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# ***Le droit à la ville – Recent Social Housing Policies in Porto, the case of Tomás Gonzaga Street***

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## **Abstract**

*This paper focuses the recent social housing policies of Porto city hall (at the north of Portugal). Considering the huge development of the tourist sector in the last few years, Porto municipality launched a social housing program to control gentrification. The main goal of this policy is avoiding the problems associated to the displacement of families from their traditional residential area due to the real-estate speculation in the historical city center, classified by UNESCO as Humanity Heritage since 1996. Seventeen plots were selected for the 1st phase of the program, being Tomás Gonzaga Street one of those plots used in the article as a case study.*

*Keywords: Porto Houses of Heritage, Social Housing, Tomás Gonzaga Street, Gentrification.*

## **1. Introduction**

The right to the city (Le Droit a la Ville) as Henri Lefebvre defined in his book, launched few months before the revolutionary may of 1968, reflects the interpretation of the city as a social space framed among its multi-networks intersections. According to himself, this social space should structure social cohesion urban policies as a way for consolidating the bases of democracy. Those issues had transformed the concept of 'right to the city' in a tool used by the social movements to demand policies focused on disadvantaged neighborhoods residents, migrants or slum dwellers. The access to the centrality and the public services had been considered as a base of the integration process of people with low financial resources and as well as a way to promote urban social sustainability.

In Portugal, during the last 45 years, the urban policies for social housing reflected both adhesions, as distance to this historical Marxism proposed by Lefebvre thoughts.

Besides the ideological issues behind 'the right to the city', the debate about social housing also had structured the identity of Portuguese Architecture in the democratic period. The involvement of architects in the revolutionary period of 1974 in Portugal, allowed the definition of some of the main bases of the discourse which has been disseminated over the last decades. The Ambulatory Support to Local Residents program, which emerged with Revolution, was an idealistic laboratory for rehearsing a sense of realism about the economic situation of the

country, as well as a tool for understanding people, locations, materials and technical solutions. Particularly in Porto, the program had a considerable impact mobilizing the class of the architects to solve lacks housing scarcity.

After the eradication of slums in the country, between 2004 and 2015 Porto City Hall launched intensive investments in the renovation of the social housing neighborhoods of the peripheral crown of the city.

The recent increase of real-estate valorization, motivated by the strong development of the tourist sector, has potentiated a massive change of the urban environment in Porto. Many buildings have been intervened, to include short-term residence programs (hotels or local residence). In order to control this process, seventeen plots were selected by the City Hall, for a housing intervention plan in the center of the city, considered by UNESCO as Humanity Heritage. The program, nominated as Houses of Heritage, aiming at controlling the loss of identity and the social problems associated with displacement of families from their traditional residential area. Tomás Gonzaga Street is one of those plots. The project foresees providing eight dwellings, of one single room. The plot is located close to the borders of UNESCO delimitation, in the parish of Miragaia.

This paper is anchored in the practical experience of the author, which as an architect had the opportunity of participating in two operations mentioned in the text, namely the urban renewal of Lagarteiro neighborhood (2008-2015), and recently the intervention used as the main case study, in Tomás Gonzaga Street (2016-...).

## **2. Social Housing Policies and programs over the last 45 years in Porto**

In the period of the Carnation Revolution of 1974, that had deposed the dictatorship led by Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970) and Marcelo Caetano (1906-1980), housing lack was one of the major's problems faced by the Portuguese society. In Porto, thousands of people lived in bad conditions in slums, precarious houses and also in the so-called 'islands' typologies in the city center.

The 'islands' correspond to the occupation of bourgeois houses backyards with small housing plots. Those houses were in general provided by the industrials to their employees, ensuring the control of the empowerment of their companies. The majority of those 'islands' were built at the beginning of the 20th century in the sequence of the industrialization process of the previous century. Although 'islands' impact on the urban morphology was high, they were almost invisible from the streets point of view due to their location in the core of the blocks.

Living conditions in 'islands' were bad, without individual water supply nor sewage. The dimension of the plots was also reduced to the family's aggregates.

