

Public Spaces and Urban Revitalization. Evidence and Insights from Luanda

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Abstract

This paper aims to provide insight into the potential of urban revitalisation interventions for improved public space in the context of African cities. Based on a review and evidence of the history, perceptions, and use of public spaces in the capital city of Angola, Luanda, the paper sheds lights on some of the challenges that surround the access to and inclusivity of quality public spaces in planned and unplanned urban set ups of African cities. Examples of urban revitalization initiatives in Luanda in turn shed light on the importance of the role of citizen adaptations and agency to tackle urban decay and the need to create public spaces that are inclusive and responsive to local needs, culture, and individual perceptions. In doing so, the paper seeks to show that the successful transfer of urban policies depends on local government leadership and support as well as a better understanding of the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of local residents and their understandings of what public space means and who they serve.

Keywords: public spaces, urban revitalization, policy transfer, Luanda

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Introduction

The importance of public space in cities as sites that are central to fostering community cohesion, culture and civic action has long been acknowledged. However, in a context of rapidly spreading policies and practices of urban neoliberalism, public spaces have increasingly come under threat in cities across the world, sparking calls for these spaces to be reclaimed. Hence, global development policies and agreements such as the New Urban Agenda (United Nations General Assembly, 2016) stress the importance of promoting access to safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces for all, as well as their importance for contributing to a range of areas, such as improved human health, social and economic development, urban resilience and climate change mitigation, the preservation of cultural heritage and the prevention of urban sprawl (art. 13; 36; 37; 53; 67; 97). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in turn include a target that is solely dedicated to the need to provide universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible, green, and public spaces particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities (SDG 11.7).

However, in practice public investments in the creation and maintenance of inclusive public spaces remain limited, and the transfer and importation of global urban revitalization policies and interventions often reinforce existing privatisation, commercialisation, and securitisation trends, especially in the global South. Moreover, truly little is known about who, why and how existing public spaces are managed and used, despite the importance of this kind of data to monitor and improve the effectiveness of urban interventions. This paper builds on research conducted in Luanda, a sub-Saharan African city with similar socio-spatial histories and legacies of conflict, rapid urbanization and informality and neoliberal urban policies and interventions with other African counterparts such as Maputo in Mozambique (Jorge and Viegas, 2021, pp. 324–338).

The methodology used combines bibliographic and case study analysis with data collected from a survey conducted by the Angolan Urban Laboratory (Laboratório Urbano de Angola - LURA). This study is part of the broader study of rural – urban dynamics research project. The objective here was to establish whether rural-urban dynamics were the major source for slum expansion and densification and understand the main challenges in the living conditions of slum dwellers. This information is presented to the municipal authorities to inform strategies in the provision of services and infrastructure that are priorities to the community. Furthermore, the case study analysis of public open spaces in Luanda's formal city centre to understand how public space intervention comes about in such a context in contrast with informal ones, the slums. Additionally, this analysis gives insight on how public spaces in the city centre can serve as inclusive platforms for socialisation and as #breathing spaces especially for those within the dense living conditions in slums.

Urban revitalization: a global perspective

Urban redevelopments are the ultimate reflection of the attractiveness of cities, especially in the west, from mid-19th century due to industrialisation which led to large rural-urban migration movements into cities that were not prepared to receive this influx of population (Gehl and Svarre, 2013, p. 39). From a broad standpoint revitalisation refers to “the rebirth or revival in the conditions and the character of a

place that has endured a period of decline” (Grodach and Ehrenfeucht, 2016, p. 4). Interventions adopted different meanings depending on time, place and policies attached to them with first waves (1930s – 1960s best known as urban regeneration) with physical determinism and slum-clearance, second waves with a more social integration concern (the likes of “war on poverty” of the 1960s-1970s and best known as urban renewals), and third waves (from 1970s and 1980s onwards) more market oriented influenced by neoliberalist ideals and the governance participatory stance (Carmon, 1999, pp. 145 - 149; Gehl and Svarre, 2013, pp. 50-69; Hall, 2014, pp. 409-411). The 1960s stand out for the search for better public spaces and vibrant public life, focusing on the pedestrian rather than the car-oriented zoning design that characterised modern movements of urban planning. Jane Jacobs and William H. Whyte were pioneers of the ideology of bringing life back to the streets to revitalising them (Jacobs, 1992, pp. 161-177; Gehl and Svarre, 2013, pp. 51-52).

During the 1970s and 1980s large cities of the west witnessed the exodus of the affluent classes and significant economic players from city centres and the influx of lower-income residents led to lowering prices in city centre land and property (Montgomery, 2014, pp. 67-69).

