

World Heritage City of Angra do Heroísmo

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Gabinete da Zona Classificada de Angra do Heroísmo, Terceira Açores Portugal

The archipelago of Azores is composed of nine islands situated in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean.

Due to the geographical location of the islands they are divided into three groups based on their relative proximity: the Eastern group including Santa Maria and São Miguel, the Central group including Terceira, Graciosa, São Jorge, Pico e Faial and the western group including Flores and Corvo.

In 1976 the Azores was granted the status of an Autonomous Region. Self-government was instated through an amendment to the Constitution of the Republic of Portugal. The area is now governed by a Regional Government located in the city of Ponta Delgada, São Miguel, and by a Regional Assembly located in the city of Horta, Faial. Members of the assembly and Government are elected by popular vote. The Portuguese Government is represented by the Minister of the Republic who maintains residency in the city of Angra do Heroísmo on the island of Terceira.

Azores has a temperate, maritime climate characterised by agreeable temperatures with small average annual variance. A high level of humidity (77% average/year), and rainfall, which is both regular and well, distributed through the year.

The nine islands of the archipelago of the Azores, each with their own distinctive characteristic. The Azores landscape is composed of contrast where the calm plains (green pastures) and the powerful mountains (the highest mountain in Portugal on the island of Pico, which reaches an altitude of 2,351 meters) contains divided by deep valleys and windings ravines convey a scenery of rare beauty.

The volcanic phenomenon transport us to the time of the great eruptions, these remains are evident on all islands some of them asleep or active thorough the existence of hot springs and extremely deep craters that have become today's lakes.

The diverse coastline includes sheltered bays serving equally as safe refuge for maritime navigators and as recreational swimming areas. The steep cliffs and rock protrusions both guard and decorate the islands.

The vegetation of the Azores is composed of 56 indigenous species and is considered one of the most interesting in Europe, as cedar and urze. Many other species were introduced to enhance the beauty of the countryside and for commercial development, like Japanese *Crytomeria* which was introduced to the region about 100 years ago, is highlighted due to its extreme importance in lumber production.

As property dividers, or as shelter from the wind for the many fruit farms, vineyards, and cultivated lands, the most common examples of this are the garden walls of the *Hydrangea* or *camellias*.

The Azores are an obligatory stop for many migrating birds on their transatlantic flights due to its' geographical location halfway between America and Europe. The Azoreans learned the trade and whaling was a livelihood for many until 1987, date of the last capture of the sperm whale. Today they are free of the threat of whalers, and are surrounded by clear waters and abundant food all year round, a true sanctuary.

The population is irregularly distributed throughout the islands of the Azores. The majority of the residents are found in São Miguel (53%), followed by Terceira (23.5%), Pico

(6.4%), Faial (6.3%), São Jorge (4.3%), Santa Maria (2.5%), Graciosa (2.2%), Flores (1.8%) and Corvo (0.2%).

The breeding of livestock is also very important to the local economy. Dairy cattle and the production of milk are by far the most important. Meat production is also very important and with high quality. The fishing industry provides a rich and diverse aquatic population.

The exact date of discovery of the archipelago is unknown. Historic accounts indicate that were to be discovered by the Portuguese navigator Diogo de Silves, in 1427. In 1534 Angra do Heroísmo becomes the first city of the Azores and the seat of diocese.

On January 1, 1980 Azores suffered a violent earthquake, especially in Graciosa, São Jorge and Terceira, which 50% of Angra's heritage suffered greatly destroying a large part of the old city. At this time UNESCO technicians make notice of the importance of the city, in Europe and international historic evolution.

A back-up office, with wider productive skills and in co-ordination with official entities (governmental and local), supported reconstruction overall, providing building materials, coordinating the activities of demolition teams, supervising the building construction and giving technical support.

Meanwhile, the Board of Town Planning made a very important survey of every façade, from the urban centre to the historical limits that is extremely useful up until today. From the legislative point of view, regarding the protection of the architectural heritage, Local Government granted lost fund subsidies for the retrieval of façades and global reconstruction of the city's most important buildings.

