



MARGINALIDADE E PROCESSOS DE TRANSFORMAÇÃO URBANA

O valor das sobras urbanas para resolver questões urbanas, sociais e ecológicas

MARGINALITY AND URBAN TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES

The value of urban scraps to solve urban, social and ecological issues

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ABSTRACT

Abandoned spaces and territories surrounding both cities and settlement systems of metropolitan areas, can play an important and central role in regeneration processes from the urban, social and ecological points of view. Starting from the recognition of the value and role that urban margins and “scraps” can assume in an both social and environmental key, it is possible to propose alternative approaches and intervention practices to the more established ones in order to reduce the growing social divide in urban field and counteract the phenomena of spatially based social segregation.

In the case study of Lisbon, it was possible to highlight, through empirical social research, a correlation between morphological margins, infrastructural lines and places of urban and social disease. Their capillary diffusion allows to design a lattice of public spaces that, alongside the existing system of squares and parks, is of considerable support for human and ecological connection and integration.

Keywords: Social segregation, marginality, public space, holistic and multi-scalar approach.

Thematic clusters: 3. Urban Dynamics.

Topic: Post-crisis city and socio-spatial dynamics.

1. Introduction

1.1. The social consequences of neo-liberal logic

In a rapidly and continuously changing social and economic framework, it is possible to observe how technology considerably alters the way we perceive reality and thus the way we think, work, and live. Uncertainty spreads because precisely during the transformation process between old structures collapsing and new ones taking over, there is a period of instability and stress. The structure in question is the social one, in fact, its contents are changed and since they are the reasons for individuals to generate it, also its form is changing as the result of mutual action between the two. The outcomes of the change taking place, as well as the perception of it, inevitably affect the spatial organization of social phenomena and thus the territory and cities (Lefebvre, 2014).

But what is the nature that connotes the transitional phase that has overtaken society? Well, the establishment of neo-liberal logics has led to the exaltation of the individual, placing him above all other interests, generating numerous conflicts for the community. This antagonism is mainly expressed in the economic field but has repercussions in many fields, for example with the exploitation of resources and natural habitats, and finds one of its most important consequences in the forms of structuring, use and organization of physical space (Nuvolati, 2011).

A clear example is the phenomenon of dispersed settlements, the process whereby individuals, in search of better housing conditions and social self-determination, began to abandon the compact city and historic centers to inhabit suburban areas. The latter, however, because of the lack of policies to govern the transformations of the territory, have become areas of polarization of the housing demand, slowly turning into diffuse cities built according to the logic of building speculation, thus based on unconditional densification, without considering the inadequate infrastructures and the absence of services for the residential function of these areas. The result has been the emptying out of some urban areas, left to the impoverishment and isolation of the weaker classes, and the construction of large shopping centers outside the city, which have further weakened the economic and working structure of small and medium-sized businesses (Secchi, 2013).

As a result of these dynamics, some of the most alarming problems can be highlighted:

- The spatially based segregation of ethnic and religious groups and fragile social classes.
- The cultural and identitarian depauperation and the impoverishment of local resources due to globalization that tends towards standardization.
- The superficiality with which social and environmental issues are treated, moreover in a disjointed manner.

The practices of intervention in the sprawl city have long focused on the rehabilitation of urban centres, particularly in its historical parts, which are subject to both demographic and urban decline. Despite the uncertain outcomes, often ineffective or at most functional to gentrification and/or their touristification, in more recent times the focus has shifted to the urban peripheries. However, even in these places, the same approach has been repeated, focusing on the recovery of the “centre”, the redesigning, re-functionalization or new endowment of the “square”.

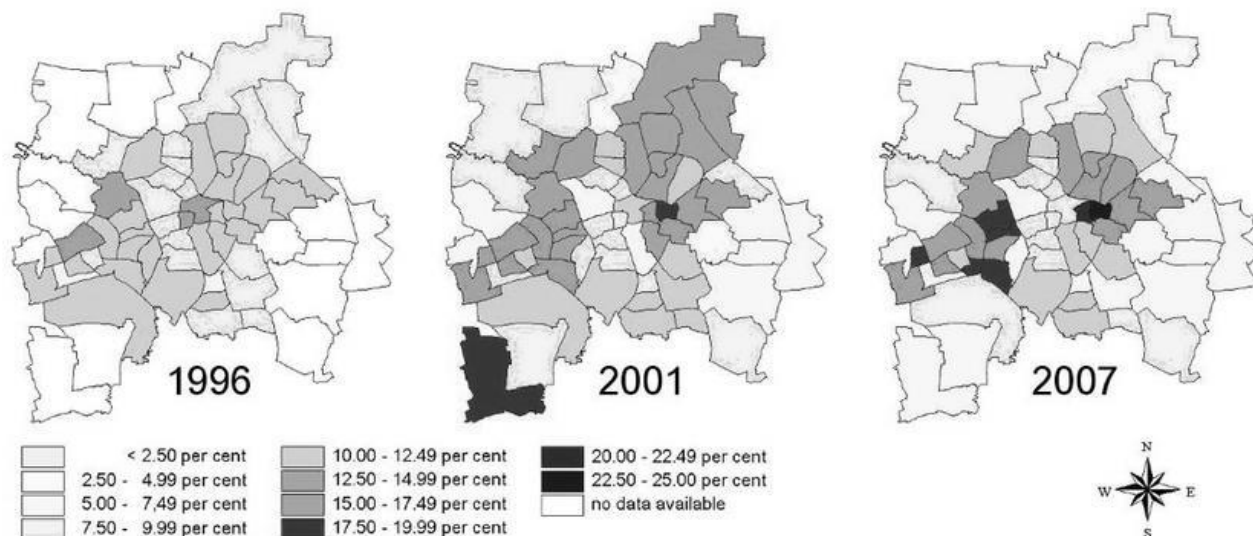


Fig. 1: Social segregation (% unemployed) in Leipzig 1996, 2001, 2007 (Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ, 2011).

1.2. What prospects for the future?

Since there is now an awareness of the counter-productivity and unsustainability of this model of urban and social development, there is an exploration of new policies of government and intervention on the territory, aimed primarily at restoring degraded urban situations - in this research architecture, urbanism, as well as sociology, play a central role. In this regard, two needs seem to gain in relevance:

- The protection and enhancement of the ecological structure to maintain a stable ecosystem, foster biodiversity and mitigate the impact of natural phenomena.
- The involvement of more social actors in decision-making processes and the search for forms of broad participation in territory governance and design.

Both are worthy intentions to pursue but, in the absence of a systemic approach to the city and its functioning, as well as a long-term vision of the city, society, and what their future transformations will be, they risk becoming a mere tool for reflection and small-scale exercises that have little effect on the entire system, and on the contrary, starting from a small dimension, risk emphasizing the only concept of identity as an element to be valorized. This approach misrepresents the resources and values of places, often falling into two opposite cases: uniformization, or homologation, which acts as a semblance and simulacrum of the globalization and leads to the impoverishment and flattening of culture, and communitarianism, as the loss of universality of the common good whose sharing without integration becomes exclusion and identity isolation (Jullien, 2016).

2. Objectives: towards an equal city 2.1. The porous city

Solving the issues highlighted above means proposing a more “equal” city in both social and environmental terms. What seems necessary is a holistic and multi-scalar vision of urban design that consider the complexity of the issues and that can propose, through the consideration of all the actors involved within the city, solutions that are shared, or at least comprehensible, so as not to give rise to phenomena of exclusion during the process of designing and transformation of the city. In this sense, reducing, or eliminating, the phenomena of spatial segregation would mean to ensure that all inhabitants can benefit and enjoy the city’s resources indiscriminately. To do this, the concept of accessibility is of great importance. This does not only encompass the sphere of urban mobility, thanks to which it is possible to move to reach different spaces and places, but also includes social and economic aspects. In fact, it is a factor that greatly conditions the utilisation of services and

opportunities offered by the city. Allowing freedom of use and movement into public spaces, according to proper needs and situations, means overcoming the phenomena of isolation and segregation of certain ethnic groups social strata, the integration and mixing of the richness of human and urban diversity and, finally, a greater urban vitality due to increased social relations. Metaphorically speaking, starting from the concept of porosity, the city can be thought of as porous when it is recognised that it is made up of innumerable public spaces, and private spaces for public use if desired, having the capacity to welcome and entertain inhabitants, who, by establishing relations, debates, comparisons and exchanges, make the city alive and absorb its positive effects such as a sense of belonging and integration on different scales.