Two major groups are at the centre of the urban revitalisation movement in the 1970s throughout the 1980s and onwards. These groups are individual citizens and private companies that partner with administrative entities to promote interventions in the public space realm (Carmon, 1999, pp. 147-148). Frequently, the result of such interventions is reflected in infrastructure improvements such as streetlights, urban equipment, greeneries, cleanliness, improved sense of security and use of abandoned buildings, to mention a few (Carmon, 1999, p. 148; Grodach and Ehrenfeucht, 2016, p. 24). On the other hand, however, such improvements have adverse outcomes such as gentrification and the displacement of the poor to distant sites (Gale, 2021b, p. 174). Furthermore, in public-private partnerships, the projects aim for large-scale and high-income groups of society such as hotels, art galleries, and shopping centres. Well-referenced examples are Quincy Market in Boston, Pike Place Seattle and Horton Plaza in San Diego (Carmon, 1999, p. 148).

In this study, we investigate gentrification, a process that generally happens in inner-city centre neighbourhoods aiming to halt the deterioration of urban infrastructure and attract wealthier social groups who fled to suburbia during city centre decline back to the city centre (Gale, 2021b, p. 185, 2021c, p. 11). Generally seen as a segregator elitist strategy, gentry’s arrival tends to raise property values and scare away less economically fortunate families that arrived during decay. Gentrification is intrinsically part and parcel of urban interventions seeking to reverse or prevent urban decline. In *The Misunderstood History of Gentrification*, Denis Gale (Gale, 2021c, pp. 9-16) studies the birth of gentrification in the United States context and identifies three shades of the phenomena: embryonic gentrification (1915–1945); federal policies versus the gentrification paradigm stage (1945–1980s); and advanced gentrification (1980–2018). These studies cross with the historic background of urban interventions discussed above. In the embryonic stage, local administration officials believed that refreshing façades and revamping buildings interiors was the way to fend off city centre decline caused by economic depression, inter and post war urban decline and avoid the migration of middle- and high-income groups to suburbia and also to partially replace a portion of the residents (Gale, 2021c, pp. 11-13).

This phase happened just before the first wave of urban interventions discussed above. However, this strategy proved to be ineffective to remove stigmatizations of areas deemed socially precarious and unsafe (Gale, 2021a, pp. 132-133). Local administrations then adopted federal policies such as redevelopment policies aiming to obliterate completely blighted areas, and uprooting incumbent families, wiping off signs of social poverty within the city centre and sending have-nots to distant sites of social housing (Ibid).

However, early embryonic gentrification inspired a reverse strategy and urban renewals meddled with embryonic urban rehab strategy ignited by well off young couples, professionals, and private companies, that looked for underrun properties within the city centre to invest, live and work, repopulating so called blighted areas with higher end socio-economic gentry groups (Gale, 2021b, pp. 182-183). This last stage is what Gale (2021b, pp. 186 - 190) calls advanced gentrification and Carmon (1999, pp. 148-149) third generation of urban interventions.

The examples discussed further down on this paper reflect on gentrification resulting from young urban professionals (yuppies also called baby boomers) or private actors that invest their money in the revitalisation of central neighbourhoods (Carmon, 1999, p. 148), as is the Business Integrated District (BIDs) Model (Guimarães, 2021, p. 7). BIDs originated in North America (Canada) in the 1960s (Hoyt, 2006, pp. 228 - 229; Peyroux, Pütz and Glasze, 2012, p. 116) with the model having spread across the western global North context and to the global South and Africa, particularly South Africa (Peyroux, Pütz and Glasze, 2012, p. 116; Guimarães, 2021, p. 3). BIDs generally tackle the cleanliness and safety of the perimeter of influence (Peyroux, Pütz and Glasze, 2012, p. 114).

Much criticism about gentrification is present in the literature (Carmon, 1999, p. 148; Uduku, 1999, p. 108; Grodach and Ehrenfeucht, 2016, p. 24) as a strategy to reverse movement of city centre exodus. The upgrading usually results in incumbent lower-class residents pushed outwards by the rise of property values and the arrival of higher-income groups. However, recent literature argues that the impacts of gentrification are exaggerated (Grodach and Ehrenfeucht, 2016, pp. 23 - 24; Gale, 2021b, pp. 185 - 187). In neighbourhoods that look forward to improving the social perception of crime and stigma, interventions without any degree of gentrification prove to have a null effect on improving the perceived image of the place and remain unattractive to higher-income clientele (Carmon, 1999, p. 148). Grodach and Ehrenfeucht (2016, pp. 23 - 24) explain that the displacement is manageable, and the surplus of income originated from building upgrades beneficial to the neighbourhood and the community. Gale (2021b, p. 186) discusses further on how the definition has changed over the years, questioning if iconic sites of gentrification should remain perceived as such and if incumbent residents, incapable of sustaining the increasing or decreasing standard of living should be considered displaced for moving out. The reality is that urban living is dynamic.

Although public policies must cater for the good of all socio-economic groups, in an age where strong neoliberal ideologies prevail, real estate market capital and the prosperity of incumbent families are vital to the fluidity of neighbourhood's comers and goers.

Urban dwellers' prosperity is the real problem.

