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ABSTRACT

The urban layout of Lisbon is closely linked with its ancient routes, shaped by the surrounding geography. Many of these routes still exist today as contemporary streets and serve as fundamental axes of the city. Along these routes, traditional public spaces such as *praças, largos, miradouros, jardins or parques*, can be found, while neglected areas known as urban interstices lie in between. Despite their abandonment, these spaces hold significant potential for important ecological and social functions. This paper aims to explore the possibilities of connecting urban interstices with Lisbon's public spaces, guided by principles of urban regeneration and the synergy between formal and informal systems. Through an analysis of the São Bento valley, it is intended to elaborate a strategy for urban integration that will serve, above all, as a platform for discussion about intervention approaches in public spaces.

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Linking the In-Between: A Strategy for the Integration of Urban Interstices in Lisbon

INTRODUCTION

There is a strong relationship between the geography and topography of Lisbon and the development of the built city. Following the theory developed by Saverio Muratori (1910–1973), Carrilho da Graça and Sequeira[1] demonstrated how it is possible to reconstruct and trace the signs of this fundamental relationship in this city. Along with the ridge and valley routes or paths, which, as argued by Carrilho da Graça and Sequeira, are at the origin of Lisbon's urban development and essential for understanding its current form, in this paper we have added one more geographical condition: the hillside line. This condition, as we will describe later, is essential for better understanding the origin and continued existence of urban interstices in the city of Lisbon.

Despite often being seen as residual and problematic elements of the contemporary city, urban interstices are valuable spaces with significant potential for addressing the challenges of sustainable development. However, integrating these spaces into the city's system of collective spaces is a complex task, requiring insights from urban economy and development, sociology, planning, and architecture. In this paper, we aim to explore the potential of urban interstices and how they can be integrated into Lisbon's system of collective spaces from an urban planning and architectural perspective, using the São Bento area as a case study. The analysis will consider the topography, ridge and valley paths, and public spaces, along with a detailed examination of the urban interstices themselves. **Fig. 1**

It is considered, on the one hand, the importance of valley and ridge paths, public spaces and major public buildings; on the other hand, the different nature and characteristics of the urban interstices. Therefore, two new paths are proposed, allowing to articulate the existing urban interstices between themselves and with formal

1

public spaces, while opening new possibilities for urban connections and uses.

URBAN INTERSTICES

The contemporary cities are changing their physical structure and their immaterial and symbolic relationships, making difficult to approach them with old concepts and tools.[2] Many authors have attempted a definition for this new urban form, such as intermediate city,[3] *città diffusa*[4] or generic city,[5] planetary urbanization,[6] regional urbanization[7]. Among all these some common features are identified, such as: the absence of clear division between city and countryside; urban and rural dimension interpenetration, overlapping and hybridization, creating blurred and indeterminate boundaries; meeting between material and virtual relationships, where local actions and regional, national, global decisions compete, according to globalized flows and local demands.[8]

Contemporary cities generate urban voids[9] within themselves and at their borders. They have been referred in many ways, such as *terrain vague*,[10] *territori attuali*,[11] *spazi interclusi*,[12] *nuove terre*,[13] spaces in-between,[14] third landscape[15] or urban interstices.[16] Considering the character of the spaces under study, the definition of urban interstices seems the most appropriate, since it concerns unbuilt

spaces within urban areas, in a condition of abandonment, marginality, uselessness, ambiguity,[17] and characterized by the lack of articulation with the rest of the city.[18]

There may be a tendency to think that urban interstices have been randomly generated and that have no use. However, they show clearly the relation with the territorial palimpsest[19] and they are often used for informal activities. In fact, emptiness can be thought as both negatively and positively.[20] These spaces allow any possibility and are bearers of hope and freedom. They have a great environmental, social and economic value,[21] since they can be integrated with traditional public spaces, or be linked each other,[22] creating a network of in-between spaces of transition, cooperation, threshold.[23]

BETWEEN THE CITIES

The geography and rugged topography of the territory have influenced and guided the development of Lisbon throughout its history. Supported by Saverio Muratori's method, Carrillho da Graça Sequeira developed an important study for the city of Lisbon. Through the analysis and comparison of historical cartography and ancient descriptions, they drew the foundational paths of the city and showed how most of these still exist today, despite the great changes that the city has undergone. They also

showed how these paths correspond with the ridge lines and valleys of the territory.

