cinedistri Ltda.. That company was responsible for an important part of the film production of Sao Paulo, and the only Brazilian to have won the Palme d'Ór at Cannes Festival.....

LAURA LOPES and CARLOS JULIANO BARROS, published by Preserva Sao Paulo.

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There were two development stages of the Luz region, the first one relates to the construction of the railway, from the late 19th century to the 1930's, the second one corresponds to the cinema era in the 1970's.

The former Escala Hotel has a strong connection to the Luz and Julio Prestes railway stations, given the use of the building, the structural features and year of construction. The analysis of the building should be carried out in the context of the activities during the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, when this particular area was the first stop for immigrants coming from the interior of Brazil, and the construction of hotels, hostels and pensions were common. The former Escala Hotel was built as part of the development process of the neighbourhood. The decline of the railway system by mid 20th century generated changes in the urban life. The activities surrounding the Luz station changed from institutional uses to a generalized commerce and trading activities.

The current Luz railway station (1895-1901) replaced the original structure built in 1867. The actual building was part of a group of stations built by the British Sao Paulo Railway Company to connect the interior of the State (Jundai) to the port of Santos. Luz station had the most significant impact on the development of the State, and to some extent, to the development of Brazil, providing the necessary transport for the exportation of coffee which supported most of the economy for a number of years in the early 20th century. The typology and external features of the station are closely linked to the presence of the British industry in many Latin American countries. Railway stations are significant in the transformation of urban and rural landscape, in technology and everyday life of towns during the first half of the 20th century.

The former Escala Hotel witnessed two stages, first, as part of the development process of the area, and later during the cinema boom of the Triunfo street in the late 1960's.

Given the fact that the Nova Luz regeneration programme launched by the Municipality of Sao Paulo in 2005, did not develop as expected, by mid 2007, Patrimonio Vivo (NGO), carried out a technical and legal assessment on the Nova Luz Programme. The results were poor regarding the real efficacy of the project in the light of the rehabilitation of heritage buildings and the participation of the private sector in the regeneration process.

In 2009, (over three years after the Nova Luz Project was announced), private investment in the revitalization of the mentioned urban area, has been very limited and the official expectation over the conservation of heritage buildings has not been met.

As heritage management architect, I was contacted by Patrimonio Vivo to lead a group of professionals to develop the original assessment made by Patrimonio Vivo, into an integral proposal to implement the aims of the Nova Luz Programme. Taking into account experiences in Latin America on: urban recovery, financial framework, urban policy and feasibility, an architectural proposal has been prepared together with feasibility studies to complete an alternative intervention model to warrant the sustainability of the historic building (former Escala Hotel).

Analysis

Heritage Status

The Nova Luz region is listed as a Regeneration Area by the municipality of Sao Paulo. Built heritage in Sao Paulo is managed by two different institutions:

- CONPRESP (Municipal Council of Preservation of the Historic Heritage).
- CONDEPHAAT (Council of the Historic, Artistic, Archaeological and Touristic Heritage of State of Sao Paulo).

The competences of these two bodies are not clear in the local legislation. Given the fact that the area has been declared of cultural significance by the CONDEPHAAT, as a buffer zone for the railway stations (Luz and Julio Prestes and 84 buildings not including the former Escala Hotel). CONPRESP has classified a number of buildings located within the mentioned area, as heritage items, the two listings are different in criteria and legislation. There is conflict of power between the two institutions.

When drafting this project proposal for municipal assessment, the former Escala Hotel was one of the two buildings of block number 76 listed as a heritage item together with the attached house on Gusmoes

street. While the former Escala Hotel is a remarkable eclectic building, the legislation only obliges to preserve the facade and the bulk of the building. The attached house has been dramatically transformed and has kept no traces of its original typology or formal features. The house is used as a warehouse.

Description of the Building

The former Escala Hotel was constructed as an iron structure, with reinforced concrete and clay bricks in 1911. The building comprises two levels, ground floor and attic, external and internal walls were made in clay bricks with cement rendering. The documentation research from municipal archives showed the foundation in reinforced concrete. The remains of the roof, confirmed that its support structure was made in timber, matching the specifications of the approval drawings. See Appendix #1.

The decorative features of the facades mixes baroque and neoclassical languages, to shape an outstanding example of the eclectic period in Latin America common during the first half of the 20th century.

Different activities given to the building are clearly expressed not only in the layout of the plans but also in the formal expression of the facades. The ground level exhibits a number of commercial doors and a “cushioning” (stucco stonework) design for the render, giving the appearance of a solid base for the building. The upper floors have windows and balconies to match the modular layout of the rooms. The top floor embedded in the pitched roof is by far, more interesting and ambitious in decoration, window features and carpentry, showing an intention to an elaborated completion of the building.

The internal layout of the ground floor is dedicated to commercial activities, the only relationship with the hotel activity is the two separate access doors to the upper floors. The functioning of level one and two has an elaborate staircase, one facing Gusmoes street for public use. A different staircase facing Triunfo street was designed for service purposes. The layout of the upper floors is developed around a central patio, one internal hallway to access different rooms. The layout of the top floor is not available nor in archives nor the measured drawings.

Integrity and Condition of the Building

The present condition of the Escala Hotel is the outcome of original materials and construction with subsequent changes, maintenance procedures, additions and the effects of time, fire and weathering. The current condition and legibility of the site as a whole is influenced by the removal of structures from the building since the hotel ceased operation in the 1980's.