Despite the success registered in the literature of the 1980s and 1990s revitalisations, they widened the gap between "the haves and have-nots" (Fainstein, 2001, pp. 228-229). Instead, cities grew divided and with aggravated social conflicts and "islands" of

revitalisation in “seas” of urban decay (Carmon, 1999, p. 149; Hall, 2014, p. 398). Nevertheless, policies and interventions aimed at urban revitalisation are still in place, taking many shapes and forms around the globe, as have other trends such as the “Night Economy” (Lovatt and O’Connor, 2010, pp. 130-133), a trend of the 1980s at a time of the rediscovery of city centre cultural and physical capital. “The Use of Festive Seasons” (Hughes, 1999, p. 124) is another trend which started during the 1990s as a strategy to improve urban safety during night hours apart in addition to economic objectives.

Neoliberalism influenced urban revitalisations from the 1980s onwards coupled with governance ideologies and policies, especially when happening in the city centre (Hughes, 1999, p. 123). Moreover, globalisation was the push for the wide transfer and circulation of such models across the world (Guimarães, 2021, p. 12), and less public investment in urban revitalisation called for neoliberal creative models to fend off city decay and urban unsafety (Hughes, 1999, pp. 120-123; Lovatt and O’Connor, 2010, p. 128; Peyroux, Pütz and Glasze, 2012, p. 112).

In recent years, Western urban revitalisation policies and practices have rapidly transpired to cities in the global South and Africa particularly (Croese, 2021, pp. 114-116). In Africa, flagship national housing programs have supported their strategies in importing slum-clearance and urban expansion (Bekker, Croese and Pieterse, 2021, p. 53, 82, 143 -144), with neighbourhood upgrading and city centre revitalisation processes (Guimarães, 2021, pp. 1 - 2). Interventions in public spaces are rarely the sole initiative of individuals or communities, but rather influenced by urban planning models (Amado, 2019, p. 14). However, there is an increasing trend that citizen initiatives ignite public space revitalisation processes (Peyroux, Pütz and Glasze, 2012, pp. 116-117). In the process of improving urban living through urban interventions and urban expansion to tackle urban decay and accommodate overpopulation, public spaces and public life were not carefully considered (Gehl and Svarre, 2013, p. 45). In the 1960s a new benchmark in urban design and urban planning started with Jane Jacobs, Christopher Alexander, and William H. Whyte, criticizing urban planning paradigms of the time, and establishing that traffic-oriented urban planning which derived from urban expansion, and the lack of liveability, walkability and pedestrian safety in street life was a problem and public spaces in general were necessary for healthy and vibrant urban life (Jacobs, 1992, pp. 161-177; Gehl and Svarre, 2013, pp. 50 - 61).

The importance of public space dates from the Middle Ages in western culture (Gehl and Svarre, 2013, p. 39) and from ancient African human settlements (Koutonin, 2016). It was in these spaces where knowledge and craftsmanship passed from generation to generation. These were also places of socialisation, debates and conflict resolutions happened at a time when mobility was mostly pedestrian.

The following discussion of policy transfer sheds light on current urban revitalisation initiatives in African cities such as Luanda. Nevertheless, apart from policy transfer, current revitalisation trends stress urban governance and public participation as vital paradigms to ensuring thriving, sustainable, and longstanding urban revitalisation (Cartwright et al., 2018, pp. 4-6; Amado, 2019, p. 28).

Policy transfer: the importation/exportation of urban revitalization policies

Policy transfer is part of urban planning history (Hoyt, 2006, p. 223). The literature describes policy agents that act in representation of the public sector, non-profit organizations, public and private organizations representatives as “policy entrepreneurs” that, by establishing knowledge networks, advocate for the spread of specific policies and information. “Urban policy entrepreneurs – like architects, planners, and other experts – have travelled to study other places, make contacts, attend lectures, and return to their homelands to report what they have learnt” (Hoyt, 2006, p. 223). For instance, French planners implemented housing projects schemes after visiting the United States and learning about New Deal projects (Carmon, 1999, pp. 146-147). Another example is the appearance of shopping centres in the United States in the early 1950s during suburbia sprawl), only to become a trend to which affluent nations with vacant land could afford the likes of Canada and Australia (Ibid).

It is vital to understand policy transfer because its practice is rising (Hoyt, 2006, p. 221). Furthermore, developments in technology such as the internet have facilitated policy entrepreneurs individually or in a professional network to “shop” and adopt “best-practices” strategies without an in-depth understanding of local legislative, economic, political and socio-cultural differences between exporting and importing realities (Hoyt, 2006, p. 224). Watson (2009, p. 151) emphasizes concerns about conventional wisdom that neoliberalist ideologies that “either the market or communities could solve urban issues appear to be increasingly unrealistic” and suggest governments’ decisive role through reformed instruments, especially in the global south, are needed. The result is, on some occasions, the worsening of urban problems intended to solve (Watson, 2009, p. 154; Watson and Agbola, 2013).