To sum up, thinking of a porous city means allowing everyone to use and benefit from any public space, ensuring accessibility in a broad sense to the services and opportunities offered by the city, giving space to human, animal and vegetal biodiversity. To do this, it is of fundamental importance to work with public space in such a way as to foster citizens' sense of social belonging, firstly to their neighbourhood, and secondly to the whole city, so as to encourage local re-appropriation of resources and values. Hence, a network is outlined, a system of interconnected spaces that respond to functional demands but that are above all endowed with quality to favour their use and the meeting and relations between people. Such a system would be able to fulfil not only local functions but also represent an urban framework supporting the ecological system and slow mobility infrastructure.

2.2. Scrap and the city

With this perspective, the reflection on the value of urban marginalities began.

The *scrap* results from the abandonment of previously used land. It appears by subtraction from the anthropized territory. It corresponds to a territory left in the absence of any human decision during a process of evolution or transformation. Since it derives from the principle of land organization, it affects all kinds of space: in rural areas, the scrap corresponds to reliefs that are incompatible with agricultural exploitation; in urban areas, it corresponds to the areas awaiting functionalization or resulting from the abandonment of an activity. At the boundary of residues, barriers become visible, the margin is evident.

These - places of border and separation, places of urban and social abandonment - represent the explorable space that lies between areas and relates them. It contrasts with the static concept of identity, which schematizes cultures by characteristic traits, failing to recognize their internal heterogeneity and thus trivializing and isolating them from each other. On the contrary, thanks to their linear configuration they can become an opportunity of connection between urban areas and, consequently, an opportunity for social integration and reticular recovery of public spaces. This kind of approach makes it possible to link large-scale urban strategies, which involve ecological and infrastructural issues, to local intervention strategies, which involve building and social issues.

Therefore, urban scraps and margins appears as areas of strong interpretative and symbolic dynamism in which processes of transformation can be established. It would be interesting to elevate indecision to the point of giving it political dignity as an occasion for reflection in which to ask questions and consider unorganization as a vital principle. What will the scrap become? We need to think of the margins as a thickness, as a territory for researching what arises from the encounter of different environments. Boundaries constitute social, cultural, biological thicknesses, and their richness is greater than that of the environments they separate. This recalls the concept of Ecotone: a word derived from the greek Oikos (home) and Tonos (tension), it is a zone of transition (and tension) between two or more different biological communities. Could Gilles Clément's Third Landscape theory be metaphorically applied to human societies? There are many ongoing studies, concerning large-scale territories, articulated around the notion of the third landscape and a few reflections can be drawn, such as that of replacing the traditional opposition between urban and rural with a more articulated one between managed and non-managed spaces. It represents a radical critique of the models of rationality that inspire much contemporary planning, to which is opposed an ethics of non-action (Clément, 2004). The city seen as the

environment in which people, engaged in specific personal and professional activities or problems, have exchanges of ideas and sometimes undertake their action creating a web of daily collective life, and thus of trust and social control in space. From this point of view, the porous city considers unused, underused and residual spaces to create or strengthen social relationships, which can promote the formation of a new biodiversity. The design of a porous city is a project that adapts its fabrics to the characteristics of places and, at the same time, changes lifestyles and the interaction of various activities (Secchi, 2009).

2.3. The value of urban scraps

Particular attention must be paid to everyday interactions in social spaces where community is built. These contacts appear mostly trivial, but their result, at the local level, is the formation of a sensitivity to the public character of individuals, of a connective tissue of respect and trust that constitutes a resource in times of individual or collective need. What is generated is social capital: the cooperative capacity that exists between the inhabitants of a neighbourhood through the interaction of everyday life and its diversity. In urban areas where spontaneous and occasional collective life is lacking, inhabitants often isolate themselves from one another. The practical result is the renunciation of performing the most basic public tasks, which require a minimum of personal initiative, and of associating to achieve a common purpose. External interventions to enliven an environment can do little if the citizens themselves are not considered and involved to trigger a certain self-healing (Jacobs, 1961).

Therefore, as expressed above, attention must be paid to the places of everyday life. Through the aesthetics and sensations that a place arouses, and thus through the quality of the urban experience, a desire to rootedness, to belonging, can be generated as a reaction to the constant changes in the city. In the moment citizens can express their authenticity, they also have the power to 'impose' themselves on space, influencing the appearance of a street or the atmosphere of an environment, and make claims on it in accordance with their own lifestyles (Zukin, 2010).



Fig. 2: Portraits of residents displayed along the streets as a process of participation in the redevelopment of Alfama, Lisbon, Portugal (Own photography, 2019).

Following this reasoning, an efficient physical planning of the urban network that constitutes the porous city should aim at the following goals:

- Involve the inhabitants in the process of redevelopment of scraps to foster a sense of appropriation.
- Giving spaces characteristics of durability and flexibility of use to allow their usability over time, even as society changes.
- Rethinking the margins as transition belts between adjacent areas and as linear routes connecting distant areas.
- Giving quality to the system of connecting routes.
- Indulge the environmental characteristics of the place to maintain contact with local specificities.

3. A case study: Lisbon's marginalities

3.1. Analysis and method

A series of experiences led to the practical application of this strategy in Lisbon, a dynamic and growing city that is facing with the socio-spatial issues in various ways and where the public administration is already intervening with a policy of widespread urban redevelopment in which citizens are gladly involved. How do these phenomena of marginalisation and spatial segregation manifest themselves within the city of Lisbon? To understand this, it is essential to have a historical and cultural background of the city and its growth over the centuries because, as André Corboz states (1989:14), "a conception is thus traced that no longer considers the territory as an almost abstract field of operation, but as the result of a very long and very slow stratification that needs to be known in order to be able to intervene". It is precisely through knowledge that one can understand the available resources. For clear reasons it is not possible to describe in depth Lisbon's cultural and urban development over the centuries, but it is essential to highlight some important facts. Since its settlement on the Colina do Castelo, located at the mouth of the Tajo River, the city has always been a very important trading port both to the ocean and seas and to the hinterland. This made it a much-desired city in the different ages, and in fact, there have been many rulers in succession. The mixture of all these influences has made Lisbon an eclectic and polyhedric city in which many cultures could, and still can, find expression. Thus, it is that its steady growth over the centuries inevitably led to the occupation of more land, mainly northward and westward on the riverfront. Its building and infrastructure pattern is the result of adaptation to natural events and planned transformations over time. In particular, a broad policy of public land acquisition was established during Salazar's rule, which became significant in the decades to follow for public space management in favour of the redevelopment of various urban areas. Indeed, in the 1970s a strong urbanization process forced the Municipality to build many residential neighbourhoods. Another contribution to development occurred in 1998 with the assignment of host city for the Universal Exposition thanks to which a large area to the east, on the waterfront, was rehabilitated and other urban interventions were also carried out, including the Vasco da Gama bridge that marks an important new access to the city for those coming from the other side of the river. As a result of this growth process, the marginal areas can already be guessed by subtraction: some peripheral areas to the north and some areas that are more inland but enclosed between the growth of the city center and the two poles of Belém and the EXPO area.

