

# Traditional city, invaded city, and reconquered city: The experiences of re-functionalization of Praça da Figueira in Lisbon (1885-2023)

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**Abstract.** The squares are multifunctional and multidimensional spaces that integrate the city's needs. For this reason, they assume different roles: they support urban life, economic activities, and the mobility system. Faced with diverse approaches and interventions in the public space, Jan Gehl and Lars Gemzø developed a typification of the city according to the design of its public space, which they call 'the traditional city, the invaded city, and the reconquered city'. These different types of cities can also be associated with various periods or interventions in public spaces. From the observation of Praça da Figueira in Lisbon, particularly its history, we understand the present situation of this space, identify the moments and principles inherent to the main functional and image transformations that this public space has undergone over the centuries. The experiences of (re)functionalization and qualification of this square conditioned its evolution from a market square (1885-1949), the noble square (1969), to the square that we observed in 2023.

## 1 The relationship between form, function, and image of public space

As a human product, the city emerges as a response to an economic and social need. Not limited to being a built set, the city deserves reading by the articulation between streets and squares [1]. In this sense, the public space, understood as the space of free access and circulation, assumes relevance in the definition of the image and form of the city, playing a relevant role translated into distinct spaces and typologies.

Although the street is the typology of public space with the most significant extension [2], the square is the space dedicated to socialization [3]. The interest in the square as a unique public space is associated with a particular function or a structuring role in the city [1]. With its social, cultural, and economic dimensions, the square results from a need and does not have a single reading, whether we are talking about its image or form.

The public space is the space of encounter, commercial exchange, and circulation [4]. In the medieval city, the square shape develops as an irregular and undesigned space [1] or an open, unbuilt, and public space [5]. However, it must be considered more than just a void in

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the urban structure [1]. Its significance for the city stems from its function as a political and cultural space [6].

However, the square develops differently according to the context. For example, it does not exist in Islamic society in its broadest sense, although it is a fundamental urban element in Western societies [1]. However, the geographical contiguity of Portugal and Spain has produced two distinct urban models: in the Portuguese city, the square is not fundamental, and in the Spanish city, the square is the center of urban public life [7]. This reflection reinforces the conclusion that the square, in its formal, functional, and image diversity, is an urban element produced by its context.

In the case of Portugal, the square became part of the urban structure and the object of planning from the eighteenth century [1, 8, 9].

However, the Portuguese city's main feature of the square is its morphological diversity. The square, in Portugal, is associated with multiple forms: squares, *largos*, *terreiros*, fields, *adros* [10]. This diversity results from the different forms and functions [10], which justifies the toponymic diversity (*Adro*, *Largo*, or *Praça*, for example). In chronological terms, Teixeira [10] distinguished three fundamental moments for analysing the square in the Portuguese city: until the sixteenth century, the eighteenth century, and the nineteenth century. However, from the eighteenth century, the square became a planned element [7] and relevant from its formal characteristics as a central element and generator of the urban fabric [10].

During the nineteenth century, gardens, or roundabouts where road traffic was privileged replaced the square [10]. From this idea of breaking the meaning of public space, Gehl and Gemzøe considered that the traditional city succeeded the invaded city [4]. The transformation of public space throughout the twentieth century is due in industrialized countries to the impact of new forms of communication, commerce, and transport, among which the private automobile stands out [4]. While the convivial and market square were transferred to other spaces, the automobile occupied the public space and gave way to the invaded city [4]. The recovery of public space and, particularly, of the square as a space of conviviality thus assumes relevance in policies for public space, as the example of Barcelona in the 80s demonstrates [4]. The reconquered city expands to other cities and contributes to the formulation, already in 2014, of the program "A Square in each neighborhood" of the Lisbon City Council [11, 12].

## 2 The case of Praça da Figueira

Praça da Figueira is in downtown Lisbon (Fig. 1) but was never part of the downtown Lisbon plan. The downtown Lisbon project was thought and designed in the second half of the eighteenth century and structured between two large squares, Praça do Comércio and Praça D. Pedro IV [13, 14]. Thus, the emptiness where today the Praça da Figueira is implanted appears in 1834 after the Royal Hospital of All Saints demolition. In 1885 a market building was created in this place to back the function of the market square. This building was demolished in 1949, returning the space to an emptiness. This public space then has the designation from the market - Praça da Figueira. It is essential to understand the historical course of this place and the motivations at the origin of the interventions the square has suffered over time. Recovering the perspective of Gehl and Gemzøe [4], public space characterizes the city in three distinct typologies: traditional, invaded, and reconquered. We analyzed the Praça da Figueira interventions through these three lenses.

