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Largo da Carioca and the rewritten city: urban interventions between 1940 and 1980

O Largo da Carioca e a cidade reescrita: intervenções urbanas entre 1940 e 1980

Largo da Carioca y la ciudad reescrita: intervenciones urbanas entre 1940 y 1980

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Abstract

This paper presents results of a research project that investigates the transformations of Largo da Carioca, located in downtown Rio de Janeiro, between the 1940s and 1980s. Based on specialized literature and historical documents, it analyzes urban interventions and political decisions that significantly altered the space's configuration, affecting its physical, symbolic, and functional aspects. The research reveals tensions between modernization and preservation, highlighting the area's ongoing loss of character. It concludes that the Largo can be interpreted as an urban palimpsest, where successive layers of technical and economic interventions have overlain collective memory and the place's original identity traits.

Keywords: urban transformations, modernization, Rio de Janeiro, urban palimpsest.

Resumo

Este trabalho investiga as transformações do Largo da Carioca, no centro do Rio de Janeiro, entre as décadas de 1940 e 1980. A partir de bibliografia especializada e documentos históricos, analisam-se intervenções urbanas e decisões políticas que alteraram profundamente a configuração do espaço, afetando seus aspectos físicos, simbólicos e funcionais. A pesquisa revela tensões entre modernização e preservação, evidenciando a contínua descaracterização da área. Conclui-se que o Largo pode ser interpretado como um palimpsesto urbano, onde sucessivas camadas de intervenções técnico-econômicas sobrepuseram-se à memória coletiva e aos traços identitários originais do lugar.

Palavras-chave: transformações urbanas, modernização, Rio de Janeiro, palimpsesto urbano.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación que analiza las transformaciones del Largo da Carioca, ubicado en el centro de Río de Janeiro, entre las décadas de 1940 y 1980. A partir de bibliografía especializada y documentos históricos, se examinan intervenciones urbanas y decisiones políticas que alteraron profundamente la configuración del espacio, afectando sus aspectos físicos, simbólicos y funcionales. La investigación revela tensiones entre modernización y preservación, destacando la pérdida continua de carácter del área. Se concluye que el Largo puede entenderse como un palimpsesto urbano, donde capas técnico-económicas se superponen a la memoria colectiva y a su identidad original.

Palabras clave: Transformaciones urbanas, Modernización, Río de Janeiro, Palimpsesto urbano

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1 Introduction

Largo da Carioca emerged where the Santo Antônio lagoon once was, at the foot of the hill of the same name. Today, it is part of the business center of the city of Rio de Janeiro. The hill occupied the space where Carioca Street, Lavradio Street, and part of Lapa are now located. In the 16th century, the Franciscans occupied the hill and built the Convent of Santo Antônio. Later, in the 18th century, it became known for the presence of the city's main fountain and the Hospital da Penitência, which were major architectural landmarks for the identity of the Largo. For many years, this space played a multifunctional role in the city, as it brought together public buildings, single-family and multi-family residences, and commercial buildings, possessing vitality and a large circulation of individuals (Fontes, 2004).

According to Segre et al. (2012), in general, Largo da Carioca served a function focused on public and social services; however, given the increasing demand for urban expansion in the central region of Rio de Janeiro, municipal administrations implemented several urban interventions in Largo da Carioca. Although the space had already undergone major transformations to its natural physical site since before the 20th century to meet population needs, it was on many other occasions disfigured, even receiving plans that were never actually realized but which, nevertheless, reshaped the viewpoints on the possible uses of the space. Some of the plans created are: the Avenue Plan (1937-1940), Redevelopment of the Largo surroundings (1940 and 1950), President Vargas Avenue (1950), Paving and street widening (1960), Downtown Modernization Plan (1970-1980), Verticalization and new commercial buildings (1970), and Historical Heritage Conservation (1970-1980).