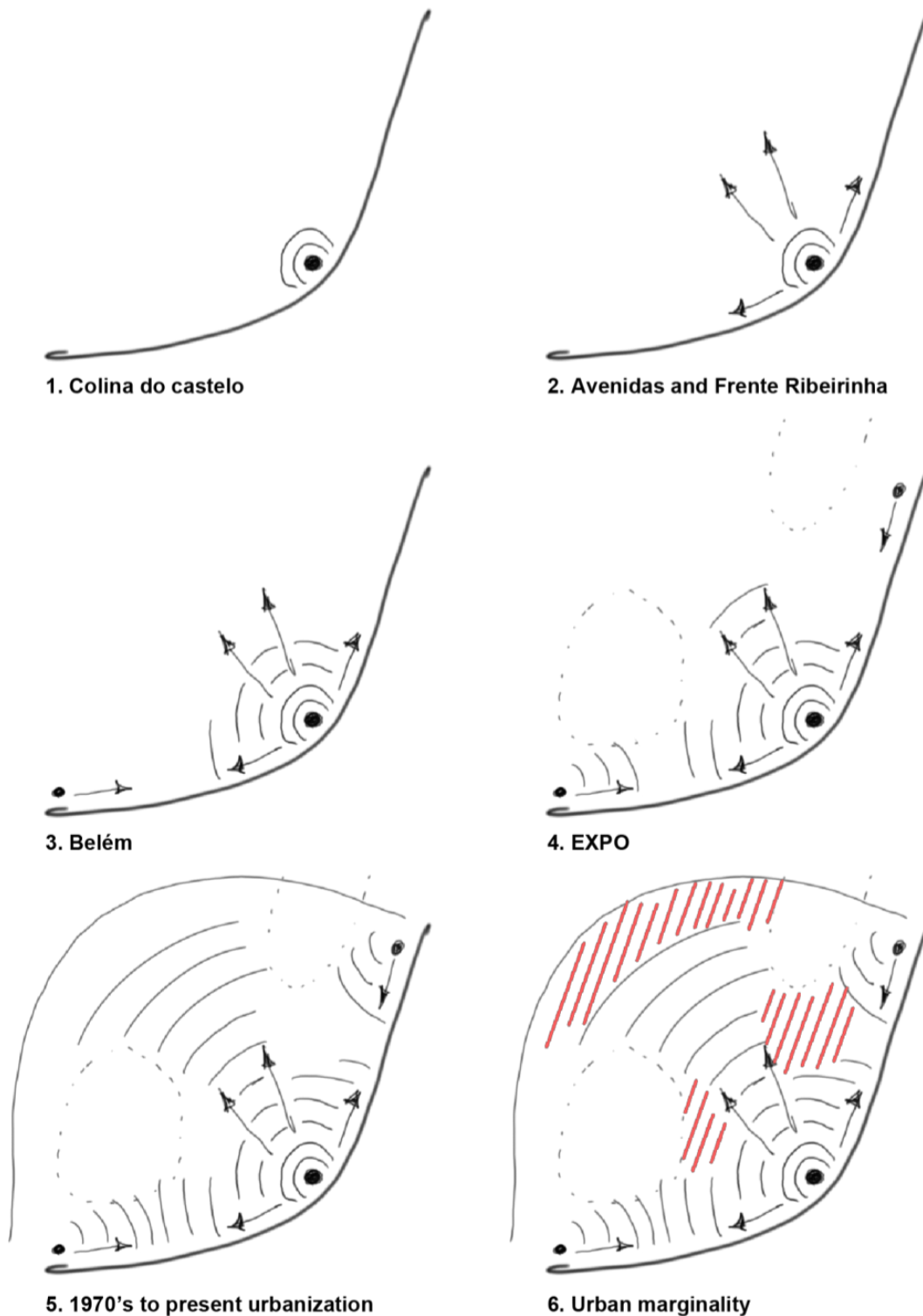


Fig. 3: Outline of Lisbon's development and genesis of margins (own elaboration).

Regarding the urban planning policies that have been adopted in the last two decades, despite the period of economic crisis, environmental sensitivity has been combined with a response consistent with growing tourist pressure, with the reception of socialization needs, with the reorganization of mobility at the metropolitan level and of public spaces in the center but also in the outer neighbourhoods. All this is now visible. The image of the city is renewed thanks to a coherent urban design due to a series of architectural-urban interventions, especially on the riverfront, carried out by the managerial capacity of the administration and signed by relevant international

firms. Nevertheless, the massive touristification that Lisbon has experienced in the last decade coupled with real estate speculation related to BnB rentals has led to a form of urban restructuring that has taken place through the widespread diffusion of small investments in the historic center with significant consequences on the housing market. A real phenomenon of gentrification has led many residents of the city center to have to move to the outlying areas: an issue that has had repercussions on several levels, starting with the middle class up to the most deprived groups who find themselves even more marginalized. In response to this situation, the Lisbon municipality has been moving in recent years with a series of widespread redevelopments of public spaces within the city to strengthen social cohesion and attract private activity and investment. Particular mention can be made of two urban intervention programs that have respectively targeted the Riverfront and neighborhood squares, and that have had major repercussions.

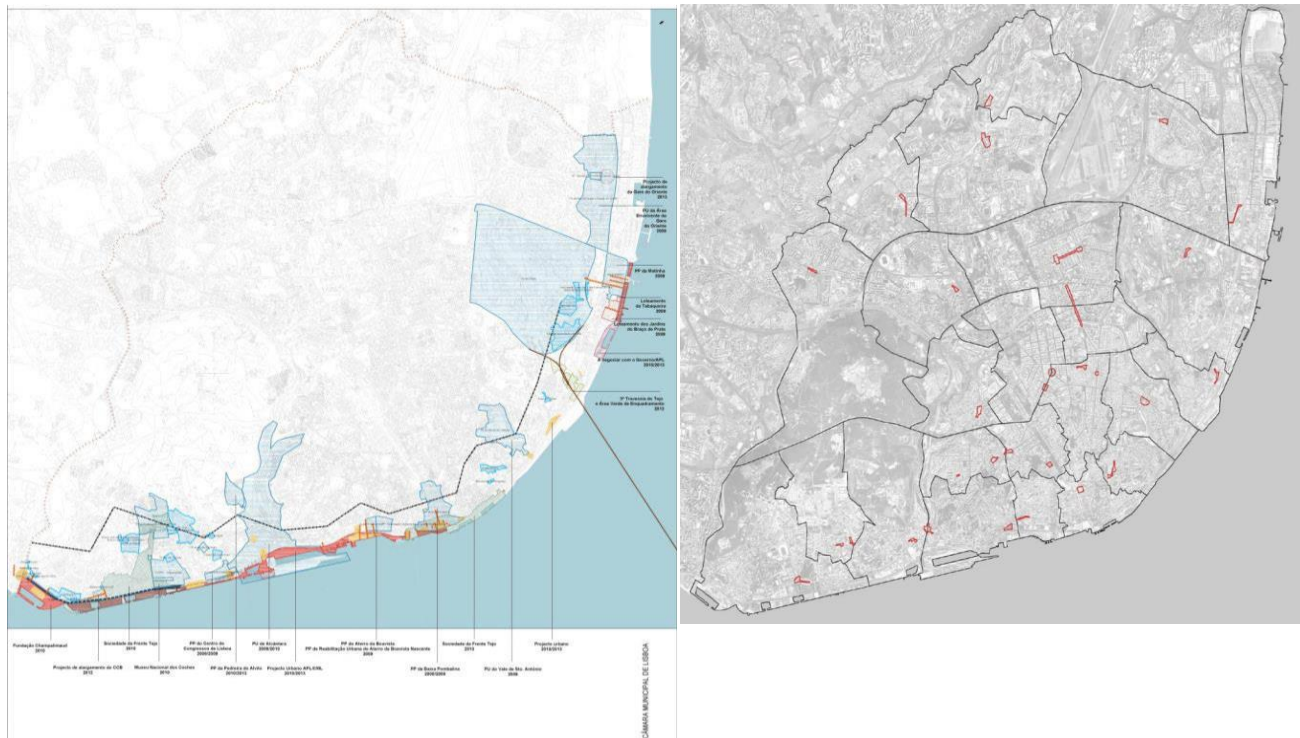


Fig. 4: on the left "Frente Ribeirinha" Plan, on the right "Uma praça cada bairro" Plan, (CML, 2010 and 2014)