The condition of most of the remaining original fabric of the Escala Hotel is good and remains serviceable. On-going use by illegal



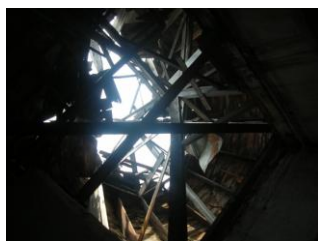
Facade detail showing missing parts of the rendering.



View of the cupola showing missing render on the brick walls.



View from the central patio, showing carpentry condition and structural reinforcement.



View from the cupola, showing missing structural elements and cladding.

Figure 2: Photos of the current condition.

occupants and commerce is significant in terms of transformations, damage and lack of maintenance and security. Finishes are generally original, although there is significant weathering on the timber structure and clay cladding on the roof. The timber structure requires to be replaced. The roof and gutters are in poor condition and urgently require replacement. The gable ends are in poor condition, offering little resistance to the infiltration of rain or entry of birds. They require immediate action to prevent further deterioration. A number of new walls have been constructed, they are intrusive and should be relocated. A detailed survey of their condition is beyond the scope of this report. See Figure 2.

Ground Level: The refurbishment process carried out during a number of years since the hotel activity was changed, led to the occupation of spaces such as the central skylight, redistribution of internal layout and subdivision of spaces. Due to the successive changes of use in the building, the original distribution is lost, original walls, and parts of the original layout such as the main staircase have been blocked and the original service access is now the only way to the upper floors. Despite the transformation of the layout we can say that parts of the original design still remain.

First Floor: As in the ground floor, the skylight and the main staircase has been cancelled. The illegal occupation of this floor, has introduced new bathrooms and laundry spaces. The former dining room has been subdivided into three different bedrooms. Interventions are mostly related to the addition of wet areas with no safety standards whatsoever. The condition of floors and carpentry is very poor.

Second Floor: The condition of this level is a consequence of the collapse of the roof and rain water has been leaking from the top floor into the second floor. Some areas have missing timber beams and wooden floors. Similar to the first floor, the major transformation is new wet areas, new electrical wiring and new partition walls.

Top Floor: The timber structure of the roof caught fire in the 1980's. Large extensions of the roof material is missing and other parts are severely damaged. The overall structure of the roof still exists and can be reconstructed. Carpentry of doors and windows were burned. Since then, the rain has worked its way through to the second floor.

The overall condition of the fabric and spaces of the building is poor, in particular after the fire on the top floor which left the roof with integral damage to the timber structure.

Statement of Significance

Historical

The Escala Hotel is representative of eclectic architecture of the early 20th century in Latin America, it was built with an imported steel structure from the early 20th century. This is one of the few existing

buildings near the Luz railway station that preserves those technological features. It represents an important document to understand the development of this urban area.

Economic Themes

The Escala Hotel is related to the institutional activities of the Luz railway station that leads to the economic development (commercial offices, banks, warehouses and hotels). Changes in the land transportation system and the increase of vehicles, made important changes on the functioning to the surrounding areas to the railway stations.

Social Themes

The Escala Hotel is significantly connected to the construction of the Luz and Julio Prestes railway station. The transformations of the region following the downsizing of the railway structure, allowed the increase of commercial activities, expelling housing and other small business. As a result, the area suffered degradation of the urban space, social and environmental changes. The construction of the Escala Hotel is evidence of the transit of passengers, the character of the place and its history.

Aesthetics Theme

The Escala Hotel is an example of robust and decorated architecture influenced by the eclectic movement from the early 20th century in Latin America. The European influence was evident during this period, caused by immigrants and professionals educated overseas. The building is relevant for its features but also because the singularity of its typology.

Landmark Value

The Escala Hotel has been abandoned for over a decade, its relevance as a hotel does not have any impact, nevertheless, it remains significant to the collective memory of the people as an urban reference.

Street Character

The Escala Hotel is significant in scale and proportions, despite the changes on Triunfo and Gusmoes streets. The Escala Hotel maintains a dialogue with the Luz railway station, and other buildings in the area. The use of cupolas on corner buildings are still present in some of the older constructions in the neighbourhood, making it part of a group of buildings with similar characteristics.

Heritage Assessment

State Heritage Assessment

CONDEPHAAT has state jurisdiction including the City of Sao Paulo. The current legislation states that the buffer zone surrounding Luz and Julio Prestes railway stations is a Conservation Area.

Local Heritage Assessment

CONPRESP has included the former Escala Hotel as a conservation building. The current legislation only mentions the preservation of the facade and the volume of the building.

Proposal

Conservation Policy

The conservation policies to be considered for the former Escala Hotel should form part of a comprehensive study to enhance the cultural significance of the building. The implementation of short, mid and long term policies, as well as the maintenance works should preserve the cultural significance of the building. These policies are supported by the following objectives:

- Preserve the heritage values of the building for the present and future generations.
- Adaptative re-use of the building to a compatible function.
- Typological restoration including the reconstruction of the cupola.
- Reconstruction of the top floor, given its extreme deterioration.
- Interpretation of the heritage values of the building.

Use

1. The building should be upgraded and restored for a compatible use respecting the original layout.
2. New uses should be carefully assessed in the light of the impact on heritage values of the building.

Adaptation

3. Adaptation to a new use is not only feasible but desirable, given the current structural condition of the building, respecting a less intervention principle on the historic fabric.

