Introduction: This research is framed by the tendency of an expanding urban population and the growing concerns of urban densification which can be summed up by the question “how will we live together?”. We focus on the city of Porto, taking the design competition for affordable housing and urban regeneration in Lordelo do Ouro for further reflecting over these issues. We argue that, while intervening in an already inhabited area – and particularly one that has been subject to several forms of depreciation, as is the case for Pinheiro Torres and Lordelo – we should be carefully considering the place’s ability to be adapted and transformed. We believe it is essential to overcome the place’s sole purpose of dwelling and, instead, apprehend it as a living ecosystem, able to integrate forms of social organization, and also to respond to the always-changing living habits (such as home-office, extracurricular activities...) particularly through its public and threshold spaces.

Objective: Our aim is to carefully explore the area entailing Pinheiro Torres and Lordelo housing settlements, while undertaking an exercise of ideographic description, gradually revealing the place’s potential and ‘failures’, as well as the pre-existing urban structure, in order to ground possible future interventions. We believe that the exercise of describing situations which we perceive as place-defining through mapping, produces a kind of knowledge in which we are then able to justify the interventions for place-making.

Methodology: We approach this exercise by putting forward two questions: does this place provide people with what is needed for a living beyond its basic needs? How can we prepare the place to intervene without enhancing urban discrepancy? We proceed to approach the place: site visits, a photographic report, and some strolls via google street view were fundamental to begin mapping the ways in which people are using and appropriating public spaces. This information was put together with a more diagrammatic site analysis, identifying central spaces, spaces of centralizing activity, as well as all structural elements configuring the place (nature, roads and walkable paths...). The third layer would thus be the way in which the built environment articulates with public space - the threshold between public and private - particularly on the ground floor level.

Conclusions: We consider the major importance of preserving and enhancing the natural structure, on a wider scale, with which the existing buildings should be establishing a closer contact. We also acknowledge the importance of the existing central spaces for centralizing activities which spring up, in some cases, on the ground floor of these buildings. However, we identify the issues with the road structure - providing access but lacking a wider urban meaning. When proceeding to take a more detailed look at the 3 close-up scenarios, we realize how little compromise there is between the built form and the configuration of public spaces. Spaces are either segregated in different heights, relations established on the ground floor - when there are any - are localized and detached from the public space they face. In some cases, spaces are clearly oversized, lacking a purpose and thus become degraded and inappropriately consumed for parking. However, we are able to identify what is missing in terms of complementary uses and we acknowledge the relevance of emerging possibilities on the ground floor as activating points for the public space. Ultimately this can be the starting point to question the Proposal adopted by the Municipality of Porto and rethink the place’s regeneration through this intermediate scale.

Common Place: inhabiting the city of Porto.

Guidelines for an intervention in a designated area for public housing.

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