Starting from these considerations, we now need to figure out which marginalities should be considered, from architectural, urban, and social perspectives and then observe whether there are correspondences or relationships among these. The social ones, find expression in the space with degraded or illegally generated neighbourhoods, the urban ones, conditioned by natural and anthropic systems, correspond to abandoned areas and/or areas to be consolidated because they are not subject to planning. To identify them, the documentation of the Camara Municipal de Lisboa (hereafter CML) is supportive where it is possible to find the Urban Areas of Illegal Genesis (AUGI) and the Bairros, neighbourhoods, and Priority Intervention Areas (BIP/ZIP). In these areas the social conditions are degraded and the building fabric reflects the situation with low maintenance and, in some cases, decay and abandonment. For these areas, several redevelopment programs are in action with the aim of intervening in public spaces and activating the population through participatory processes, so as to improve social and territorial cohesion. Other "scraps" turn out to be the residential and green areas to be consolidated, scattered around the city. These areas, indicated in the Plano Director Municipal correspond to urban meshes to be reconverted urbanistically and functionally, as well as interstitial spaces in which it is intended to build or to be allocated to the municipal ecological network.

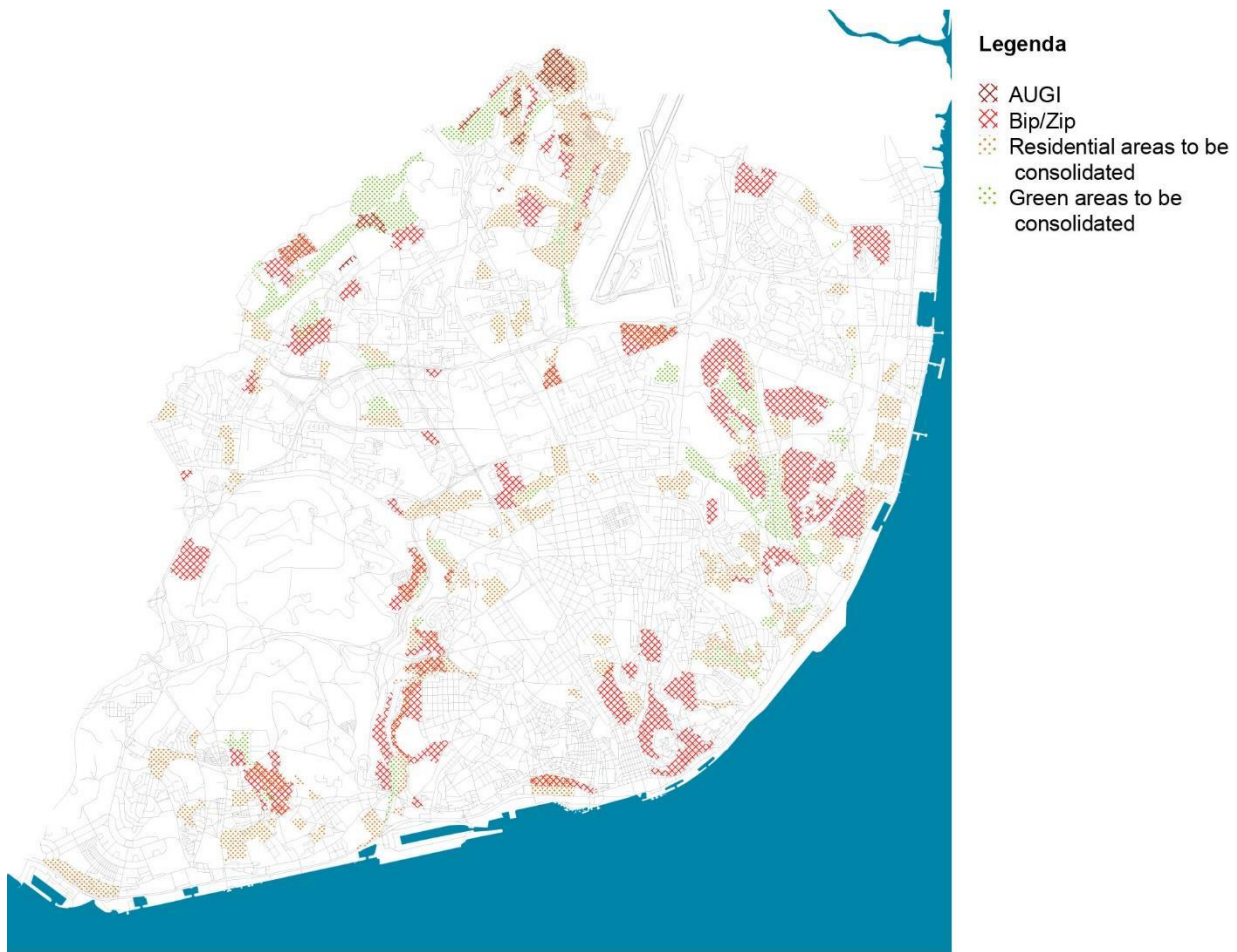


Fig. 5: Identification of social and urban marginality, scale 1:100'000 (own elaboration based on CML data)

To understand how these areas are framed within and between the urban context, it was useful to rely on empirical social research based on census data. The latter, collected on census sections called Freguesias (Lisbon's ancient 'parishes' on which the city's current administrative subdivisions are based), allow us to observe the city's social dynamics, and from their analysis, it has been possible to understand which areas suffer most from spatial segregation. This paper does not report all the analyses that the municipality carried out and that facilitated the case study, but only the most significant ones to facilitate the reading of the scraps (for the totality of the data, please refer to the "Atlas Social" developed by the CML and available on the official website [Atlas Social de Lisboa \(arcgis.com\)](http://Atlas Social de Lisboa (arcgis.com))). The main indicators of social status taken into account are the following:

- The illiteracy rate, inversely proportional to the level of education and thus to the possibility of social and economic mobility.
- The vacancy rate, linked to the degradation and abandonment of the housing stock.
- The unemployment rate, which particularly corresponds to the illiteracy rate in districts with higher values.
- The number of social benefits, reflection of the economic condition of the inhabitants.