This allowed to understand that, since its foundation, on the castle hill, Lisbon has always developed following the structure of its own territory. A particularly interesting aspect is that the city did not develop from a center, gradually expanding outwards, as in concentric circles, but quite the opposite: the city has continued to expand from the ancient paths and then from the ridges and valleys. Lisbon represents a quite evident example of the Muratori's reading of the territory, since the topography of the territory has such a clear structure and so steep level differences that it has kept this relationship visible. Even in the 1930's, Lisbon showed quite clearly this structure which had formed over the centuries, which extraordinarily reached us, and which has not changed much over time.

As Carrilho da Graça and Sequeira[24] refer, the Lisbon reliefs seem to have essentially created two conditions for the first occupation of the land: while in the valley, the rich and fertile soils were used for agricultural production, in the plateau, due to the poor soils, the first settlements and urban life appeared. **Fig. 2**

These two different conditions have generated the urban development of Lisbon. The first settlements were built on the ridges and promontories and most of the most important buildings were placed, which influenced the subdivision of land for agricultural use, up to the valleys, which still remained mostly rural. With the passage of time the city grew and, still in perfect coherence with the Muratorian theory, the valleys began to take on more and more importance.

In *Os verdes anos* (1963), there is also a scene where the protagonists walk on a green hill in Lisbon, populated by olive trees, while behind them it is possible to see the new residential buildings of modern architecture. This scene depicts how the bucolic landscape faces the advance of the city, with a gap between them?

What is then left in between? The specific development of the city influenced by the geography of the site, starting from the ridge and valley paths, creates almost like two distinct cities, with the void in between. A void, or rather, urban voids that are not accidental. In fact, these voids reflect once again the complicated topography of the city, because they are the most difficult to pass through and, very often, areas with a steep slope, and therefore also difficult to build.

In *Lisboa, Crónica Anedótica* (1930), there is a scene that immortalizes the situation at a time when this condition is still clearly visible. It is possible to see the aqueduct that crosses the valley, two different settlements – the ridge and the valley settlement – and between them, the void. Since then, the city has continued to grow and thanks to the best technologies it has managed for the most part to build in these empty spaces, thus uniting the two cities. However, some large areas with a steep slope still appear today as large unsolved voids within the dense building, divided by walls.

Moreover, as argued by Francesco Cacciatore[25], the rugged topography of the city has also profoundly influenced the development of public spaces, generating a multitude of different types of spaces adapting to the territory. These urban interstices are mainly the places designated to absorb and resolve the frequent changes in altitude, changes in position and connection points within the city. This determines from time to time a wide range of hybrid spaces that are typical of this context. **Figg. 3 | 4**

ANALYSIS

The subject of this study is the São Bento valley in Lisbon, the area between the hills of Estrela and Bairro Alto and which extends over the entire length of the current São Bento Street. As a case study, the São Bento valley approached through two complementary readings: i) the historical and the vertical one, considering urban and geomorphological configuration; ii) the horizontal one, considering the direct observation in situ.

First, the historical and the vertical reading were combined, in order to reconstruct the territorial palimpsest.[26] While the historical reading allows to clarify the process of formation of urban interstices, the vertical reading "from above" highlights the urban and geomorphological configuration of the case under study. Second, the horizontal reading as an "itinerant method over the ground, with a notepad and a camera,"[27] proved to be a fundamental complement to the interpretation of the particular characteristics and values of the urban environment.

The preliminary analysis of the territorial palimpsest allowed to recognize the various traces accumulated over time, of a geographical and anthropic nature. These traces make it easier to identify urban interstices and at the same time to know their origin and characteristics. The current São Bento Street would perfectly coincide with the ancient valley path, which stood on or near the riverbed. This valley is located between the hill where the Bairro Alto rises and, to the west, the hill where the Estrela Basilica stands.