Given the presented context, some questions arose: what were the most relevant urban changes that occurred in Largo da Carioca between 1940 and 1980? How did the municipal administrations of this period impact these transformations? Despite the characteristics of increasing urbanization, Fontes (2004) states that the Largo was not considered an axis of urban development, like Praça XV, which constituted the first public space of symbolic value in the city during the colonial era; Campo de Santana, which gathered government buildings constructed during the Empire in the 19th century; and Praça Marechal Floriano (Cinelândia), which maintained their roles as political-administrative centers. Understanding the urban changes carried out in Largo da Carioca, from the 1940s to the 1980s, is essential to also understand how the city's urban expansion articulates with the preservation of its cultural heritage, especially in the central region. The chosen time frame is due to the period from when the hill was considered for demolition until the construction of the Carioca Metro Station. This study analyzes which aspects of Largo da Carioca were gradually modified or neglected and how these changes reflect the priorities of the administrations of each period.

Furthermore, it investigates how government actions, implemented during the period in question, impacted the dynamics of urban development, considering the social effects and legislative implications resulting from these interventions. According to an analysis of the work of Reis (1977), these actions show that many public policies were implemented without in-depth reflection on their cultural and social impacts. As a consequence, there were significant losses in the memory and identity of the place, in addition to modifications in the infrastructure and social dynamics of the space.

Therefore, the general objective of the research is to understand the urban evolution of Largo da Carioca and its respective motivations from the 1940s to the 1980s. To answer the raised questions and achieve the general objective, the following specific objectives were defined:

- Analyze the chronology of the urban development of Largo da Carioca;
- Map current aspects in Largo da Carioca that were influenced by urban decisions made from the 1940s to the 1980s;
- Describe the major impacts generated by the urban changes in Largo da Carioca;
- Define the political motivations for certain urban changes in Largo da Carioca.

2 Methodology

The research developed in this article is qualitative in nature and adopts an exploratory purpose, seeking to understand the urban transformations that occurred in Largo da Carioca between the 1940s and 1980s, as well as their political motivations and their impacts on the configuration of the space. The qualitative approach allowed for the interpretive analysis of historical and urban processes, based on a critical reading of authors who have dedicated themselves to the study of the city of Rio de Janeiro and, especially, its central region.

The main methodological strategy adopted was a bibliographic survey, with an emphasis on the selection and analysis of works that address the urban development of Rio de Janeiro, the actions of public administrations within the defined period, and the physical interventions in Largo da Carioca and its surroundings. The chosen authors contributed with different perspectives: Fontes (2004), addressing the reconfiguration of the Santo Antônio Esplanade and the occupation of the historic center; Ceniquel (1996), dealing with the projects of Affonso Eduardo Reidy and their repercussion in the area; and Reis (1977), with an analysis of the municipal administrations between the 1940s and 1980s. In addition to these, other secondary sources, such as academic articles, theses, institutional web pages, and scientific dissemination materials, were consulted to broaden the understanding of the implemented urban projects.

The treatment of the material consisted of the chronological and thematic organization of the interventions, allowing for the identification, within three analytical blocks, of the main historical landmarks of Largo da Carioca: the evolution of the social and symbolic role of the space; the urban projects carried out between 1940 and 1980; and the political decisions of the municipal administrations that led such changes. This analytical structure enabled a reading of Largo da Carioca as an urban palimpsest, a concept mobilized to express the overlapping of historical and symbolic layers that characterize the urban landscape transformed over time.

From this approach, it was possible to construct a critical narrative about the different ways in which public power acted in redefining Largo da Carioca, articulating political decisions, modernization projects, and the inherent tensions in the preservation of urban memory.

To this end, the article is structured into three main topics. The first, titled Historical Context of the Largo da Carioca Space, will address the development of the social role of the Largo since its emergence, considering the time frame adopted by the research. The second topic, Urban Projects for Largo da Carioca from the 1940s to the 1980s, will describe the projects and plans implemented during this period, analyzing how they influenced the current configuration of the Largo. Finally, the third topic, Municipal Administrations of Rio de Janeiro from the 1940s to the 1980s, will examine the motivations and decisions of the mayors responsible for the urban changes carried out during their administrations.

3 Historical Context of the Largo da Carioca Space

Largo da Carioca played a significantly relevant role in the urban structure of the city. Since colonial times, the space has served as a stage for daily activities, encompassing informal commerce, religious celebrations, and social gatherings, in

addition to functioning as a link between important sectors of the urban fabric (Fontes, 2004).

