

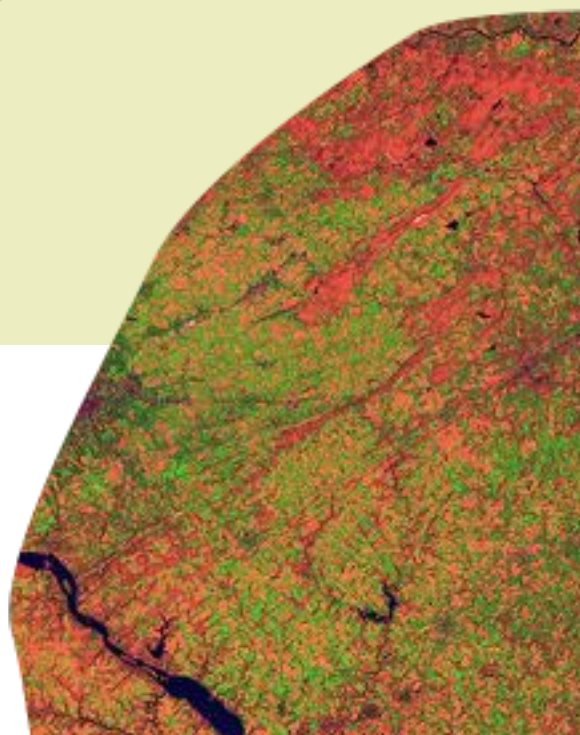
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FORMAS



Save the Confiança Factory

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Regenerating and rehabilitating the urban space

Once someone said that the city of Braga is the city of concrete. The historical buildings, some over fifty years old, have been left behind, and new ones are being built. And a detail that must be taken into account is that the incessant construction of new buildings takes over viable green spaces. This is happening in the city of Braga. If the reader decides, one day, to visit this city, they will find degraded, abandoned buildings, in particular in the city center. For instance, the reader will find ghostly shopping malls or barely used buildings. Nevertheless, that can change.

The new program of the City Council of Braga is the regeneration and rehabilitation of urban space, starting in the center of the city. This is and must be a priority of intervention to avoid damaging the urban landscape and reuse the buildings. Such a program involves a three-pronged intervention strategy for territorial development: technical-scientific, the real estate market, and the construction industry.

The Confiança Factory

The building of Confiança illustrates a place where urban regeneration and rehabilitation come to the top of the discussion. The future reuse of the building of Confiança has been discussed for a long time. Since production ceased, discussions intensified when the City Council of Braga acquired it in 2011. The Building of Confiança is the old headquarters of the Soap Factory and Perfumery Confiança, once a well-known factory with an impressive reputation (Guimarães, 2014). Founded in 1894, this factory remains active today and it is one of the oldest manufacturing facilities in Portugal, although it moved in 2005 to the industrial park. Located in Rua Nova Santa Cruz, in the parish of São Vítor, close to center of the city, the factory was envisioned and founded by Rosalvo da Silva Almeida and Manuel dos Santos Pereira, two residents of the city. The factory became a significant piece of people's life. Its construction responded to an emergent situation and, consequently, conquered the society of Braga, as well as Portuguese society and later other foreign societies. Introducing a new consumer good, which no one was familiar with, the new factory produced hygiene products before the institutionalization of hygiene.

Even though it was the third largest city in Portugal, at the end of the nineteenth century, Braga was not an industrial hub. This was a rural city, traditional, conservative, and with a strong religious culture. The industrialization process in Braga was lengthy. It started with the installation of small family workshops and reached its height with the settling building of the Confiança Factory.

The building stands as a remarkable example of industrial architecture from the beginning of the twentieth century and symbolizes a close relation between society, the industrialization process, and urbanization. That's why this building deserves to be preserved.



Figure 1 Confiança Factory in 1928. Source: *Jornal Arquitectos*

The Confiança Factory: a damaged building

Today, the Building of Confiança is a damaged edifice. Its original structure is still preserved and its original parts can be identified, despite the many changes that the building suffered throughout time. However, the building has some damage due to environmental effects and anthropogenic interference, such as pollution and graffiti.

The materials that constitute the building are timber, stone, iron, and concrete. So, its constitution is diversified and complex. Restoring this building is a difficult process, still worthwhile. The success of its restoration might depend on the reconnaissance of the damage and decay, which could reveal an advantageous strategy of treatment and intervention.