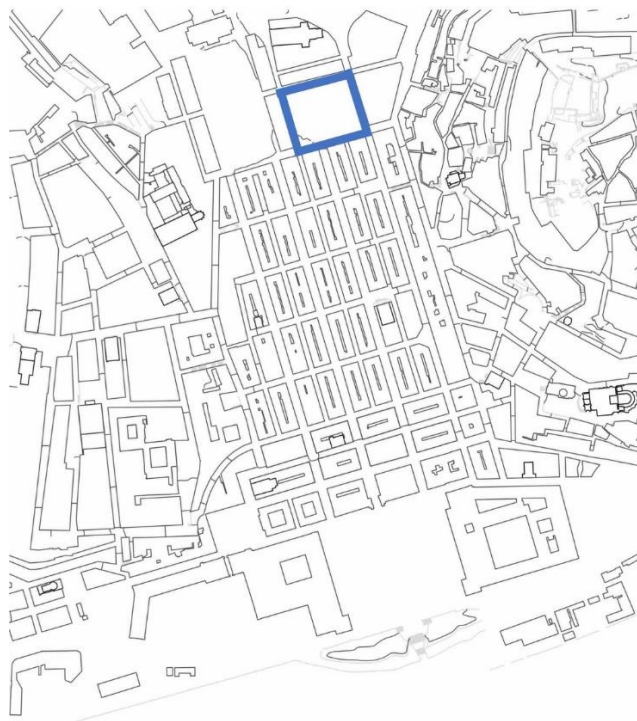
## 2.1 The Traditional City

Praça da Figueira's territory has had different occupations over time. It was a necropolis in the Roman city of Lisbon (Felicitas Iulia Olisipo), an Islamic neighborhood in the twelfth century (Al-Ushbuna neighborhood), as the excavations prove [15], a Dominican convent (founded in 1241) in the following centuries, and a hospital in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries (the Royal Hospital de Todos-os-Santos) [16].

In 1750 a fire destroyed much of the Hospital Real de Todos-os-Santos and the adjacent buildings [16], and finally, with the 1755 earthquake. The chief engineer of the kingdom Manuel da Maia (1677-1768) wrote a dissertation with proposals to rebuild the city of Lisbon. A total of six proposal plans were presented, even though the chosen plan attributed to Eugénio dos Santos (1711-1760) is unknown [17].

The Praça da Figueira did not appear in the initial plans for the reconstruction of downtown Lisbon (Proposals of 1756), nor in the 1758 drawing by Eugénio dos Santos and Carlos Mardel (1695-1763) (Fig. 2), because it corresponded until 1834 to the Hospital Real de Todos-os-Santos area [16, 18]. However, in the reconstruction of Lisbon's downtown, the space that the square today occupies had several proposals.

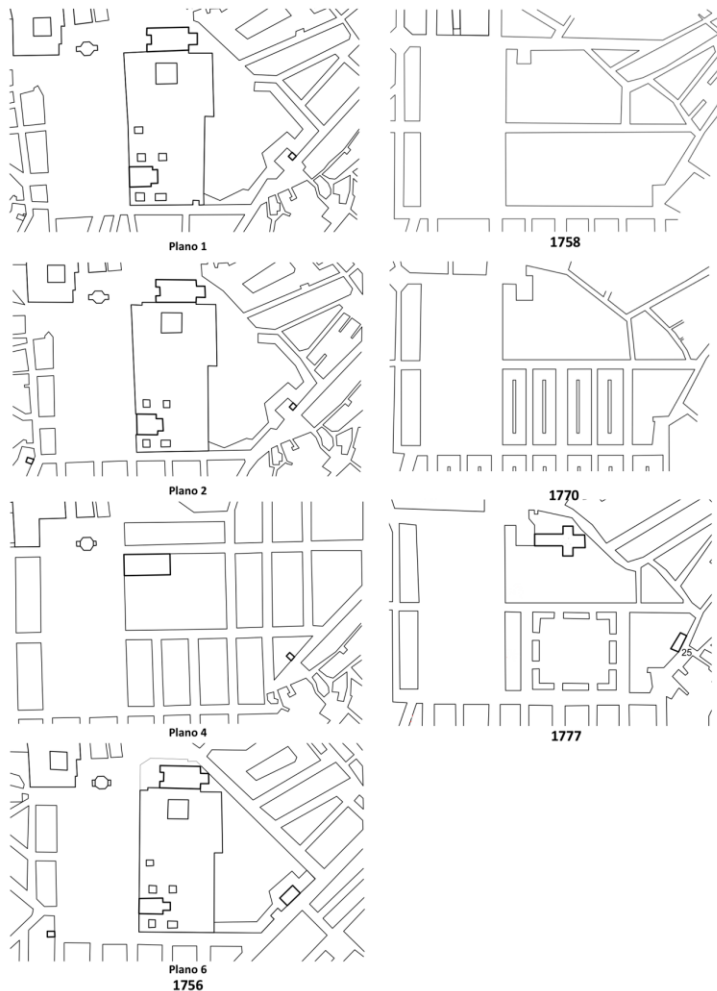
Observing Fig. 2 (vectorization of eighteenth-century cartography) that presents the Praça da Figueira area, we highlight, in the cartography related to Plans 1, 2, and 6 of the proposals to rebuild the post-earthquake downtown Lisbon (1756), the large building of the Royal Hospital Real de Todos-os-Santos. The proposal of Plan 4 of 1756, the selected project (1758), and the cartography of 1770 still do not correlate to the void drawn by Praça da Figueira. In 1770 José António Monteiro Carvalho (date unknown-1780) designed a set of plans for Lisbon's downtown and included the blocks edification in the space that would become the Praça da Figueira. This 1770 design is identical to plan 4 of 1756.



