



SESCeffect



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SESCeffect

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INTRODUCTION

“The city should be for everyone”. According to Paulo Mendes da Rocha, “the city has to address the issues of coexistence, inclusion and the transformation of its own fabric”⁽¹⁾. This is the “battle” the Brazilian institution SESC (Serviço Social do Comércio) is facing from its birth in 1946. As a non-profit private institution kept by trade businessmen, SESC primary aim is the welfare of workers and their family. However, the institution is also open to the general community. It was created with the purpose of providing to the society education, health, leisure, cultural and medical facilities and infrastructure.

This approach to an inclusive architecture is reflected in the units that SESC has built across Sao Paulo; most famously the SESC 24 de Maio, by da Rocha, and the Sesc Pompeia, by Lina Bo Bardi. This two interventions have a fundamental role in the redevelopment of social functions within the tumultuous Brazilian community. In fact, *“this cultural and recreational facilities have been part of political operations in the transformation of historic centres”*⁽²⁾, where architecture is the responsible for the existing urban and social environment rebirth, as the facilities are developed in abandoned transformed buildings, to give back to the city its own fabric. This was very unconventional for the 2nd postwar period, as the government was pushing for a massive construction of new buildings, also influenced by the advent of modernism in Brazil. The idea of an industrial architectural heritage didn’t exist at the time. These interventions, especially Bo Bardi’s Sesc Pompeia, are revolutionary: they were meant for the preservation of the form, the structure and the idea of that place, working places where the work was hard becoming places for workers’ leisure. The architectural heritage meet the social, historical and political background.

Therefore, this thesis will deepen the combination of means like businessmen’s fundings, collaboration between architects and users and the redevelopment of the industrial heritage, that allowed this institution to be powerful enough to express itself against the hard existing social, political and economical conditions of Brazil, thanks to a revolutionary architectural translation.

1 – Carlo Gandolfi, A Place between the square and the sky, Abitare magazine, Habitat, Urban Design, April 23, 2018.

2 – Carlo Gandolfi, A Place between the square and the sky, Abitare magazine, Habitat, Urban Design, April 23, 2018.

Moreover, thanks to the revolutionary result, this institution is considered a worldwide recognised model. In fact, some European recreational and cultural centres (e.g. FRAC by Lacaton&Vassal, Fondazione Prada by OMA, CentQuatre by Atelier Novembre and Fives Cail Babcock (FCB) site in Lille), which have references (or similarities) in the SESC projects, especially Pompeia centre, will be used as examples of how the city can be redeveloped starting from its existing fabric (SESCeffect). However, the contemporary city is disputed between those architects looking for a multifunctional architecture, redeveloping the existing environment with co-existing facilities (SESCeffect) and those who are focused on architecture as a performance, asking for “mono-functional signature” architectural work by a famous architect”⁽³⁾ (Bilbao effect).

This debate is the second and conclusive part of the thesis, an analysis of these examples of the SESC-influenced buildings, both developing and facing challenges within the contemporary western cities, being preferred the construction and spreading of new ‘icons’. This landmarks’ construction with the aim of attracting tourism is making forget the importance of the development of an architecture based on the social sustainability, thanks to infrastructure containing various programs for the local citizens. The example of SESC in São Paulo—“*quite a vertical and densely populated city, a city of great resources and also tremendous poverty, a city with a high crime rate, a city with severe traffic issues, and a city with public health problems*”⁽⁴⁾—it’s an evidence of the key role of architecture’s contribution in the urban development, currently threatened by interventions that do not better respond to modern cities requirements.

3 - ACCESS FOR ALL, SÃO PAULO'S ARCHITECTURAL INFRASTRUCTURES / exhibition presentation, Architektur Museum TU Munich / June 13 - september 8, 2019

4 - ACCESS FOR ALL, SÃO PAULO'S ARCHITECTURAL INFRASTRUCTURES / exhibition presentation, Architektur Museum TU Munich / June 13 - september 8, 2019

THE SESC MODEL

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historical background

01

“The SESC model is a wonderful model that we should have all over the world...to integrate everything, to have theatres, pool, library, restaurant, workshops and museums all together, is so very clever. It makes culture part of everyday life, not something apart.” (1)

1 – (Nan van Houte, director of the Netherlands Theatre Institute).

SÃO PAULO, Brazil, 1946 — after the allies' victory in the Second World War and the fall of the Estate Novo (New State) of Getúlio Vargas the democratisation of the country began (but democracy was still a 'big word').

Brazil's commercial and industrial sectors were worried that workers might be attracted to Communism. As industrialisation and urbanisation developed, union movements multiplied in the fight for labor rights. In this moment of transition SESC was founded, on September 13, 1946, by the President of the Republic E. G. Dutra. The creation of the Serviço Social do Comércio is officially described in the Social Peace Charter as solution to contain tensions between workers and employers. Furthermore, not to be omitted is the religious influence. Brazil is the largest Roman Catholic country in the world and the Social Christian doctrine promoted papal encyclicals like the "Rerum Novarum". These called for greater social solidarity and a more harmonious relationship between capital and labor⁽²⁾.

The first Sesc unit appeared in Rio de Janeiro, in the Engenho de Dentro neighbourhood. Rio has been the most damaged city by the progressivist right dictatorship, as it became one of the poorest cities of the country. Therefore, maternity, childhood and tuberculosis care were the main areas of assistance to reduce mortality rates. Before the 1950s, Sesc had already installed its first executive units in several Brazilian states, which over the years have become Regional Departments. The nature of the activities was initially ephemeral (such as UNIMOS at page 11). Before owning the current 580 permanent units spread across the country, 40 of which in the State of São Paulo, a good part of the activities were carried out through mobile units, which visited cities and installed close to schools, clubs and squares. The target of these facilities is very broad, from tuberculosis' treatment hospitals to summer camps for children.

The advent of the 50s is the beginning of SESC expansion and modernisation. Brazil's history was agitated due to Vargas returned to power in 1951. His nationalist dictatorship provided the founding of state-owned companies that culminated in a political and economic crisis.

2 – Larry Rohter, Brazil's
Unique Culture Group Stays
Busy Sharing the Wealth,
New York Times, March 27,
2021

As the elites turned against him, he committed suicide in August 1954. Juscelino Kubitschek replaced Vargas as president, starting a new moment in the country's history. The political and social scenario of the decade made Sesc expand its operations. A network of Activity Centers was built for new activities. The modernisation of social work started inside this new infrastructures based on education (fixed and mobile libraries), culture, recreation (restaurants and theatres) and health. Moreover, with the expansion of its scope and the qualification of its technicians, Sesc initiated a development plan, structuring training centres and courses, instituting scholarships for its employees.



image – Picture of 1955: Sesc became a movement for the society that expanded its operations (first cultural activities and the modernisation of social work) within the tumultuous political and social scenario; retrieved from: SESC, Nossa historia, SESC website / https://www.sesc.com.br/portal/sesc/0-sesc/nossa_historia/

In the 1960s we have the first evidence of Juscelino Kubitschek's biggest project as president: the construction of the federal capital, Brasilia, between 1956 and 1960. This plan was the result of the impetus of the Brazilian economy and industrialisation, influenced also by the advent of modernism (in architecture). New trends in fashion, behaviour and socioeconomic reforms in Brazil and worldwide. After Brasília was built, the capital moved from Rio to the modern metropolis in 1964 and the military took power under the leadership of General Castelo Branco. There was no more sign of democracy, Favelas started to grow around Rio, and Sao Paulo became the industrial pioneering city of Brazil and the richest area of the country. Brazil was gaining new directions with the economic miracle: expansion of

foreign trade, foundations of new universities and development of telecommunications. However, despite the prosperity promoted by the state, Brazil was becoming ubiquitous in public policies, through the restriction of freedom, censorship of the media and culture. The country still suffered from poor infrastructure in several sectors. As it happened in 1946, when the institution was founded, it was in a period of transition like this one, characterised by massive expansion and urbanisation, that Sesc started the 60's by reinforcing its activities of education and nutrition (to combat child malnutrition) mainly in the interior cities. That is why, in 1966, to improve the service offered keeping the same velocity of the social “development”, Sesc started the UNIMOS (we unite) campaign, the Mobile Social Orientation Unit, that became popular in areas where fixed units or appropriate spaces did not yet exist (such as Favelas or industrial neighbourhoods). Thanks to them, strong social work technology was shaped. They toured cities and installed themselves in mobile stations close to schools, clubs and squares, offering courses, shows and sports practices.



image – Acervo Sesc Memórias / Mobile Social Orientation Units (UNIMOS), 1966 / description: “When we said that Sesc always had wheels on its feet, we were not exaggerating...” / https://www.sescsp.org.br/online/artigo/compartilhar/13712_SESC+SOBRE+RODAS+CULTURA+EDUCACAO+E+SAUDE+POR+TODOS+CANTO

In 1969, experienced the challenging scenario of the previous 10 years, Sesc holds its IV National Convention, in Petrópolis, to plan the actions of the next decade. Regardless the increasing social inequality, Brazil was amused by the good new directions the economic miracle was leading to, such as expansion of foreign trade, foundations of new universities and the development of telecommunications.