Many were the buildings whose reconstructions weren't supervised, whether because of the pressure of the local community, which almost instantaneously transformed the city in a huge work yard; whether it was due to the low efficiency of inspection that even after the approval of the projects didn't put a stop to inexcusable changes.

The need of replacement of the city's identity, the lack of technicians, of labour force, of building materials and the isolation of the Island itself, brought to an attitude of reconstitution of the pre-seismic situation.

It was only in December 7 1983, mostly as a result of the quick reconstruction of the city, that Angra do Heroísmo was included in the list of the World Heritage, according to the criteria IV and VI.

Criteria IV – «Angra's harbour, inevitable scale port of the merchant fleets of Africa and the Indies, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, is an imminent example of the creation connected to the naval function, in the picture of the Great Discoveries.»

Criteria VI – «Such as the Torre de Belém, the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos, as Lisbon and like Goa, Angra do Heroísmo is directly and materially associated to an event with an universal historic meaning: the Overseas Discoveries, that allowed trades between the great civilizations of the planet.»

By local legislative law – Decreto Legislativo Regional 15/84/A – a set of rules is created for the preservation of the city, as well as a new office called Gabinete da Zona Classificada de Angra do Heroísmo. The office's functions are essentially focused in: the issue of technical opinion for every building construction, technical and financial support and the follow-up and inspection of the building construction activity.

The reconstruction period, through the bearing of pre-seismic reconstitution was worsened by the local law above mentioned, despite being relevant, it has never been as deep as often mentioned and it meant the beginning of making the city look like a Museum.

Unlike many other cities, whose centres lodge a poorer population, with severe social problems and with abandoned areas, Angra do Heroísmo possesses a great urban vitality, especially on the Summer. The mild temperature, the commerce, the restoration and the bay

itself constitute an attractive to the leisure activities of the inhabitants. The diversity of functions allows the use of the same space in different schedules.

Tourism, little explored up until now, is one of the goals for the development of the city to a worldwide scale. One of the strategies of Tourism is the promotion of the Azores as a natural environment. Although rural tourism is the most explored, the existence of a world heritage city – Angra do Heroísmo – makes it possible for the cultural tourism. The use of new means of communication as the Internet, allows a wider broadcast.

Nevertheless, the high number of hotels, being built or to be built, may introduce ruptures in the familiar aspect that one feels in the city. The need for back-up structures for Tourism will also be an aggravating circumstance to the “terciarisation” of the centre and to the loss of the residential function. The occupation of the centre as a privileged area for implanting commerce, new marketing techniques and to the introduction of Franchising (not accessible to all community) merged to the occupation of most of the buildings or to impossibility to have access to the upper floors, by the total occupation of the terrestrial floor.

If once the building exiguity inner the city has ruled the journey to the outskirts, the elements mentioned above block population from returning to the centre. The variety of services and equipments, the bay’s proximity and the high price of rents make that high social classes are the one that look most for the centre.

Another problem affecting the city is the growing occupation of public space by cars. To reverse this situation, parking places have been built on the outskirts of the city, backed up by free public transportation, that provide access to the centre. Parking in the city centre, has been made easier for shop owners and inhabitants, which means that it is for free.

Other measures have been implemented for the requalification of public space, throughout supports from the EU. The PROCOM is a program of incentives to the qualification of the traditional commerce, as for the remodelling of shops as for the renewal of the urban equipment. POLIS Program, directed to promote and revitalize the development of cities, comprises mainly Angra’s Bay. Besides the Marina (already built), it aims to renew the Nautical Club and the Corte-Real Garden.

Although the city isn’t faced to the sea, one wishes to create a narrower connection between the two, improving this way an area, that hasn’t been fully used. By creating a pedestrian path complemented with commercial areas of leisure and support to the Marina, qualifying the marine front that shows already a large degrading state.

The Classified Area embraces almost 50% of the city, through the creation of protection areas, as ruled by Local Legislation – Decreto Legislativo Regional 29/99/A. This legislation submits Angra do Heroísmo overall to severe restrictions.