Roof

4. Complete reconstruction of the top floor and roof structure is necessary to restore the significance of the building.

Doors and Windows

5. Doors and windows on the facades should be repaired and restored.
6. New windows and doors should be sympathetic to the existing ones.

Interior

7. The internal layout of the building has been compromised by additions and alterations, significance of the typology has been greatly diminished. Conservation of the interior would not be warranted.

Existing Additions

8. The existing additions on the ground floor have introduced new electrical wiring and water supply causing damage and intrusion

to the steel structure, walls and floors. Those additions are encouraged to be demolished.

Future Additions

9. Integration of spaces is permitted. New additions should not interrupt hallways and circulations as originally designed.

Sanitary Facilities

10. Sanitary facilities should be reviewed in the light of the building code and the new user needs. Any increase of sanitary facilities should consider the original location of the bathrooms.

Services

11. New or upgraded systems should not intrude on the heritage fabric or character of the place.
12. Current additions on the ground floor should be removed.
13. Additional water tanks should be installed under the roof cladding.
14. Additional lighting for the new use should be installed.
15. Rain water should be collected and safely discharged from the building.

Interpretation

16. Stages of development of the site (including the housing development), operational and heritage value should be interpreted through interpretative signage and by making the location of elements and missing parts.

An interpretation of this policy can be examined against my Project Proposal in Appendix # 2.

Method

Strategy & Difficulties

Conservation Plan

The present Conservation Plan has gone through a preliminary assessment at the APROV (Department for Building Approvals) and CONDEPHAAT (Council for the Protection of Historic Heritage), the assessment has taken over one year to produce an official report.

Master Plan

A master plan to accomplish the conservation of a heritage building in the context of the Nova Luz regeneration programme requires an alternative way to finance conservation works. That is the reason for integrating the former Escala Hotel to the neighbouring land and produce a pilot project to ensure the sustainability of the heritage cultural expressions.

Approvals

The municipal assessment and approvals does impact in the feasibility of projects with the complexity of the Escala Hotel + Quadra 76. Taking into account that in average one year is the time frame for the

municipal bodies to produce a technical assessment, it is considerably unlikely to run feasibility studies on properties, construction, market prices and banking interest.

All proposed works on the heritage item must be reviewed by the municipality against the master plan and the expert's recommendations.

Design and Documentation

Design and documentation of the proposed works to the heritage building requires the completion of technical studies including: structural assessment, electrical, sewer, water supply, voice and communications, heating, air conditioning and the necessary detailing for construction.

Maintenance

This project includes a maintenance plan of the building to be reviewed by the municipality together with the owner.

Conservation Priorities

Urgent works:

- Reconstruction of roof and cladding
- Top floor repairs (floor beams, timber floor, walls, carpentry, finishing)

The conservation project for the Escala Hotel must be seen in the context of an integration with the new building.

Feasibility Issues

Feasibility of historic buildings (former Escala Hotel), in the context of the Nova Luz programme is significantly related to: the circumstances given by the local legislation to attract investors, the physical condition of the building, financial viability, and the tendencies of real estate market. To achieve feasibility in the preservation of the Escala Hotel it is necessary to see the context and the governmental policies.

The Nova Luz programme provides a set of conditions oriented to the redevelopment of the region, although the future of historic buildings within the region remain uncertain, since there are no provisions to warrant the intervention on the built heritage.

After a detailed assessment of the former Escala Hotel and its context, the building has shown difficulties to achieve an adequate balance between investment and return.

A feasible scenario for the rehabilitation of the former Escala Hotel and other buildings in the region, is to link the conservation project to a development plan including adjacent land. The objective of the equation is to balance conservation vs. building potential and other considerations that have a positive impact on the overall scheme of the business.

Sao Paulo in Context

The city center of Sao Paulo has limited comparisons with other experiences such as Havana - Cuba and Quito – Ecuador, in Latin America, which have proven to have achieved sustainability. Sao Paulo however, does exhibit some of the same urban and social circumstances that have been identified in Quito and Havana and in addition to that, Sao Paulo shows institutional conditions that could envisage the success of a revitalization process. Firstly, Sao Paulo shows an apparent political will to recognize a sector of the city centre, to be of historical value, cultural significance and economic potential. Secondly, it has developed an urban legislation to favour the revitalization of the Luz area. Thirdly, a tax legislation that widens the possibilities for private investors to allocate taxes into urban regeneration projects. And fourthly, the municipality has developed a mechanism of expropriation that facilitates the resolution of ownership and tenure issues of the land.

It is necessary to understand that feasibility of regenerative actions in urban areas is closely linked to the land policy, land ownership, tenure of buildings and real estate speculation. While a well structured legislation is essential to ensure a balanced development, it is also necessary to design integral urban interventions involving social and financial actors to control speculation and gentrification of the region.