Brazil was knowing about the outside world, and the outside world was knowing about Brazil. At this time, new activity centers and tourism were created. From north to south, hotels and resorts emerged. Moreover, in large centers, the population started demanding for leisure. Sesc has become the country's main arts and leisure institution for its gyms, swimming pools and sports courts (e.g. SESC Pompeia by Lina Bo Bardi, built in 1977). *“The policy is based on the access of workers to leisure options. Basic needs consumed all the family's income and social tourism establishes itself as one of the hallmarks of Sesc's activities”*⁽³⁾.

3 – 1974, Leisure at Sesc, SESC, Nossa historia, SESC website / https://www.sesc.com.br/portal/sesc/o_sesc/nossa_historia/



image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / source: “Lina Bo Bardi: Together” exhibition at The Graham Foundation, April, 2015.

The decade 1980-90 was characterised by the economical recession that caused high percentages of unemployment and inflation. Therefore, the working class started protesting again in 1982, for the first time since 1965, claiming for direct elections. Realising the country's political and social change, Sesc invests in cultural actions, such as theatre, cinema, plastic arts, music and literature, previously suppressed by the Military Regime. Through this cultural openness Sesc promotes international culture. SESC takes on the responsibility of using different languages as an instrument of transformation, but also of preserving regional traditions, through an alternative and purposeful national program. In fact, in 1986, SESC's First National Action Plan was prepared. The plan aims to guide Sesc's national action, creating conditions for the development of a consolidated programming that is less subject to changes in government policies, such as state fundings as unique source of supplying. Therefore, this plan provided Sesc with a more independent position inside the Brazilian community. In fact, SESC owes its enviable position largely to a financing model that its leaders believe is unique in the world. A private, nonprofit organisation whose budget derives from a 1.5 percent tax imposed on and collected by Brazilian companies: *"as the workforce in this nation of nearly 200 million people expands, so does the organisation's budget"* (4).

4 – Larry Rohrer, Brazil's Unique Culture Group Stays Busy Sharing the Wealth, New York Times, March 27, 2021.

historical sources:

- SESC, Nossa historia (Our history), SESC website / https://www.sesc.com.br/portal/sesc/osesc/nossa_historia/

- Vittorio Romieri's interview to Vanessa Grossman (1st March 2021), Assistant Professor at TU Delft, curator of the International Architecture Biennale of São Paulo in 2019 and co-author of the book "Access For All, São Paulo's Architectural Infrastructures", 2019.

EVERY DAY'S MANIFESTOS

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SESC 24 de Maio and SESC
Pompeia

02

"The city should be for everyone."

Paulo Mendes da Rocha

SÃO PAULO — Brazil’s most populous and prosperous state with 41 million people, 12 million only in the capital São Paulo. The lack of public space in the city ‘helps’ social inequality, high crime rates, congested traffic, and severe public health issues. Therefore, for decades, the city has seen public and private investments in architecture that facilitate the citizens the access to educational, health, cultural and recreational programs to contrast these open space shortages and consequent tumultuous social conditions. Every year 25 per cent of SESC’s state budget is spent on “*expansion and renovation*” of its arts and recreation centres, another 20 per cent goes to the cultural programs, and the remainder divided among other activities such as education, nutrition and health support⁽¹⁾. This massive investment aims to give back to the urban fabric buildings, open spaces, and infrastructural projects at different scales (public, semipublic, or privately owned) which become inclusive places for the society. Examples of these interventions are several projects located along the city’s iconic Paulista Avenue.

“*The city should be for everyone*”. According to Paulo Mendes da Rocha, “*the city has to address the issues of coexistence, inclusion and the transformation of its fabric*”⁽²⁾. This is the ‘battle’ the Brazilian institution Sesc is facing from its birth in 1946. This approach to inclusive architecture is reflected in two of SESC leisure and cultural centre complex: one of them da Rocha himself designed, SESC 24 de Maio, and the SESC Pompeia, by Lina Bo Bardi. These two interventions have a fundamental role in the redevelopment of social functions within the tumultuous Brazilian community. In fact, “*these cultural and recreational facilities have been part of political operations in the transformation of historic centres*”⁽³⁾, where architecture is responsible for the existing urban and social environment rebirth, as the facilities are developed in abandoned transformed buildings, to give back to the city’s fast dynamics the public space it deserves. As presented in the first chapter, in the period following the Second World War the government was pushing for massive construction of new infrastructure, also influen-

1 – Larry Rohter, Brazil’s Unique Culture Group Stays Busy Sharing the Wealth, New York Times, March 27, 2021.

2 – Carlo Gandolfi, A Place between the square and the sky, Abitare magazine, Habitat, Urban Design, April 23, 2018.

3 – Carlo Gandolfi, A Place between the square and the sky, Abitare magazine, Habitat, Urban Design, April 23, 2018.

ced by the advent of modernism in Brazil. The idea of an industrial architecture heritage didn't exist at the time. So, these interventions are revolutionary and unconventional.

Nowhere in Brazil SESC is as important as in Sao Paulo. Its facilities perfectly fulfil the need for public spaces in a city centre overcrowded with building blocks thanks to an efficient architectural translation of its intentions. As stated by P. M. da Rocha and MMBB Arquitetos – ex-students and previous collaborators of Mendes – in the project description of SESC 24 de Maio, they “...*believe that the process of transformation and development of cities like São Paulo is slowly adapting to the changes in the customs and way of life of the societies that build them.*”⁽⁴⁾

SESC 24 de Maio is the latest of SESC's centres, built in 2017. It's a complex of recreation facilities and services that occupies the previous Mesbla's headquarters building, a 13-storey-high shopping mall abandoned since 1998, on the corner of 24 de Maio Street and Dom José de Barros Street, in a residential area in the downtown São Paulo. This project reflects the intention of transforming the built urban heritage to combine the need for public 'voids' in dense neighbourhoods and the desired recovery of remarkable areas of the city. Thanks to the adaptation of the infrastructure that originally served functions way different to those that are being programmed, SESC 24 de Maio acts like a vertical machine (“*a place between the square and the sky*”) where cultural and recreational activities for the residential district are distributed. However, besides the building adaptation for new functions, the architect was searching for a relationship between the new and what was already there. There are several previous da Rocha's projects of existing buildings transformations where the architect intervened with strong but careful operations, treating the existing as an urban void in which to develop new possibilities, such as the Pórtico Praça do Patriarca (1992) and the MuBE (Museu Brasileiro de Escultura) with their large empty portals, the Pinacoteca do Estado (1993), the FIESP Cultural Centre (1996) and the Museu da Língua Portuguesa (2000) where new volumes create new space arrangements.

4 – Pedro Vada article for Sesc 24 de Maio / Paulo Mendes da Rocha + MMBB Arquitetos, ArchDaily, 3 May 3, 2018.



image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha, Praça do Patriarca, São Paulo, 1992 / photograph by Nelson Kon.



image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha, MuBE (Museu Brasileiro de Escultura), São Paulo 1987 / photograph by FLAGRANTE.



image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha, Centro Cultura FIESP, São Paulo, 1996 / photograph by Leonardo Finotti.



image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha + E. Colonelli + W.R. Torres, Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo, 1993 / photograph by Nelson Kon.

This *parasitic* approach to the architectural heritage is, therefore, visible in the SESC 24 de Maio. Here, the ground floor on the corner is an extension of the street that connects the different surrounding urban levels. This free passage is dubbed by Mendes himself as “*the square of the SESC*”, where all the dynamics of the neighbourhood are linked. The concept of the covered emptiness as a breaking point is strategically repeated in more levels of the building, where the absence of the facade provides coexistence squares and suspended gardens.



image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha
MMBB arquitetos, SESC 24 de
Maio, São Paulo, 2017 / photo-
graph by Nelson Kon.