**Fig. 1.** Location of Praça da Figueira in downtown Lisbon (Author's drawing – Vectorization of current plant)

However, in 1775, with the relocation of the Hospital to the Jesuit College of Santo Antão (current Hospital of São José) and with the demolition of the old building of the Hospital Real de Todos-os-Santos, an urban void was created that solved the lack of a central market in Lisbon [18]. The creation of Praça da Figueira is complementary to Rossio because the sale of vegetables and fruits in Rossio had been banned [19]. Thus, still in 1775, D. José donated to the Lisbon City Council the land occupied by the Hospital so that there was space for the sale of fruits and vegetables [20]. After 1775 was drawn "ruler and square," an urban setting to the east of the Rocio that will, on the one hand, regularize one of the facades of the Rossio and, on the other hand, geometrize a new square also aligned by the geometry of the blocks of the downtown Lisbon. In the letter of 1777 (Fig. 2) appears, thus, for the first time, the design of an enclosed space that characterizes the new void where the Praça Nova would be born (the first designation of Praça da Figueira).

We have records for 1835 of constructing a well in the Square (for hygiene reasons) and planting 124 trees [20, 21].

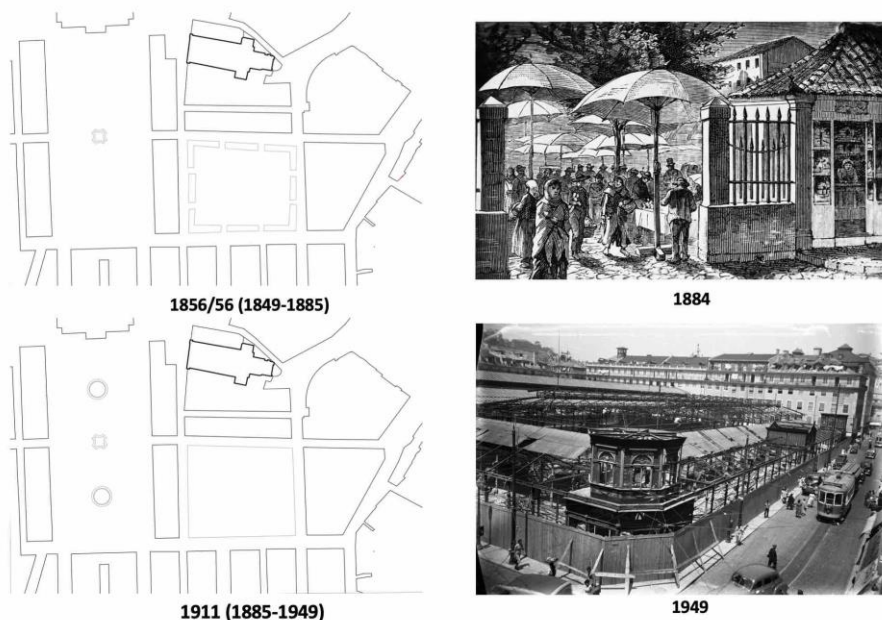


**Fig. 2.** Traditional Area surrounding the Praça da Figueira in the plans of reconstruction (1756) of the post-earthquake Low; and in the maps of 1758, 1770 and 1777. (Author's drawings – Vectorization of the original cartography).