Results & Current Status of the Work

Nova Luz Programme – Social Housing – Built Heritage

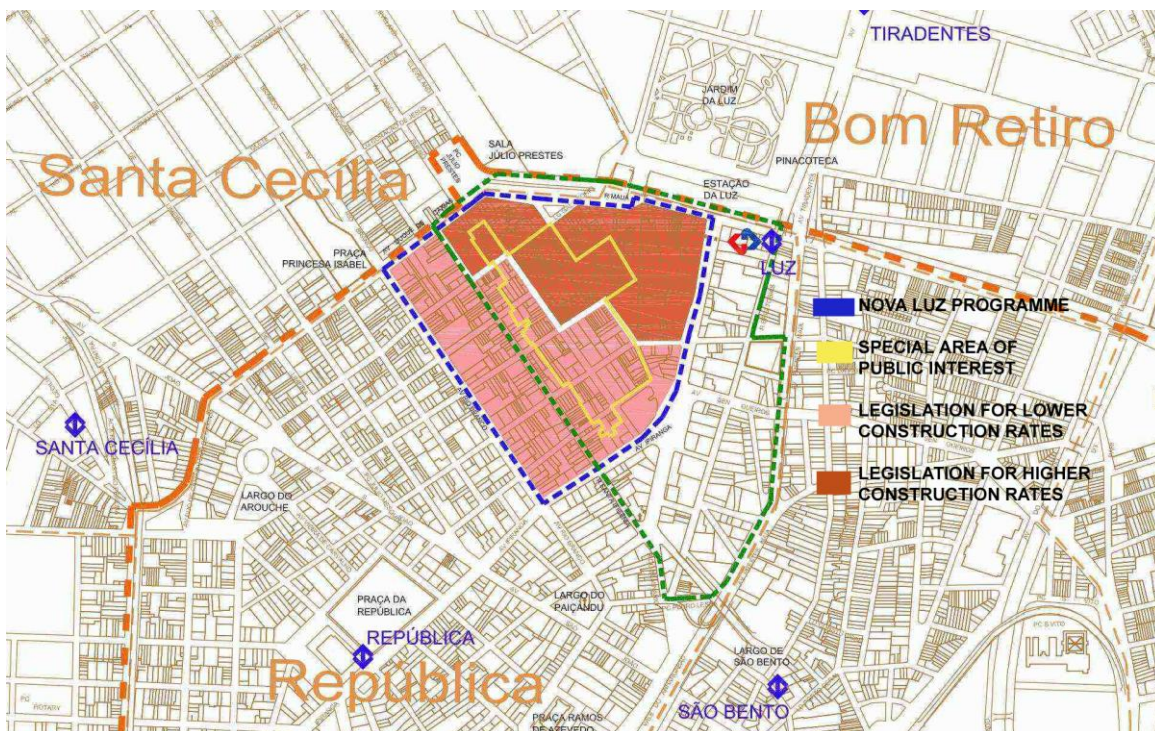


Figure 3: Nova Luz Programme - location

The Nova Luz Urban Regeneration Programme has decided to identify a number of blocks for ZEIS (Special Zoning for Social Housing) legislation to increase the development of social and low income housing projects. The declaration of Public Interest has been controversial and disputed by several sectors of the urban economy on the following grounds: firstly, the real estate sector supports the idea that low income people should not live in areas of better living conditions (transport, cultural and health infrastructure, security, etc.), secondly, that social housing generates slums and degradation to the region, thirdly, that social housing is feasible when the amount of units is substantial in considerable areas. Fourth, the availability of large “lots” of land is limited by the presence of heritage buildings, the integration of social housing and conservation does not improve the commercial conditions of the venues.

Given the circumstances imposed by the ZEIS legislation, its application in a region like Nova Luz (a historic area) requires a creative approach for feasibility studies to be undertaken which will combine built heritage with social and low income housing and provide realistic projects which will be attractive enough for private investments.

Development activities in the Nova Luz region that includes ZEIS legislation are determined by the official evaluation of land costs, carried out by CAJUFA (commission of experts of the judicial system), which assessed the real price per square meter of each and every “lot” subject to re-development, facilitating the financial studies.

The impact on the current residential buildings will be minimal given the fact that buildings above 3 stories (mostly housing) located within the ZEIS area are not feasible for demolition, maintaining the traditional inhabitants of the region. Another reason why housing projects have limited impact to the urban space is that social and low income housing are not mandatory to provide parking spaces.

Escala Hotel + Quadra 76

Given the above circumstances regarding the feasibility of conservation proposals for heritage buildings, their possibilities and limitations, Património Vivo NGO decided to carry out a pilot project to test the potential of heritage buildings to be integrated to development plans in the Nova Luz region.

Taking into account that block # 76 (Quadra 76 which includes the Escala Hotel building of the Nova Luz region), shows physical degradation, illegal occupation, vacant land and a heritage building, Património Vivo decided to carry out a study to test the feasibility of the current urban legislation for re-development of the block, see Appendix # 3. The assessment of the ZEIS area within the Nova Luz

Project showed that the average size for land subject to development, is between 2,500 and 2,700 M2, so the choice for this pilot project is to include the adjacent “lots”, to complete 2,700 m2.

Quadra 76 in Sao Paulo city centre exhibits social and physical degradation present in the overall context of Nova Luz. The current use of the land includes: one illegal parking lot, retail commercial buildings (IT, computer parts), housing and office buildings from 1960’s and 1970’s.

The definition of Quadra 76 is: A real estate development that combines social and low income housing, commercial space and incorporates the conservation of one heritage listed building.

The equation used for this feasibility study considers the mandatory area rates for social and low income housing (40% - 40%), commercial space (20%). According to the legislation by mid 2008, the conservation of listed building have the possibility to transfer building potential to a new development in the region increasing the construction area.

Development

Quadra 76 was designed based on the following principles: 1. Integration of the heritage building to the housing development. 2. Restitution of the public use of the former Escala Hotel. 3. Restitution of some of the activities related to the Triunfo street using part of the building as a cinema. 4. The new building to be sympathetic with the heritage item. See figure 4.

