

Marginal heritage:

Studying effects of change in spatial integration over land-use patterns and architectural conservation in the old town centre of Natal, Brazil

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Edja Bezerra Faria Trigueiro¹ and Valério Augusto Soares de Medeiros²

¹ Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

² Universidade de Brasilia, Brazil

Abstract

This paper synthesises a study that aimed to contribute knowledge for reinforcing the official status of the old town centre in Natal, Brazil, as a Preservation Zone. It seeks to demonstrate how change in the city's spatial configuration has affected land use patterns and led to the destruction of older buildings. Space analysis procedures were developed to investigate: the transformation of Natal's integration core in a diachronic perspective; relations between axial integration and the construction and conservation of buildings over time; and possible effects of current redevelopment actions over the surviving heritage. Findings indicate that: most integrated axes along successive periods, tended to attract institutional edifices, upper class residences, then commercial buildings of mixed status; every time the integration core was transformed, former well-integrated streets tended to stagnate as new construction concentrated in the new well-integrated ones; buildings in streets which were part of the previous integration core and later become part of the periphery of the new integration core suffered disfiguring conversions for commercial use; the configuration resulting from ongoing/planned redevelopment will lead to a general increase in the area's average integration and to its insertion within the margins of the new expanded integration core. Although an increase in commercial value seems desirable when an effort to overcome urban decay is in progress, such findings urge the need for envisaging specific development strategies for preservation zones in a society that does not recognise architectural heritage as an asset and for whom its conservation is, in itself, a marginal issue.

Keywords

Spatial configuration, land use, conservation of architectural heritage, Brazilian old town centres

edjatrigueiro@eol.com.br
edjatrigueiro@eol.com.br
vaugusto@unb.br

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