The problems associated to the 'islands' was increased in the 1950s when a new cycle of industrialization took place in Portugal. This cycle was associated with the measures resulting from the development plans launched, since 1953, through the Fund for National Foment (Fundo de Fomento Nacional). Those policies were supported by the Marshall funds for Europe distributed through the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which Portugal took part as a founder member. Minister Ferreira Dias (1900-1966), responsible for the economic affairs, between 1958 and 1962, managed an ambitious development policy aiming at stimulating national and international investments to increase manufacturing productivity.

The impact of those investments in the national territory became more visible in the 1960s, when the contribution of the second sector (industry) to the Gross Domestic Product, passed from 36.5% in 1960, to 48.1% in 1970. On the other hand, the contribution of the primary sector (agriculture) decreased in the same period from 25% to 12.7%. The industrial growth would also be stimulated by the Colonial War that had started in 1961 in Angola, sprawling after to Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. The economic changes would interfere in the national population distribution, turning the cities of Lisbon and Porto more attractive to people that lived in rural territories. The result was the beginning of a rural exodus of the population, seeking out better-living conditions in the cities. The trigger of emigration to the center of Europe had been also initiated in this period, mainly to France, Swiss and Luxemburg. In 1960 the national population was 8.292.879 inhabitants, living in Lisbon metropolitan area 1.506.000 inhabitants and Porto Metropolitan area 723.340 inhabitants, concentrating both cities with 26.8% of the national population. (*cf.* FADIGAS, 2015)

As a way to control the hygienist lacks resulting from the increase of the population in Porto, Mayor Machado Vaz (1903-1973) launched the 'Improvement Master Plan' (Plano de Melhoramentos) for the city in 1956. One of the goals of the plan was rehousing people that lived in bad conditions, particularly in over-populated 'islands', to the new neighborhoods in the outskirt crown of the city. The process was supported by an urban typology developed by the city hall, featured by terraced houses delimiting nuclear facilities, such as primary schools or playground enclosures. The 'Improvement Master Plan' provoked a gap in the relation of the population with the city center, pushing them away from their civic condition and limiting their participation in the living of the city. Although the enhancement of the living situation provided

by the new neighborhoods, most cases those urban sets were deployed in non-infrastructure areas concerning public transport or public facilities.

Lagarteiro neighborhood, located at the east limit of Porto in the Campanhã parish, is one of those cases. Built in two phases in 1972 and 1976, his set corresponds to a late project resulting from the 'Improvement Master Plan'. Lagarteiro was configured for about 1500 inhabitants, distributed in 420 dwellings. Its distance to the city center was at the time increased by the Campanhã valley, a geomorphologic accident which was not easy to overpass. Although the high impact of the neighborhood in the urban fabric where it was deployed, the relations between the new inhabitants and the surrounding areas were almost inexistent due to the morphological enclosure of the neighborhood inside itself. In 2008 when a renovation process was launched by the City Hall (through its Municipal Company Domussocial), the neighborhood was damaged and depressed, containing several social problems, such as unemployment, low scholar levels, and parallel economies. Besides the renovation of the buildings, public space, and infrastructure, the intervention focused on the establishment of connections between the neighborhood inside itself and also with its surrounding, turning it more open, fluid and accessible.



**Figure 1.** Lagarteiro neighborhood renovation, coordinated by Paulo Tormenta Pinto (photo © JCS)

Despite the efforts to lodge and accommodate people in the cities, housing lacks remained visible in the middle of 1970s. The issue became one of the most important argument to mobilize people to the revolutionary process that took place in 1974. The right of housing would be later included in the Constitutional text of 1976, becoming a fundamental issue to the democratic society.

The Ambulatory Support to Local Residents program (known as SAAL), was the most critical initiative of the first provisional government resulting from the revolution. Nuno Portas (b.1934), at the time Secretary of the State for Housing and Urban Planning, was the key figure that sketched a participative program to solve housing scarcity in Portugal. The policy, which was available between 1974 and 1976, aimed at the constitution of neighbor associations to work with the architects to build new houses in the same areas where they were living at the time. Mainly in Porto, SAAL was seen as a laboratory that involved the architects in the construction of a new discourse for the Portuguese architecture in the democratic period. Álvaro Siza Vieira (b.1933), along with other architects in charge of housing projects, had to deal with the situation, figuring out solutions in the housing typologies where people lived in the center of the city. The morphological grammar of the 'islands', the small spaces, or the natural appropriation process of buildings done by their inhabitants, were considered relevant subjects to be merged with the architectonic culture in order to reach a kind of continuity of the city, sensible to the domestic needs of the population and their wishes. Both Bouça and São Vítor neighborhoods designed by Siza, those principles were visible in their domestic scale and feature. (cf. PINTO, 2017)