In addition to that, characteristics such as the height of the old building’s floors is determinant to design duplex units in the new building, to match external features such as windows and balconies. The legislation for social and low income housing states that social housing can’t be larger than 50,00 M2 and low income housing between 50,00 and 70,00 M2. The areas, shaped a contemporary building integrated to the historic building. Appendix #6.

Replication of the Model

The experience of integrating a heritage building into a development proposal (Quadra 76) has been tested in other cases, the ZEIS area and also other blocks within the Nova Luz Programme. The results of these assessments proved to be subject to replication in the majority of the lots with development potential with an average area of 2.500,00 M2 that have a neighbouring heritage building. See Appendix # 4 and 6.



Triunfo street



Gusmoes street

Figure 4: Adjacent land to the Former Escala Hotel.

Conclusion

The opportunity to develop a Conservation Plan for a heritage building in the perspective of a regeneration programme (Nova Luz) for a context as sensitive as the centre of Sao Paulo - Brazil, has shown the restricted possibilities preservation has, in securing the future of a building undergoing a major degradation process. I faced not only the challenge of the building itself but also the limitations of the conservation sector in participating in management and policy making for urban regeneration. For the past 20 years the Cultural Heritage industry has developed integrated perspectives to overcome difficulties like the one presented in this paper. It has also recognized the multidisciplinary approach needed for assessing interventions of urban revitalization, where the implications of preserving tangible and intangible expressions of cultural heritage are determined by a number of factors: governmental management policies, real estate market, social degradation, land and ownership policies, urban mobility and human sustainable development.

It is narrow minded to pretend that conservation of a building is limited to the context of its own condition, therefore it is fundamental to incorporate urban, social, economic and other aspects tuned to the global agenda of sustainability.

Traditionally Cultural Heritage has been an official responsibility of the state which has proven to be insufficient for the significance of the agenda that involves culture, urban development and social integration, amongs others. New forms of co-governance where civil society plays a role in supporting understanding between stakeholders seems to be a safe way to equity, and this is what the Escala Hotel Conservation Management Plan has influenced a holistic and multidisciplinary approach.

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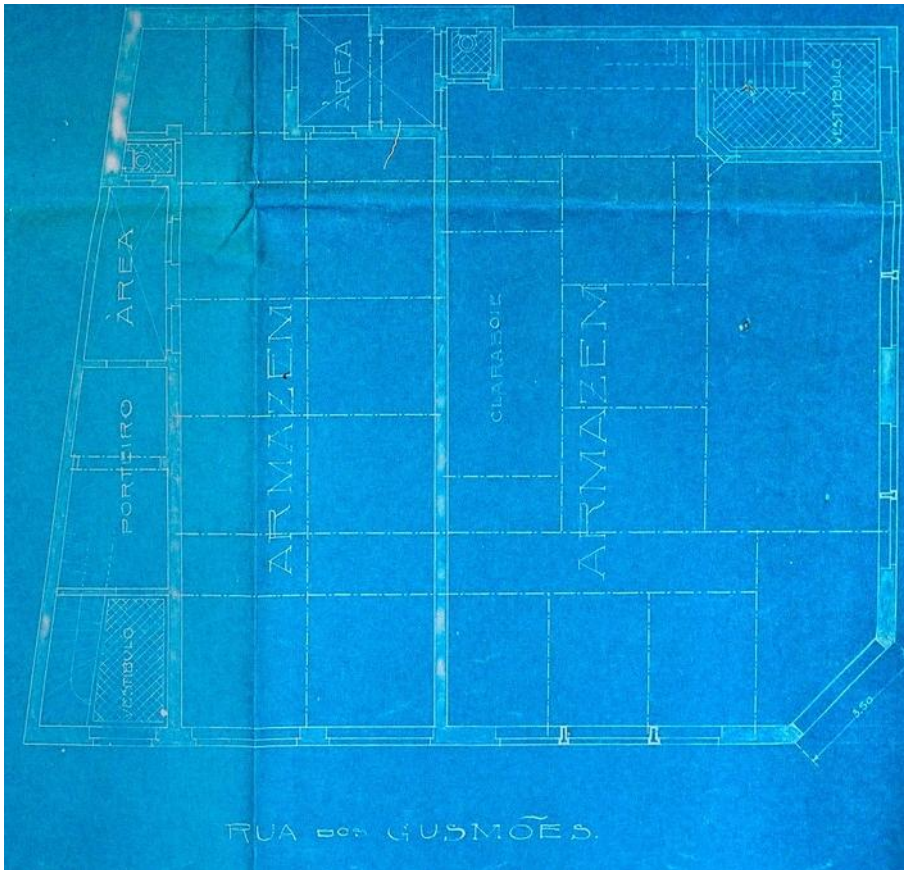
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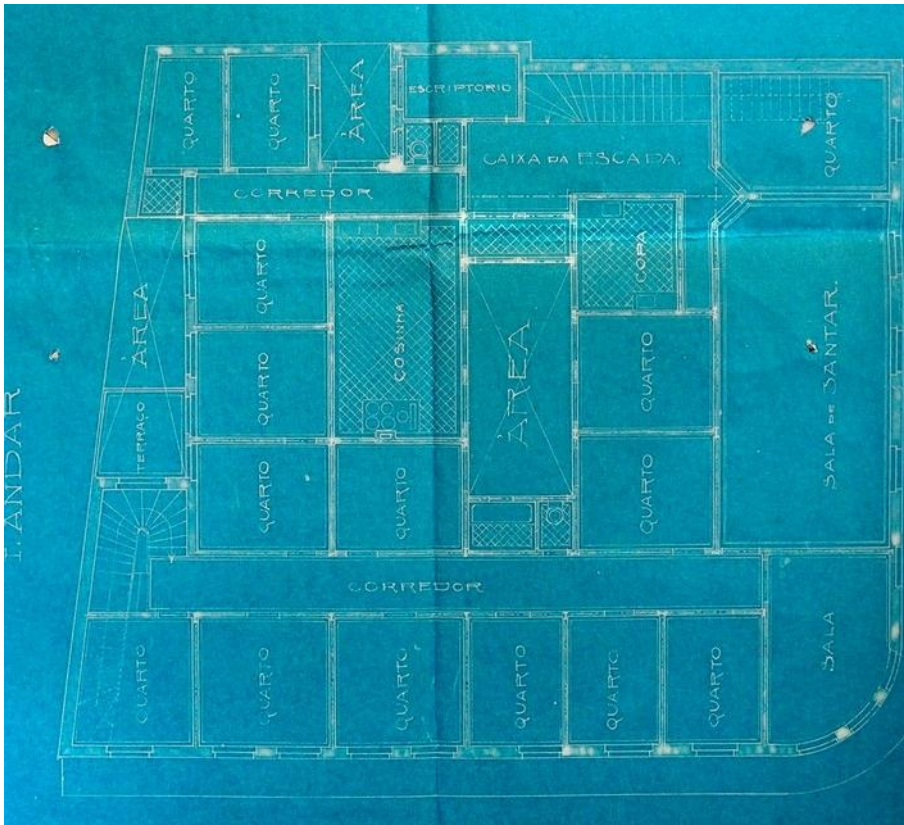
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Appendix # 1