These two hills were part of the city's ancient ridge paths, creating significant elevation differences between the valley floor and the hilltops. In this district two distinct conditions still coexist that are rarely found together: on the one hand the prominent position, central and close to the oldest part of the city, with the presence of important buildings; on the other hand, the rural condition of the area with large voids and therefore the possibility of setting up large buildings. This situation makes the site of interest for the studies of the city and with great potential. **Fig. 5**

Urban interstices were analyzed based on: causes that generated them; surface (permeable / non-permeable); presence of trees; limits (buildings, property walls, retaining walls, breaklines[28]); presence of public buildings; potential for connection and integration with the public spaces of the city.

One of the most significant findings is that none of the analyzed spaces are flat. This is undoubtedly a result of the complex topography of the city and that they are either in the hillside condition or in any case in a geographically intermediate condition between the valley and the hill. Over
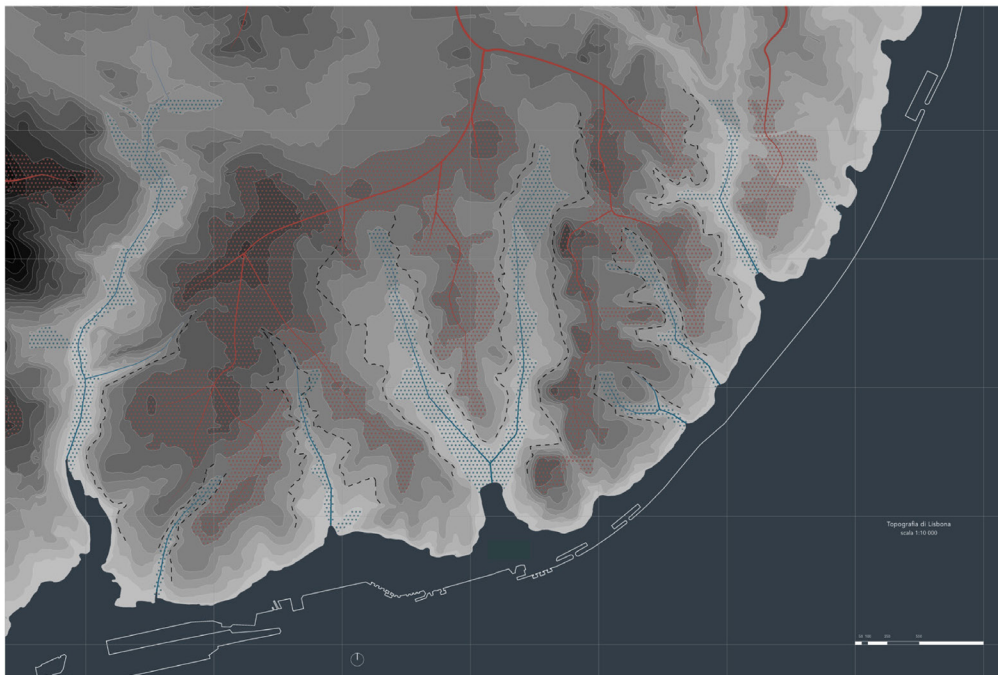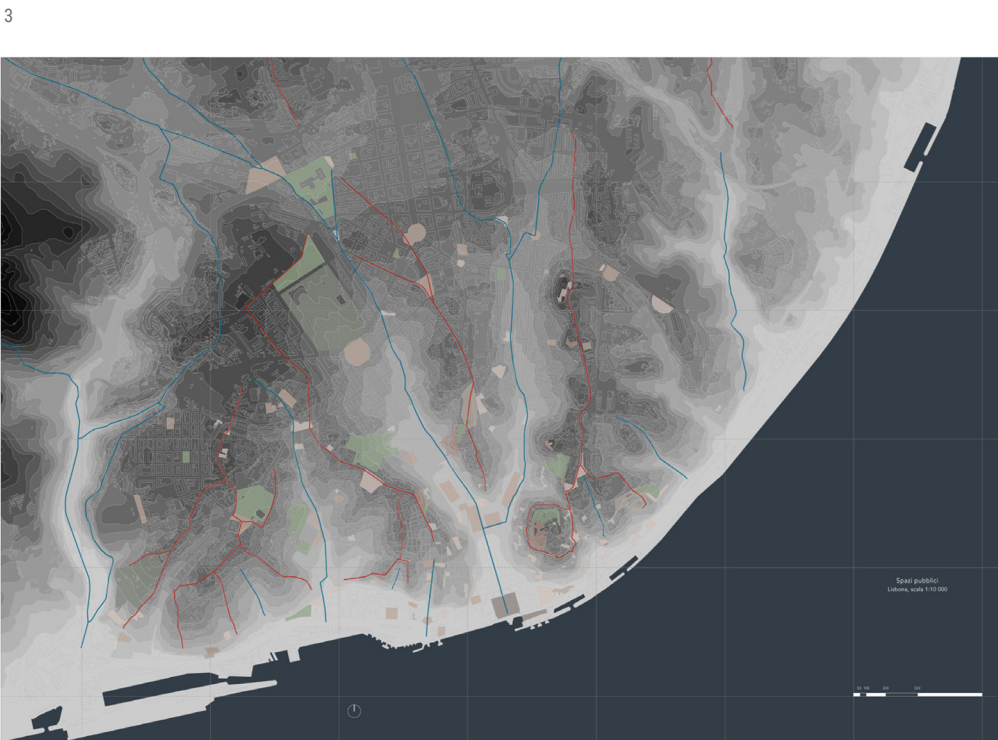
Topografia di Lisbona