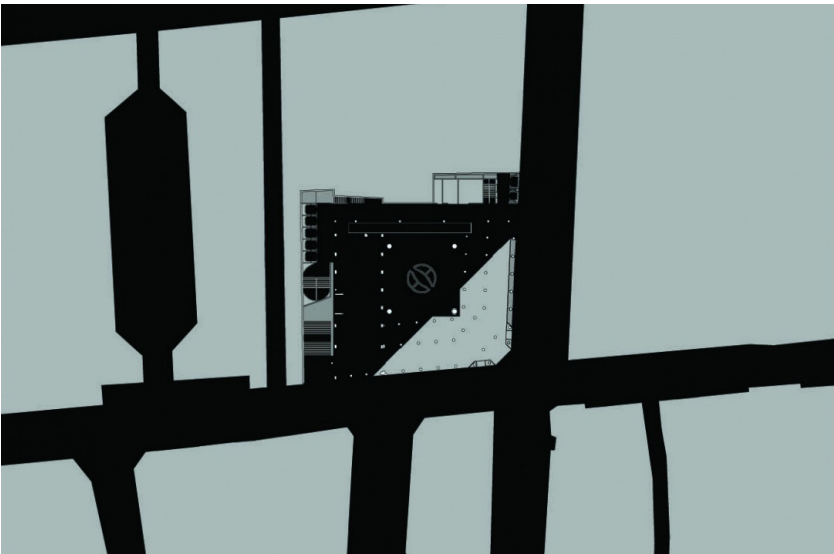
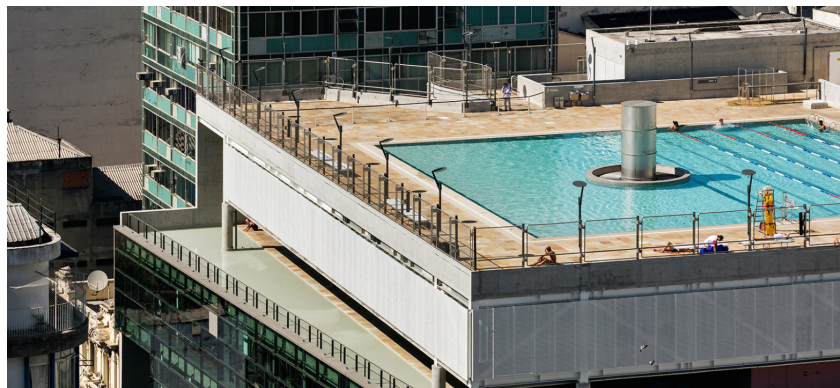


image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha
MMBB arquitetos, SESC 24 de
Maio, São Paulo, 2017 / project
diagram, retrieved from www.mmbb.com.br/projects

Finally, the covered passage on the ground floor has as a counterpoint the large water square on the top of the building from where it's possible to admire the skyline of São Paulo. SESC has always been struggling with the fact that this crowded corner of central São Paulo doesn't provide the space for a pool. Therefore, da Rocha crowned the building with a 25-metre pool, like any self-respecting luxury tower, but *"rather than for millionaires, this rooftop pool is for the people"* (P.M. da Rocha). The 'beach' continues downstairs (swimming pool garden), at the point where the line of the façade is set back, thanks to a circular hole through which the water of the pool falls into a small basin of water. *"Mendes da Rocha envisioned the beaches of Rio"*, where people of all ages *"mingle"* on the sand. Also, he provides spaces where people can grab something to eat a couple of floors below. In this way, people have the same feeling *"as if they were on the sand and have crossed the street to buy a snack"* (P.M. da Rocha), like the snack bars of Copacabana⁽⁵⁾.



5 – Eleanor Beaumont, Social climber: SESC 24 de Maio cultural centre in São Paulo, Brazil by Paulo Mendes da Rocha and MMBB Arquitetos, The Architectural Review, 14 Oct 2019.

image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha MMBB arquitetos, SESC 24 de Maio, São Paulo, 2017 / photograph by Nelson Kon.

image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha MMBB arquitetos, SESC 24 de Maio, São Paulo, 2017 / photograph by Nelson Kon.



image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha MMBB arquitetos, SESC 24 de Maio, São Paulo, 2017 / photograph by Nelson Kon.



image – Access for All: São Paulo's Architectural Infrastructures, Andres Lepik and Daniel Talesnik, 2019, front page photograph by Ciro Miguel



image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha MMBB arquitetos, SESC 24 de Maio, São Paulo, 2017 / photograph by Nelson Kon.



image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha MMBB arquitetos, SESC 24 de Maio, São Paulo, 2017 / photograph by Nelson Kon.

“Between these two contrasting places – light and dark, square and sky”⁽⁶⁾ – are organised all the other functions of the SESC. There is a two-hundred-seat underground theatre, developed inside the previous garage, administrative offices on the first floor, a cafeteria and restaurant on the second and a flexible space that can be used for co-working on the third. Then, six blocks respectively host cultural, health and sports programs, just below the swimming pool area. On the fourth floor, the cultural area houses a library, on the fifth one working and research stations, while on the next one (6th) there is an exhibition hall. As stated in the first chapter, SESC has provided accessible medical service too, especially dentistry. That’s why the seventh floor is dedicated to dental surgery. This floor separates the cultural block from the sports facilities, which occupy three entire floors. The new intervention is, therefore, characterised by a micro-macro relationship between the different elements and functions. These singular independent environments (squares) are, at the same time, positively influencing each other. This can happen thanks to the new vertical circulation system. Mendes provided the existing structure with a “continuous circuit” made of ramp sets that transform the enclosure of the previous building into an “*unchained and playful*” walk⁽⁷⁾ (*promenade architecturale*) through the unexpected succession of activities of the SESC programs.

6 – Carlo Gandolfi, A Place between the square and the sky, Abitare magazine, Habitat, Urban Design, April 23, 2018.

7 – Pedro Vada article for Sesc 24 de Maio / Paulo Mendes da Rocha + MMBB Arquitetos, ArchDaily, May 3, 2018.

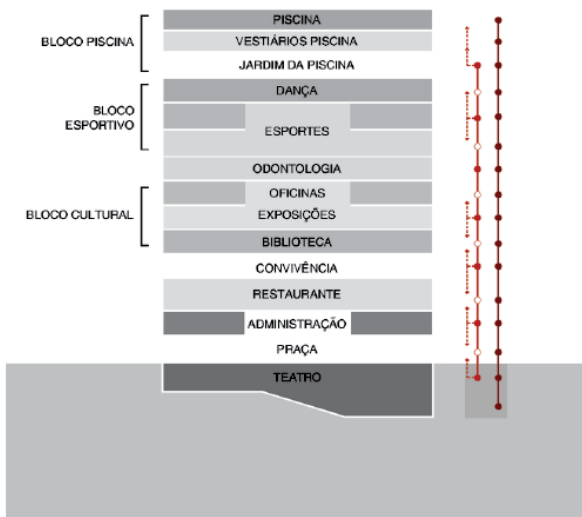




image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha MMBB arquitetos, SESC 24 de Maio, São Paulo, 2017 / photograph by Nelson Kon.



image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha MMBB arquitetos, SESC 24 de Maio, São Paulo, 2017 / photograph by Nelson Kon.



image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha MMBB arquitetos, SESC 24 de Maio, São Paulo, 2017 / photograph by Nelson Kon.



image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha MMBB arquitetos, SESC 24 de Maio, São Paulo, 2017 / photograph by Nelson Kon.

Finally, many of Mendes' projects include an element called 'annexe', an external volume with secondary functions that are necessary, but not necessarily public⁽⁸⁾. In this case, a new service tower is set alongside the building and connected to it by small bridges. This independent and taller volume, facing onto Rua de Barros, contains changing rooms, storerooms, utility rooms, infirmaries and maintenance facilities, to concentrate and isolate the technical and mechanical facilities to support the various activities.

The vision for SESC 24 de Maio originated back in 2002, however, the construction of the project took around eight years. The architect was approached directly by SESC, by its director Danilo Santos de Miranda who showed the old Mesbla building to da Rocha. From that time on, Mendes insisted that the project was only possible with the annexation of the small adjacent plot for the Service Tower. Mendes da Rocha and the commission agreed so he approached MMBB to join him – ex-students of his and previous collaborators. *“For these architects from São Paulo, whom have also designed all the furniture and fittings, this project is a political operation...a commercial void has been turned into a place full of architectural and urban meaning, its glazed façade mirroring the city which everyone should feel belongs to them”*⁽⁹⁾.