The construction of the Convent of Santo Antônio in the 17th century, followed by the construction of the Carioca Fountain in the 18th century, consolidated the site as a landmark for water supply and religious expression, also assigning it well-defined social and functional roles. From the 20th century onwards, the Largo became the target of various urban reforms inspired by Europe, reflecting the ideal of a more modern and orderly city. The vision of progress, tied to the pursuit of a clean, monumental, and efficient metropolis, drove the demolition of old buildings and the creation of major thoroughfares, such as Rio Branco Avenue. In this process, the original landscape, characterized by hills and dense vegetation, was drastically modified with cuts, landfills, and significant removals, as happened with Morro do Castelo (Castelo Hills) and part of Morro de Santo Antônio (Santo Antônio Hills).

These changes shaped the space according to technical, political, and economic interests, often distant from social needs and the collective memory associated with the place. From an urbanism perspective, this scenario illustrates the concept of an urban palimpsest well. This idea was also incorporated by thinkers like Santos (2006), who viewed the urban fabric as the result of overlapping historical moments, the concept of the city as a document rewritten over time, where historical and cultural layers physically overlap.

They are remnants of different periods that, even transformed, still reverberate in the landscape and in everyday urban experiences. In this way, Largo da Carioca can be interpreted as an authentic urban palimpsest. Despite the various interventions that altered its original configuration, the site continues to play a central role in the urban dynamic, keeping alive the existence of social practices and symbolic meanings that withstand time and changes.

Between the years 1940 and 1980, Largo da Carioca underwent profound urban transformations, accompanying the modernization process of Downtown Rio de Janeiro. Starting in the 1940s, the verticalization of the region began, with the replacement of old mansions by multi-story commercial buildings, driven by the increasing appreciation of the urban area. During this period, the surroundings of the Convent of Santo Antônio also underwent changes, with demolitions at the base of the hill for the implementation and widening of roads, adapting the space to new traffic demands.

In the 1950s, this transformation process gained momentum, with the consolidation of modern buildings and the reconfiguration of the Largo as an important commercial hub. The construction of the Avenida Central Building, completed in 1950, which symbolized this new phase of verticalization and modernization of the area, stands out. The Largo began to host large companies and adapted to the growing transportation demand, with the expansion of streets to accommodate the increase in the number of cars, streetcars, and buses. This change established the Largo as a strategic center of economic and social activity in the city.

In the 1960s, new urban interventions were carried out in downtown Rio de Janeiro, focusing on road restructuring and preparation for larger-scale mobility projects. During this period, the first studies for the implementation of the subway in the city emerged, which included the Largo da Carioca area as a strategic point of integration. Improvements in pedestrian circulation were also proposed, with plans for underground passages, although many of these ideas would only materialize in the following decades (Abreu, 2000).

The 1980s were marked by a significant transformation in Largo da Carioca, with the construction of the Carioca Metro Station, inaugurated in 1979. The interventions carried out profoundly impacted the area above and below the Largo, remodeling the configuration of the public space. The project involved the requalification of sidewalks, the installation of modern street furniture, and the reorganization of pedestrian flow, seeking greater integration and functionality of the space. In this

context, the work of Roberto Burle Marx, responsible for the landscaping project of the Largo and its surroundings, stands out. Burle Marx incorporated elements of native vegetation, geometric patterns in the paving, and proposed a visual integration between the new area and its history, seeking to preserve the memories of the place while meeting the needs of modernization (Magina; Mello, 2016).

In the 1980s, Largo da Carioca underwent reforms focused on the aesthetic and functional qualification of the public space. The landscape redesign aimed to improve accessibility, promoting the integration of the metro station with the commercial and business surroundings. Furthermore, there was a significant effort to revalue the Largo as a center of urban sociability, encouraging cultural, social, and leisure practices, with the aim of reclaiming the historical vitality of the place.

4 Urban Projects for Largo da Carioca from the 1940s to the 1980s

Understanding the transformations in Largo da Carioca between the 1940s and 1980s means understanding the profound urban changes that shaped downtown Rio de Janeiro during this period. Far from being isolated interventions, these modifications reflect the development ideologies of the time, the priorities of urban flow, and the conflicts between the modernizing impulse and the nascent concern for heritage preservation. Among the projects developed are: the Avenue Plan (1937-1940), the Requalification of the surroundings (1940-1950), the construction of Presidente Vargas Avenue (1950), the leveling of Santo Antônio Hill (1955), Paving and street widening (1960), the Downtown Modernization Plan (1970-1980), and The Emergence of Heritage Preservation in Downtown Rio (1970-1980).