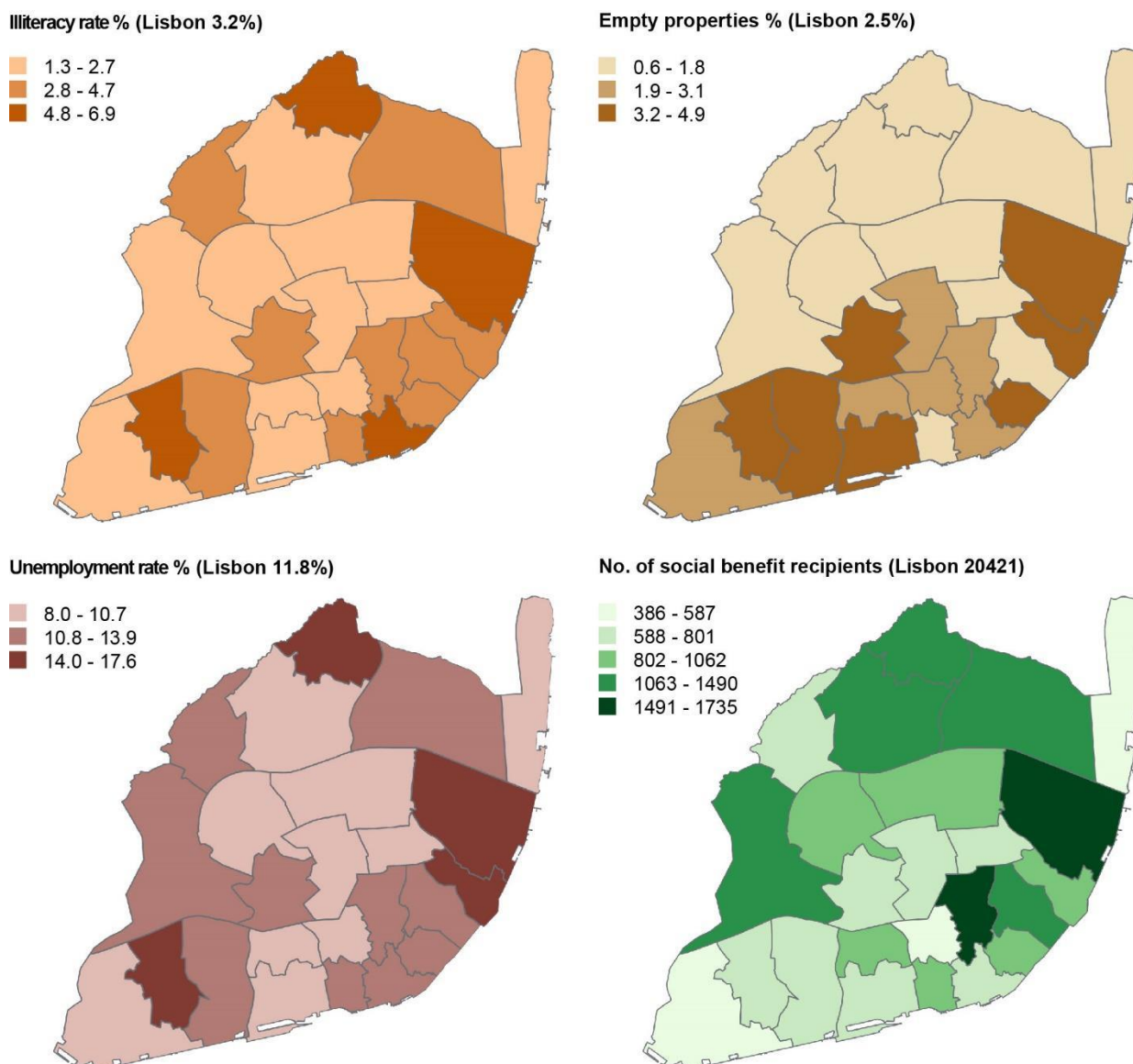


Fig. 6: Atlas social de Lisboa (CML, 2017)

In this general situation, the Freguesias apparently more subject to degradation, both social and urban, can be enclosed in three clusters: to the north along the administrative border of Lisbon, to the east the narrow area between the historic centre and the Expo area, along the Alcântara valley canal. Among all of them, social asymmetries are particularly visible in Santa Clara and Marvila. People who arrived in Lisbon through migratory flows from the Portuguese hinterland and people who still had to live in shantytowns in the mid-twentieth century were often housed there. The clusters indicated correspond quite precisely with the marginalities identified earlier and with the areas to be consolidated indicated in the Lisbon master plan. This means, on the one hand, that over time there have been difficulties of inclusion to mitigate social disparities, and on the other hand, that there is an awareness of the administration and a willingness to resolve these situations. Finally, it is interesting to observe how in most cases the situations of greatest social decay and areas in a state of abandonment or degradation are found in correspondence with morphological marginalities, precisely because of the difficult adaptation of urban life, and the margins or limits that infrastructure has come to define on the urban frame: this is the case of the highways and surface railway lines that clearly provide an important link between distant areas and suburbs, but at the same time mark a dividing line between close neighbourhoods, interrupting the usability of spaces and services.

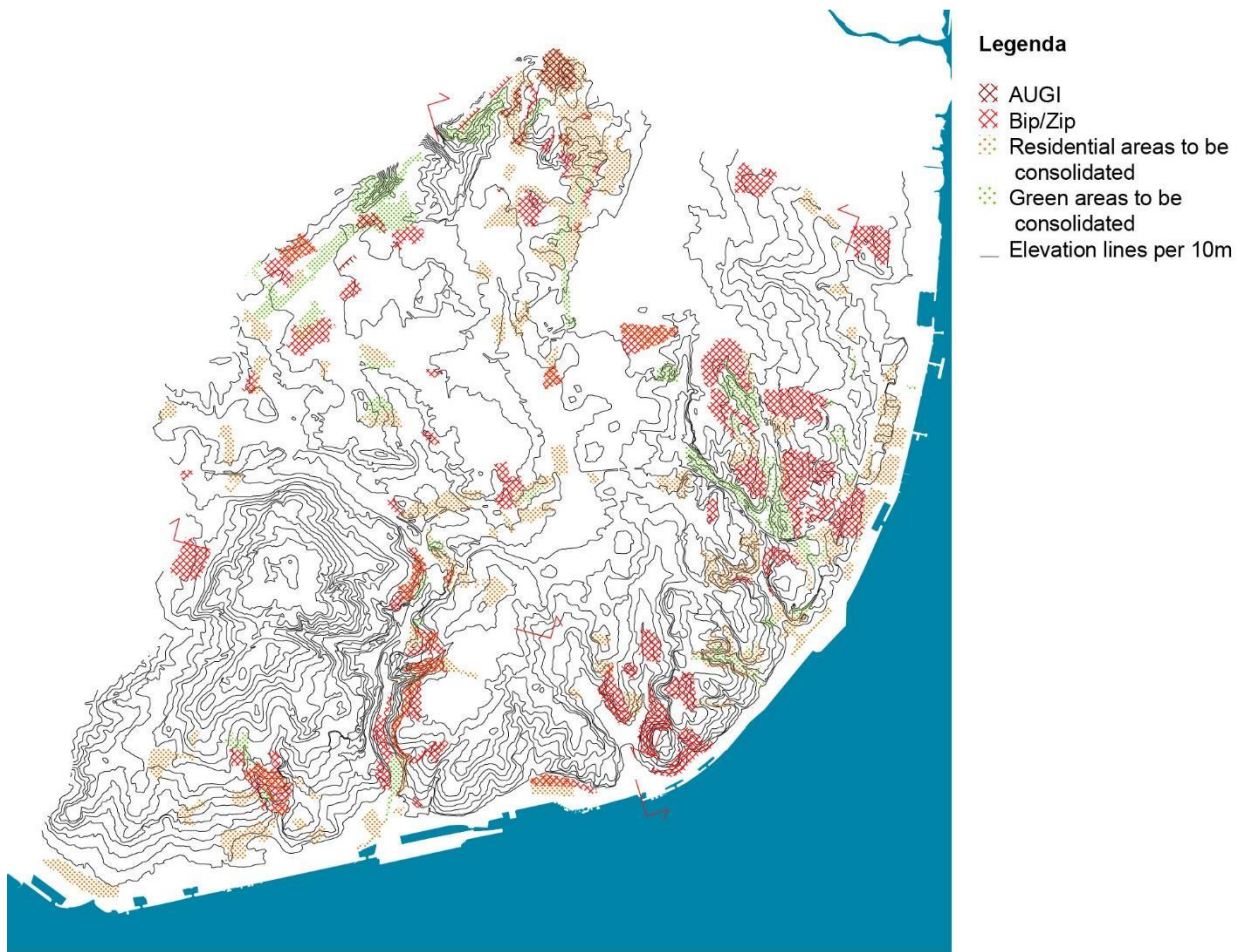


Fig. 7: Correlation between marginality and morphology, scale 1:100'000 (own elaboration based on CML data)

This confirms that limits, both natural and man-made, become points of marginalization and therefore need a different paradigm to open up to neighbouring areas and allow for the permeability of people, cultures, goods, etc.