The interdiction of the introduction of some materials, such as aluminium and even iron, exists in order to preserve the wooden framework, not only because it is a characteristic element of the city’s architecture, but also because it offers greater resistance to the climate conditions (high humidity, precipitation and salt concentration). However, the loss of traditional building techniques and the lack of qualified labour force become a problem to the maintenance and continuity of the use of traditional materials.

Despite this interdiction, those materials are systematically being used, resulting in low qualified situations, by the incorrect use of materials or by not existing any aesthetic concern in its application. As a result of this attitude, a vicious circle is created, for despite the urge of new materials that overcome the needs of the building construction market, as those don’t offer aesthetic qualification, they are considered less noble to integrate the already pre-existing structures.

Iron is already used as a structural element, but there scarce examples, where aesthetic profit is taken from its use. Reinforced concrete, highly used in cases of renewal of historical value buildings, due to the degree of humidity, is not a recommended material, in the city’s

limits. Although it is currently used in current building construction, due to its low cost concerning the preservation of wooden floors and to the lack of the building inspection, it doesn't offer, in most cases, physical and structural concern.

Wooden floors, due to the lack of material, qualified labour force and its high cost, are often replaced by concrete even if they are in a good state of preservation. If some materials are interdicted, others whose interference isn't aesthetically visible, interact inadequately with traditional materials. As an example, we point out the use of whitewash that lets the rock masonry breathe, that has been replaced by paints. These contribute to the deterioration of the masonry and to the growth of the building indoor humidity.

All these factors contribute for the adulteration of traditional architecture.

The use of reinforced concrete, as a structural element, allows a wider freedom when making open spaces, since the wall is no longer a structural element. Once, width and placement of doors and windows frames, that were symmetric, were conditioned by its seismic behaviour.

If on one hand, the restrictions mentioned above, lead to a feeling of "excess" of heritage, the introduction of new architectural trends, throughout minor achieved examples, lead to a certain phobia in relation to those trends.

As a result of this situation, there were imitations of the traditional architecture, in which it is held to believe that the inclusion of frames in the windows and doors is enough to be considered "traditional". But then there are no worries about certain fixtures in the façades, such as electrical wires.

The same doesn't happen with Publicity, for which was created specific legislation. The city has several examples of aesthetic quality and personification. Franchising itself adapted to the city's characteristics.

The office of the classified area of Angra do Heroísmo, is the only one, at a national level, to be independent from City Council, because it belongs to the Local Office – Regional Secretary of Education and Culture. Such characteristic assumes a greater political exemption, but on the other hand, it makes more difficult a bigger co-ordination of the works.

In the year 2000, the Office suffered a deep renewal; the substitution of the technical staff introduced new directives in the management of the Heritage. It is in progress the elaboration of several territories planning as the project – Classified Zone of Safeguarding Plan that will bring major changes to the protection of the Heritage.

Presently, there is an analysis of the candidacy of the Holy Spirit Cult, associated with the empires, to Intangible World Heritage taking place.

Being common the legalisation of cases of the most varied situations, it has been established a project of sensitising regarding heritage concerns. This project is divided in two essential parts: sensitising the population and the contact with other offices of different Worldwide Heritage cities.

The first goal is centred in a narrower contact with population by making guided tours, release information about the office's activities, the making of informative leaflets not only of the places where the office intervenes, but also as an identification of historical places and buildings.

The relationship with similar Offices start to have good results, having been established contacts with cities such as Havana, Cuba; Medina de Fés, Morocco; Quito, Ecuador; besides the Offices of the Portuguese classified cities.

All these initiatives aim not only the attempt to avoid making the city into a museum, as well as projecting Angra in the worldwide context, giving it the meaning as an interest of Humankind.

The natural isolation requires a greater effort in outside relationships that make possible the city's continuous development. The inherent characteristics of the place oblige an adaptation of the imported models that have, generally, contributed to the preservation of a high life quality.

The Azores are characterised by a safe environment, where social relationships are favoured and by a practically natural territory, where factors such as pollution and stress are yet unknown.