After its presentation in Venice, Artéria's proposal received a local authority grant of €50,000 for its development

The Lisbon skyline handbook is on the making

ANDRÉ TAVARES

RUI PINHEIRO

To help deal with Lisbon's urgent rehabilitation, Artéria has recommended what it describes as a Skyline Operation. Instead of making bombastic statements or offering technical solutions for an unsolved problem, they have chosen to address the question of housing rehabilitation through the so-called "rooftop hypothesis". If one of the main causes of urban decay is the lack of resources to help inhabitants keep buildings in good shape, why not find a new and as yet unexploited way of enhancing their savings and funding the much needed rehabilitation? The roofs of a large number of Lisbon's historical buildings are held in commonhold by their inhabitants. Currently unused, such spaces might offer delightful views over the urban landscape. Furthermore, renovating them in line with contemporary technical solutions would provide enormous benefits in terms of reducing energy costs. If a building is prepared to make an investment in its rooftop, this will help to provide the income needed for its rehabilitation. The panoramic views over Lisbon from the various scenic lookouts suggest endless possibilities for countering the decay of the city's downtown area.

Artéria bypassed the standard conventions that are endlessly debated at congresses on design and architectural rehabilitation

When it was presented at the opening of the Venice Biennale, the Lisbon Skyline Operation created some fuss in Lisbon. Could it really be so simple to reverse its decay? No one knows, but one thing is certain: the Skyline Operation is not the only strategy being developed. There is tremendous pressure from tourism over the whole of the downtown area, which often threatens the very qualities it is supposed to deliver. Neither the local population – aged and living on low incomes – nor the city's economic fabric are in a position to counterbalance the power of the international investment funds currently vying for a chance to reshape its social and economic landscape. The architectural impact of these investments on the urban landscape is gradually becoming visible and, under the magic guise of urban rehabilitation, a new city is obliterating some of Lisbon's unique qualities. By providing both the means and the strategies for part of the population to become actively involved in the city's rehabilitation, the Lisbon Skyline Operation seeks to counterbalance an apparently irreversible process by mobilizing its inhabitants.

The possibility of involving the city's elderly population has not escaped the radars of local authorities. After the proposal's initial presentation in Venice, Artéria compared its research with the results of the census undertaken in two of Lisbon's neighbourhoods, Anjos and Pena. They noticed that the share of commonhold properties is about 60% of total housing, with such buildings being on average between 76 and 84 years old and housing a population of 13,487 inhabitants. Confining the problem to these two neighbourhoods allowed Artéria to propose an exhaustive survey of 1021 buildings, directly encouraging the inhabitants to debate the Skyline Operation. The proposal was presented to the municipality, which, through its support program for intervention in social priority neighbourhoods (BIP/ZIP), awarded a grant of €50,000 euros to develop the survey and to publish a handbook of legal and technical solutions.

Such recognition and trust in the innovative qualities of an architectural response are encouraging. Contrary to the great works of the internationally acclaimed Portuguese architecture, Artéria responded to the question of Lisbon's rehabilitation by proposing an alternative participatory model. They bypassed the standard conventions that are endlessly debated at congresses on design and architectural rehabilitation and – without even a drawing or a prefiguration – they managed to arouse the curiosity of both private and public sectors about an architectural solution. This is yet further proof of the fact that architecture is not only about design or technical solutions, something that we have known full well ever since Vitruvius. So, then, if this is not a novelty, what is the news? The news is both the ongoing debate that has begun about Lisbon's downtown rehabilitation and the debate about the skills of Portuguese architects.

Seen from above: rooftops offer common areas to envision contemporary action over the complex web of property and interests currently leading to urban decay