Besides the initiative to solve housing lacks, SAAL program would be seen as an ideological proposition, following the thoughts by Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991), particularly in his book *Le Droit à la Ville* (1968). The right to live in the city, maintaining social networks, was considered the fundamental base for an active citizenship. The SAAL program also created a sense of realism, which can be considered as a tool for understanding people, location, materials and technical solutions. All those aspects defined some of the most relevant of theoretical bases for contemporary Portuguese architecture. Those bases were published as the main subject of several publications of that period, being the issue 'Portugal An 2' ('Portugal Second Year'), published in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* in 1976, a remarkable moment of cultural dissemination and an opportunity for presenting Portuguese architects and their architecture in an international approach. Besides, the French magazine issue also highlighted

[illegible]

The end of the dictatorship regime increased the migration flux to the main Portuguese Cities with the arrival of Portuguese citizens returning from the former overseas territories, escaping from the violence installed in the process of transition to independence. After Portugal became a member of the EEC (European Economic Community) in 1986, the first signs of some control were seen to tackle the substantial legacy of the conflicts resulting from the installation of democracy. European adhesion meant that public practices had to be more tightly controlled. This was accompanied by a change in the direct relationship between architects and the communities, which was also linked to the political pressure to resolve the problem of precarious housing, extended to settlements of clandestine and illegal housing, which meanwhile had been built in the outskirts of cities. (*cf.* PINTO, 2013)

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of the easy access to credit and also investments done by the State and by the Local Authorities with the aid of the European cohesion funds. This expansion as a whole was also based on the opening up of new fronts of housing as a result of the new infrastructure built as part of the European integration process. (Ibid)

Supported by the cohesion funds, the government launched the Special Re-Housing Program (PER)<sup>1</sup> in 1993. The main goal of the program was to give conditions to the municipalities metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto to proceed to the eradication of the slums and consequent re-housing of inhabitants in houses of controlled costs.

Despite the economic development, there were still about 3.000 slum houses and damaged 'islands' in Porto in 1990. Through the Special Re-Housing Program, a vast political effort was done to eradicate those focuses of poverty related to the housing shortage. Through this program, 1.356 dwellings were provided, which 802 ones were included in new buildings (built in terrains belonged to the City Hall or replacing existent precarious constructions), 542 dwellings were renovated in existing social neighborhoods, and 12 were purchased by families. Although PER program allowed Porto municipality to reach its goal of eliminating all slums, promoting new buildings, public space, and facilities, in a short period of twelve years, social issues resulting from this intensive program emerged immediately upon the top of the table. Families integration in the new sets sometimes was not easy, demanding a shift in their behaviors and habits, in many cases increased by the displacement and consequently break of their social network. (*cf.* GOMES, 2013)

After the investments of PER, Porto City Hall initiated in 2004 a new cycle of policies in social housing issues, based on the renovation of local neighborhoods. Projects such as the Lagarteiro urban renewal already mentioned (2008-2015), as well as Contumil and Pio XII (2004-2006), Rainha Dona Leonor (2005-2013), or Lordelo do Ouro (2008-2009) neighborhoods can be quoted as relevant interventions in this process. Despite those projects retook the concepts of 'critical areas rehabilitation' and 'urban re-conversion', predicted in the Law of Soils of 1976, they also reflected the awareness about the importance of urban renovation which, in the following years would become predominant in national policies, aiming at stimulating private and public investments in areas already built, as a way to limit the urban growth.

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<sup>1</sup> Special Re-Housing Program (Law-Decree n° 163/93, from 7<sup>th</sup> of May), was a program coordinated by the Portuguese government between 1993 and 2003 to Lisbon and Porto metropolitan areas.



In 2005 the government triggered an experimental program nominated as Critical Neighborhoods Initiative (IBC), with the main goal of defining approaches to intervene in urban areas with critical factors of vulnerability, this program foresaw to compensate some of the shortcomings in the previous social housing programs, mostly in terms of participation and social development. The European Crisis of Sovereign Debt, which reached Portugal in 2011, would cool off this process.