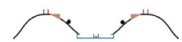Linea di valle
Linea di crinale
Promontorio
Fondovalle
Mezzacosta

Topografia di Lisbona
scala 1:10 000

Spazi pubblici di Lisbona

Praça
Largo
Miradouro
Terreiro
Campo
Jardim
Parque

Spazi pubblici
Lisbona, scala 1:10 000

Spazi pubblici di São Bento

Praça

Largo

Miradouro

Jardim

Largo de Jesus

Praça de São Paulo

Miradouro de São Pedro de Alcântara

Spazi pubblici di São Bento
scala 1: 3 500
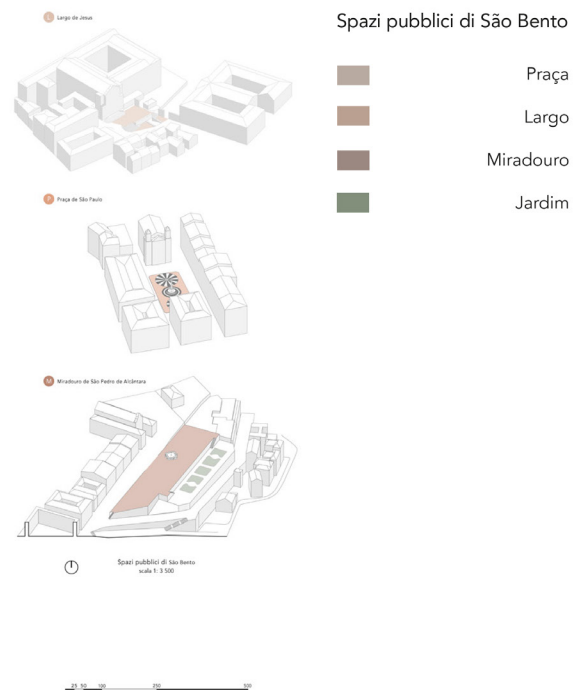
2
Topography of Lisbon (author's edition, 2022).

3
Topography and public spaces of Lisbon (author's edition, 2022).

4
Street of Lisbon (left); urban interstice on Lisbon hillside (right) (author's photograph, 2022).

5
Topography and public spaces of São Bento (author's edition, 2022).

time, this situation has made it more challenging to develop or even design public green spaces in these areas. The presence of greenery is another aspect that the analysis highlighted: the spaces have large areas of permeable surface, very important in this area of the city, and also a considerable presence of trees and vegetation.

It was also possible to recognize a correspondence between the cause of origin of these spaces and some characteristics such as the size and the presence of public buildings, which are determinant elements in the perspective of their regeneration. Spaces 3 and 8, which are spaces that are in the condition of hillside and which were originated from the agricultural appurtenances of the convents, are larger, extend over an extended area between the valley and the hill, and these are the spaces that still have public buildings of considerable interest today.