In the global South, and specifically in the sub-Saharan African context, cities under colonial rule were sites of experimentation, urban development policies and practices happening concurrently in the global north (Fainstein, 2020). Notwithstanding the proclamation of independence of those countries, Hoyt (2006, p. 9) alerts to the fact that simplistic importation/exportation of policies have perpetuated in colonized countries where urban policies and practices still date from pre-independence times (Watson, 2009 p. 154; Myers, 2011, p. 56). Furthermore, modernist urban planning ideologies used in colonial territories, such as Luanda and Maputo’s case, regard most public spaces as “leftovers” from built structures and often surrounded by road infrastructure with little attention given to social interaction (Carmona, 2021, pp. 4-5). In cities such as Luanda and Maputo for example, both ex-Portuguese colonies, the shopping and adoption of state led housing developments and gentrification/urban intervention strategies are visible in urban redevelopment programs adopted by governments (Ovadia and Croese, 2016, p. 285; Barros and Balsas, 2019, p. 33; Roque, Mucavele and Noronha, 2020, pp. 335-336; Maloa, 2021, p. 2). Post civil - wars city redevelopment ignited physical determinism, but the duality of formal and urban rural settlements remains a challenge. Real estate capital and/or state led slum clearance programs permanently harass and push the poor out of site from city centre to open way to high rise office and luxury apartment buildings and also in the peripheries to the construction of townhouse complexes. State led housing programs have not sufficiently catered for the needs of those who require it the most, favouring mostly middle- and high-income families (Barros and Balsas, 2019, p. 33; Jorge and Viegas, 2021; Maloa, 2021, p.8). The waves of urban interventions in these sub-Saharan African cities are an

iterative process and rarely progressive or sequential as in the western realities as discussed above. It is also worth mentioning that in the sub-Saharan context of Luanda and Maputo rural-urban migration did not happen due to an industrial revolution as in western counterparts (Castells, 1983, pp. 78–79). This revolution is yet to come about. On these contexts a history of colonisation coupled with regional inequalities, and asymmetries, long civil wars, unplanned urban growth strategies, unclear public housing policies and the lack of economic robustness, hinder equitable urban development (Roque, Mucavele and Noronha, 2020, pp. 338 - 339; Capitango et al., 2022, p. 14). In Luanda, the duality of *musseques* and the city of asphalt prevails (Barros and Balsas, 2019, p. 31), and in Maputo, the city of asphalt and the *bairros de caniços* are also strikingly so (Roque, Mucavele and Noronha, 2020, p. 332 - 333).

Public paces in Luanda

The Constitution of the Republic of Angola of 2010 regards public spaces as public domain, and article 95 identifies beaches and coastal areas, zones subjected to environmental protection such as parks and natural reserves for fauna and flora preservation, including infrastructure, as well as classified monuments and buildings of national interest as public spaces. In terms of land management, article 217th and 219th of the Angolan constitution indicate local municipal governments to be the government administrative bodies that implement urban development and correct social inequalities. Municipal governments have the power to deliberate over public urban structures destined for entertainment, sports, green areas, classified buildings, and overall town planning matters.

However, the historical context of the urban development of Luanda intertwines formal and informal areas (Real, 2011, p. 22; Maia, 2019, p. 94; Mingas, 2011, p. 38) explains that most of the old informal settlements in Luanda, locally referred to as *musseques*, served as transit sites for Angolans brought from the inlands shipped to the Americas as enslaved people. The term “*Musseques*”, also written *Muceque*”, comes from one of Angola’s national languages, Kimbundu, and means sandy soil, which in Luanda designates the red soil land of the highlands and as an extension refers to the human settlements established on such lands (Amaral, 1983; Amaral, 1983, p. 296). The term now refers to any spontaneous settlements beyond state approval or recognition. After the abolition of slavery, these areas evolved into labour sites and, after independence, permanent though (in)formal residential settlements for the native Angolan in Luanda (Mingas, 2011, p. 38). However, such areas were deprived of urban basic services and infrastructures such as water, electricity, sewage, and a paved road network connected to the established urban centre.

The colonial and post-independence public administration invested in infrastructure in some *musseques*, such as Marçal, which benefited from domiciliary connections of water and electricity. Such infrastructures have been expanded and improved in some cases but not throughout all informal settlements in the city. Furthermore, with the population growth in Luanda, new *musseques* have emerged in the city centre and outskirts. Lack of sewage and rainwater drainage is common among *musseques* dwellers’ concerns, especially during the rainy season (Real, 2011, pp. 39 - 40; LURA, 2021, p. 23). As such, *musseques* are sites of persistent social and urban impoverishment despite the time elapse from colonial administration to independence. Informality in Luanda

stems from the colonial administration; however independent Angola remains challenged to address slums' precarious conditions effectively.

Efforts to improve Luanda's housing, infrastructure, and public spaces are visible. In 2014, the government of Angola invested in a metropolitan inter-municipal master plan for Luanda (Portuguese acronym PDGML) (GPL, Universidade Nova de Lisboa and Geotpu, 2015).

The plan envisages giving Luanda compact, multifunctional, metropolitan, and inclusive city qualities (GPL, Universidade Nova de Lisboa and Geotpu, 2015). The plan proposes participation in the design and implementation processes within government structures and ordinary citizens. It also includes integrated strategies to revive and upgrade existing public spaces and create new ones, emphasizing slum upgrading with and without forced removals. Slums classification used the occupation's nature, such as density and site locations, that may pose a risk for the communities (Ibid).