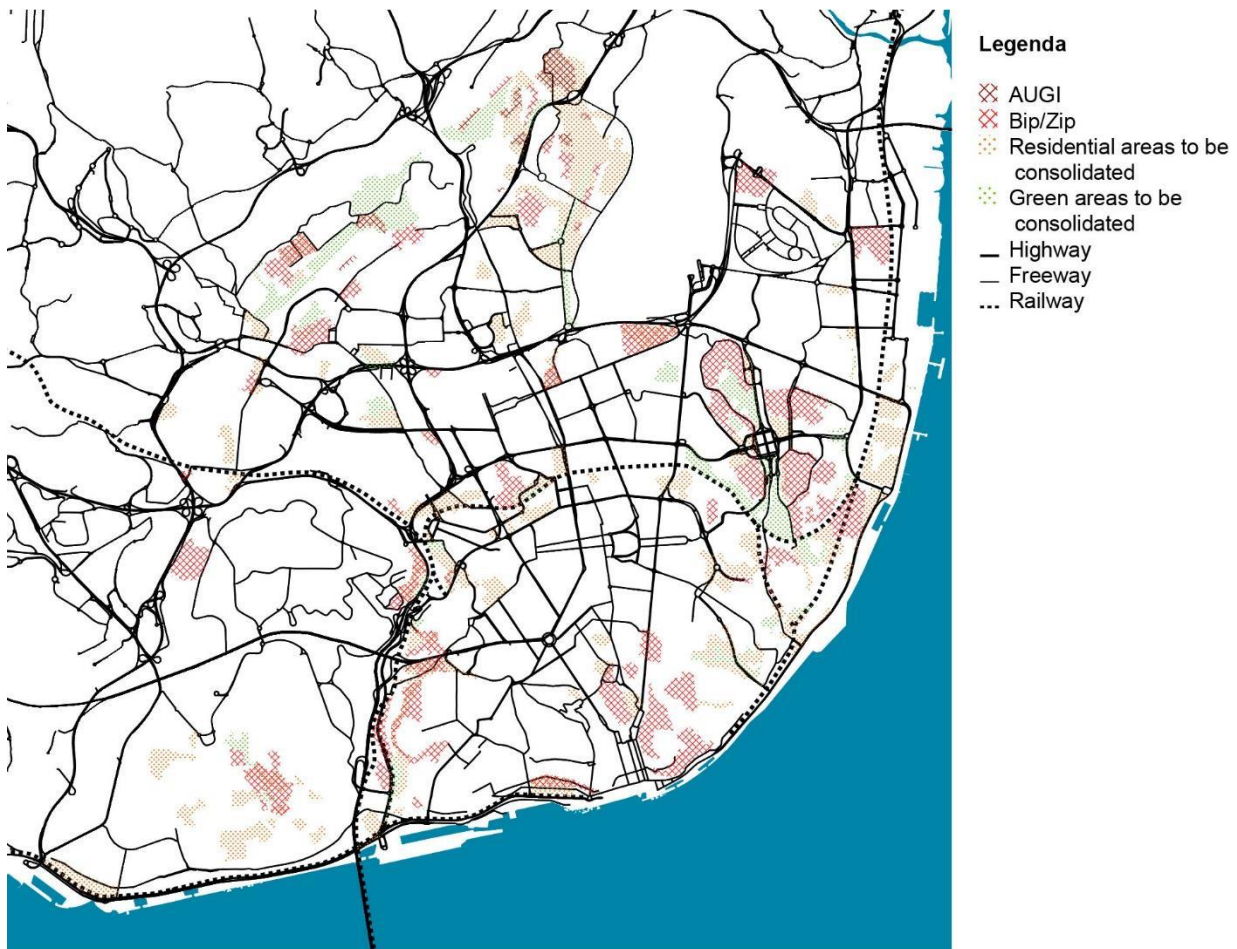


Fig. 8: Correlation between marginality and fast mobility, scale 1:100'000 (own elaboration based on CML data)

3.2. The proposal

The development and spontaneous transformation of urban marginalities, starting from a place of reference, can have different mechanisms. In Lisbon in particular, a radial development was observed, and then by directrices starting from two extreme poles such as Belém and the Expo. Once attractive hubs are located, expansion between areas is left to be spontaneous (see the cases of the LX-factory and the Hub Criativo Beato). In these places, it can be interesting to search for the cultural features present in the city. One method of thinking about a network of spaces that infiltrate throughout the city, making it porous, is to start with the orographic conformation and then rely on the dense presence of permeable and non-permeable public spaces that make up an urban mosaic. It is possible to link all these places through linear valleys and ridges, marginal areas having linear characteristics. In landscape ecology, the notions of corridor and mosaic are spatially structuring. Corridor is continuity, mosaic is fragmentation, and no discontinuity is needed for the activation of circulation, this is valid for all types of flow (water, air, people etc.). It is possible to think of guaranteeing the usability of spaces through redesigns that are organic with the context and through furnishings that do not require excessive management so as to leave an important role to the people: that of participating in the definition of these spaces through the forms of use they prefer to perform there.

The CML, through its redevelopment programs, is already in line with this strategy, in fact, it is redesigning some squares and public spaces within the neighbourhoods, thus thickening the existing mosaic. The next step is to connect all these squares by transforming the margins into filter and connection areas. Sort of like what was done on the riverfront where a general redesign was proposed and then refined according to the specifics of the location. Thus, by comparing the consolidated public space, both permeable and non-permeable, with the

areas to be consolidated, where there is the greatest possibility of urban redesign, it is already possible to identify the network that connects the neighbourhoods to be redeveloped, the marginalities, both among themselves and with the rest of the city.

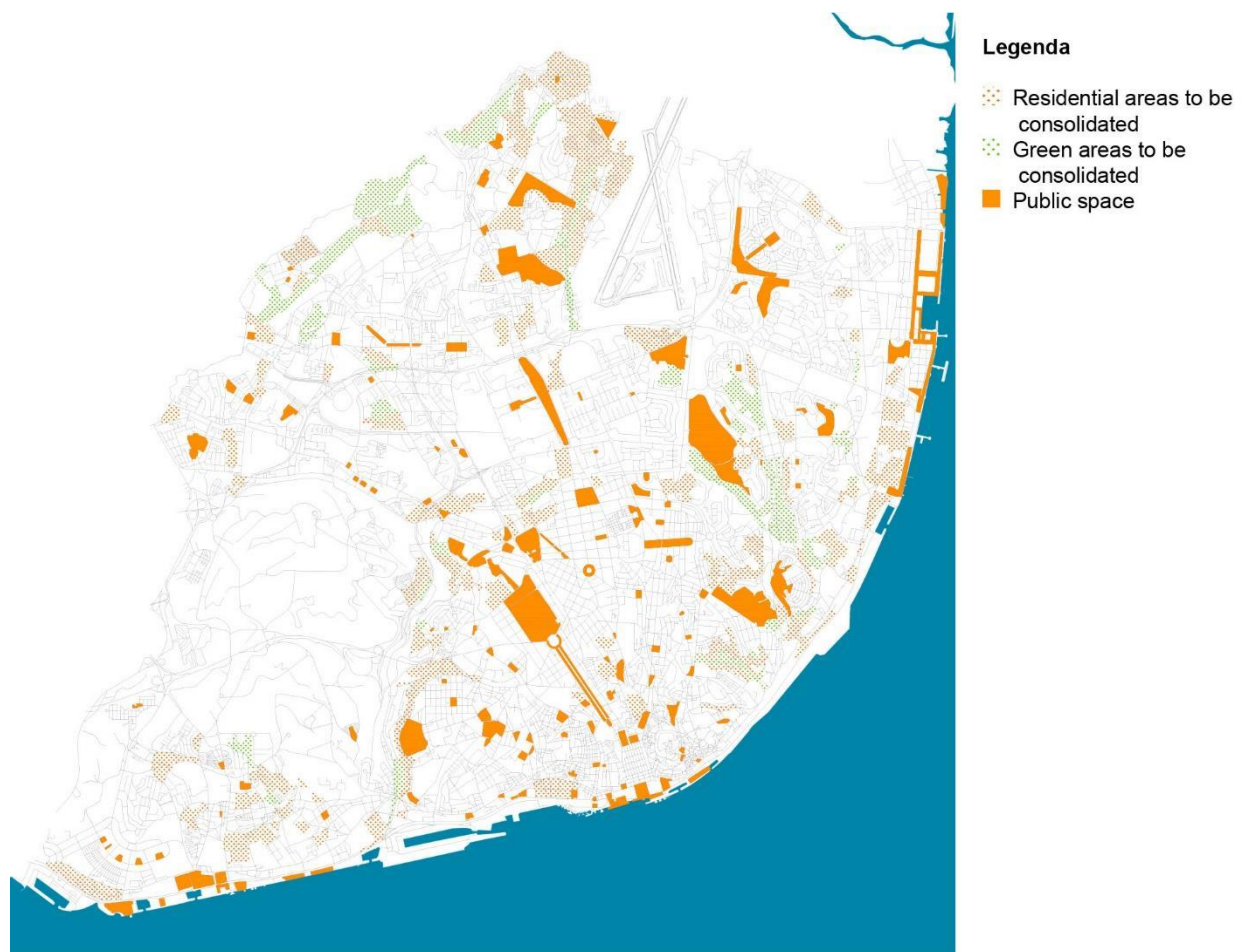


Fig. 9: Correlation between marginality and public space, scale 1:100'000 (own elaboration based on CML data)