The spaces 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11, on the other hand, originated from the type of district called *Quartierão*, closed-mesh buildings that had a large open courtyard in the center. Due to the presence of greenery, the possibility of bringing light and area to the surrounding buildings, these spaces represent a great value for the place. **Fig. 6**
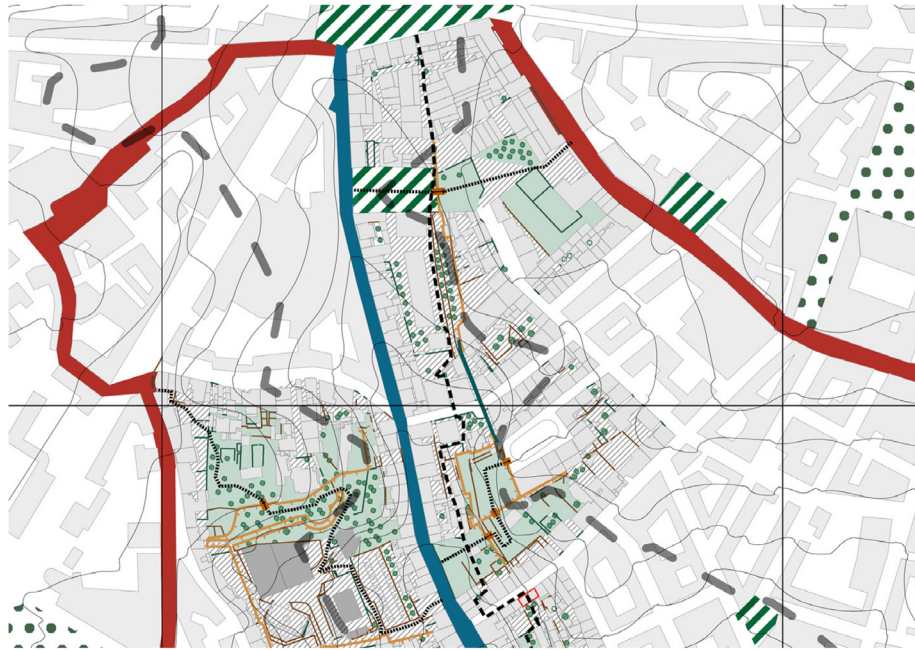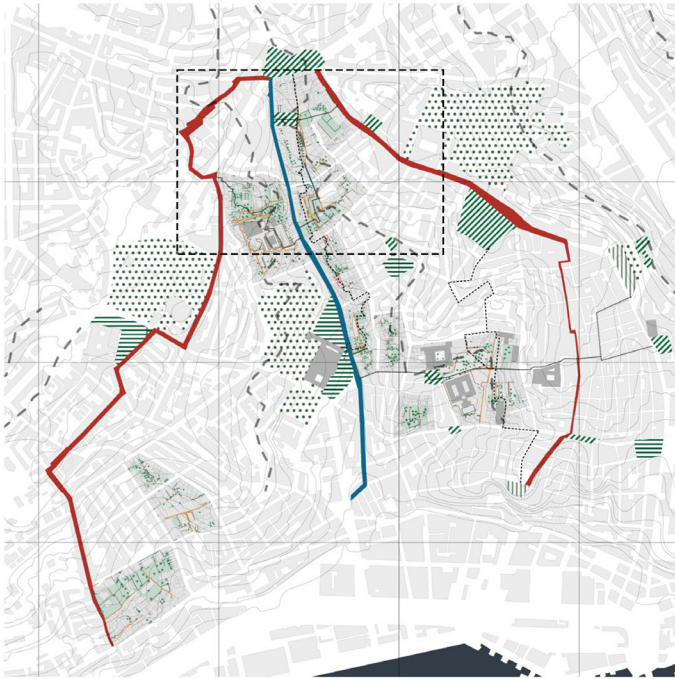
STRATEGY

The study and in-depth analysis of the urban interstices of the São Bento area led to the formulation of a hypothesis on their possible future. These marginal spaces have characteristics that are hardly compatible with traditional collective use spaces or in any case with traditional functions. The most important aspect is that these spaces have few possibilities if taken and conceived individually, but instead have great potential if they are designed and work together, if they are connected.