New software for an old city

ARTÉRIA

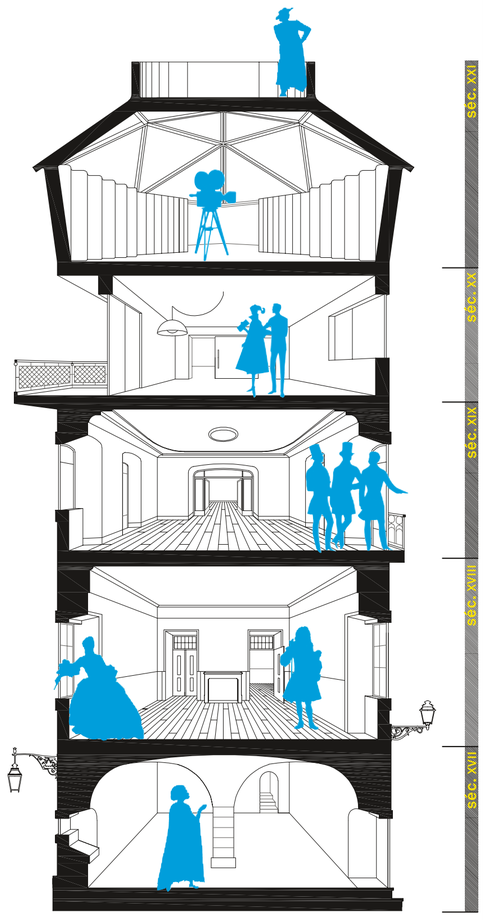
Lisbon Skyline Operation [LSO] explores a hypothesis to invert the city's degradation through the use of the inactive upper floor's common areas, of Lisbon's residential buildings. Looking up at the city's rooftops, seeing them as a creative territory, and using architectural tools one can envision futuristic images. Nevertheless it is fundamental to understand and accept the city's complexity. Artéria studio and the law practice Piscarreta & Associados joined efforts to conceive a multilayered overview of Lisbon, crossing architecture with the legal framework underlying the city's organization. Artéria studio was set up to discuss the problematic of urban renewal, inscribed in an adverse socio-economical context for the practice of architecture and arts. It assimilated scarcity and started to attempt to break into this territory through a critical perspective, searching for the needs, the incongruities, the paradoxes and designing solutions for the opportunities provided by so many absences. We reflect upon intervention hypothesis, knowing from our experience that our city needs architecture, not necessarily construction.

Lisbon needs regeneration software, designed to run through its temporal strata, with the precision to recover and bring back to life its old and precious files. With this in mind, many ideas can come to the table. The Lisbon Skyline Operation is the result of a collective vision, designed to be a new software for an old city with the purpose of activating its regeneration. It's not about form, it is about building a process, an 'instruction manual' to reach the implementation stage of the rooftop hypothesis. From the point of view of architecture it can be an opportunity to re-think the fifth facade and add a new layer to the city in favour of its future.

We reflect upon intervention hypothesis, knowing from our experience that our city needs architecture, not necessarily construction

Underlying the creation of the Skyline's Handbook, the coming together of several skills around the same table: architecture, urbanism, law, environmental engineering and management. It will provide models of action aimed at condominiums and investors. The goal is to create, together with the Central and Local Government, an operative model for urban regeneration.

In the consolidated city our role as architects is to create continuity, to think and program new uses for cities, searching for new ways of acting, becoming more pro-active, facing problems and proposing project-solutions. Approaching the urban needs by shifting our viewpoint can lead to more accurate and sustainable architectural interventions and to more conscious and efficient urban strategies.



Lisbon Storeys: Lisbon's historic strata in a building, presenting the XXI \century as a top floor room with a view
Scheme Artéria and Armanda Vilar ©, 2014

Modern Perpletixities

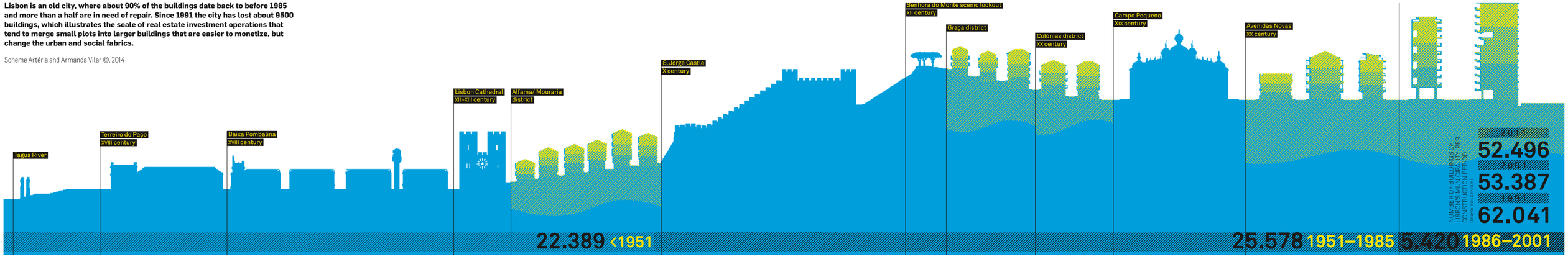
Portuguese architecture is known for the qualities of its design and detailing. Proposals like the Lisbon Skyline Operation have aroused some perplexity in the more conservative Portuguese circles. Absorbing modernity throughout the twentieth century, Portuguese architects have proved their ability as service providers. Architecture has become synonymous with design, the sophisticated mastery of construction techniques, and talent for responding to complex circumstances with a poetic flavour. Internationally acclaimed, the success enjoyed by some Portuguese architects has tended to crystallise the local perception of architects as mere designers. Technical competence has seemingly entrusted architects with a presumed moral superiority, struggling to improve society through the excellence of their response. Faced with the failures of urban growth and social inequalities, they found comfort in the pristine quality of their buildings. Although this cartoon-like picture is heavily ironic in tone, in Portugal there is an ongoing debate on the limits and possibilities of the architectural profession. Artéria's Lisbon Skyline Operation is symptomatic of such controversy. Why are architects suggesting a strategy instead of a specific design? In actual fact, Artéria is not prescribing any one specific model to apply to all Lisbon rooftops; it might seem that their work is more of a political or social proposition than an architectural output. So what? Their ability to put forward a strategy to rehabilitate many of Lisbon's decadent dwellings is the outcome of an architectural line of reasoning. And it might establish the terms for a whole host of future architectural commissions. Should architects abandon the ground of social and cultural innovations that they conquered with such great effort throughout the twentieth century? When there are no appointments to design , stepping back might be a practical solution: not only to find commissions, but also to root future practice in a deeper social context. Whatever the case, the preliminary success of the Lisbon Skyline Operation highlights the contemporary need for such architectural knowledge.