Between 2011 and 2016, during the period of the crisis, profound efforts were made to relaunch the reputation of Portugal internationally, as a way to encourage the exportation sector and the attraction of foreigner capital. Tourism industry would be remarkably developed in this period, growing in its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product, from 5.2% in 2011 to 7.1% in 2016. Besides the traditional tourist regions of Algarve and Madeira Island, the development of this sector generated a huge demand in the historical centers of Lisbon and Porto. This impact was increased by political measures related to the Golden Resident Permit, so-called as Visa Gold, addressed to foreign people able to invest more than €500.000,00 in the acquisition of a property. Those measures stimulated real estate and considerable speculation in historic areas, which until then, had remained depressed with old housing stock, in most cases inhabited by an elderly and vulnerable popular population.

Aiming at controlling the abrupt gentrification and the change of urban landscape in historical areas, visible in the closing of traditional stores, and in the quick process of transformation of buildings to include short-term residence programs (hotels or local residence), Porto city hall announced in 2015 the intention of promoting investments in social housing in the historical nucleus of the city, which was classified by UNESCO as Humanity Heritage, since 1996. The program foresaw an intervention in seventeen plots aiming at reversing the loss of identity and the social problems associated with displacement of families from their traditional residential areas.

### **3. Houses of Heritage Program**

Social housing interventions in the historical center of Porto is part of an extensive plan of the City Hall for rehabilitation the area which is extended to the infrastructure and public space. The social, economic model is based on the typology of Supported Housing Rent, aiming at enlarging the spectrum of public housing policies. Through this system, according to the profile definition on a competition, people can apply to the houses available, paying for the rent

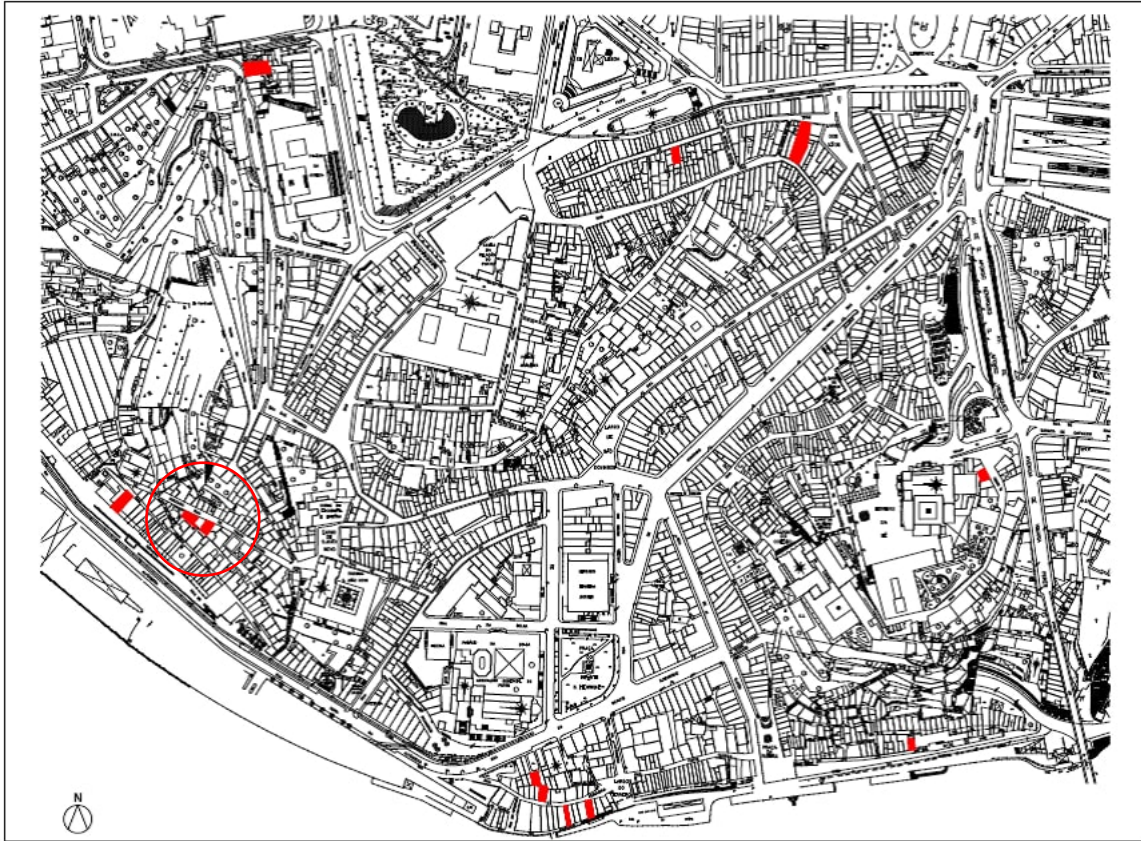
according to their recourses.<sup>2</sup> The program also aims at overpassing the previous conceptions of policies for social housing in Portugal, generally directed to needy people with low financial resources. Although preserving preferences of house attribution to single-parent families, disabled people, or victims of domestic violence, Houses of Heritage program open a new front of policies, extending social support to the middle class which is eligible to apply to a municipal house.