This is nothing new for Lisbon, where the city hall has promoted a plan called *Corredores Verdes*, aimed at connecting and managing green areas within the city, even if they are small.[29] Following this same principle, a strategy is proposed to connect all these residual spaces and create two new green paths within the city: a path that connects all these residual spaces crossing them in the direction of the valley, and some cutting paths, which, orthogonal to the it, allow a quick connection between the paths of the ridges and the paths of the valley. Furthermore, the connection of these spaces through green paths will increase the permeable area of the city, bringing considerable advantages to the disposal of rainwater and mitigating the problem of flooding. **Fig. 7**

A particularly interesting example for our study is the Chiado recovery intervention by Álvaro Siza. Following a devastating fire in 1988, almost the entire Chiado area was

Dimensione

matrice/pubblico

spazi interstiziali
edifici pubblici
isolati
conventi
percorso mezzacosta
percorso tagliante

Strategia spazi di São Bento

- - - - - - Percorso di mezzacosta

.... Percorso tagliante

➡ Scala o rampa

☐ Edificio privato

6
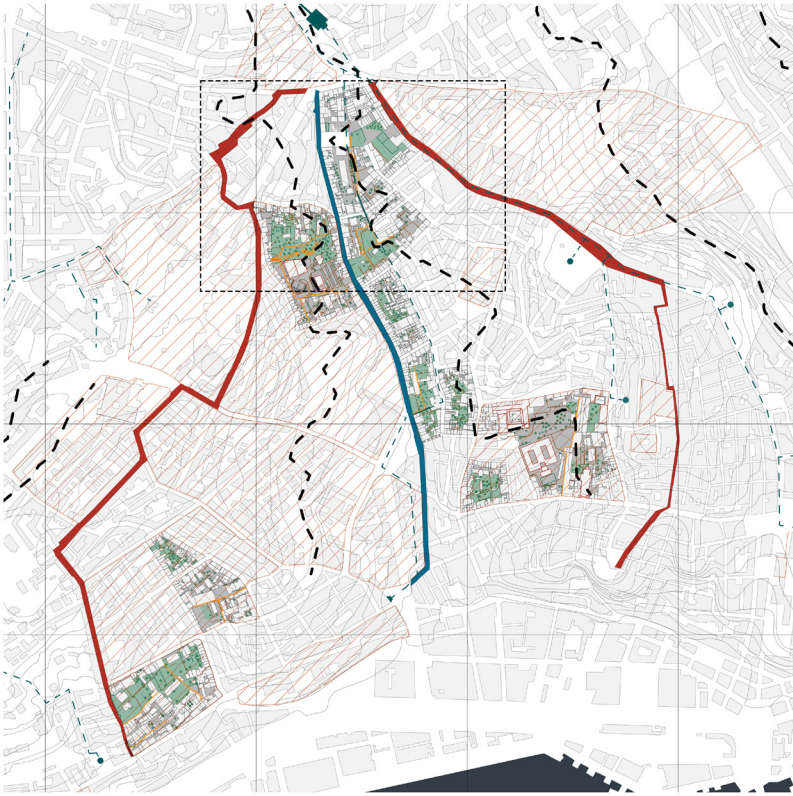
Spazi interstiziali di São Bento

🟩	Sup. permeabile
⬜	Sup. non permeabile
⦙⦙⦙	Alberi
⊔⊔⊔	Breakline
——	Muro di sostegno
——	Muro di proprietà
– – –	Mezzacosta
▨	Proprietà conventuali
—— – – –	Acquedotto esistente e progetto

destroyed. Of the buildings only the facades remained, while the interior was completely ruined. This intervention is particularly significant for three reasons: (i) the delicate balance between history and the parts that remain standing, (ii) the public reuse of the courtyards of the buildings, and (iii) the issue of connecting the different levels.

First, it was important to understand the reality and the vocation of the Chiado area, in order to be able to safeguard its function within the city and plan a coherent future. The fundamental question therefore becomes the reading of the topography and the nature of the area's transitional space. These aspects are not only maintained in Siza's recovery projects but enhanced. Siza decides as much as possible to keep the original layout and the buildings that had remained standing, because he thinks that a new plan and new contemporary interventions are not legitimate because architecture does not have the right to overcome the measured transformations of the slow pace of the city.[30] According to Gonçalo Byrne,[31] an investigation following the fire revealed that the extension of a considerable number of free spaces and passages more or less abusive between the buildings, together with the inadequacy of safety standards and the permissiveness of controls, contributed to the rapid spread of the fire.

