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Placement of Public Art. Two Examples from Lisbon's Waterfront

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Abstract. In our contemporary cities, some public spaces seem to have greater ability to host art interventions, like historical centers, urban sprawl areas, gardens and parks, new residential districts, among others. Also in port cities, its waterfronts constitute privileged spaces for the placement of public art. On Lisbon's riverfront, we can see a relevant number of works and of monuments of strong symbolic nature. In turn, the placement of public art is a way to value the inherently symbolic nature of the waterfronts and to emphasize its monumentality. However, the criteria for the placement of public art on those spaces are not always clear. In some cases, there are some thematic correspondences between the works and the places, namely with the theme of the water, the Discoveries and others like that. Nevertheless, we cannot observe a profound spatial integration, or a design with the context. In some cases, the artistic elements are produced with a logic of isolated work of art and later they are acquired and placed in some public space. In other cases, we assist to an unusual situation: a work is conceived in a strict relation with a place, but then, without any evident justification, it is dislocated to a completely different context. Or simply it is removed, disappearing from the public space. Although it seems a strange situation, such kind of dislocations often occurs in Lisbon. On this framework, this research proposes a discussion about the processes of implementation of public art. We will analyze two cases of public art replacement: 1) The monument *Primeira Travessia Aérea do Atlântico Sul* (First Aerial Crossing of the South Atlantic), by Laranjeira Santos and Rodrigues Fernandes, 1972; and 2) The public sculpture *Ribeira das Naus*, by Charters de Almeida, 1995. Both works were designed to very specific and important places on Lisbon's waterfront and both were later replaced to other locations on the inner city, quite far from the river. This kind of "(de)monumentalization" of a space originates the following questions: why is a work removed from a public space and why it is decided to give it another destination? What are the implications of those changes? Is public art removable? Considering public art besides its purely aesthetic significance, this phenomenon seems to reveal that the physical and the social integration with the place are not always important, or, at least, they are only important in some moments. Also, we can see it from another point of view: a removal or a replacement of a work always reveals specific strategies for certain places, in certain moments. We can thus conclude that the processes of implementation of public art are clearly indicators of the policies and of the dynamics of the cities.

1. Introduction

Throughout the second half of the 18th century, public art has enhanced the city's public spaces. The production of monuments or smaller works like busts or statues has been interwoven with the urban design processes. Progressively, across the 20th century, the monumentalization



paradigms have changed, but still the values of monumentality remained, assuming new ways of expression. More recently, urban regeneration actions have included public art programs, as a way of providing the new public spaces of symbolic contents¹. But the placement of public art raises several questions: first, which areas of the cities are elected for its implementation? Are there any relations between the physical and social characteristics of the spaces and the new interventions? Is it possible to identify models of placement? Finally, is it possible to relate different historical moments with paradigms of monumentalization? Despite the lack of systematization of those themes, authors such as Sitte [2], Stübgen [3], Jaussely [4], Hegemann & Peets [5] and more recently Kostof [6], focuses on the interaction between urban form and the placement of public art, in a framework that positions it across different disciplines.

Having those questions as background, this article aims to analyze the processes of implementation of public art, from the case of Lisbon. In parallel, it proposes a study about two monuments designed to very specific places on Lisbon's waterfront and were later replaced to other locations on the inner city, quite far from the river.

This research is linked with a database of 250 public art elements placed in spaces related with Lisbon's waterfront. The methodology used was the direct observation of the spaces, thus all the elements were identified *in situ*. This survey was crossed with primary and secondary sources, to gauge the dates of placement in the public spaces. Like the two referred monuments, other 16 works suffered replacements and removals, but it is estimated that there will be a lot more. With the exception of 1 work, one cannot see on them any references to the previous placement(s). It seems that it is considered something normal and it is not important to justify it.

2. Placements and (re)placements on Lisbon's waterfront

Along Lisbon's waterfront, one can find a wide variety of works of public art, regarding its physical characteristics, like scale, size, shape, materials, colours [7]. However, the criteria for the placements on those spaces are not always evident. In some cases, there are some thematic correspondences between the works and the places, namely with the theme of the water, the Discoveries and others like that. But most of the times, one cannot identify intentions of spatial integration. There is often - and this not only happens in Lisbon - a time lag between the development of some works and its placement on the respective public spaces. Several public art elements are conceived many years before and/or to very different contexts, in some cases without any historical or urbanist justification [8]. Others are not even designed for public space and sometimes the authors fails to meet the placements of their works.

