

# Recovering Multifunctional Open Spaces In The Contemporary City

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This approach brings up the urban multifunctionality of open urban spaces and reflects on the importance of the ethical issues, concerning the Nature and Culture.

It starts with the definition of rossio, an open urban space Portuguese typology, discussing its location, form and functions; move towards the importance of rossio in the context of the historic and contemporary city; and ends with the explanation of its potential for today's society. The aim is to value this singular open space, to argue for its adaptive capacity in the improvement of our cities, and to underline its character as a fundamental urban unit.



**A**s described by Marques (1987), the rossio is an important open space, present in urban Portuguese spaces since the Middle Ages. This traditional open space typology has singular attributes, namely the dimension, the spatial emptiness and the capacity to join at once various functions. Along centuries the rossio has been the largest and emptiest open space (several acres without impediment), the most multifunctional (express in the tendency for accommodate multiple functions and activities), and the open space more valorized in the collective memories (Freire, 1999). As suggest by Freire (1999), the size, the emptiness and the location are determinant for its occurrence and maintenance along the time:

- The large size and the empty space express occurrences link with the utilitarian vocation (used for agriculture, for commercial exchanges), related with extraordinary events (as the cultural, civics or recreational, involving people masses) and also with the easiness assurance for build up;
- The peripheral location (originally in the transition urban-rural, outdoors the walls and near a city door, and later between the historic and the contemporary city), together with the large size, valid the utilitarian vocation. Such low areas (and, as a consequence, more wet) express the agriculture vocation, which included several rented lands for agriculture. The commercial activity (animal markets, annual or mensal fairs) is also explained by those attributes, which privileged the empty space near the door.

As a result, the rossio is an unusual open space - in size, form, function and meaning. The spatial characteristics underline the extraordinary character and versatile utility.

In the origins its functions were mainly productive and commercial. It was been used for agriculture, for commercial exchanges, and most recently for sociability and for city expansion. It was also appropriated for other functions, always revealing the social nature of space and ability to adapt to new functions, namely some particular cultural evens and sport activities, increasingly valued. Meanwhile the agricultural vocation has been lost and the rossio has been basically a space of exchange (markets and fairs) and a

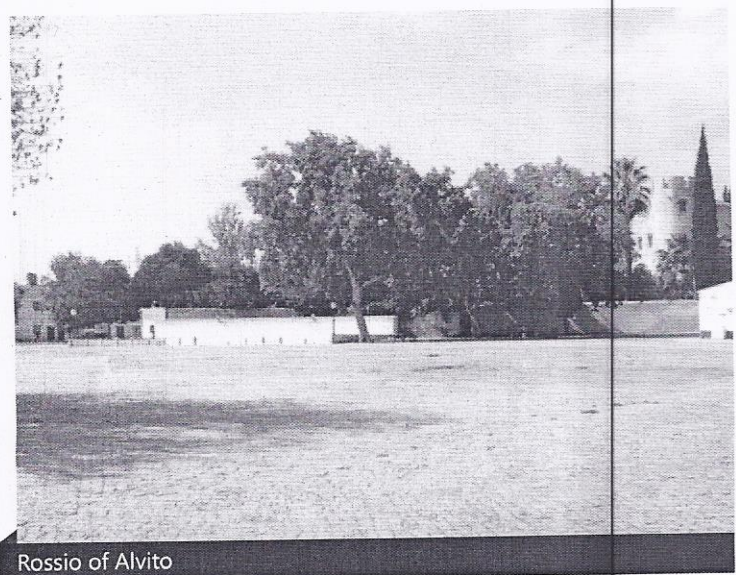
meeting point for people and parking.

Today the space is above all a fragmented void, significantly reduced, with an increase meaning of the 'ideal void' to receive equipments, builds and others constructions spatially disconnect (schools, cultural centers, urban parks, commercial areas, sports constructions, parking areas, new quarters). The residual empty space is exceptionally used for cultural actions, commercial activities, sports or others events, and during the most part of the year is appropriated for parking. Thus a residual space globally de-characterized and de-qualified.