Original Plans



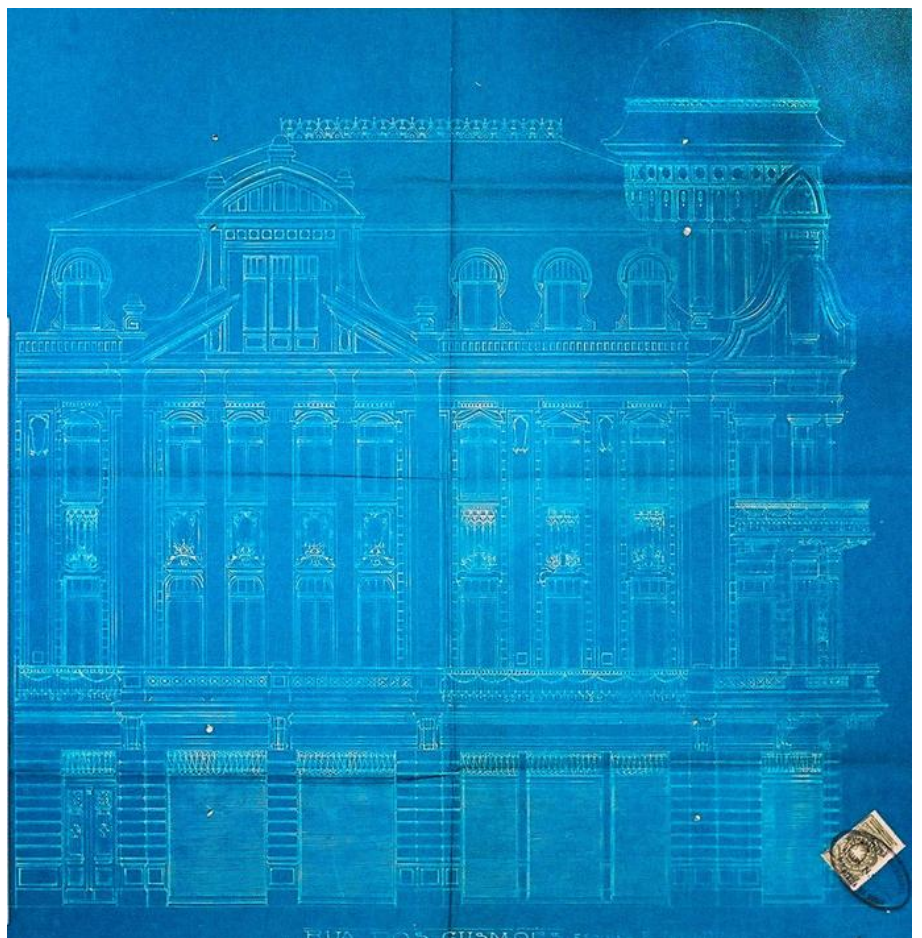
Ground Level plan, showing location of shops, entrances, staircases and structural layout.



First Level plan, showing layout of the former hotel, notice the central corridor, patios and staircases to serve employees and public.