However, nearly a decade since the adoption of the plan, very little evidence exists regarding its implementation. Since then, the most iconic public investment into the betterment of public space has been the renewal of Luanda's waterfront (Croese, 2021, p. 114), and government investments in public housing and infrastructure upgrading projects have not been sufficiently accompanied with the creation of green and public spaces or the maintenance of existing public spaces, resulting in limited use and low levels of satisfaction. The survey conducted in the neighbourhood of Marçal, in Luanda, give evidence to such perceptions.

On the other hand, from the analysis of the results from a survey conducted by the author in 2022 in public open spaces within the city centre gives evidence that such sites remain attractive and usable by urban the initial residents and newcomers. This phenomenon demonstrates that the urban design approach remains valid to Luanda's urban dwellers which in turn translates the cultural importance of the public spaces inherited from the colonial administration urban fabric to sub – Saharan cities.

Marçal neighbourhood

Marçal dates from colonial administration as a temporary settlement for the native Angolans. In interviews conducted in 2021 (LURA, 2021, p. 4), senior residents explained that initial houses were built with wood, and the site had minimal infrastructure (water and electricity). After independence and with the city's growth, Marçal is no longer a peripheral settlement, and its location attracts people living in distant areas but working in the city centre. More than 70% of the influx of residents comes from nearby neighbourhoods, and distant ones and the remaining residents come essentially from the country's northern provinces.

The survey in Marçal took place in 2021. Here, existing public space was a sports court, and the community used the street for fraternizing amongst themselves. The community's level of satisfaction is reflected on the following indicators:

- 70% indicates flooding as a critical negative environmental issue an inhibitor for the use of public spaces
- 17% indicates cleanness as another negative factor to the use of public spaces
- 55 % never use public spaces
- 70% unsatisfied with public spaces

- Most pressing matters for the betterment of public spaces and the neighbourhood, in general, are road improvement (23%), sewage discharge infrastructure improvement (21%), increment of public spaces in the neighbourhood (14%) and better safety and public lighting combined (16%). Another critical remark is that the city's centre was populated primarily by European residents during colonial administration, and natives resided mainly in the peripheries (Real, 2011, p. 37) and public spaces in the city centre did not serve all of Luanda's citizens.



Figure 1. Marçal Neighbourhood, Mercado da Chapada.

The survey in Marçal gave insight about Mercado da Chapada, the neighbourhood's traditional market. During the 1970s, this space which once served as a soccer field began to be used as an informal community market and its periphery encroached by spontaneous housing constructions by the residents. These constructions reduced the area of the market. In the 2000s government fenced what remained of the place, and by the 2010s, the physical structure was erected. However, the market administration charges a fee from traders to use the space and requires that they purchase their tables and seats. These requirements and fees led to the abandonment of the building. Furthermore, remaining traders complain that low visible access of the interior of the building by passers-by result in low sales revenues.

The historic trajectory of the land where the market "Mercado da Chapada" stands, informs the nature, typology, and mutations of public spaces within slums in Luanda. Although it is now a confined building managed by the municipality, Mercado da Chapada preserves its iconic meaning for the community as a place of socialisation, where residents and visitors still meet, buy and as a cultural reference.



Figure 2. Interior of Mercado da Chapada. Source: LURA, 2021.

Discussion

Public spaces are a challenge in informal settlements. In Luanda's informal context, public spaces such as parks and squares are scarce. Most *musseque*'s implementation do not follow an urban plan which would envisage such breathing spaces. Moreover, in the struggle for space *musseque* dwellers eagerly cease the first opportunity to occupy any 'empty' land for building or for vending, resulting in narrow streets and flooded houses during the rainy season (71% of Marçal dweller indicate flooding as their main environmental concern).

Perceived forms of public spaces are sports venues, informal markets, streets, and even private yards since all serve as shared public spaces for the informal dweller in Luanda. In addition, these spaces serve for entertainment and mourning, such as children's playgrounds, funeral ceremonies, and commercial activities (LURA, 2021, p. 22).

In *musseques* roads can be mere paths which constitute a hindrance for fire brigade vehicles and ambulances in case of emergencies. The lack of public lightning is severe favouring high rates of criminality, essentially to females. In the case of Marçal access to transportation means is not a concern to residents (65% of residents take 5 to 15 minutes walking distance to the nearest collective transport access point). Additionally, about 88% of the households have water and electricity connections to public providing companies regardless of their tenancy status.

The survey conducted in Luanda indicate willingness from informal dwellers for better public spaces and pleasant public life experiences and dissatisfaction about the general living conditions and delivery of essential services. Most common complaints about public spaces are safety-related issues, poor roads, lack of surface water and drainage and proper sewage drainage infrastructure, and lack of variety of public spaces.

Nevertheless, there is an opportunity to encourage social cohesion and spark better public life within the formal urban fabric for lower and higher social extracts of the society with bottom-up approaches, and Rua dos Mercadores is an example.