8 – Eleanor Beaumont, Social climber: SESC 24 de Maio cultural centre in São Paulo, Brazil by Paulo Mendes da Rocha and MMBB Arquitetos, The Architectural Review, Oct 14, 2019.

9 – Eleanor Beaumont, Social climber: SESC 24 de Maio cultural centre in São Paulo, Brazil by Paulo Mendes da Rocha and MMBB Arquitetos, The Architectural Review, Oct 14, 2019.

image – Paulo Mendes da Rocha MMBB arquitetos, SESC 24 de Maio, São Paulo, 2017 / photograph by Nelson Kon.

The belonging feeling, pointed by Eleanor Beaumont in the article ‘Social climber’ for *The Architectural Review* in 2019, is the final result SESC is aiming for. The largeness of São Paulo is characterised by its variety of areas and neighbourhoods, each of them with different social conditions, often opposite. For example, the corner between 24 de Maio Street and Dom José de Barros Street is a residential area in the downtown São Paulo, the commercial heart of the city, densely ‘filled’ with towers. During the week the streets are overcrowded of employees and shoppers. However, during the weekend the area is predominantly inhabited by the homeless, drug addicts and some shadowy bodies facing the outside from doorways and parapets. On the other hand, this apparently healthy commissioning of vertical integration and densification caused a change in the old middle class neighbourhoods – Pompeia for example – that faced a lack of investment in infrastructure for the suburbs of the city of São Paulo. The 39 SESC centres across São Paulo, each offering diverse programmes, are meant as a mean for the architectural and social conversion of the city and its degraded neighbourhoods. For many – Brazilian – architects, it is a dream brief and has produced most significant buildings in the country⁽¹⁰⁾. Before the construction of SESC 24 de Maio by Mendes da Rocha and MMBB Arquitetos, Lina Bo Bardi’s SESC Pompeia was the main SESC centre of the city.

SESC Pompéia, started in 1977 and finished in 1986, it’s a project of transformation of an old barrel factory in a post-industrial pleasure palace, where different facilities and environments are inserted in a miniature city developed within the walls of the previous factory. According to Bo Bardi, SESC Pompéia was leisure, rather than a cultural, centre. In her opinion “*cultural is too weighty and can make people think they should perform cultural activities by decree*” (Lina Bo Bardi). “*It houses football, swimming, theatre, dance and art. Old men play chess there, and children play with building blocks. You can eat in a popular canteen, and you can sunbathe on a boardwalk called “the beach”. Or you can simply sit and watch the passing scene, as you might in a park*”⁽¹¹⁾.

10 – Eleanor Beaumont, Social climber: SESC 24 de Maio cultural centre in São Paulo, Brazil by Paulo Mendes da Rocha and MMBB Arquitetos, *The Architectural Review*, Oct 14, 2019.

11 – Rowan Moore, Lina Bo Bardi: buildings shaped by love, *The Observer*, Architecture, September 9, 2012.

The disposition of all the programs and their relationship in SESC 24 de Maio exactly remember the ones in SESC Pompeia. Through the use of internal alleys, ramps, stairs, and plazas, the Pompeia project created a dialogue between the old and the new and preserved an important symbolic connection between its spaces and the neighbourhood.

When she first visited the old barrel factory in the working class district of Pompéia, the space – owned by SESC – had already been colonised by neighbours who spent weekends in the abandoned warehouses doing some informal and spontaneous activities like barbecues or theatre performances (*in an ad hoc and hands-on manner*), functions that the new centre had already planned to provide: the priority was to maintain and promote this vital activity. *“She was struck by this spontaneous reuse of the buildings by the local people as a place for...playground and other purposes and also by the honesty and elegance of the original industrial architecture. These two aspects steered the concept for this project”*⁽¹²⁾. Then, Lina moved her office to the factory during the renovation, that allowed her to define most of the design directly on site. She followed the entire project, from the urban scale to the furnishings, thinking of every single element as part of a broader system that would make the degraded area a suitable place for socialisation and social redemption. *“When SESC was being built, Bo Bardi worked on-site, absorbing and throwing out ideas, and listening to builders and users...allowing its multiple activities to co-exist happily”*⁽¹³⁾.

So, as the main duty of the intervention was weaving the lot with its surrounding streets, Lina Bo Bardi provided a route suitable for both pedestrians and users of SESC, an extension of the public within the transformed old factory. The space between the inner sheds became a street, a sidewalk extension of Rua Clélia, strengthening the factory’s rhythm. This passage is vital for both the projects and the district: daily used, is key to the project’s vitality, and, on the other hand, is reinforced by SESC Pompeia’s program arrangement. The bond between architecture and street is the core of the design concept for a democratic urban life⁽¹⁴⁾.

12 – Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage – Concepts and Cases of an Emerging Discipline, pag. 132 - 136

13 – Rowan Moore, Lina Bo Bardi: buildings shaped by love, The Observer, Architecture, The Guardian, September 9, 2012.

14 – Julia Daudén, Lina Bo Bardi and the Generosity of the Streets, ArchDaily, June 29, 2020



image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photograph by Haupt & Binder.



image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photograph by Pedro Kok.



image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photograph by Markus Lanz.

The second step of the project was to redevelop the existing industrial buildings. Bo Bardi argued that the old factory should not be demolished. Without demolishing the existing reinforced concrete structure – designed by the French François Hennebique – the project aimed to preserve the original features of the complex. First of all, as previously stated, she exploited the industrial spatial qualities, creating different levels of privacy and atmospheres within one space through the addition of mezzanines and vertical partitions – made of raw industrial materials – as rooms dedicated to a library, an 800 seats theatre, workshops, exhibition spaces, board games, lounge and living rooms – also a fireplace – and a river that runs through them all. The warm and welcoming atmosphere is strengthened by the carefully designed wooden benches, chairs, and tables; hidden wheels in the square sofas maximize the flexibility of the space⁽¹⁵⁾. The different multifunctional spaces are, therefore, an “*assembly of spaces*”, a Citadel for leisure, culture, sport and entertainment⁽¹⁶⁾.

15 – Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage – Concepts and Cases of an Emerging Discipline, pag. 132 - 136

16 – Rowan Moore, Lina Bo Bardi: buildings shaped by love, The Observer, Architecture, The Guardian, September 9, 2012.



image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / original drawing dated 10-6-77, retrieved from <https://arquitecturaviva.com/works/sesc-fabrica-pompeia-9>



image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photography service by Leonardo Finotti and Nelson Kon , retrieved from <https://arquiteturaviva.com/works/sesc-fabrica-pompeia-9>

SESC 24 DE MAIO AND SESC POMPEIA



image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photography by Andrea Valeriani.



image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photography by Andrea Valeriani.

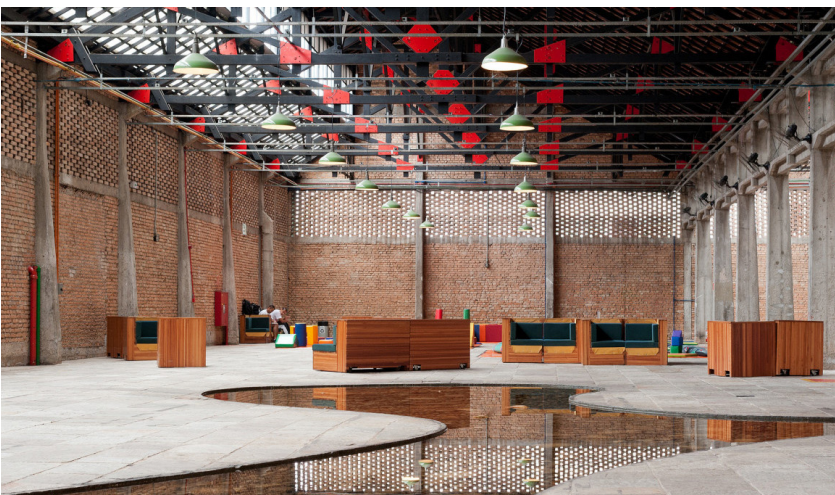


image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photography by Andrea Valeriani.