The properties available for the program are under the management of the City Hall in the sequence of the extinction of the Commissariat for the Urban Renewal of Ribeira/Barredo Area (CRUARB) and of the Foundation for the Development of the Historical Zone of Porto (FDP). Both institutions owned a set of properties and vacant houses, waiting for interventions. The CRUARB had been created in 1974 under dependence of State, passing in 1982 to the City Hall administration. This institution was relevant for the city to reach the UNESCO classification. The action of the Commissariat was based on the conservation of heritage and cultural assets, urban renovation and tourism and commercial development. A set of housing renovation were promoted by this institution in order to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants of the historical area of the city. In 2003 its functions were transferred to Porto Vivo, a Company of Urban Rehabilitation which result from a partnership between the City Hall and the Government for managing investment funds. The FDP was created in 2008 with the main goal of launching bases for social development of the population of Porto historical area. The Foundation resulted from a partnership among the City Hall, Social Security (Segurança Social) and also the Confederation of Solidarity Institutions. The period of 6 years of its activity was not enough for introducing relevant changes in area.

Houses of Heritage program has been coordinated by Domussocial, a municipal company that manage social housing neighborhoods that belong to the City Hall of Porto. The seventeen areas included in the House of Heritage program correspond to the 1st phase of this urban strategy. It's foreseen interventions in buildings built in the temporal arch between the late 18th century to early 20th century. Most of the cases are considered as 'Bourgeois houses' adapted to the urban fabric that feature this part of the city (*cf.* FEIO, et Al, 2018), which represents the legacy of the 18th century so-called Almadás Plan to the urban areas surrounding the old medieval walls of the town, led by João de Almada e Melo (1703-1786) and Francisco de Almada Mendonça (1754-1804), as mayors of the city, between 1763 and 1804.

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<sup>2</sup> The Supported Housing Retting (Arrendamento apoiado para habitação) was regulated by the Law n° 32/2016, from 24th of August.



**Figura 3.** Houses of Heritage program in Porto historical center plan. Tomás Gonzaga Street location (plan provided by Domussocial)

The areas of intervention are spread in different places of the historic city center, as it can be seen in the attached plan. The investment of the City Hall in this program corresponds to €3.600.00,00. Seven architect's companies were involved and selected under competitions by invitation, aiming at engaging a new generation of technicians in this program. The intervention areas are in general small and reduced, which meant variations between two and nine dwellings in the projects set.

The interventions in the historic area of Porto are submitted to a careful and detailed examination of several public institutions that manage and control the integrity of the classified heritage urban landscape. Despite the specificity of the historic area of Porto, the importance of the urban setting as a whole it's so valued as the individual features of buildings. Currently, 11,7% of existent dwellings in Porto, are the public propriety that belongs to City Hall and 24% corresponds to dwellings that belong to the government. Recent data pointed out to a list of about 1000 claiming for applying for a Heritage House. Through this process of seventeen interventions in the Houses of Heritage, it is predicted to reach to 57 dwellings, which can be

inhabited by 168 persons, which corresponds to 2% of the population that live in Porto Historical Center, as mentioned in 2011 Census. (*cf.* FEIO et Al, 2018)