The project therefore finds in these small empty spaces between the buildings or inside, the legitimacy for an intervention that is both concentrated and measured, so as not to change the nature of this part of the city, but which significantly improves its capabilities. Attention to the natural pace of evolution of the city and the interpretation of the area's vocation, therefore, allows for the concentration of interventions in these forgotten but highly potential interstices. A project with an extremely complex program, which must take into account the multitude of actors involved, private and public.

Regarding the project, Siza states that its definition depended on the relationships with the areas involved, with the margins, with the transition areas, where there is a notable vocation for transformation, with the interstices forgotten in the body of the city. Siza decided to recover these degraded interstitial spaces and exploit them to create a complex system of accesses and connections, conjugating them with the topographical characteristics of this area. **Fig. 8**

However, opening these private spaces to public use is a delicate decision, and one may even question whether it is legitimate. Siza also considers this a sensitive issue, and one that should not be taken uncritically. In the case of Chiado, as he mentions,[32] the decision was due to the possibilities that urban interstices represented an improvement of local conditions, by connecting spaces in a comfortable and direct way, in an area with a difficult topography, and by favoring the regeneration of the inside the blocks.

8

CONCLUSION

With this paper it was intended to approach the urban interstices on the Lisbon hillside, seeking to recognize their nature and origin, their current situation and most importantly, how they can be integrated into the system of spaces for collective use. As revealed by the analysis, these spaces are currently divided into small parts, they are separated from the rest of the city and public spaces. This favours their abandonment and does not allow the use and care by citizens, nullifying the potential that these spaces could have for the city. Despite this, they already serve important ecological and social functions. Urban interstices can be key to creating sustainable and inclusive cities, where green spaces are accessible to everyone, integrated with public areas, and decisions are made together by the municipality and citizen groups.

It seems necessary to develop a new approach to these spaces: no longer an approach based on land consumption, mono functionalism and zoning, but a more flexible, dynamic and reversible approach focused on urban relations systems. A new way of designing based on diversity, which represents the greatest resource of these spaces: social diversity, functional diversity and biological diversity.

The proposed strategy considers all the characteristics of urban interstices and, by solving the crucial question of their connections, starting from the well-known relationship with topography, opens up new possibilities of use in the future. In accordance with the theory of Saverio Muratori, two paths are proposed that correspond to the subsequent phases of land occupation, after the ridge and valley: a cutting path, which solves the difficulties of the slope by quickly connecting the valley path to that of ridge; a path along the hillside, which allows you to connect all the urban interstices, creating an unprecedented green path within a densely built-up area. As stated in this paper, it is not possible to generalize a solution for these spaces, and therefore it seems necessary an in-depth knowledge of each case to support the development of each solution.

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[27] Rossi and Zetti, *In mezzo alle cose*, 76.
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Collegare le zone intermedie: una strategia per l'integrazione degli interstizi urbani a Lisbona

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PAROLE CHIAVE
spazio pubblico; interstizi urbani; crescita e sviluppo urbano; morfologia e topografia urbana; vuoti urbani

ABSTRACT
L'assetto urbano di Lisbona è strettamente legato ai suoi antichi percorsi, modellati dalla geografia circostante. Molti di questi percorsi esistono ancora oggi come strade contemporanee e fungono da assi fondamentali della città. Lungo questi percorsi si trovano spazi pubblici tradizionali come praças *(piazze),* largos *(larghi),* miradouros *(belvedere),* jardins *(giardini) o* parques *(parchi), mentre nel mezzo si trovano aree trascurate note come interstizi urbani. Nonostante l'abbandono, questi spazi hanno un potenziale significativo per importanti funzioni ecologiche e sociali. Il presente saggio si propone di esplorare le possibilità di collegare gli interstizi urbani con gli spazi pubblici di Lisbona, guidati dai principi della rigenerazione urbana e della sinergia tra sistemi formali e informali. Attraverso l'analisi della valle di São Bento, si intende elaborare una strategia di integrazione urbana che serva soprattutto come piattaforma di discussione sugli approcci di intervento negli spazi pubblici.*

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