Lina Bo Bardi's intention to preserve the old factory reduced the space available for sports facilities to a small corner of the plot that had a central corridor on which was not permitted to build due to the high presence of water in the ground (area covered by the wooden floor meant for sun-bathing). The solution was radical, but granted a monumental aspect to the complex: she added three concrete towers, as a message to any right-wing government that might want to demolish the old factory. Two prisms and one cylinder. The language recalls the industrial style, in full harmony with the previous use of the site, with a rough exposed concrete that refers to the masters of contemporary Brazilian architecture of those years. So modernist but also so exquisitely *Carioca*, the "South American touch" is given, in the largest volume, by irregular openings on a red background, almost wounds in the massiveness of these bodies.

image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photography service by Leonardo Finotti and Nelson Kon, retrieved from <https://arquitecturaviva.com/works/sesc-fabrica-pompeia-9>





image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photography service by Leonardo Finotti and Nelson Kon , retrieved from <https://arquitecturaviva.com/works/sesc-fabrica-pompeia-9>

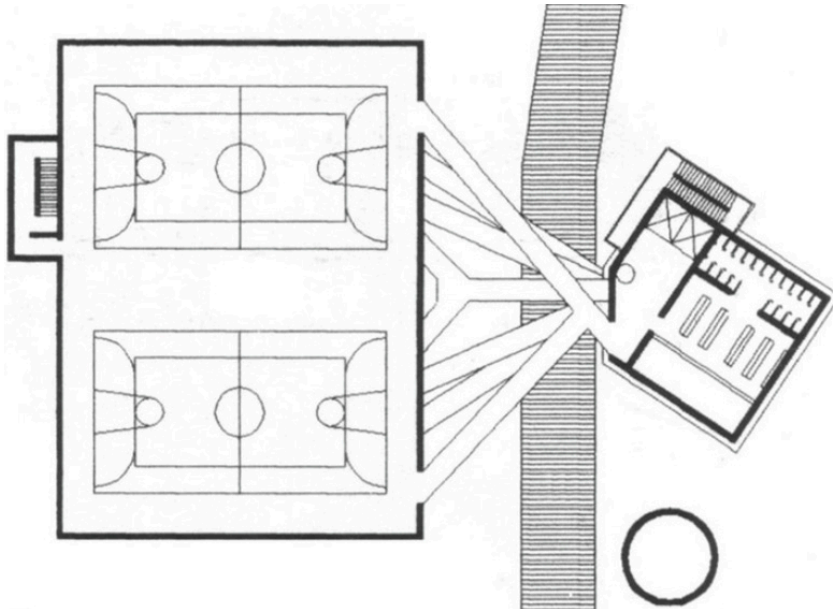


image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photography service by Leonardo Finotti and Nelson Kon , retrieved from <https://arquitecturaviva.com/works/sesc-fabrica-pompeia-9>



image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photography service by Leonardo Finotti and Nelson Kon , retrieved from <https://arquitecturaviva.com/works/sesc-fabrica-pompeia-9>

The smallest prism (but highest: eleven floors) houses dance halls, gymnastics rooms and dressing rooms, while in the biggest one there are a swimming pool and sports courts. The third tower, cylindrical in shape, is used as a reservoir for the service water of the whole SESC centre (here we can see one more connection between Mendes SESC 24 de Maio and this project – the annexe), rising seventy meters high, acting “as a landmark that can be seen from afar inviting citizens to become part of this little joy in a sad city” (17). Between them there are eight prestressed concrete footbridges: the walk from locker to court is “an event of urban drama, with the city spread out around you” (18).



17 – unknown writer, SESC Pompéia Factory, São Paulo, Arquitetura Viva

18 – Rowan Moore, Lina Bo Bardi: buildings shaped by love, The Observer, Architecture, The Guardian, September 9, 2012.

SESC 24 DE MAIO AND SESC POMPEIA



image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photograph by Beatriz Marques.



image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photograph by Markus Lanz.



image – Lina Bo Bardi, Sesc Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1977 / photography service by Leonardo Finotti and Nelson Kon , retrieved from <https://arquitectura-viva.com/works/sesc-fabrica-pompeia-9>

Sesc Pompeia was meant for the preservation of the form, the structure and the idea of that place, a (hard) working place becoming a place for workers' leisure. As previously stated, it is an architectural and social conversion of the district. In this intervention, according to her ideals and SESC intentions, Lina Bo Bardi puts people in the centre of the project. Here, the architectural heritage design fulfils the social, historical (and political?) requirements. According to Rachel Sara, *"the buildings have been kept in a state of incompleteness", allowing a collaborative occupation by its users*". Lina Bo Bardi described SESC Pompeia as a *'Citadel of Liberty'*: 'citadel' as it is a 'place for defending the city' (mainly from political 'threats') and 'liberty', referring to the very open, generous, and social character and atmosphere of the place⁽¹⁹⁾. SESC 24 de Maio, too, stands as a provocative statement of the power of collectivity, social aggregation and cultural exploration against the hostile political climate in which SESC 24 de Maio has been born. *"Every project is a political statement"* (Paulo Mendes da Rocha).

The aspect of urban growth in São Paulo – quite a vertical and densely populated city facing huge challenges, such as poverty, high crime rates, traffic issues and public health problems – is a scenario not unique in the world. All metropolis around the globe – (un)intentionally – combine great resources with their opposite conditions (consequences). The interventions described in this chapter illustrate how architecture and infrastructure can contribute to a city's urban and social development in multiple ways. Therefore, São Paulo – and especially SESC – is a model to consider. The Brazilian metropolis persistently supports programs and usages that serve its permanent residents, maintaining a prudent policy of investing in communal infrastructure, thus providing inclusive multifunctional spaces for all of its 20 million inhabitants, and that is aimed at social sustainability for local citizens⁽²⁰⁾.

19 – Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage – Concepts and Cases of an Emerging Discipline, pag. 132 - 136

3 – ACCESS FOR ALL, SÃO PAULO'S ARCHITECTURAL INFRASTRUCTURES / exhibition presentation, Architektur Museum TU Munich / june 13 - september 8, 2019



3 - ACCESS FOR ALL, SÃO PAULO'S ARCHITECTURAL INFRA-STRUCTURES, Renato Anelli, Correia De Lira, Fraya Frehse, Vanessa Grossman, Andres Lepik, Paulo Mendes Da Rocha, Marta Moreira, Ana Luiza Nobre, Daniel Talesnik, José Tavares, Enrique Walker, Guilherme Wisnik / book's front-page

THE SESSCeffect

—

examples of adaptive reuse

03

Within “...the era of architecture as a spectacle, we are looking for a new conceptual centre of gravity. The laboratory is in the multifunctional spaces dedicated to artistic and cultural production. Teachers? Cedric Price and Renzo Piano, Lina Bo Bardi and Lacaton & Vassal...All these episodes demonstrate how the quality of the spaces and the resistance to time are a function of dynamic habitability, even more than the complexity of the forms. Inventing does not mean fantasising...but reflecting on space and dreaming of progress with a deep knowledge of things and reality. Only in this way can the architect return to being a true humanist and regain possession of the role of promoter of social and cultural innovation.”⁽¹⁾

1 – Carlo Gandolfi, After the star architects era, *Abitare* magazine, Studies, May 4, 2018.

The first two decades of the 21st century have shown the modern city ‘disputed’ between two competing architectural models, debating the existing built environment preservation. However, different approaches on the topic were already developed in the second half of the 20th century. Some architects of the Modern Movement, such as A. Rossi, P. Portoghesi and O. Bohigas, showed their interest in the inner cities and their social, economic and cultural meaning expressed by the dominating role of architecture. They emphasised the redevelopment and improvement of already existing areas, which means realising new possibilities for them. If this approach was previously revolutionary (as we stated for SESC Pompeia), nowadays, the adaptive reuse of existing buildings is considered necessary.

While in Brazil buildings’ adaptive reuse has been exploited for the contemporary urban and social redevelopment of some neighbourhoods, in Europe the approach to the built fabric has threatened the European countries of losing their potential for development and innovation. Protected monuments’ original appearance has been preserved as much as possible, and new constructions have replaced old buildings considered useless or old-fashioned. But, with the passing of years, the number of listed buildings and sites keeps growing, making it impossible to approach the conservation in a strictly restorative manner. The separation of heritage and development will result in a frozen architectural dimension, avoiding the possibility of a new active “*societal life*”. Thankfully, this approach is changing. As the increasing density of the built fabric limits the availability of new constructions, “*adaptive reuse of buildings and sites has become important as an urban, architectural, and conservation strategy*”(2). Furthermore, the need for sustainable development rejects large-scale demolition in favour of transforming the existing. The governments are stepping back from large-scale funding for heritage conservation, opting for its transformation in a sustainable built fabric in both ecological and socio-cultural terms(3).