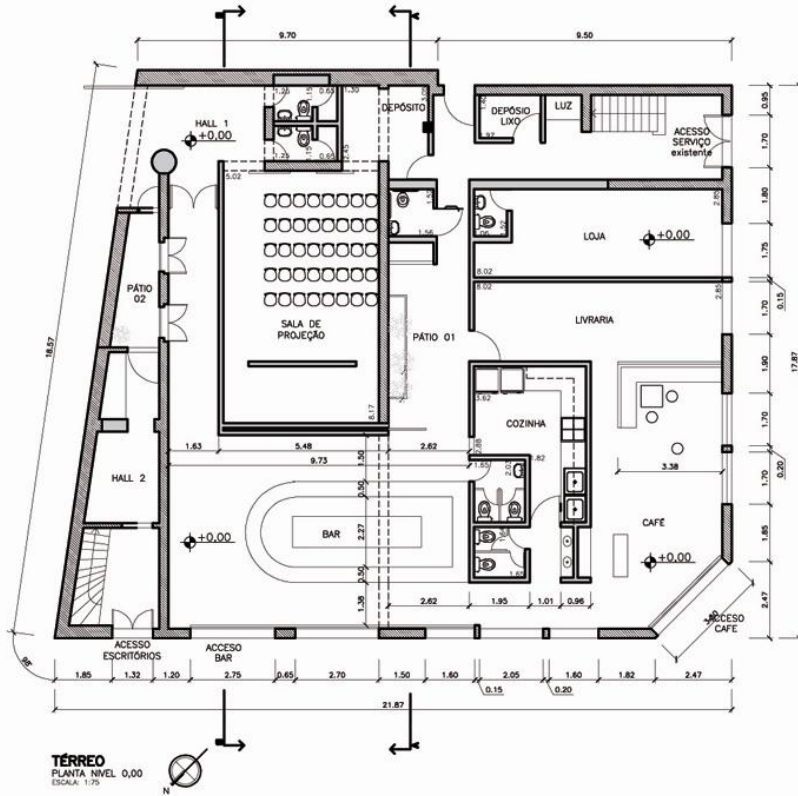
Second Level plan, showing original layout.



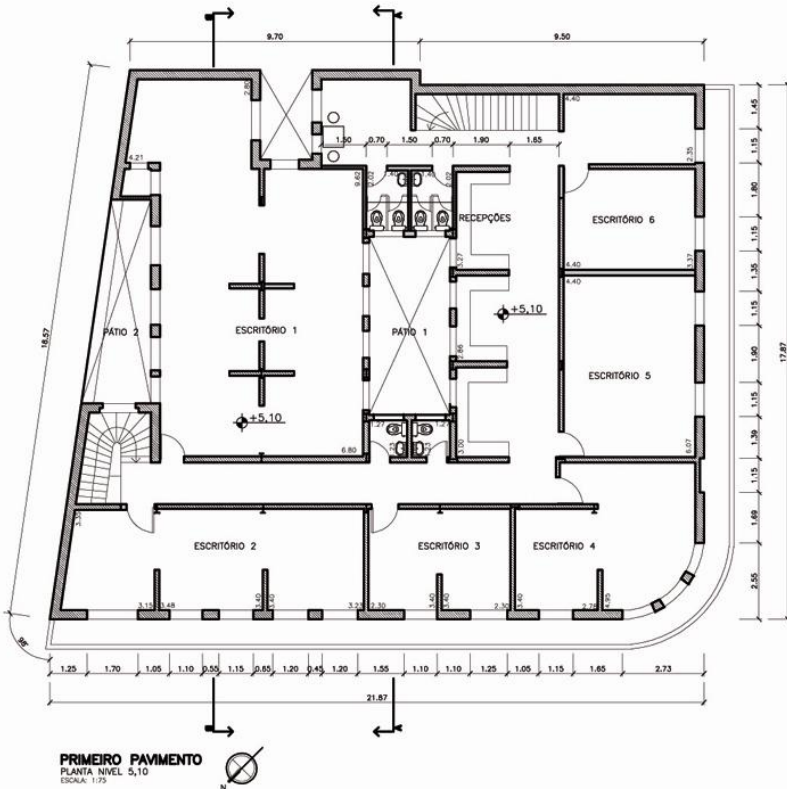
Northern Elevation.