Additionally, public administration leadership, dialogue-based urban design methods, including participatory processes and co-creation, may be the starting point for creating public spaces in the informal context and improving those in the formal city.

It is essential to note that the city dwellers also struggle to preserve and enjoy public spaces. Within the formal fabric in the city centre, dwellers continually lose their public spaces such as leisure spaces, football camps, parking spaces, sidewalks, public gardens, cinemas, either to privatisation or for the sake of markets, bars, restaurants and reckless parking of day workers and visitors.

There are reasons to explain that situation:

1. The increase of informality.
2. Occupation of roads, streets, and sidewalks for trade
3. The growth of car parks due to insufficient parking within the city centre.
4. Slum clearance strategies that push away the poor into far distant areas while the remaining areas are used for the construction of condominiums. Moreover, this poor population comes back to the city centre as informal traders because the market is "profitable".
5. The Public-Private Partnership also has transformed public gardens into a mix of gardens and restaurants, bars, and craft markets.

6. The occupation of spaces reserved for the expansion of urban infrastructure that sooner rather than later result in a movement of evictions and demolitions of any house built in these areas.

In face of these challenges, the SDG goal of guaranteeing affordable houses, inclusiveness, resilient and sustainable cities seem an unachievable target to meet. The year 2030 was defined as the mark of reaching SDG 11 is on our doorstep, and many issues are still unsolved.

There is a need to deepen the study of local interventions promoted by citizen agency to improve public spaces. The example of Rua dos Mercadores sheds light on bottom-up approaches and lessons that can inform similar interventions across cities in Angola and the sub-Saharan region.

Urban revitalization initiatives in Luanda

Recently, based on Luanda's Master Plan (GPL, Universidade Nova de Lisboa and Geotpu, 2015), the city has benefitted from Third Generation revitalization projects, as is the case of Rua dos Mercadores in the city centre. This revitalization resembles what Carmon (1999, p. 148) considers the public-individual partnerships where young architects with local administration support and incumbent residents improved public space conditions primarily, and owners refurbished and rented abandoned properties to bring about positive change. As a result, this project is accepted mainly by the middle-income community and higher as a success story despite portraying the gentrification previously discussed in advanced gentrification (Gale, 2021b, p. 179) and third generation urban interventions (Carmon, 1999, p. 148). However, informal traders are present and are welcomed in the precinct.

Rua dos Mercadores (Merchants' Street) is an historical patrimony urban site activated by commercial activities such as bars, restaurants and shops, improved street lighting and graffiti animating the old façades with local artistic expression.

The street is one of the oldest in Luanda, dating from the 1600s, and residents were merchants mainly of European descent and many of them slave merchants (Jacob, 2011, p. 48; Caldeira, 2014, p. 20). Houses were predominantly double storey with shops in the lower ground and living above. The yards served as transit venues for enslaved people transported overseas paid in exchange for gold or "escudos", the Portuguese currency at the time; however, enslaved people also served as domestic help in the military and commercial businesses of landlords (Caldeira, 2014, pp. 20 - 22). The street was classified as an "Imóvel de Interesse Público" (heritage urban site) by ordinance no. 9689, published in the Official Bulletin n.º. 7 of February 13th, 1957, (INPC - Instituto Nacional do Património Cultural, 2007).

Academics and non-profit organisations, namely the Centre for Architectural Studies and Scientific Research – (CEICA from the Portuguese acronym) of the Universidade Lusíada of Angola and Associação Kalu, are pioneers in recognising the historical and touristic value of Rua dos Mercadores. Both entities mobilised graffiti, open-air public expositions, and cultural gatherings on the street. More recently, a private initiative further improved the street, attracted new businesses, and improved the cleanness and safety of the street. The initiative took place to commemorate 442 years of the city of Luanda.

Local administration leadership and commitment to improving the image of public spaces of the municipality, Ingombota, played an important role. The administrator at the time, architect Rui Duarte, got involved in the process, and micro revitalisation actions were made possible with the participation of architects, the collaboration of residents, vacant building owners and private companies.



Figure 3-4. Rua dos Mercadores.

During an interview conducted in August 2021, the owners of architectural firms that worked on the project, Júlio Rafael, and Graciela Mendonça, confirm the importance of benefaction from private companies for implementing the project. The strip of the road intervened that was grimy, lacking proper street lighting and perceived as dangerous became the destination of tourists for site visiting, the youth for entertainment and the stage for art exhibitions and public holiday celebrations open air. The intervention only happened in part of the length of the street.

Looking at the historical background of BIDs, Rua dos Mercadores integrates similarities worth mentioning though unintentionally applied. The first important aspect to note is the similarity of the scale of intervention. BIDs generally happen in small areas such as urban blocks or streets. Another similarity worth noting was the need to improve public space appearance and cleanness and preserve the built fabric that incorporated, refurbishing the façades, improving public lights, remaking the pavement, and giving light to new businesses. These interventions promoted the area's safety, attracted the desired clientele for businesses and improved the market value for the precinct buildings.