The damages observed in the building are the natural aging of the materials and the natural environmental effects, including areas damaged by waters caused by rain or rising humidity. Stains on the surface of the material are detected, as well as dirt from the outside. Graffiti is observed on the outside walls of the building, creating the impression of decay. Botanical growth can be found in the building's biological annexation such as algae, plants, and moss. Concerning the mechanical elements, there is a loss of cohesion: some materials are being reduced to small pieces, and perforations and cracks can be found all over the building (Guimarães, 2014).



Figure 2 Building of Confiança, today. Source: (Guimarães, 2014)

Confiança is not for sale

The Building of Confiança is not for sale, in particular, to a private individual. Preventing the sale of the building to private individuals is the main objective of citizens, institutions and cultural agents of the city of Braga. These are those who already expressed their support: Academia de Teatro Tin.Bra, Arte Total, ASPA, Neighborhood Alegria Association, Braga+ CEA, Cidade Curiosa, Cineclub Aurélio da Paz dos Reis Civitas, Encontros da Imagem, Fotograma, JovemCoop, Parish Council of São Vítor, Krizo, Nova Comédia Bracarense, O cão Danado e Companhia, PIF'H, Quercus, Velha-a-Branca Estaleiro Cultural. A platform <https://salvarafabricaconfianca.org/> was created to defend the building from sale and a petition was written:

The Perfumaria e Saboaria Confiança property was acquired by the City Council of Braga in 2011/2012 through a process of expropriation

for public utility with the express purpose of being rehabilitated and within the scope of a broad consensus regarding the safeguarding of this landmark of Braga's and Portuguese industry.

The investment in this industrial building has been fully paid for, not constituting any charge for the City Council, beyond the mere maintenance of the property (which, in this case, has not even occurred). Considering that the City Council did not decide to allocate funds for its rehabilitation and that simultaneously there are several public and private entities committed to the safeguard and that together they may start a process of recovery of the property for cultural/social purposes at the service of the entire community if it is established as a priority to find an alternative solution to the hasty alienation and without public discussion.

The sale to private individuals is an irreversible act, it will represent an inestimable loss for the Parish, the city, and the Country and will mean an automatic demotion of Braga's candidacy for the European Capital of Culture 2027.

The undersigned citizens,

Studies and news about the future reuse of the factory since the appropriation by the City Council have been disclosed, more and more often. Why the building must be well-maintained is no longer the main question, rather, it is about how it must be preserved and how to reuse the building. The City Council of Braga bought the building firstly to protect it as an industrial symbol of progress in the city. However, nothing has been done, and now, as mentioned, citizens fear that the sale of the building would signify the loss of that symbol. The City Council is taking too long to come up with a decision about the future of the factory. It was revealed that the City Council, together with the University of Minho, was working on a project to reuse the building to construct a new student residence.

Allowing the building's deterioration, abandoning it, emptying it, brings with it environmental complications. This building degenerates over time, accumulating garbage, as a result of human activity, and as an environmental effect. Its degradation contributes to rundown urban landscapes and reduced air quality and, therefore, fragile human health.

Engaging with climate change

Urban rehabilitation and regeneration engage with the problem of climate change. Picturing the consequences of degraded buildings and responding to them can be a mitigation or adaptation strategy for climate change if cities consider how to “recycle” buildings, instead of building new ones. So, tackling climate change through rehabilitation and regeneration of urban space is possible, however alone this might not be effective and have to be applied along with other measures.