The proposal consists of the creation of 'corridors' that can have both an ecological and a light mobility support function, and that cross areas that are disused or to be consolidated. The aim, in addition to improving the accessibility of neighbourhoods both inside and outside them, is to transform currently degraded space, and thus rejected by the inhabitants, into usable and appropriable quality space. The hope is that, by fostering the sociality and liveability of the place, it will also increase its attractiveness for social classes of a higher socio-economic status so as to generate the mixité necessary for the establishment of work activities and the formation of the social capital that these areas need.

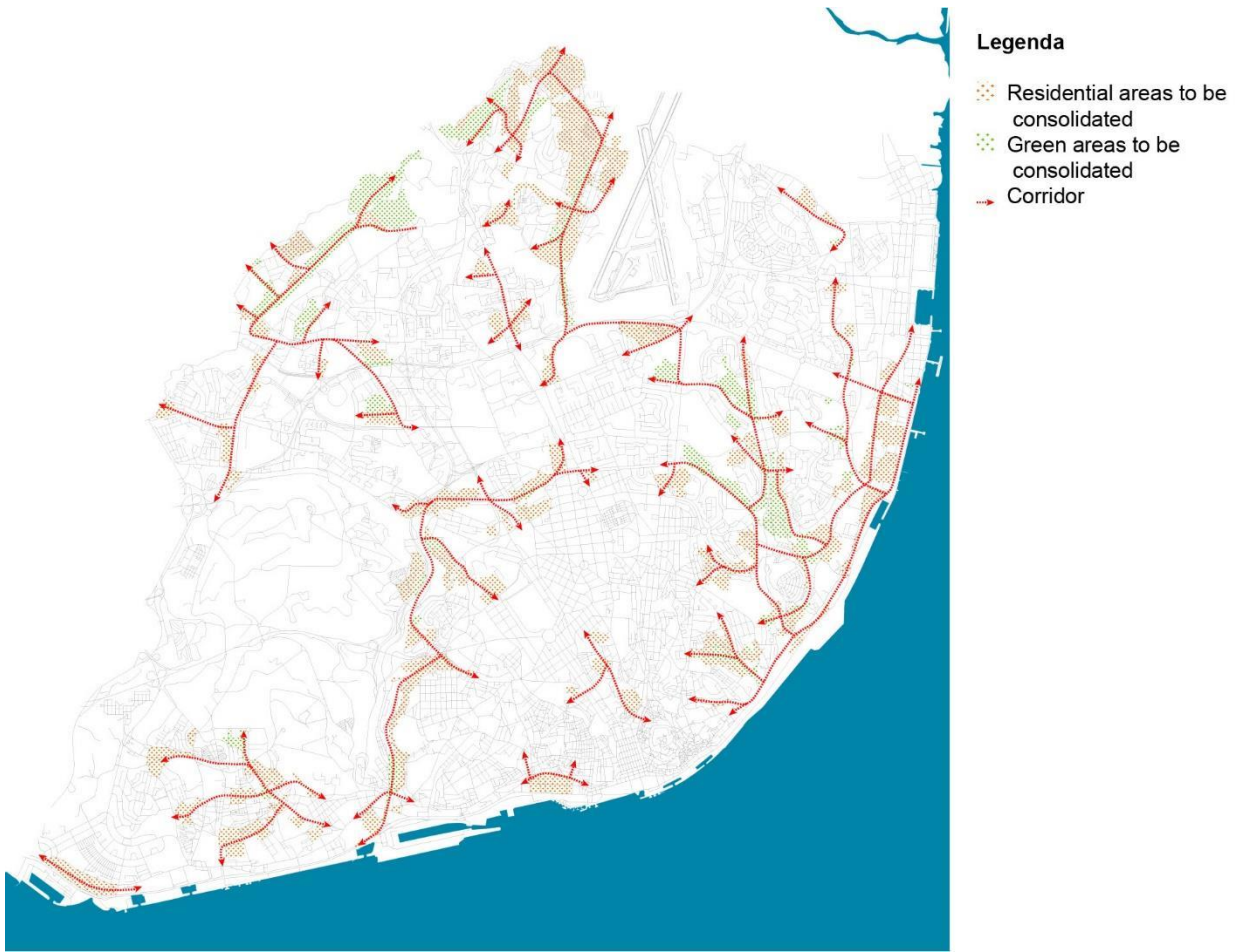


Fig. 10: Identification of corridors along the areas to be consolidated, scale 1:100'000 (own elaboration based on CML data)

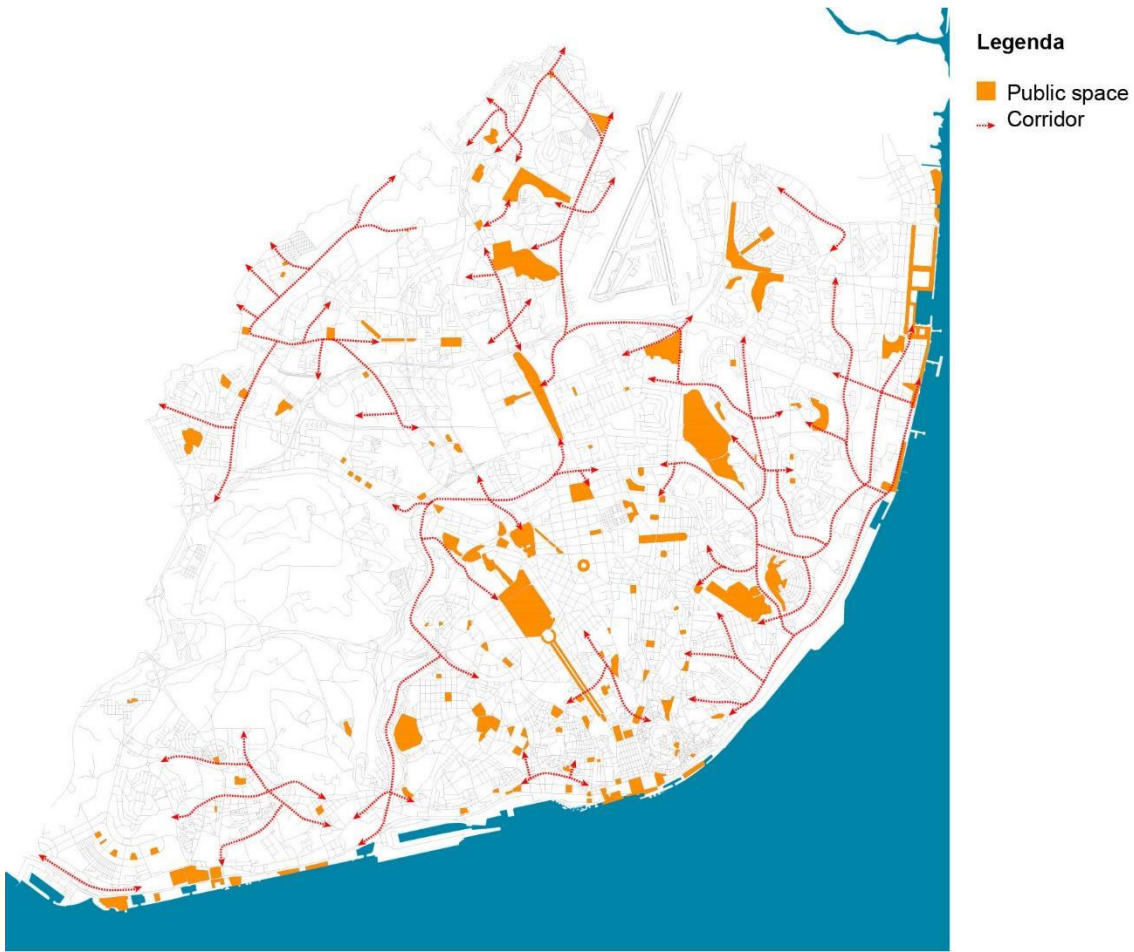


Fig. 11: Interconnected spaces, scale 1:100'000 (own elaboration based on CML data)