In 1778 the opening of Praça da Figueira was established as the model of public space organization in downtown Lisbon Pombaline, which continues to this day. The public space of the reconstruction area of downtown Lisbon Pombaline is structured, thus, fundamentally, in four squares articulated with each other: Praça do Comércio/Praça do Município and Rossio/Praça da Figueira [5].

The 1856/58 letter drawn by Filipe de Sousa Folque (1800-1874) (Fig. 3) shows the alignment of outdoor stalls, which surrounded the Square and the grove implanted in 1835. the Mayor José Rosa Araújo (1840-1893) in 1875, idealized a new market for Praça da Figueira. That same year the City Council received three proposals for constructing the new market building in Praça da Figueira. Thus, the Market began to be built in 1883 and inaugurated in 1885 [20].

In 1911, Júlio António da Silva Pinto (1860-unknown date) completed the plan for Lisbon, and the new iron market structure is depicted, as shown in Fig. 3. In the so-called traditional city, we have only a record of a square opening in 1778 during the construction of the downtown plan. In 1885, a building in iron architecture was built in this void that would remain until 1949.



**Fig. 3.** Traditional City: On the right Praça da Figueira in 1884 and 1949, on the left Praça da Figueira in the survey of Filipe Folque (1856/58) and in the survey of Silva Pinto (1911). Source: Photographs of the Municipal Photographic Archive of Lisbon; File Quotas: 1884 - PT/AMLSB/CMLSBAH/PCSP/004/EDP/001702, and 1949 - PT/AMLSB/POR/018162

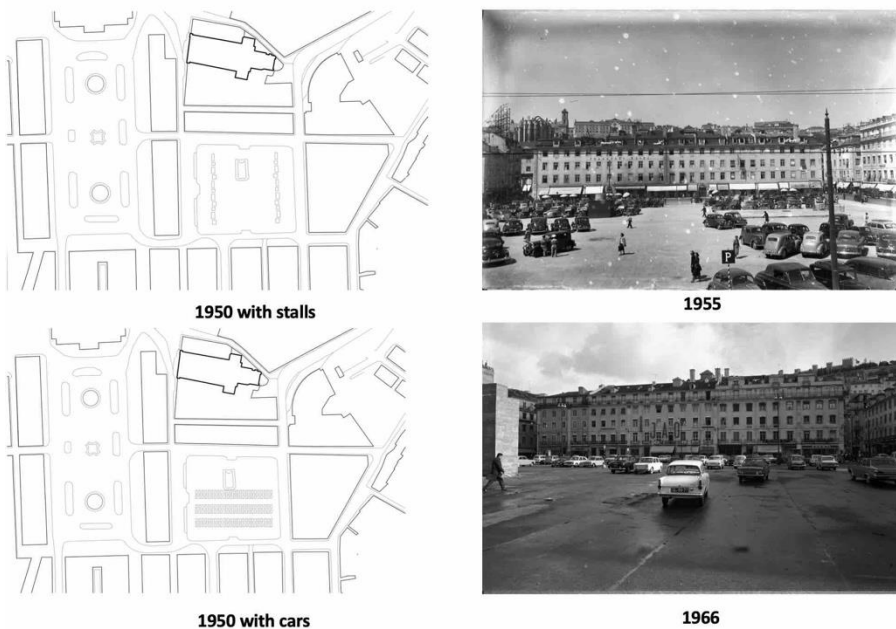
## 2.2 The Invaded City

With the city's north expansion, Praça da Figueira became a desirable space for creating a road node of articulation with the city to the north, making the connection with the old Rua Nova da Palma and Avenida Almirante Reis. Several projects were formulated between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth with this intention. However, none were able to propose the demolition of the iron market [21]. In 1887 the first sketch was elaborated to connect Avenida Almirante Reis to Rua Nova da Palma. Others followed this

project, but only in 1934 did we have a record of a project that suggested the demolition of the market and the extension of Rua da Palma to Praça da Figueira. The press at the time discussed this proposal a lot. Thus, the alteration of the role of Praça da Figueira in the urban structure of the city of Lisbon began to be thought of in the early twentieth century, associating itself with a growing concern with issues of the physical and moral unhealthiness of the traditional city. The image of the market of Praça da Figueira, considered old, insufficient, and unfashionable [22] and far from the image of the ideal city at the time [1], legitimizes its demolition.