4.1 Avenue Plan (1937–1940)

The Avenue Plan, drawn up in the late 1930s during the administration of Mayor Henrique Dodsworth (1937–1945), constituted an inflection point in the way of conceiving the urban territory of Rio de Janeiro. Inspired by modernizing proposals circulating in Europe and by experiences developed in cities like São Paulo, the plan sought to adapt the city center to the new demands of motorized circulation, especially in the face of the consolidation of the automobile as the main means of individual transport (Abreu, 2000).

More than a set of specific actions, it was a comprehensive proposal for urban reconfiguration, with guidelines focused on opening new avenues, widening existing roads, and creating more efficient traffic axes. Although Largo da Carioca (Figure 1) was not the immediate focus of the plan, the logic that structured it, centered on modernizing the urban space, traffic fluidity, and the disarticulation of the historical fabric, exerted a direct influence on the interventions carried out in the area in the following decades (Abreu, 2000).



Figure 1: Largo da Carioca in the 1950s
Source: (National Archive, 2020)

The strategy of breaking with the traditional urban fabric in favor of wide and continuous axes, typical of this approach, enabled the implementation of projects that led to the demolition of buildings and the disfigurement of historical sectors, such as the surroundings of Largo da Carioca (Benchimol, 1992). This orientation was already hinted at previously in plans like that of Alfred Agache, which, although never fully executed, proposed similar structural transformations and envisioned the replacement of consolidated areas with new monumental avenues. Such proposals reflected an urban conception strongly linked to the association between progress, monumentality, and the rationalization of circulation (Sequeira, 2008).

4.2 Requalification of the Surroundings (1940 - 1950)

The 1940s and 1950s marked the beginning of more incisive interventions in the surroundings of Largo da Carioca, in line with the perspective of modernization and restructuring of the downtown area, outlined by the Avenue Plan. During this period, demolitions of buildings considered obsolete or incompatible with the new aesthetics and functionality desired for the central region became frequent. It was an action both physical and symbolic, aimed at preparing the urban space for the implementation of a new landscape consistent with the ideals of progress of the time.

The removal of old constructions aimed not only to free up areas for the opening of new roads and the construction of modern buildings but also to promote a process of sanitation and visual updating of the city center (Nesi, 2000). The requalification actions sought to consolidate a more orderly, functional environment representative of the image of a developing metropolis. Although the details of the specific interventions in Largo da Carioca may vary, the broader urban context of Rio de Janeiro pointed to the simultaneous valorization of pedestrians and automobiles, the improvement of urban infrastructure, such as lighting, paving, and technical networks, and the introduction of contemporary-designed street furniture (Cavalcanti; Bezerra de Meneses, 1983).

This set of transformations prepared Largo da Carioca to welcome the rationalist architectural language that was then asserting itself, marked by verticalized

buildings that significantly altered the scale and perception of the space. The dispute between different conceptions of the city, already present in earlier moments, remained active, influencing urban interventions and leaving deep marks on the territory (Zally, 2000).

4.3 The Construction of Presidente Vargas Avenue (1950)

The inauguration of Presidente Vargas Avenue is certainly one of the most emblematic and controversial episodes of modernist urban planning in Rio de Janeiro. Conceived as one of the monumental axes foreseen, in a way, since the spirit of the Avenue Plan, its construction in the 1950s implied a *bota-abaixo* (knock-down), a term that characterizes the mass demolition in Downtown Rio (Abreu, 2000). Entire areas, rich in history and consolidated social dynamics, such as Praça Onze, were wiped off the map to make way for a large expressway, designed for the speed of automobiles and traffic flow (Faulhaber, 2016; Rio Memórias, [n.d.]).

The impact on Largo da Carioca, although not a direct demolition of the Largo itself, was profound and reconfiguring. Presidente Vargas Avenue radically altered the surrounding urban fabric, cutting traditional connections and redefining the circulation of pedestrians and vehicles in the city center. Largo da Carioca, which previously had more organic relationships with the neighboring streets and neighborhoods, found itself tangential to this new and imposing road artery. The opening of the avenue represented the affirmation of road transport as an absolute priority and the adoption of large-scale urban planning, often carried out to the detriment of the human scale and the preservation of historical and cultural heritage.