Appendix # 2

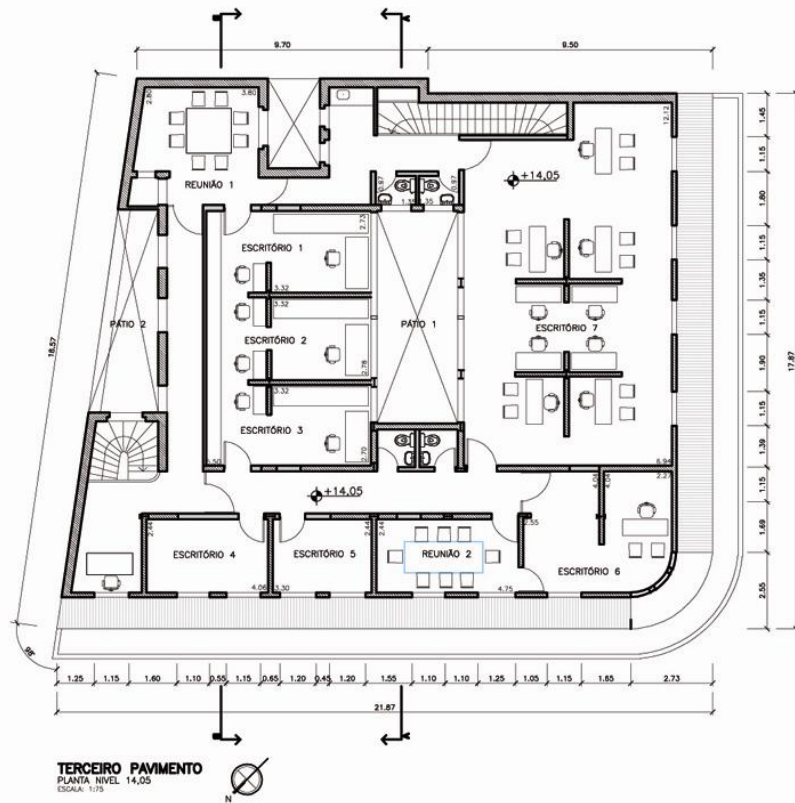
Project Proposal Plans



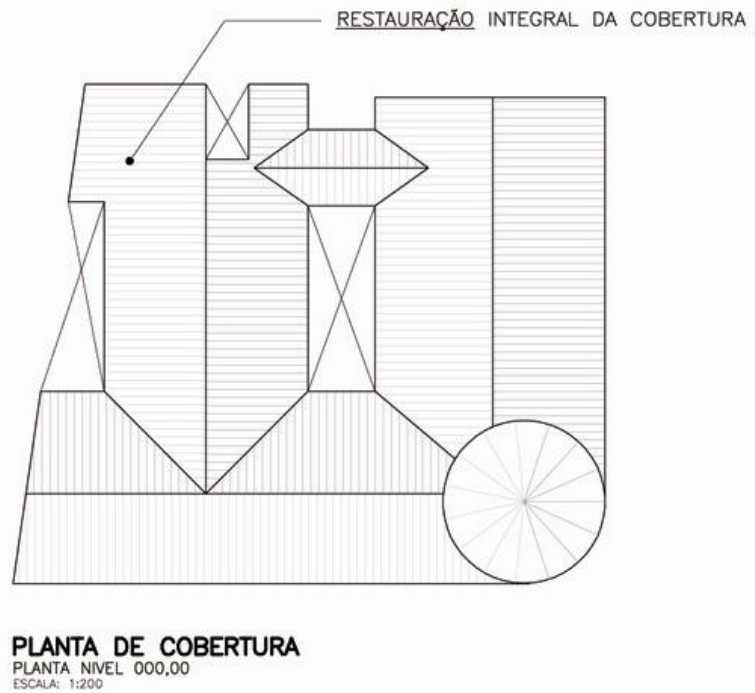
Ground Level plan, showing new proposed activities (bar, café, shops and cinema), original walls (dark gray), restoration of original staircases and central patio.



First and Second Level plan, showing adaptive reuse of the original layout, preserving corridors, staircases, wet areas and patios. New use for offices requires the integration of some spaces.

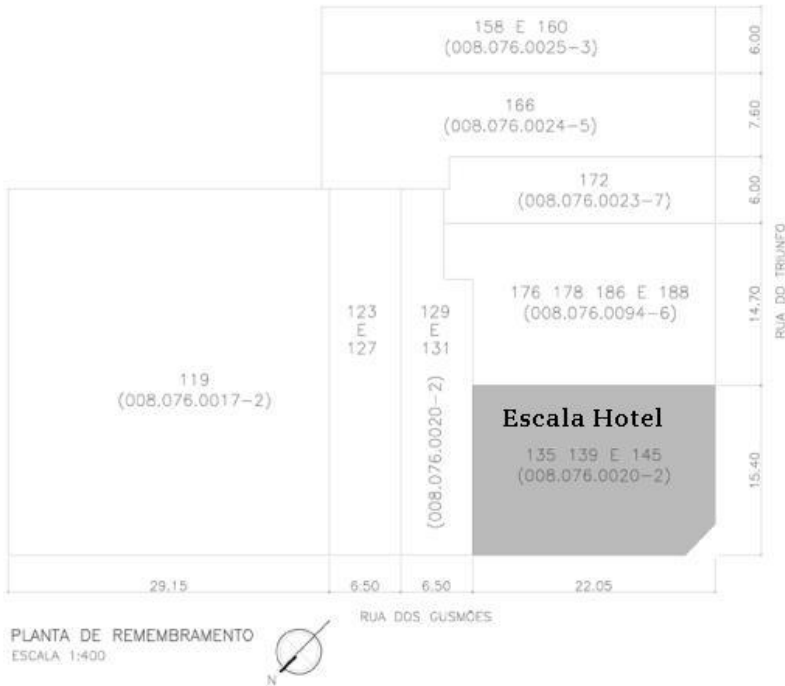


Top Floor plan, showing adaptive reuse of the original layout, preserving corridors, staircases, wet areas and patios. New use for offices requires the integration of some spaces.



Appendix # 3

Escala Hotel + Quadra 76



Location former Escala Hotel and neighbouring land to compose project Quadra 76.

Appendix # 4

Interpretation of the Model in the Nova Luz District



ZEIS Area Nova Luz Regeneration Programme

Appendix # 5

Feasibility Study

Sale prices		
HIS (social Housing)	US\$505,38/m2	US\$3.206.636,61
HMP (Low Income Housing)	US\$833,33/m2	US\$6.790.956,16
Commercial	US\$1.250,00/m2	US\$3.848.825,00
Total sale		US\$13.846.417,77
Costs		
Land		792.822,91
Management		83.333,33
Architecture		83.333,33
Documentation		125.000,00
Construction	291,66/m2	7.455.455,00
Restoration	250,00/m2	397.500,00
Taxes (7%)		969.249,24
Marketing (3%)		415.392,53
Total cost		US\$10.322.086,34
Profits		US\$3.524.331,43

Appendix # 6

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