As mentioned before, there are examples of public art that are conceived in a strict relation with some places, but then, without any evident justification, they are dislocated to different contexts. Or they are removed, simply disappearing from public space. In some situations, the reason for this removal is the ephemeral or the mobile character of the works. But in most of the cases the justification is not that one. The apparent absence of reason for it seems to reveal that public art is often considered as a decorative object, which can change from one place to another, whenever one wish. As if neither the choice of the place or the relations with it were important.

¹ It is important to clarify that public art is here considered in an inclusive position. We refuse the point of view of public art as isolated object, restricted to the common assumptions of monuments, sculptures, or statuary. Thus, besides its aesthetic values, public art is considered as an urban fact, establishing physical and social relations with the urban environment. On the other hand, the concept refers to all the elements that *charge* the urban space; it considers some presences that although have not intentionally been produced *to be* public art, they finally are, therefore having earned particular values, because of their symbolic feature [1]. Intentional or unintentional, the concept of public art includes the elements that give symbolic values to the urban space, monumentalizing it. So, one has two key assumptions for this understanding: 1) observation of public art in relation to its environment, not as an isolated objects; 2) public art as the elements that constitute physical and symbolic references in urban space.

2.1. Replacement #1: *monumento à Primeira Travessia Aérea do Atlântico* (*Crossing of the South Atlantic*)

The monument to the First Aerial Crossing of the South Atlantic was developed through a municipality's competition on 1971. It should be placed near the Tower of Belém, next to Bom Sucesso dock, where left the flyers. The winning work were conceived by Laranjeira Santos and Rodrigues Fernandes and the monument was erected in 1972, in the scope of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the First Aerial Crossing of the South Atlantic. After this initial placement, the monument had the following route (Figure 1):

- 1972 First placement, on the Belém Tower Garden;
- 1985 Moved to one of the cloisters of the Jeronimos Monastery; at the original place where left the concrete pedestal and the water plan (still today);
- (1991 Placement of another monument to the First Aerial Crossing of the South Atlantic, by Soares Branco and Eduardo Bairrada, in the same space, a little closer to the waterfront);
- 2001 Once recovered, the original monument is replaced, although incomplete (without the concrete pedestal and the water plan), in Alvalade, on the crossroad between Igreja Avenue and Rio de Janeiro Avenue.

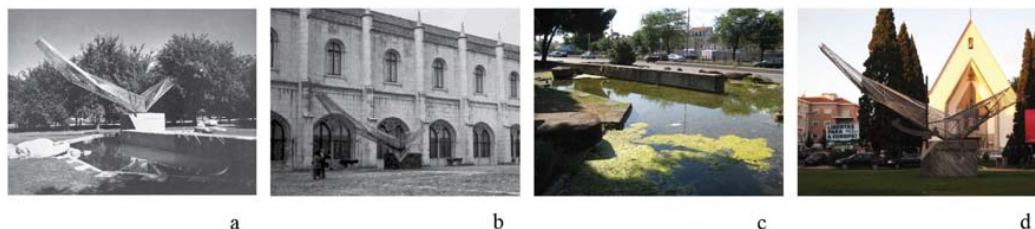


Figure 1_ the placement and the replacement of the *Primeira Travessia Aérea do Atlântico Sul*: a) on the Tower of Belém (Câmara, 2009); b) on the cloisters of the Jeronimos Monastery (Câmara, 2009); c) the concrete pedestal and the water plan still in the Belém Tower Garden; d) in Alvalade, on the crossroad between Avenida da Igreja Avenue and Rio de Janeiro Avenue.

Being the *Primeira Travessia Aérea do Atlântico Sul* the first abstract sculptural piece placed by official entities in Lisbon public space, we find here one of the most controversial processes that involved a work of urban sculpture in the Portuguese capital. The fierce reaction triggered by the institutions and which culminated on its removal, becomes even more glaring because of the confrontation between the plastics of the original and the mimetic character adopted in the new solution for the same place. Probably, the prevailing mentality in the years 1980 was still not prepared to accept a more abstract language [9]. The place chosen for the new placement of the original may have something to do with the association of the thematic – the First Crossing of the South Atlantic – to the new local toponymy, the “Rio de Janeiro” Avenue.