2, 3 – Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage – Concepts and Cases of an Emerging Discipline, introduction.

However, adapting existing buildings for new and continuous use is a challenging intervention. The reason why many old buildings have been demolished is that “*finding a suitable function for them is not as straightforward as it may at first seem*”⁽⁴⁾. They are often seen not convenient for contemporary needs, “*of an inappropriate size and shape for modern life, and unsuitable for the dynamic exchange necessary within a digital age*”. But, it is not often considered their capacity (and possibility) of adaptation. The process of heritage rehabilitation consists (or should consist), therefore, in creating a new balance between the ‘disassembled’ values of the buildings and its context, “*moving from historical and conservational values towards architectural, societal, and economical values*”⁽⁵⁾. Rather than freezing the historic fabric, the adaptive reuse of the existing aims to activate its heritage’s full potential. History, sense of collective memory and authenticity are some of the values within these buildings. Their potential is the physical contribution that they make to the built environment.

“*This sense of worth is combined with another twenty-first-century obsession*”⁽⁶⁾: the need for everything to be productive and functional as a contribution for a better society(r), as witnessed by the ‘Reduce, Reuse, Recycle mantra. Contemporary western society is facing the ‘ghost’ of possible uselessness of outmoded buildings. They have previously contained functions central to the development of their urban environment and have played an important role in the community of the local society: every building has a deep relation and connection with the context that it inhabits and the people who inhabit the context itself, those who originally constructed the building and those who lived and remodelled it, it has a link with the past, the present and the future human experience. “*As a society evolves, so do their priorities, needs, and wants*”⁽⁷⁾. Therefore, the (adaptive) reuse of those buildings aims to adapt their structure and values to the modern cities’ requirements.

4, 5, 6, 7 – Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage – Concepts and Cases of an Emerging Discipline, introduction.

What (how and why) has to be done with those structures that have outlived their original use?

“Public buildings are the cardinal points of the urban fabric, and their role can be a key in redefining the meaning of architecture. In particular, collective buildings – especially those related to entertainment and artistic and cultural production”⁽⁸⁾ – are far-sighted places of identity capable of intercepting and escaping those complexities related to time with the ambition of providing the city with a flexible and multi-functional architecture responding to the necessity long-lasting adaptation. Together with flexibility, today’s architecture is asked to be many things: to mention some of them, sustainable – especially in its costs and in its consumes – regenerative and resilient.

SESC perfectly fulfils these architectural requirements. The SESC example in São Paulo – *“a vertical and densely populated city of great resources but also tremendous poverty, with a high crime rate, with severe traffic issues, and with public health problems”*⁽⁹⁾ – it’s evidence of the key role of architecture’s contribution in the urban (re)development. The rehabilitation of the industrial heritage has been combined with the community involvement in the project, such as businessmen’s fundings and the collaboration between architects and users, allowing the private institution to be powerful enough to express itself against the existing social, political and economical hard conditions of Brazil. Thanks to these efficient results, the individual buildings of the SESC – especially SESC Pompeia – have been studied (and appraised) for the effect that these interventions had on the architectural culture, thus being considered a worldwide recognised model.

In this chapter, some European recreational and cultural centres with references (or similarities) in the SESC projects, will be used as examples of the city – instead of spreading with new constructions – redeveloped starting from its existing fabric’s regeneration, the so-called UMBAU or, by myself defined, SESCeffect. These projects, through the use of typical elements of the city (covered squares, streets, passage etc), aspire to strongly respond and adapt to the modern cities’ complex necessities, such as the transformation of forgotten peripheries (resilience).

8 – Carlo Gandolfi, *After the star architects era*, Abitare magazine, Studies, May 4, 2018.

9 – ACCESS FOR ALL, SÃO PAULO’S ARCHITECTURAL INFRASTRUCTURES / exhibition presentation, Architektur Museum TU Munich / June 13 - september 8, 2019

Le CentQuatre (104)

Paris, 19th

architect: Atelier Novembre

client: City of Paris, Department of Cultural Affairs

transformation: conversion of the old funeral directors of the City of Paris (2008-2012)

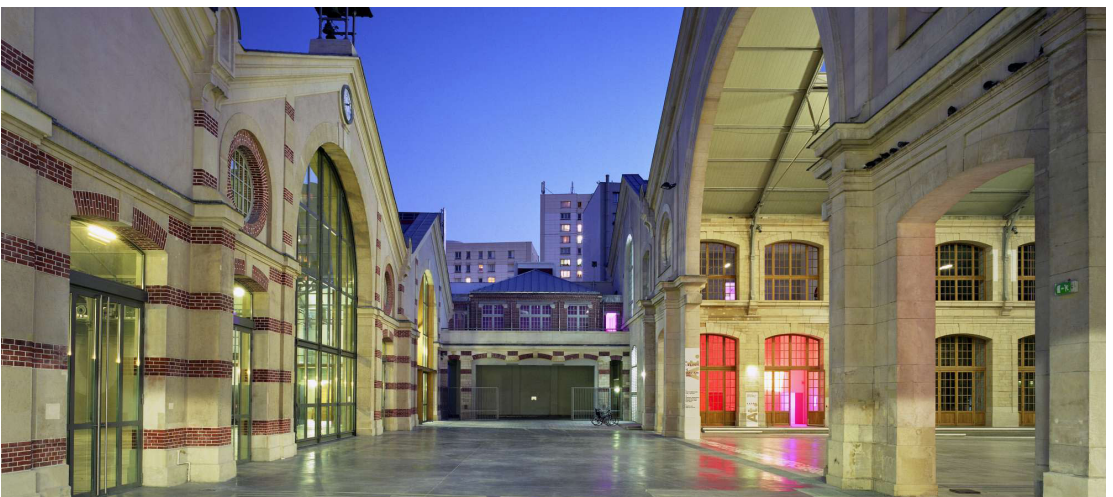
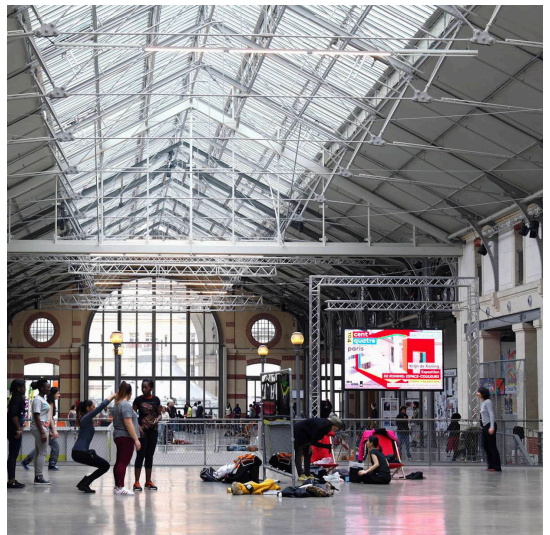
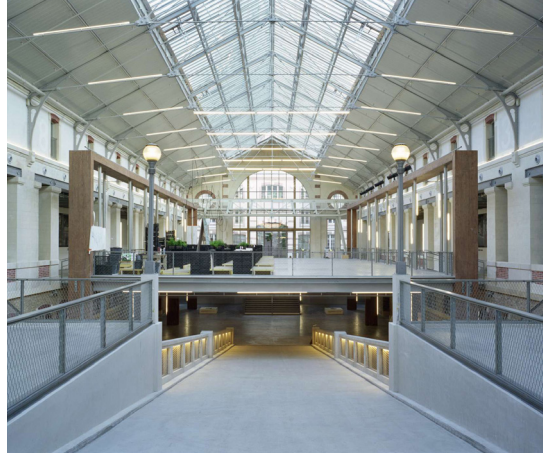
program: artistic stages, performance halls, shops, exhibitions, event spaces, car parks

Saved from destruction in 1997, the old town funeral directors have undergone a complex conversion. Open to all the arts, CentQuatre now makes up a unique architectural ensemble where art in all its forms meets all audiences. Corresponding to a new generation of facilities where dialogue between art, cultural practices and territories must be permanent, the CentQuatre is part of an urban renewal process in a rapidly changing sector. The mission consisted in designing both the program and the architecture of this unique project without a pre-existing model, with a rehabilitation based on criteria of simplicity, flexibility and reliability, at the service of plural and evolving artistic project. Anchored in its district, this place will beckon to the inhabitants of all of Paris. Cultural and artistic multidisciplinary is a priority goal, inherent in this approach of combining innovative practices. Dancers, visual artists, musicians, street artists, designers, actors, gardeners, creators of images..., work on projects in cohabitation. All skills dialogue and share with the public in this multimodal place organised on both sides of a new Parisian passage. The cultural project is reinforced by an economic pole which makes it possible to aggregate activities such as shops (bookstore, bar, restaurant, etc.) or rental of spaces for events (fairs, exhibitions, company conventions, fashion shows, etc.).

text by Atelier Novembre, retrieved from <https://novembre-architecture.com/projet/le-centquatre-centre-de-creation-artistique-paris-19/>

images by Atelier Novembre, retrieved from <https://novembre-architecture.com/projet/le-centquatre-centre-de-creation-artistique-paris-19/>

EXAMPLES OF ADAPTIVE REUSE



Fondazione Prada

Milan

architect: OMA

client: Fondazione Prada

transformation: conversion of a former gin distillery in the Largo Isarco industrial complex in Milan (2008-2018)

program: museum/gallery, public space, theatre, restaurant/bar, offices, library

The new Fondazione Prada is a coexistence of regenerated buildings including warehouses, laboratories and brewing silos, as well as new buildings surrounding a large courtyard. The complex expands the repertoire of spatial typologies in which art can be exhibited.