Contrary to the typical BID initiatives, Rua dos Mercadores does not have private patrolling for enhanced security and is not a BID registered project. In Luanda's context, the closest to BID in land management are gated communities that are generally private

land and dedicated to housing. Despite no legal framework support, the project was initiated by young professionals living in the vicinities that studied abroad and contributed to Luanda's cityscape with fresh ideas.

The Municipal Administrator's participation was paramount to attract private investments to implement the project. However, only time will tell if the new tenant of the municipality will stand faithful to its predecessors' ideals. Without local public administrative leadership, neither the market nor the community would access the place and implement the project.

Despite being an island of revitalisation (Carmon, 1999, p.149), the intervention in Rua dos Mercadores gives valuable lessons, and the strategy could inform projects across the country and the region.

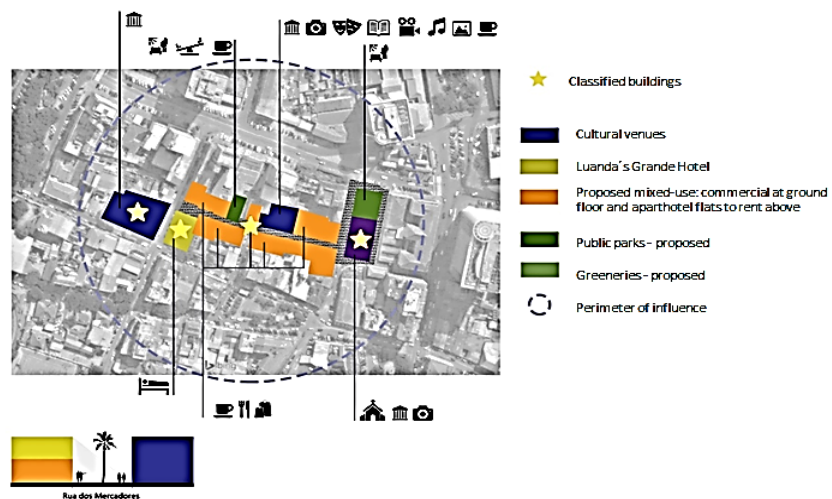
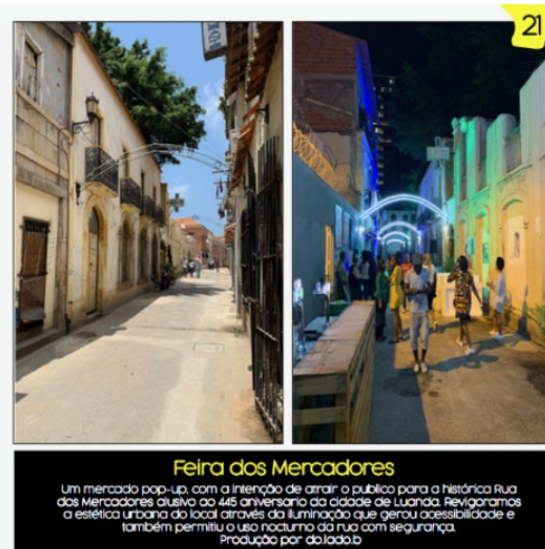


Figure 5-6-7. Intervention in Rua dos Mercadores.

The intervention of Rua dos Mercadores does not stand alone around the formal urban fabric of Luanda. There are other initiatives such as Naxixi Street and pop-up flea market events in shopping centres' parking lots. Micro revitalization interventions are on the rise in Luanda.