4.4 Leveling of Santo Antônio Hill (1955)

With the start of the demolition works of Santo Antônio Hill (Figure 2) in the 1930s and 1940s, the Superintendency for the Works of Santo Antônio Hill (SOST) was created in December 1952, through Decree No. 11,879 of December 31, 1952. Although interventions had already begun in previous administrations, a significant portion of the hill still remained intact. It fell to the administration of Mayor Dulcídio Cardoso (1896-1978), from 1951 to 1955, to give new impetus to the project, intensifying the demolitions and distributing their execution among different contractors.



Figure 2: "Tabuleiro da Baiana" in the foreground and the beginning of the leveling of Santo Antônio Hill in the background (1950s)

Source: (Bafafá, 2020)

4.5 Paving and Street Widening (1960)

In the 1960s, urban interventions in downtown Rio de Janeiro maintained the focus on improving road circulation, with emphasis on the widening and paving of streets at strategic points, such as the surroundings of Largo da Carioca (Figure 3). This stage aimed to complement previous larger-scale works, such as the construction of Presidente Vargas Avenue, seeking to facilitate pedestrian movement and optimize the flow of vehicles, both private and collective.

In Largo da Carioca, these changes translated into the reorganization of adjacent roads, with the use of modern paving techniques, installation of updated signage, and adaptation of the urban layout to the increase in traffic (Brasiliiana Fotográfica, [n.d.]). Although less radical than the interventions of the previous decade, these actions reinforced the logic of prioritizing motorized transport in the city center, directly affecting the function of the Largo as a social space. The visual and sound landscape of the area was transformed, marked by the constant and accelerated presence of automobiles.



Figure 3: Public spaces - Largo da Carioca (1956)

Source: (Arquivo Nacional, 2025)

4.6 Downtown Modernization Plan (1970–1980)

The 1970s marked a new phase in urban interventions in downtown Rio de Janeiro, guided by the Downtown Modernization Plan. The main objective was to consolidate the region as a competitive business hub, capable of attracting investments and

rivaling other metropolitan areas (Vargas; Castro, 2007). The actions foreseen in the plan included the expansion of the subway network, with the construction of strategic stations like Carioca, and the restructuring of public spaces, through the renewal of sidewalks, installation of new lighting, and updating of street furniture (Pereira, 2011).

In Largo da Carioca, one of the most significant transformations resulting from this plan was the intensification of the verticalization of the surroundings. Large commercial buildings, known as corporate towers, began to occupy the space previously intended for smaller-scale, often historical, constructions (Pereira, 2011). This change reinforced the role of the Largo as an area of passage and commerce, following the logic of real estate valuation that saw the city center as a strategic location for tertiary sector activities. The presence of these buildings altered the scale of the urban space, impacting the visual and symbolic relationship with the still-preserved historical elements (Coelho; Novais, 2015).

4.7 The Emergence of Heritage Preservation in Downtown Rio (1970-1980)

During the 1970s and 1980s, amidst the advance of urban modernization and real estate valuation, a growing attention focused on the protection of historical heritage in the central region of Rio de Janeiro emerged. Even if in an incipient manner and, at times, as a response to concrete losses, this attention consolidated itself in the face of the recurring destruction and disfigurement of areas of historical value, contributing to broaden the debates surrounding the preservation of relevant buildings and urban ensembles (Funari; Pelegrine, 2009).

Despite the irreversible losses that occurred in previous decades, it was during this period that a more systematic action in defense of heritage in downtown Rio de Janeiro consolidated. In the case of Largo da Carioca, protection initiatives began to take shape based on the valorization of important historical references, such as the Church of the Third Order of Saint Francis of Penance and the Convent of Santo Antônio. This mobilization resulted in the creation of institutions dedicated to preservation and the implementation of legal instruments, such as listing (tombamento), aiming to contain the progressive disfigurement of the surroundings (Gonçalves, 2002).

The idea of the Cultural Corridor, which would begin to be conceived in this period, exemplifies this new approach, seeking to reconcile the revitalization of the city center with the preservation of its historical and cultural legacy (Rocha, 2006; Nascimento, 2020). However, this concern coexisted with modernizing interventions, resulting in conflicts and compromise solutions that did not always manage to avoid the disfigurement of historical areas (Choay, 2001).