“To apparently everybody’s satisfaction, the abandoned industrial space has become art’s default preference – attractive because its predictable conditions do not challenge the artist’s intentions – enlivened occasionally with exceptional architectural gestures. The new Fondazione Prada is projected in a former industrial complex too, but one with an unusual diversity of spatial environments. To this repertoire, we are adding three new buildings – a large exhibition pavilion, a tower, and a cinema – so that the new Fondazione Prada represents a genuine collection of architectural spaces in addition to its holdings in art. It is not a preservation project and not a new architecture. Two conditions that are usually kept separate here confront each other in a state of permanent interaction – offering an ensemble of fragments that will not congeal into a single image, or allow any part to dominate the others. New, old, horizontal, vertical, open, enclosed – all these contrasts establish the range of oppositions that define the project. By introducing so many spatial variables, the complexity of the architecture will promote an unstable, open programming, where art and architecture will benefit from each other’s challenges.”

text by Rem Koolhaas, retrieved from <https://oma.eu/projects/fondazione-prada>

images by OMA and Marco Cappelletti, retrieved from <https://oma.eu/projects/fondazione-prada>

EXAMPLES OF ADAPTIVE REUSE



Lycée Hôtelier de Lille

Lille

architect: Caruso St John Architects

client: Ville de Lille / Region Nord Pas de Calais

transformation: conversion of a former steel factory in Fives, Lille (2011-2016)

program: school of catering (training kitchens, training restaurant, residential accommodation and sports facilities)

The Lycée building is the first step in the city master plan to introduce new uses to the Fives-Cail-Babcock (FCB) site, former steel fabrication works, and a historical place of employment for the district. The programme for the Lycée is organised within the footprint of the former factory structures so that the existing buildings could be retained. At the front of the school complex—where the FCB site and the surrounding city meet—is a complex of new buildings for the gymnasium, student residence and staff accommodation, that mediate between the existing surrounding communities and the new communities that will inhabit this emerging urban quarter. The wider site is characterised by large-scale structures and open spaces. The master plan sustains the scale, monumentality, and strong spatial qualities of the factory complex. The embodies the site's historical significance, presenting afresh the quality and atmosphere of the historic fabric, yet simultaneously adapting the place for community and learning. Existing structures are kept in their entirety with their attractive, romantic, and melancholy character intact. Applying a light touch to the restoration brings into focus their epic scale and their history. The new structures are pragmatic and share a tectonic and material sympathy with the existing ones. The design is not a game of new and old; it is rather about making a new environment, where interventions work at the scale of the factory, and new programmes draw energy from the extreme spatial generosity.

text by Caruso St John Architects, retrieved from <https://carusostjohn.com/projects/lycee-hotelier-de-lille/#more>

images by Hélène Binet, David Grandorge, retrieved from <https://carusostjohn.com/projects/lycee-hotelier-de-lille/#more>

EXAMPLES OF ADAPTIVE REUSE



Civic Centre 1015

Barcelona

architect: H ARQUITECTES

client: BIMSA (Barcelona d'Infraestructures Metropolitanas S.A.)

transformation: conversion of a former glass factory (2012-2016)

program: adult education centre and language standardisation consortium

This public facility houses an adult education centre and a language standardisation consortium. The project is located in a triangular plot in the Parliament district of Barcelona. Two of the three sides of the site are part of the former Planell glass factory, built on Calle Anglesola in 1913. Therefore, part of the heritage-listed frontage. The building makes use of the entire plot, acting as an intrinsic part of the urban landscape, regardless of the triangular shape and the classified facades prevent it from occupying the entire site. The programme is distributed across four levels which are set back from the south-facing heritage facade. The resulting atrium reconciles construction and heritage, improves the natural lighting for the classrooms and provides heat and sound barrier. This long and narrow courtyard is replicated at the northern vertex, which exhausts the geometry, but acts as a relational system between the administrative uses of the building and the exterior.

text by H ARQUITECTES, retrieved from <http://www.harquitectes.com/projectes/centre-civic-cristaleiri-as-planell-barcelona/>

images by Adrià Goula, retrieved from <http://www.harquitectes.com/projectes/centre-civic-cristaleiri-as-planell-barcelona/>

EXAMPLES OF ADAPTIVE REUSE



FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais, Dunkerque

Dunkerque

architect: Lacaton & Vassal

client: Communauté Urbaine de Dunkerque

transformation: extension of an old boat warehouse (2013-2015)

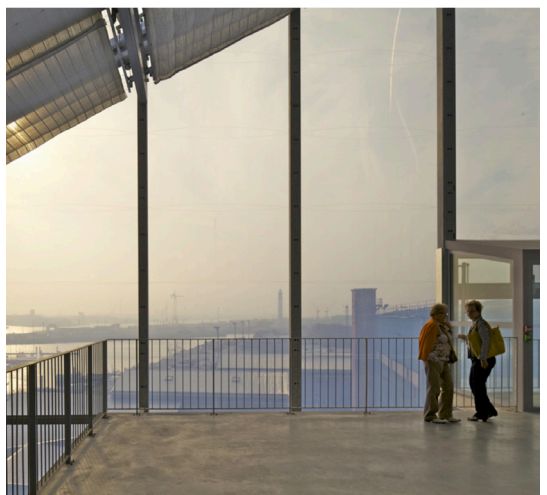
program: cultural and recreational centre

The North region FRAC is located on the site of Dunkerque port in an old boat warehouse called Halle AP2. Its internal volume is immense, bright, impressive. Its potential for uses is exceptional. To implant the FRAC as a catalyst for the new area, and to keep the Halle in its entirety becomes the basic idea of the project. To achieve this concept, the project creates a double of the Halle, of the same dimension, attached to the existing building, on the side which faces the sea, and which contains the program of the FRAC. The new building juxtaposes delicately without competing nor fading. The duplication is the attentive response to the identity of the Halle. A prefabricated and efficient structure determines free, flexible and evolutionary platforms, with few constraints, fit to the needs of the program. The transparency of the skin allows seeing the background vision of the opaque volume of the artworks reserves. The public footbridge which crosses the building becomes a covered street entering the Halle and the internal facade of the FRAC. The Halle AP2 will remain a completely available space, which can work either with the FRAC, as an extension of its activities, or independently to welcome public events, enriching the possibilities of the area. The functioning of each of the buildings is separated or combined. The project so creates an ambitious public resource, of flexible capacity, which allows work at several scales from everyday exhibitions to large-scale artistic events, of regional and international resonance, which consolidates the redevelopment of the port of Dunkerque.

text by Lacaton & Vassal, retrieved from <http://www.lacatonvassal.com/?idp=61#>

images by Lacaton & Vassal and Philippe Ruault, retrieved from <http://www.lacatonvassal.com/?idp=61#>

EXAMPLES OF ADAPTIVE REUSE



THE CITY'S PUBLIC

—
final reflection on current
city-building realities

04

“In Bruno Latour's terms, critical attention is shifted from architecture as a matter of fact to architecture as a matter of concern. As matters of fact, buildings can be subjected to rules and methods, and they can be treated as objects on their own terms. As matters of concern, they enter into socially embedded networks, in which the consequences of architecture are of much more significance than the objects of architecture”⁽¹⁾.