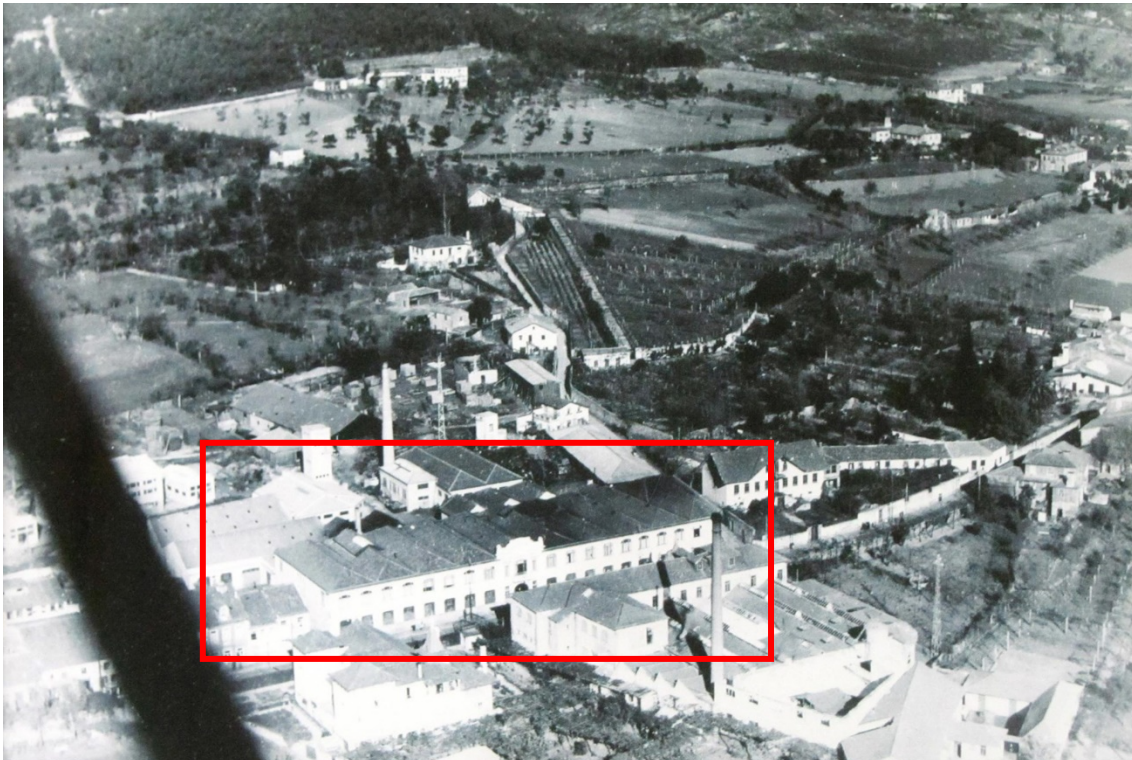


Figure 3 Aerial view of the factory (red rectangle), 1955, representing the feature of industrialization and houses and fields surrounding the large building. Source: Jornal Arquitectos

The shortcomings, the limitations, and problems

The rehabilitation and the regeneration of the Building of Confiança may effectively result in improving the urban landscape. However, shortcomings, issues, and limits can be pointed out. There are no visible effects since the City Council has not come up with a final decision about the reuse of the building and this is a major critical point, as well. The increasing deterioration of the building and the ongoing disposal of garbage limits its renewal even as the sale of the building becomes likely, and this last represents a problem for the most industrial icon of the city. Another limit is the budget available to pursue the project and the real cost of the edifice’s rehabilitation.

The physical position of the building, which is the parish of São Vítor, must be taken into consideration for its reuse due to its proximity to the city center and the existing residential buildings, the university, the mall, and small businesses nearby.

A problematic issue that might arise along with the building revitalization is conflicts of interest: that is, what is the best choice that benefits the population, and what is the real choice of the City Council?

Restoring the Confiança Building leads to broader changes

This initiative to revitalize and rehabilitate the urban space leads unequivocally to broader changes. To restore the historical city center, environmental laws must be decreed, and even in the case that the urban regeneration and rehabilitation project is recognized, there is no guarantee that environmental laws are being applied. The application of this initiative, envisioning environmental conservation, permits identifying those entities responsible to intervene in the domain of environmental quality. Still, these entities must ensure that the population, in general, participates in conserving nature, so providing access to information is a crucial point. The population can be more thoroughly prepared to reflect on issues that arise with climate and urban environment.

This initiative also promotes sustainability, that is, this project envisions improving people's lives not by spending money on other buildings and letting existing buildings rot. It involves safeguarding a place that has a significant value to the city. This is in line with sustainable proposals, preserving the urban environment and submitting economic and industrial activities to ecological principles, satisfying the current generation, so that future generations appreciate their urban space as much as the previous ones did. Also, restoring this building, in particular, might bring more visitors to the city.

A replicable project

This initiative for the rehabilitation and regeneration of a specific urban space is replicable all over the city. The Building of Confiança is the most urgent case for intervention and is a suitable starting point to pursue this strategy. There are more buildings in the city center and its surroundings that need to be added to the project proposed by the City Council. Nevertheless, it is difficult to know if those buildings are owned by the City Council, as the Building of Confiança is.

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