4.8 The Conflict Between Modernization and Preservation: The Carmo Viaduct (1978)

The construction of the Carmo Viaduct, inaugurated in 1978, became an emblematic case of the tensions between urbanization models based on traffic fluidity and efforts to preserve historical and cultural heritage (Abreu, 2000; Jacob, 2005). The structure was designed to establish a direct connection between Largo da Carioca and Presidente Vargas Avenue, passing over the architectural ensemble of the Carmo Convent in Praça XV. The intervention generated strong impacts, both from a visual and symbolic point of view, on this important historical site (Rio Memórias, [n.d.]).

The viaduct symbolized the primacy of automotive transport, creating a physical and visual barrier between Largo da Carioca and Praça XV, disregarding the historical and landscape importance of the surroundings. The imposing structure strongly contrasted with the colonial and baroque architecture of the historical buildings, generating criticism from architects, urban planners, and heritage defenders (Jacob, 2005).

The Carmo Viaduct still exists and remains operational in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Built with the objective of connecting Largo da Carioca to Presidente Vargas Avenue, it remains part of the central road network. Despite its permanence, the structure is often criticized for causing negative impacts on the architectural and historical ensemble of the region, especially in the surroundings of the Carmo Convent and Praça XV. Today, the viaduct represents a clear example of urban decisions that prioritized vehicle traffic to the detriment of historical heritage preservation. Its presence reinforces the conflicts between modernization and conservation that continue to be part of the debate about downtown Rio de Janeiro.

In this way, the Carmo Viaduct became a symbol of the logic that prioritized transport efficiency to the detriment of preserving local memory and identity. It exemplified the conflicts characteristic of the phase of accelerated modernization in downtown Rio de Janeiro. The transformations in Largo da Carioca, between the 1940s and 1980s, reflect the urban dynamics that shaped Rio de Janeiro in the 20th century. Each intervention, from the Avenue Plan to the construction of the Carmo Viaduct, left its mark, evidencing the priorities of each period and the clashes between different conceptions of the city.

In summary, the urban transformations in Largo da Carioca between the 1940s and 1980s illustrate the tensions between modernizing development and the preservation of historical heritage. Each intervention, from the Avenue Plan to the Carmo Viaduct, reflects the pursuit of a more modern and efficient city, but often at the cost of its historical memory. While the 1970s and 1980s witnessed the growing valorization of historical landmarks and the beginning of a formal organization in defense of heritage, the conflicts between these two approaches, modernization and preservation, profoundly marked downtown Rio de Janeiro. Largo da Carioca, in particular, became a stage for these clashes, evidencing the complex dynamics of urban transformation and the influences of different administrations on the current configuration of the region.

5 Municipal Administrations of Rio de Janeiro: Urban Transformations in Largo da Carioca (1940-1980)

According to Abreu (2000), the urban interventions carried out in Largo da Carioca between the years 1940 and 1980 did not result from isolated actions but were part of continuous urban policies applied by municipal administrations. These transformations express a sequence of strategies aimed at modernizing the city, which left visible marks on the spatial configuration of downtown Rio de Janeiro. Below, the key moments and public actors responsible for such changes are highlighted.

5.1 Henrique Dodsworth (1939–1945): Beginning of Urban Reforms

The administration of Henrique Dodsworth, between the late 1930s and early 1940s, initiated the reconfiguration of Largo da Carioca with actions such as road widening and the expansion of public space. These measures were aligned with the Avenue Plan (1937–1940), whose objective was to adapt the downtown area to the demands of modern circulation and reorganize the urban fabric according to the technical principles of the time (Soares, 2009; Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, 2014).

5.2 Ângelo Mendes de Moraes (1947–1951): Commercial Transformation

During his administration, the demolition of the National Press Building (Imprensa Nacional) in 1947 allowed for the occupation of the surroundings with commercial constructions, integrating Largo da Carioca into the business circuit. This remodeling followed the logic of functional modernization and real estate densification of the city center (Pimentel, 2017; Arquivo Geral da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, 2014).