1 – AWAN, Nishat, SCHNEIDER, Tajana, TILL, Jeremy / Spatial Agency, Other Ways of Doing Architecture, 2011

When I introduced the first twenty years of the current century and the modern city disputed between two competing architectural models, I argued that they are different in approaching or not the existing built environment. Well, I was wrong. As architecture always deals with its context, we can make a distinction on the way it does it. On one side, as described in the previous chapter, the redevelopment of the existing built environment is seen as the most sustainable architectural intervention – for the architectural heritage, for the environment, for the city and its community. At the same time, most of the modern cities aim for iconic, tourist-orientated projects – such as museums or theatres – the so-called “Bilbao-effect”. However, the conceptual and methodological boundaries between adaptive reuse and new construction are blurred as contemporary architecture is often highly contextual and new buildings are meant as an intervention to its existing urban, rural, or natural context⁽²⁾, as the case of the Guggenheim in Bilbao, designed by Frank Gehry and opened in 1997.

2 – Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage – Concepts and Cases of an Emerging Discipline, introduction.



image – Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 1997 / photography by David Healdn, retrieved from <https://www.guggenheim.org/blogs/checklist/how-analog-and-digital-came-together-in-the-1990s-creation-of-the-guggenheim-museum-bilbao>

The Bilbao-effect aims, through powerful architecture, to transform cities “*down on their luck*”⁽³⁾ into vibrant metropolises. Several areas around the world have benefited economically from the investment in these infrastructures to incentivise people to visit the place. And this is the goal the city of Bilbao asked Frank Gehry to reach. “*It was meant to be a transformational project, a catalyst for a wider plan to turn around an industrial city in decline and afflicted by Basque separatist terrorism. It was to be a driver of economic renewal, an agent of economic development that would appeal to a universal audience, create a positive image and reinforce self-esteem*”⁽⁴⁾. And the intervention succeed, as it has been rewarded with a steady million visitors a year.



From that time on, thanks also to the incredibly improved ability of computers to design elaborate buildings, the Bilbao-effect has become a defining feature of contemporary architecture. Although sensible architects have been pointing out its weaknesses and ‘abuse’ of shape, this iconic architecture shows no sign of stopping, instead the abnormal is becoming normal. “*This long-running craze would have happened in any case, but the Guggenheim gave it fuel*”⁽⁵⁾. And its influence affects two main audiences.

3, 4 – Rowan Moore, The Bilbao-effect: how F. Gehry’s Guggenheim started a global craze, The Observer, The Guardian, October 1, 2017.

image – source: EL PAIS, October 12, 2017, “Guggenheim, 20 years transforming Bilbao” / title: The Kings with the Lehendakari José Antonio Ardanza on the inauguration day in October 1997, photography by Alfredo Aldai.

5 – Rowan Moore, The Bilbao-effect: how F. Gehry’s Guggenheim started a global craze, The Observer, The Guardian, October 1, 2017.

On one side, the public authorities that used some version of the Bilbao-effect to (try to) start urban regeneration. In Spain, for example, the Bilbao-effect resulted in monuments whose appearance overwhelm their content, looking redundant when this trend spread. On the other, private developers used funny shapes as marketing tools for their towers – for example Spain and London in Europe.



image – Santiago Calatrava, City of Arts and Sciences, Valencia, 1996 / retrieved from: <https://www.archdaily.com>



image – Peter Eisenman, City of Culture, Santiago de Compostela / photography by Eisenman architects.



image – Oscar Niemeyer, Centro Niemeyer, Avilés, 2011 / photography by Iñigo Bujedo Aguirre.



image – Atelier Jean Nouvel, Torre Agbar, Barcelona, 1999-2005 / photography by AJN



image – Foster + Partners, 30 St Mary Axe Tower, London, 2003 / photography service by Nigel Young (Foster + Partners) and Richard Bryant

Both approaches, public and private, have in common the use of spectacle to distract attention. *“Public authorities might not want you to notice that their regeneration plans are weak. Developers typically use eye-catching design to justify their stretching of planning restrictions or to sell buildings before they are realised – in some cases too to deodorise the dirty money that pays for the projects”*⁽⁶⁾. These mono-functional signature architectures designed by archistars (famous architects) often do not better respond to modern cities requirements. Regardless the original intention of the Guggenheim construction in Bilbao was to transform the image of the city, in Spain and abroad, intending to attract tourism, the effect it has provoked is making forget the importance of the development of an architecture based on social sustainability for the local citizens. The witnessed success of Bilbao was, instead, a failure in other cities: dozens of post-industrial cities in the world have tried to copy-paste this model to revitalise their metropolises (e.g. Zaha Hadid in Glasgow) and achieve their "Bilbao-effect", with the opposite of the expected results.

6 – Rowan Moore, *The Bilbao-effect: how F. Gehry's Guggenheim started a global craze*, *The Observer*, *The Guardian*, October 1, 2017.



image – Zaha Hadid, *Riverside Museum, Glasgow*, 2004-2011 / photography retrieved from: <https://www.archdaily.com/161343/over-500000-visitors-to-the-riverside-museum-in-its-first-weeks>

WHY? They tried to reach the same experience through the construction of unique auto-referential architecture. The success of the Museum built by Gehry is not based only on its construction, rather on a more complex reality deriving from the reaction against the economic and political crisis, seen as an opportunity to rethink the future of the city. Juan Ignacio Vidarte, director of the museum, said that *"the Guggenheim effect is an investment in a cultural infrastructure that acts as a catalyst for a whole process of transformation of the city...another of the more intangible effects was the projection of the image of the city abroad including also the psychology of the city, this type of transformation that makes citizens feel a renewed confidence and therefore better conditions to face future projects"*(7). There is, therefore, a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the construction of the Guggenheim museum and the urban redevelopment of Bilbao.



image - Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, maquette of the building / retrieved from: <https://www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/en/the-building/frank-gehry>

Introducing the thesis, I mentioned Paulo Mendes da Rocha and its statement “*the city should be for everyone*”, meaning that “*the city has to address the issues of coexistence, inclusion and the transformation*”(8), identifying a specific audience for the architecture of the city, that are the citizens themselves. Here is another radical difference between the two architectural approaches towards the redevelopment of the built environment. The Guggenheim project, regardless of being a completely independent building, stands only as of the visible part of a more complex urban change. However, the effect it has provoked produced buildings that have the only goal in themselves. These grand gestures do not worry “*about the strengths and weaknesses of their society or the planning of change strategies that start from citizens*” (John Freire)(9). As a counterpart there is the redevelopment of the existing built environment presented as a new way of looking at old buildings, those adaptive reuse can produce different new architectural and social possibilities for the local community.

As described in the Spatial Agency book and project’s introduction, the current architecture is asked to “*propose a much more expansive field of opportunities in which architects and non-architects can operate*”(10), suggesting other ways of doing architecture. HOW? Firstly through the appropriation of abandoned or unoccupied spaces adapting them for flexible and interdisciplinary programs, highlighting their embedded values. Then, the dissemination (distribution) of the program widening the range of users interested. In this way, the community will take control over the environment (empowerment). Pro-activity rather than re-activity. As the program has to be flexible to respond to the different social requirements, “*this can be a way of networking where a core group of people expands according to each project and the expertise it requires*”(11). The whole adaptive intervention is based on a process of subversion, where existing entities – buildings and policies mainly – are used “*for purposes other than those they were designed for*”(12). Also, the Spatial Agency position moves away from the figure of the ‘*architect as individual hero*’ – no labels, no styles and no mainstream

8 – Carlo Gandolfi, A Place between the square and the sky, Abitare magazine, Habitat, Urban Design, April 23, 2018.

9 – Samir Awad Núñez, El Efecto Bilbao, Urbanismo y Transporte, August 25, 2014.

10, 11, 12 – AWAN, Nishat, SCHNEIDER, Tatjana, TILL, Jeremy / Spatial Agency, Other Ways of Doing Architecture, 2011

fashionable language – rather it aims for a more collaborative system, like the one of SESC. Spatial Agency, theoretically, and SESC(effect), practically, ‘*uncover the second history of architecture*’ through a transformative, adaptive and subversive intent, to give back to the city and its public – the community – their own fabric.



image – AAA atelier d'architecture autogérée, Passage 56, Paris/
“Passage 56 is the transformation of a disused passageway, located in
a Parisian neighbourhood noted for its density and cultural diversity”,
retrieved from: [https://www.spatialagency.net/database/how/subver-](https://www.spatialagency.net/database/how/subversion/aaa)
sion/aaa

“The city should be for everyone.”
Paulo Mendes da Rocha

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*The city of the future should care more about its
SESCappeal*

