

[Re]Making School heritage

Text published in the monografia *Heritage – Between Time and Movement | Liceu passos Manuel*, de Victor Mestre e Sofia Aleixo, Uzina Books, Lisboa, 2011, pp. 10-13.

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The old Lyceu Passos Manuel is an exception in the entire collection of Portuguese schools, being the first purposely-designed secondary school building in Portugal.

It is located at the western end of Bairro Alto, on Land of the former grounds of the Convent of Jesus; José Luís Monteiro (1882) designed the original project, later reformulated by Rosendo Carvalheira (1906) to cope with the new programmatic requirements arising from Eduardo José Coelho's 1905 reform and with budget constraints. Its design expresses a teaching method based on a pedagogical core founded on formal teaching practices where the classroom is the base nucleus of its spatial programming and organisation. Faithful to the convent building model it is organised around a central nucleus consisting of two outdoor patios surrounded by the classrooms.

Although showing no signs of neglect, due in part to its robust construction and the absence of major alterations to its original format, this old school had nevertheless various deficiencies that had accumulated over a century of intensive use, as well as a shortage of spaces which hindered its use and place it at a disadvantage in relation to other schools in Lisbon.

Parque Escolar's decision to reform the school buildings which had a heritage interest and historical meaning, from a perspective of continuous use, as is the case of Lyceu Passos Manuel, meant that the conditions to transform these buildings and their capacity to accept new programmes and functionalities had to be evaluated beforehand.

The programmatic complexity of the contemporary school is reflected in the spatial organisation of the buildings and in the relations that the various teaching and non-teaching areas establish between themselves and the environs, to respond to a teaching mode that is not confined to the classroom and to allow its use by the external community, which is not always possible in an existing situation.

When preparing the modernisation programme *Parque Escolar* had already collected and systematised information to find the number of buildings to be reformed and to put into perspective the conditions to respond to the intended objectives. Having cross-referenced those buildings' production methods, their spatial and pedagogical models and the building processes adopted with their future conditions of use, a charter of guiding principles was set out to provide a global framework for each intervention and define how it would be achieved. The intervention in Lyceu Passos Manuel was justified because resources were identified for the intended reform to be carried out without precipitating conflicts with regard to heritage values or imposing the demands and expectations that would be required in more recent constructions. It was necessary to choose the best methods for this modernisation to be carried out, without erasing the memories of the building, reconciling "change" with "permanence".

The surrounding urban context, the scale and the formal and constructive characteristics of Lyceu Passos Manuel and the need to readapt it in terms of functions and infrastructures, including a more pragmatic plan to comply with the legal framework on safety, accessibility, environmental comfort and energy efficiency features, proclaimed a complex but delicate intervention and foresaw a demanding task for the designers involved.

The choice of the designers was decisive for the success of this operation. In addition to being experienced in rehabilitating old buildings, knowing the problems involved in an intervention in heritage buildings, having technical knowledge and being able to articulate with other specialties, it was also necessary to reconcile the capacity for dialogue and communication with the parties involved. Considering the project as an instrument to resolve specific problems, from the start it was believed that the project should be approached in an atmosphere of collaboration and interaction among the designers, the owner and the school community, the end users of this intervention. The decision was to select Victor Mestre and Sofia Aleixo to coordinate the intervention.

The intervention began formally in the second term of 2007 and was completed in April 2010. The first involvement of the school community coincided with the phase that diagnosed the conditions of use. With technical staff from *Parque Escolar*, walkthrough visits were prepared with the various groups of users (students, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and alumni) so that it was possible to witness on site conflicts resulting from spatial limitations and gather suggestions to rectify them.

Having obtained the first diagnosis the school board then organised the participation of the school community and conducted the dialogue with the team coordinated by Victor Mestre and Sofia Aleixo and with *Parque Escolar*, first whilst carrying out the Base Programme and the Preliminary Study and then when defining the various stages of the works and the programme regarding the move and the temporary premises, so that classes could continue.

Having presented various scenarios for the intervention, explored several possibilities for articulating the buildings and the external spaces with the direct surroundings of the school and having contacted the various institutions responsible, it was decided to restrict the intervention to the actual school itself.

The history and the architectural evolution of the building were researched, based on an accurate survey, on characterisation of the building processes and a pathological analysis, which supported the proposal presented and the options made. This enabled the attributes and potentialities of Lyceu Passos Manuel to be harmonised with the new demands for its use.

The solution thus entailed reorganising the main building by means of the logical distribution of the teaching and non-teaching areas, reinforcing the role of the patios in the dynamics of usage and controlling the functionality of the spaces and the relations between them; it was decided to resort to limited interventions to avoid replacing building materials as well as the intrusive presence of infrastructural networks and safety and environmental devices, including machinery and equipment.

Given the need for new spaces, one of the design options was to reveal the presence of new buildings, making them stand out from but not compete with the existing constructions.

In response to the challenge to adapt the building of Lyceu Passos Manuel to the dynamics of a contemporary school, the team coordinated by Victor Mestre and Sofia Aleixo concentrated on the project-maintenance/change-permanence binomial and unfolded an elaborate process of (re) invention of the Portuguese school heritage.