5.3 Alim Pedro (1954–1955): Landscaping and Public Space

The administration of Negrão de Lima intensified urban transformations in Downtown Rio, such as the continuation of the leveling of Santo Antônio Hill and the widening of Uruguaiana Street. During this period, discussions about the implementation of the subway advanced, and Largo da Carioca began to be planned as a strategic point for urban mobility (Abreu, 1984; Figueiredo, 2013; Franco 2021).

5.4 Carlos Lacerda (1960–1965): Infrastructure Expansion

The government of Carlos Lacerda consolidated the modernization project with the opening of República do Chile Avenue and the complete removal of Santo Antônio Hill. These actions aimed to adapt the downtown area to population and economic growth, prioritizing traffic and large enterprises (Soares, 2009).

5.5 Mobility and Urban Restructuring (1965–1971)

In the new term of Negrão de Lima, the focus was on reorganizing urban mobility with the deactivation of the streetcar terminal known as Tabuleiro da Baiana. The transition to new systems, such as the subway, redefined the role of the Largo as a strategic circulation point (Carvalho et al., 2016).

5.6 Marcos Tamoyo (1975–1979): Subway Implementation

During the administration of Marcos Tamoyo, the inauguration of the Carioca Metro Station marked one of the most significant interventions in the region. The new mobility dynamics intensely altered the urban space and brought important modifications to the landscape of the Largo (Aragão, 2004; Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro, 1979).

5.7 Israel Klabin (1979–1982): Functionality and Preservation

The government of Israel Klabin continued previous projects but incorporated a greater concern for historical preservation. The adaptation of street furniture and the full operation of the metro station gave the Largo a central role in the city's daily mobility (Pinheiro, 2007; Lima, 2006).

Throughout these decades, Largo da Carioca was shaped by successive administrations that implemented diverse urban modernization projects. Road reforms, the verticalization of the surroundings, and the introduction of new transportation modes left deep marks on the space, often in tension with heritage preservation values. Each administration reflected the demands and visions of the future that shaped the city center.

6 Transitional Considerations

The research aimed to understand the urban changes that occurred in Largo da Carioca between the 1940s and 1980s, with an emphasis on the actions undertaken by municipal and state governments and the ways in which these interventions expressed different conceptions of the city, administrative priorities, and the recurring clashes between technical progress and the preservation of historical heritage.

During the analyzed period, Largo da Carioca was the target of a set of transformations embedded in a context of intense urban changes, marked by the expansion of the road network, increased urban land value, and the functional restructuring of the central area. These processes, often conducted without attention to the human scale and the symbolic dimensions of the space, favored interventions aimed at traffic fluidity and the renewal of the built fabric, to the detriment of the permanence of historical landmarks and collective memory.

Among the questions that guided the study, the following stood out: in what ways did urban interventions modify the configuration of Largo da Carioca over the decades? What was the role of the different public administrations in this process? And how did the tensions between interests linked to the modernization of the city and the efforts to preserve its cultural heritage manifest themselves?

The undertaken analysis allowed us to observe that the actions carried out during the period mostly followed a functionalist and developmentalist logic, which prioritized the rationalization of circulation and the economic exploitation of the territory. Municipal administrations played a central role, both in promoting structural works and in redefining the use of public spaces. The verticalization of the surrounding lots and the transformation of the Largo into a mobility hub demonstrate the pursuit of an efficient city model, albeit not always sensitive to the historical value of the site.

On the other hand, the research also highlighted the persistence of Largo da Carioca as a significant space in the urban life of Rio, both due to its strategic position and its symbolic character. Despite successive interventions, the location maintained aspects of its original identity, acting as an urban palimpsest, where different layers of time and meaning overlap and dialogue.

Thus, it can be stated that the established objectives were fully achieved. The investigation allowed for an understanding of the various stages of the urban transformations of Largo da Carioca, identified the agents responsible for its current conformation, and reflected on the existing tensions between urban development and heritage conservation. From this, the research contributes to a more critical view of the urban policies implemented in the central areas of Rio de Janeiro and reinforces the need to reconcile modernization with the preservation of urban memory.

It is concluded, therefore, that the study not only answered the initially formulated questions but also provided relevant reflections on urban planning in consolidated historical contexts. The experience of Largo da Carioca reaffirms the importance of promoting urban interventions that recognize and integrate the complexity of the city, its temporal layers, and the meanings attributed to its spaces by the community.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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