Integrated with the demolition projects of downtown Lisbon, *Mouraria*, and *Socorro*, the demolition of the Figueira Market in 1949 also contributed to better articulating Avenida Almirante Reis to the Pombaline downtown, facilitating car traffic [22]. After the demolition of the market in 1949, a preliminary design for the Square was designed in a modernist style that replaced the Pombaline buildings but was also not accepted [21]. However, Lisbon's northern expansion changed Praça da Figueira's relative position in the city. Praça da Figueira occupied a more central position, unlike the usual satellite location of the market squares. The demolition of the Praça da Figueira Market in 1949 [21] created a void that turned, first, into a shipyard for the subway's construction and then into a parking lot (Fig. 4).

In the same context to which Gehl and Gemzøe allude, the traditional city is invaded, because of an urbanism that does not hesitate to flatten what remains of the city to make way for cars, for communication routes" [6].



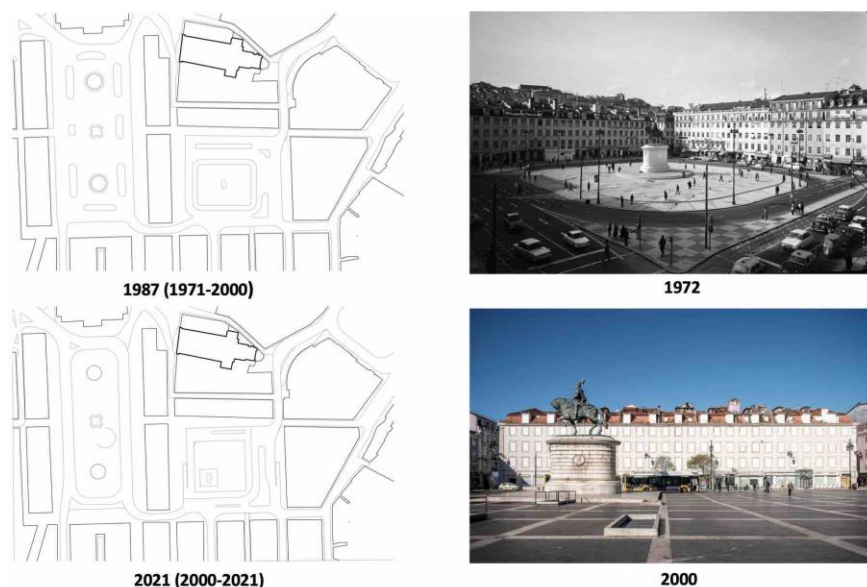
**Fig. 4.** City invaded: On the right Praça da Figueira in 1960 and 1966, on the left images relating to their cartography Source: Photographs of the Municipal Photographic Archive of Lisbon; File Quotas: 1955 - PT/AMLSB/POR/019367 and 1966 - PT/AMLSB/CMLSBAH/PCSP/004/SER/009007 (Author's drawings – Vectorization of the original cartography)

### 2.3 The Reconquered City

At the end of the 1960s, the composition of the image of Praça da Figueira was profoundly altered, giving way to a noble square centered on an equestrian statue dedicated to D. João I and in which priority is given to the function of permanence in the square (Fig. 5). However, this composition of Praça da Figueira as a noble square is anachronistic. The quadrangular shape of the square was reused and transformed into a monumental square, following canons of the eighteenth century, rebuilding the square to serve as a frame for the statue of a king [9, 23]. This ennoblement of Praça da Figueira has no correspondence in the building that defines it since this project does not design buildings with monumental functions [1]. This intervention in Praça da Figueira does not contemplate the surrounding buildings, their aesthetic improvement, or the attribution of a particular function that accompanies the noble image of its composition [1].

The Praça da Figueira Market demolition did not improve the connection between Lisbon's downtown and the axis of Avenida Almirante Reis. As a noble space, the square ended up not imposing a new image of the place [22]. Thus, already in the 2000s (Fig. 5), the square was the target of a new intervention designed by Daciano da Costa (1930-2005) [22]. The main change was the relocation of the equestrian statue in a marginal position to the Square [22], giving preference to its framing in the tangle of Rua da Prata and in counterpoint to the standard statue central position, as seen in the Plaza Mayor in Madrid, in the Amalienborg Square in Copenhagen, or even in the Praça do Comércio, in Lisbon.

The project of Daciano da Costa, which also proposed to cover the facades of the square with tiles [24], came to be recently realized, albeit partially. The evolution of this place and its interventions raised questions about the difficulty in establishing new relations between its function and image. We can argue whether the displacement of the equestrian statue is somehow related to the fragility of the project of ennoblement of Praça da Figueira.