Along the centuries, the perepheral location and the size of the rossio turns it into central place, which is reaffirmed today in the context of the contemporary city. Thus, such continuity (temporal and spatial) makes the typology a fundamental reference in urban areas - an empty space fundamental to societies, which used and maintained them.

Its patrimonial value is related with the important authenticity of the urban/rural context, with the image of historical cities and with the structuring participation in the development of the urban centers.

Over the last century, urban planning and heritage policies favored the accommodation of specific activities and functions, often with



Rossio of Alvito



This functional specialization and spatial dispersion, devalues the multifunctional essence of Mediterranean landscapes, so well explain between others authors by Ribeiro (1987), and the relationship established by societies for centuries. Thus, we defend the need to think the uses and the users needs in a multifunctional perspective.

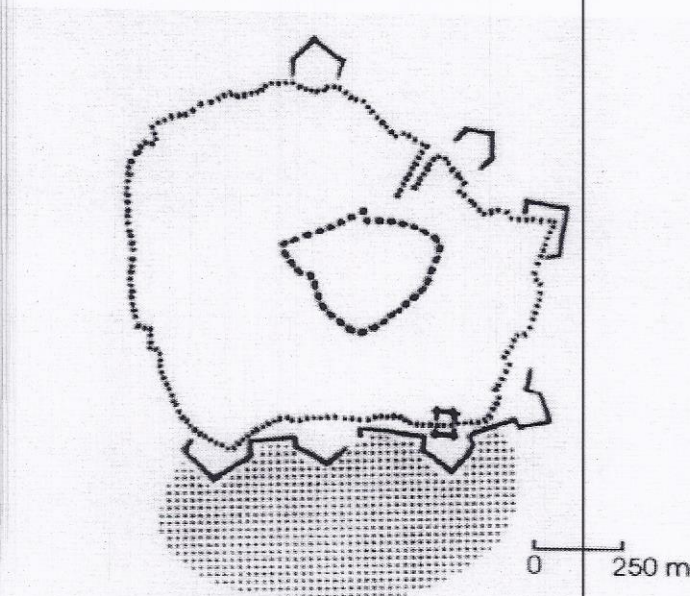
Today cities have varied urban fabrics, differently characterized by the mode of articulation and differentiation of its constituent solids and voids (Choay, 1992). The global fabric includes the historic and the contemporary city. Some urban spaces have exceptional urban units, with incomparable multifunctional capacities, as the traditional urban typology present in urban fabrics in Portugal. As we explained, the main characteristics of the rossio, remarkable in the city live and city transformation turns the typology with great potential in the development of contemporary cities, which is sustained in two aspects:

- The urban open space is the space of physical, ecological, social and cultural continuity. This continuous and hierarchized structure, as to respect the site ecology, the history and culture of societies;
- The exigencies of today society have an exceptional dynamic and an ephemeral character.

The historical value of rossio, together with the singular spatial characteristics (the location, low lands, large and multifunctional void spaces), express an enormous potential, to congregate different requirements (activities, functions, values), especially linked with the ephemeral or transitory character of today's society. Spaces with such characteristics and with such adaptive capacities seem to be crucial for ensuring the dynamic and exigencies of contemporary urban spaces. The resilience of the typology may ensure diverse opportunities for urban living. It may include space for leisure time, for urban agriculture, for gardening, for commercial activities, cultural and civic events and also parking.