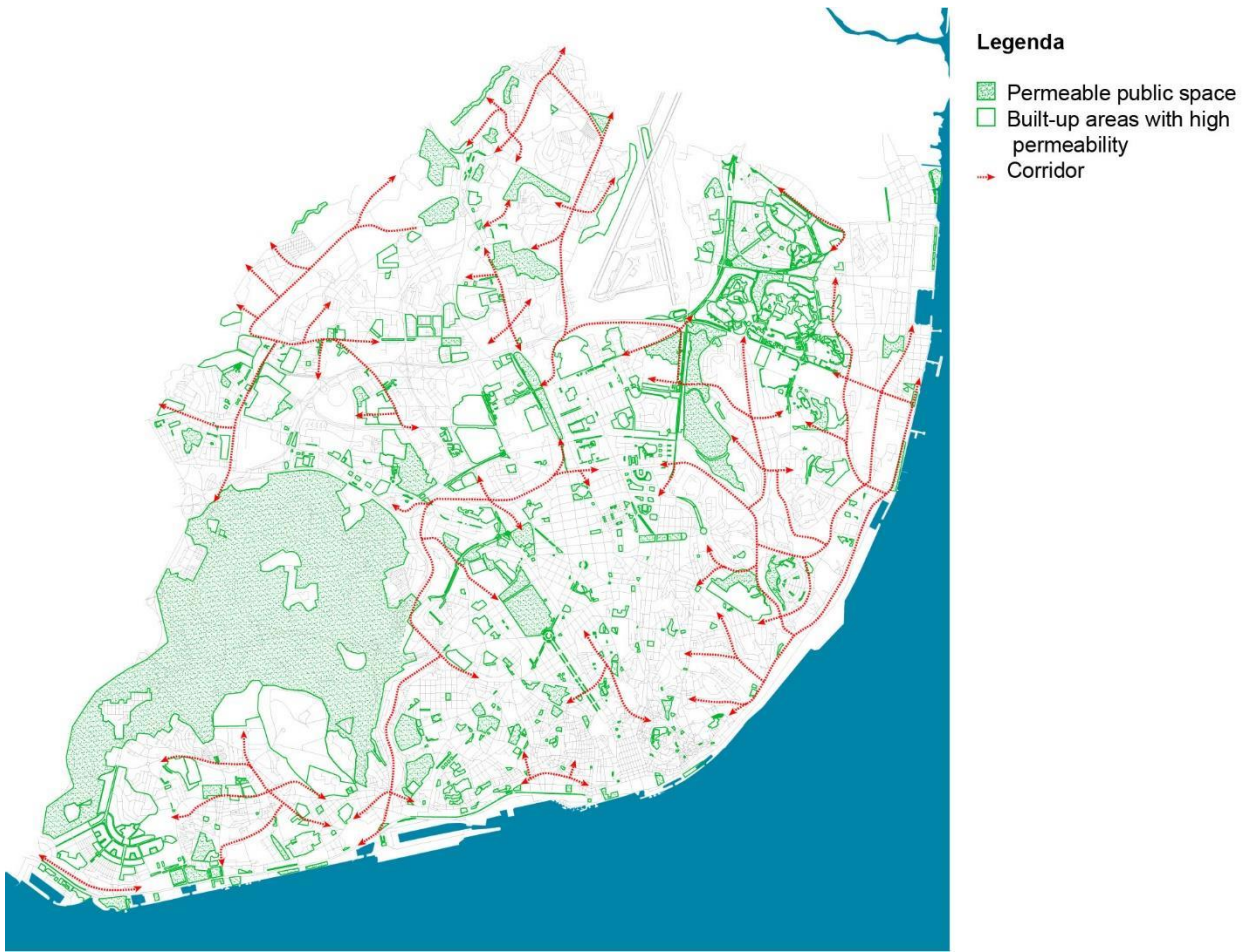


Fig. 12: Ecological corridors, scale 1:100'000 (own elaboration based on CML data)



Figure 13: Margins and urban porosity, scale 1:100'000 (own elaboration based on CML data)

This connecting framework, which takes place at the urban scale, is followed by more in-depth study at the district and then neighborhood scale to adapt to the specificities of place and to be able to involve residents in the process of design, implementation and finally appropriation (De Carlo, 2013). Obviously, this type of approach involves multidisciplinary expertise, not only in architectural or urban design but also in sociology. In this, the Lisbon administration proves to be in the vanguard thanks to a particular sensitivity to social integration. Indeed, local democracy, participation and inclusion, transparency and responsibility are promoted with the aim of ensuring sustainable urbanization and quality of space. Since 2008, the Lisbon municipality has circumscribed and controlled the growth of the Urban Area of Illegal Origin (AUGI) on the basis of a specific law. Landowners and tenants have become co-responsible for co-financing and managing all reconversion processes through their participation in joint administrative committees with the municipality. The involvement of local partners and residents in a participatory planning process is a key factor for well-balanced urban planning to promote social inclusion (Friedman, 2011). Participatory methods such as focus groups, community mapping, and photo-voting have been used in this process. More recently, in 2015-2016, a new division was created in the municipal structure and a multidisciplinary team worked to promote participatory planning processes. An example of action in the Santa Clara district where focus groups were organized with local partners and a participatory diagnosis of the area to be rehabilitated was produced. This participatory and integrated approach is the basis for the design and implementation of Sustainable Urban Plans and a future Local Action Plan (Fernandez, 2017).

4. Results and conclusion

To redevelop socially degraded areas, it is necessary to work on two fronts: on the external image, to strengthen the connection with the city and remove social barriers or stigmatization, and on the internal image, to adapt to local characters and form a sense of community. Regarding the first one, it is necessary to form cores of use and transit, to think of housing and B&Bs redistribution policies, and to trace routes and stations for slow mobility. As for the second, we need to work on neighborhood links, to foster self-healing, and jointly face social, economic, housing, and labor issues.

Thinking in terms of scraps and margins within the city turns out to be an important opportunity to solve spatial problems generated by the city's continuous growth. These spaces, often corresponding to abandoned or socially degraded areas, in the absence of an attribution of meaning and significance, lend themselves to design dynamism and represent an opportunity for intervention to solve urban, social and ecological issues on different scales.

A few considerations must be made in order for an intervention in these areas to be effective:

- The identification of marginality is not unique. Depending on the cultural point of view with which they are approached they can be read and interpreted in various ways.
- Since these are the spaces where dialogue is possible and therefore an opportunity for confrontation, it is appropriate that an intervention within them maintains this property so as to leave free interpretation and action by people and nature.
- It is appropriate to think in multi-scalar and pluri-disciplinary terms to understand the urban dynamics that generated them and in which they are currently found. Once their capacity and value are understood, it is possible to integrate them with the city and their surroundings.
- It is necessary to enter into a logic of process in which, aware that urban interventions can have radically different effects depending on the circumstances and the context in which they are inserted, the behaviour of the users and the transformations they bring to the space must be monitored.

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