2.2. Replacement #2: *Ribeira das Naus*

The public sculpture *Ribeira das Naus* was designed by Charters de Almeida and was a Metropolitan offer to the city. The initial placement was very near to the water and this privileged relationship with the riverfront was explored. After this initial placement, the work had the following route (Figure 2):

- 1995 First placement, on Ribeira das Naus Avenue;
- 2011 The sculpture is dismantled in the place;
- 2012 Replacement on Alameda da Universidade (University Mall).

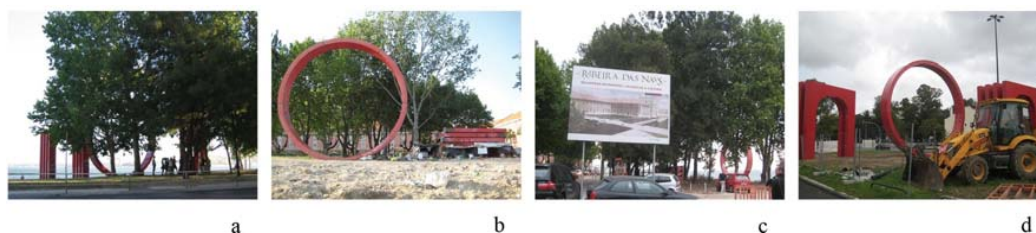


Figure 2_the placement and the replacement of the sculpture *Ribeira das Naus*: a) on Ribeira das Naus Avenue; b) and c) dismantling of the sculpture in place, while was publicly announced the urban regeneration of the waterfront between Cais do Sodré and Terreiro do Paço squares; d) on Alameda da Universidade (University Mall).

Just before the beginning of the works for the urban regeneration of the waterfront between the Cais do Sodré and Terreiro do Paço squares², the *Ribeira das Naus* was scrapped in the place, being *relegated* from its public art status [10]. One cannot find out why this piece was not integrated on that intervention, or the reasons for its new location, on the University Mall.

3. Why this happens? Is public art removable?

From the two cases observed, but also from the other identified cases, it is possible to point out some considerations. First, about the possible reasons of those movements:

- a) non-acceptance/rejection of the works;
- b) changes and regenerations processes at the places and surroundings;
- c) problems of functional issues related to the spaces in which they are placed;
- d) ephemeral or mobile character of the works.

Respecting to the criteria for the new placements, we have:

- a) the choice of the place through the toponymy;
- b) the choice of a place related to the life or to the portrayed characters or events.

In some cases, the works are moved to very different contexts, both for spaces physically very different, as for spaces far from its original placements: we saw as the work *Primeira Travessia Aérea do Atlântico Sul* was removed from the public space where it was designed, a garden near Belém Tower, and later transported, incomplete, to an urban roundabout. Or the work *Ribeira das Naus*, moved from a place with the same name (Ribeira das Naus Avenue) near the Tagus River, to a University Mall. All these movements come to corroborate the thesis initially placed that certain types of public art are not understood by policy-makers as something in communion with its environment. And only this can explain the "strange movements" referred by Pinharanda [7].

4. Conclusions

Recently, the public art implementations is increasing in the cities. However, most of the works do not profound the relationships with the places. Few situations promote a morphologic and visual symbiosis between the public art and its context, limiting it to some thematic associations. Also the time lag between the making of the works and their placement in the public space, or the removals and replacements of some works confirm that the relationship with the place is not always considered.

In an opposite attitude of the understanding of public art as decorative elements, we finally conclude that, although the placement depending on the thematic already represents a way of

² Project of 2009; by João Gomes da Silva GLOBAL, João Ferreira Nunes and Carlos Ribas PROAP.

symbiosis, its implementation should seek for a deeper integration; promoting, whenever possible, relations with the urban morphology, but also with the social reality to intervene. Public art *should be it* in relation to its environment. Its integration and the dialogue with its physical and social context are essential aspects for the construction of meanings in the cities.

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