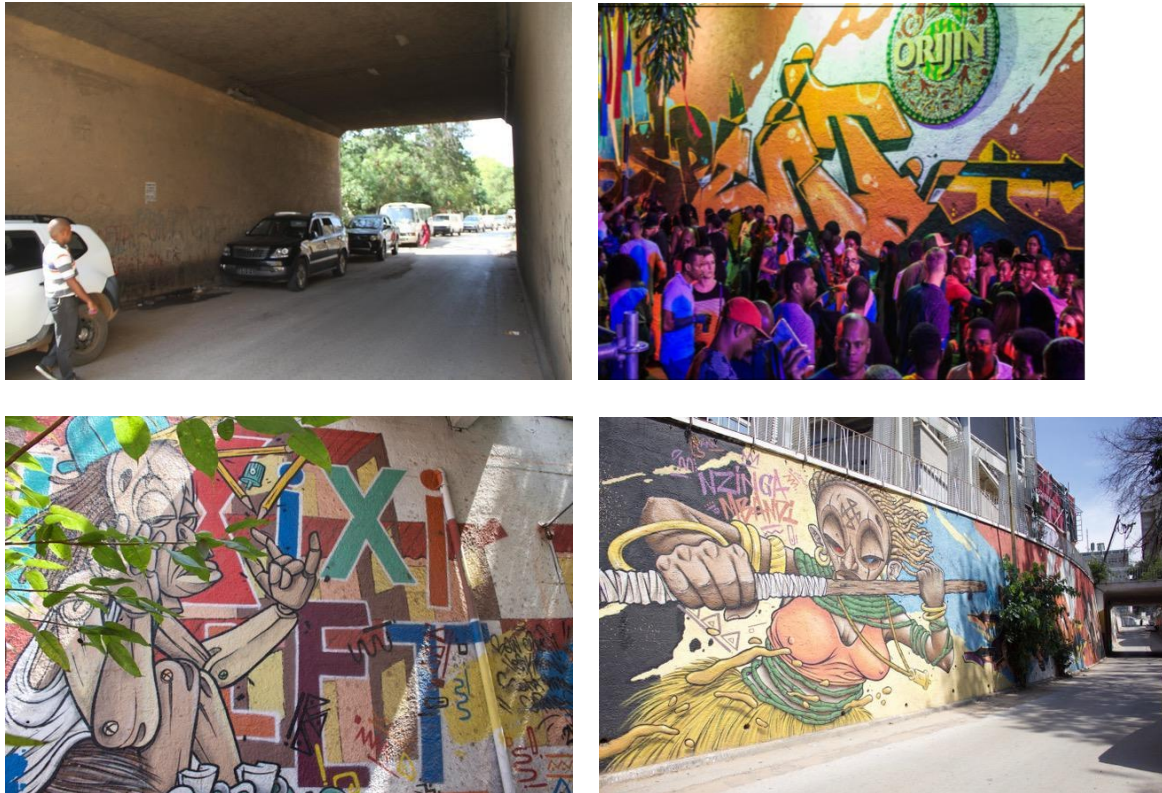


Figure 8-9-10-11. Micro revitalization interventions in Luanda.

Conclusion

To summarise the findings in both cities, it is possible to state the following:

- Urban design intention to create inclusive public spaces alone, in practice, may not resolve the negative impacts of gentrification in revitalisation processes nor surpass the need for participatory processes and cultural and socio-economic knowledge of the community around but provides a significant opportunity for social interaction and promotes a platform for social inclusivity.
- Administrative leadership and citizen agency played an important role despite some gentrification in the outcome of Rua dos Mercadores. Nevertheless, the positive note here is the initiative of professionals and building owners to revitalise streets, recapture the rich historical architectural characteristics of city centres and provide open-air venues to the city for cultural and public celebrations.
- Density poses a challenge in informal set ups, and street pavement and the multi-functionality of public equipment such as schools, sports fields, and markets present opportunities to provide spaces for social interaction and entertainment that also serve commercial and educational purposes.

- The lack of maintenance and safety conditions in the use of spaces in the city centre. Therefore, public spaces require functional structures/mechanisms for their management.
- The monitoring of public spaces needs to include indicators on their adequate access and use, especially by the most vulnerable, to assist local authorities and organisations of the civil society to improve the provision of better, inclusive, and accessible public spaces.

To conclude, processes of public spaces interventions from globally known cities are abundant in the literature, but there is a scarcity of information about middle-income towns such as Luanda; this is the primary contribution this article intends to make. Despite the centralised autocratic nature of the Angolan governing context, the examples of Rua dos Mercadores show some bottom-up approaches from the community and the private sector to step-up and contribute to the creation of public spaces and public life. Inclusive public spaces and co-creation may assist in reducing adverse gentrification effects.

Moreover, successful examples may lead to intra-city “importation of policies” and a broader improvement of public spaces and public life in Angola, as happened in western countries in the global north. Nevertheless, investments in public open spaces in informal areas are needed amounting to the overall need to improve the basic infrastructure and the quality housing units. Public spaces in the informal context play an important role in social interaction and commercial and agricultural activities in areas where unemployment rates and family units are high.

Another critical point is the perception of what public spaces are and what they serve. In the case of Maputo, for instance, the use of university lawns for agricultural purposes displays the need to reconcile cultural backgrounds with legislation definitions and community needs.

Luanda is the capital city of Angola and share the same urban problems as other sub-Saharan African counterparts, namely high population density, poverty growth, lack of infrastructures that could serve the entire population, and, most importantly, the fact of high levels of socio-economic inequalities.

With a dual urban structure formed by *Musseques* and the city of the asphalt, where there is a tiny number of wealthy people and many people living in underserved infrastructure, the social tension is observable in public spaces. The city is fighting to meet SDG 11 in the context of the sole eight years to reach 2030. Water, lighting, transport, hospitals, roads, gardens, schools, sports fields all constitute what city dwellers are fighting for and depend on how public policies are designed, implemented, and monitored.

The economic component of public spaces interventions is not the focus of this paper. However, it would be an oversight not to mention that cityscapes design, intervention, and maintenance with public or private funding in middle-income countries correlates intrinsically with economic issues. Castells (1983, p. 79) discusses the challenges of investing in null tax revenue areas that are densely populated with high rates of unemployment (*Musseques or Bairros de Caniços*) because they are unable to self-sustain themselves. The struggle to convert informal settlements into decent living settlements relates to the state’s economic dependence on exporting raw materials and an underdeveloped industrial local sector.

This article does not explore the approachability of government officials to implement such projects nor the bureaucratic procedures that underlie the process of urban interventions such as Rua dos Mercadores. Understanding such dynamics from project conception to implementation is not explored in this article and would further contribute to this work.

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