ANDRÉ TAVARES

Lisbon Skyline: a hidden key to pursue the city's regeneration

Lisbon is an old city, where about 90% of the buildings date back to before 1985 and more than a half are in need of repair. Since 1991 the city has lost about 9500 buildings, which illustrates the scale of real estate investment operations that tend to merge small plots into larger buildings that are easier to monetize, but change the urban and social fabrics.

Scheme Artéria and Armanda Vilar ©, 2014



Rehab

Lisbon Skyline Operation

LSO is an architectural, legal and economic tool to rehabilitate the city through the collective endeavor of it's inhabitants: step by step, house by house, roof by roof

LSO is an architectural, legal and economic tool to rehabilitate the city through the collective endeavour of it's inhabitants: step by step, house by house, roof by roof.
This urban operation is reported in the Portuguese Pavillion at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia 2014

What is the Lisbon Skyline Operation?

LSO is a strategy to regenerate the city through its roofs. LSO presents the upper floors of a building as an economic resource to rehabilitate entire structures. LSO wants to reshape old rooftops allowing their full use as an asset and a key element for Lisbon's rehabilitation. LSO interventions will provide social, economical and environmental return for the city and it's inhabitants.

What is the identified problem?

The dilapidated state of buildings in Lisbon's historic districts is obvious. The financial difficulties that condominiums face prevent them from undertaking the necessary maintenance works and lead to a decay of buildings spread throughout the city. The resulting panorama is a large number of deteriorated but inhabited buildings. LSO is a tool to enable the rehabilitation of these buildings, designed to revert this ongoing cycle.

What is this idea founded on?

LSO strategy is based upon the notion of 'communal space'. A great number of historical buildings in downtown Lisbon have the ownership of their roofs attributed to common property, this creates a significant asset that allows engendering investment solutions with great consequence for the city. LSO starts by revealing the roof-scape as a physical resource for the city's rehabilitation allowing the creation of a new inhabited skyline for Lisbon.

Who can join the Lisbon Skyline Operation?

LSO proposes a win-win strategy for both condominiums and investors. LSO designs a strategy that fits both sides, combining community requirements with investors' perspective. Providing the city with an architectonic, economic and legal tool for it's endemic rehabilitation, maintaining the basis of it's social fabric. Thus, neighbour's organizations and investors can get together in a profitable and innovative partnership.

What can rooftops do for the city?

LSO is literally a top down strategy. Top floors present several construction problems: the majority are badly built, poorly insulated, and have low quality of lighting and salubrity. By understanding the morphology of Lisbon's rooftops and channeling twenty first century building technology, this operation will upgrade historical buildings and establish an effective strategy for the city's regeneration.
LSO will recreate rooftops and integrate measures to enhance biodiversity and energy efficiency, key factors in the rehabilitation and improvement of the urban environment.

Why invest in Lisbon's rooftops?

Lisbon is the ideal city to invest in rooftops.
The city's topography offers unique views from rooftops, mansards, terraces; from these one has access to outstanding panoramic urban views. LSO embodies the vision advocated in the current Local Development Plan for Lisbon [PDML] which advocates the use of attics and the possibility to change the overall configuration of rooftops to provide it's effective use. Skyline investments are available to an enormous range of investors, from common citizens in search of a home to call their own, to investors who want to be placed the best location.