Évora, Rossio



Évora, the rossio outside de citywalls

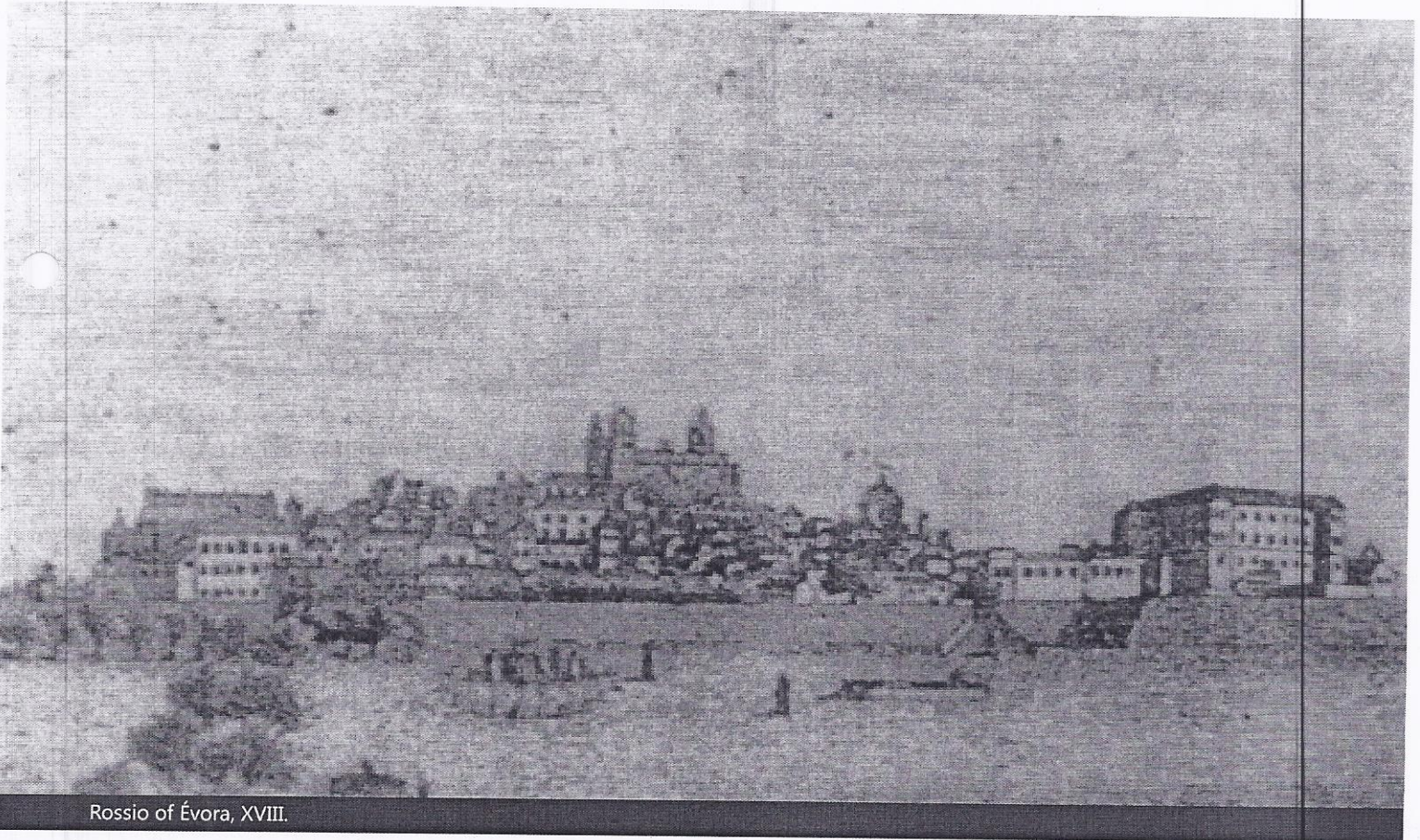
As so, we are defending the recovering of a true porous space – natural and cultural - for water and air flowing, for people circulation, for happening distinct functions and activities. A polyvalent unit surely important for the global structure (ecologic and cultural) as defined Magalhães (2001). Thus, this recovering brings about the ethical issues - towards the nature and the Culture.

A combination of domains - make clear through the spatiality, the functionality, the void atmosphere and in the ecological and cultural meaning – that are suggestive of integrated innovative and sustainable solutions for how to design, plan and manage today cities, in the context of the most ephemeral urban sociability.





Rossio of Estremoz



Rossio of Évora, XVIII.





Rossio of Évora, XXI.

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