

Of the fixation of memory from urban morphology – conceptual essays of urban form museology

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From context to pretext, the fact that we are part of the team developing the project to create Casa da Memória, in Guimarães, coordinated by the Brazilian artist Bia Lessa, challenges us to present our reflexive testimony about the “state of the art” of this project in a “work in progress” perspective, taking into account the interaction between the research unit, whose mission is to create content in the fields of geography and urban history, and the production team, that is responsible for the conceptual plan of the new cultural equipment for Guimarães.

This is a project inserted in the “Museum of the City” theme, a reality that is familiar to the field of general museology – i.e. the city’s relation with patrimony and urban memory – particularly since the founding meeting of London (1993), organized with the support of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), promoted by that museum with some of the city’s existing museums. Therefore, in April 2005, in Moscow, the International Committee for the Collections and Activities of Museums of Cities (CAMOC) was created.

It is under a significant stream of experiences, in the frame of theoretical approaches and in practical examples, that we started a research project that tends to question this particular domain of representing cities in space and time.

The growing importance of urban contemporary phenomena assigns the disciplinary specificity of this type of patrimony a polysemic expression that goes far beyond knowing and understanding historic past and ethnographic exposition, summoning instead, from the museological canon, new challenges and new ways of contact with the individual and the communities, which has its own identity that is to be transmitted to others. In some way, Guimarães and Casa da Memória compose a kind of “identity frequency tuner”, capable of promoting a generational interactivity and the appraisal and projection of possible urban future(s).

This sector, in which we insert our research work, which is of a clear museological etymology and is developed from a dynamic idea of fixation, according to Robert R. McDonald, emeritus director of the museum of the city of New York, is confronted with two categories of

issues: those that concern programming the museum to the city, and those that are linked to a definition of a museology that will represent the city.

In the actual context, we are interested, mostly, in the second issue, since we are committed in the conception process of the equipment in a stage where the architectural project is adapted to the concept and nature of the museological program.

It will be from the field of urban morphology, in which we are closely articulated with physical geography experts (geomorphology, hydrography and environment) and art history experts (history of architecture), which are, in turn, all related with a wide interdisciplinary team of anthropologists, sociologists, historians, archivists, etc, that we intend to consider, in its multiple modalities, the privileged relation of the urban form with patrimony in the perspective that these domains should integrate the concept of Casa da Memória.

Finally, taking advantage of the synchrony between this project and the international project Guimarães, European Capital of Culture – 2012, we propose ourselves to discuss the need to problematize the knowledge and consistency of urban patrimony – especially the field of urban morphology – as a fundamental factor in considering new challenges and perspectives for our cities in the scientific, artistic and civic frames.

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