**Fig. 5.** City Reconquered: On the right Praça da Figueira in 1972 and in 2000, on the left images relating to their cartography Source: Photographs of the Municipal Photographic Archive of Lisbon; File Quotas: 1972 - PT/AMLSB/CMLSBAH/PCSP/004/SER/011878, and 2000 - PT/AMLSB/CMLSBAH/PCSP/003/LXC/000029 (Author's drawings – Vectorization of the original cartography)

### 3 Discussion

This article contributes to the historical evolution of Praça da Figueira's comprehension as a public space in Lisbon. This evolution strengthens the city's characterization in three distinct typologies: the traditional city, the invaded city, and the reconquered city. We conclude that this Square was the subject of modifications made over time. These changes relate to this place's origin, city expansion, and recent gentrification.

Praça da Figueira was not planned as a space of permanence, and a less noble character appeared as a market space, unlike Rossio or Praça do Comércio. In this context, Praça da Figueira initially developed as a space dedicated to everyday sales, organized on a clay space [22]. The materialization of this space as a market led to the formalization of the idea of José Rosa Araújo concretized in an iron building in 1885, reinforcing the relationship between the function and the image of Praça da Figueira as a market. Thus, when the engineer Júlio António Silva Pinto surveyed the city of Lisbon in 1911, he drew the space occupied by the iron structure market that survived until 1949.

The quadrangular shape of Praça da Figueira resulted from the void created between the buildings projected in the downtown plan after the 1755 earthquake. The strength and clarity of its shape made this square maintain itself because, as Kevin Lynch told us, a solid physical form is not essential for recognizing a tangle [2]. However, where space has a shape, the impact is much more significant [2]. Even though the square shape never changed, Praça da Figueira's functional changes should be considered. The Praça da Figueira developed as a market square over two centuries. This function was materialized in what was the oldest market in the city. Unlike the other three structuring squares of downtown Lisbon (Praça do Comércio, Praça do Município, and Praça Dom Pedro IV), Praça da Figueira does not have a unique building or function. This function was associated with the Praça da Figueira Market, built in 1885 and demolished in 1849.

The intervention of the 2000s intended to give a new image to the Square, but the non-uniformization of the facades may explain this project's failure. The 2006 diagnosis portrayed Praça da Figueira with low-grade shops, cafes, and poor housing [25].

Both the Baixa-Chiado Revitalization Proposal (2006) [25] and the reports that support the elaboration of the Baixa Pombalina Safeguarding Plan (2010) [26] refer to Praça da Figueira as a commercial space, making explicit mention of the adverse consequences of the market's demolition in 1949. In the case of the Proposal for the Revitalization of Baixa-Chiado, it recommended reinstalling a market in Praça da Figueira, partly in the open, or reassigning to Praça da Figueira a relevant commercial role [25].

With the increase in tourist activity in Lisbon, especially since 2014, several fairs and markets began to take place in Praça da Figueira.

The return to the original function of Praça da Figueira is not an exception. In other cases, this has happened where *genius loci* is condition as Lefebvre demonstrated: The city historically is only a goal of cultural consumption for aestheticism, for tourists eager for spectacles and picturesque [6]. The city is dead even for those who seek to understand it effectively [6].

In 2016, under the project "A Square in each neighborhood" [11, 27], the Lisbon City Council proposed a new intervention in Praça da Figueira, which has still not been executed. The details of this intervention are not known; however, considering the references to this Square in some guiding documents, the idea of Praça da Figueira as a noble square may be definitively abandoned. Over time the city grows on itself. She acquires awareness and memory of herself. In its construction remain the original motifs, but simultaneously the city clarifies and modifies the reasons for its development [28].

Frustrated by the attempts to ennoble and qualify this public space, is the solution for Praça da Figueira in the recovery of its function and its original image? The regeneration of its public spaces does the regeneration of the city. It is essential to integrate the rehabilitation



of public spaces into urban policies, creating and recreating spaces as urban areas develop to foster quality urban life. The city must be thought and designed in long-term governance.

Function and image establish an interdependent relationship with each other. So, beyond the permanence of form, can we speak, in the case of Praça da Figueira, of the permanence of the image? Or even a memory-based reconstruction? What image should be preserved in this case: the original market square or the 1960s noble square?

## Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) through ISTAR-IUL's project UIDB/04466/2020 and UIDP/04466/2020.

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