#### **4. Tomas Gonzaga Street as a case study**

The plot and the ruins in Tomás Gonzaga street correspond to one of the areas of intervention under the Houses of Heritage program still under project phase. It is located close to the borders of UNESCO delimitation, in the parish of Miragaia, close to Saint Peter's Church considered National Monument, and the Customs House designed by the French architect Jean-François Colson in 1859. (*cf.* PINTO, 2017)

The archeologic campaigns in the place have revealed some trace elements from the Roman period. Although the construction of Saint Peter's Church is documented since 1120, the origin of the temple can be sited in the 10th century, as indicate some architectonic elements reused in the church, which belonged to a pre-Romanic building. In the medieval period, Tomás Gonzaga Street, at the time nominated as Esperança Sidewalk, established the connection between the high zone of the city (former rope manufacturing) and river. In the early 19th century this artery was aligned, promoting some reformulations of the buildings' main facades - The existent ruins of the intervention area, contain stone elements dated from the 17th, such as the chamfered frames of the windows of the west and south façades. Another aspect which reinforces the particularities of this place is its proximity to the former factory of Miragaia Crockery - one of the most important units of Porto, which worked between 1775 and 1854. In the near plots, it is frequently identified some trace elements of this activity, such as old spaces and deactivated factory structures or readapted to other programs, labor instruments and unfinished or defected fragments of ceramic objects.

The intervention area is featured by a triangular shape, facing to the Douro River, in its longer limit, at the south. Currently, the terrain integrates several kinds of constructions, some of them in ruins. Looking at the area from the river, it's possible to see a granitic masonry building standing itself in the middle of the terrain, together with another small granitic construction at the bottom of it, mediating those volumes there is a small housing building in ruins. The intervention proposition aims at preserving the two granitic volumes, full filling the empty areas with new building volumes, in order to complete the morphological density of the place. This operation also allows increasing the capacity of the intervention regarding dwelling number.





**Figure 4.** Tomás Gonzaga Intervention area from the Douro riverfront. (photo © PTP)

The south elevations of the new volumes were designed following a grid of granite slabs, which organizes the windows, contributing to emphasize the vertical reading of the set. The north elevation was composed taking into account some existent elements, which were adjusted to the shape of the proposed volumes. Steel grid doors allow reaching the houses entrances, providing visual connections between Tomaz Gonzaga street and the river. The roofs of all volumes will be built in Marseille roof ceramic tiles, ensuring a continuity of the so-called 'fifth elevation' of Porto historical center.

The project foresees to build eight dwellings, which one of them corresponded to a T0 (studio with kitchen, bathroom, and no sleeping rooms) and seven T1 (houses with kitchen, bathroom and one sleeping rooms). The intervention is divided into four main areas.



**Figure 5** – Image of the model of the project in Tomás Gonzaga Street (photo © N.A)

The parcel A, which correspond to the east area, has currently the remains of a former house in ruins. Through this area, it's possible to access to the core of the intervention area. This area will receive a new building, with three levels, integrating the dwelling T0 and one T1 dwelling organized in a duplex. This volume is foreseen to be built under a concrete structure of pillars beams and fungiform slabs, the exterior walls will be built in ceramic masonry isolated with an 'ethics' system of cork panels.

The parcel B corresponds to the central area, presently integrating one of the granitic volumes to be preserved. This area will receive three T1 dwellings. It is foreseen to remove all the existent interior core. A concrete blade will reinforce the granitic facades border. The pavements will be build using a light steel frame structure. The interior predicts the thermic isolation. The granitic masonry will be plastered with a poor mortar of clay.

The parcel C corresponds to the west area, doesn't containing any constructions at now. The area will receive a new housing building, featuring the same constructive system foreseen to the volume of parcel A. This volume will integrate two T1 dwellings organized as a duplex. This parcel will also incorporate a multifunctional space projected inside of a small building

that tops the intervention at west. This small and narrow volume with a roof of two slope faces, follows the dominant characteristics of the place, contributing to consolidating the image of the set.

The Parcel D corresponds to the area located at the bottom side of the intervention area, containing a second granitic volume already mention. This parcel will be rehabilitated with the same system described in parcel B, to receive one T1 in a duplex.

<b>Parcels</b>	<b>Dwellings</b>	<b>Area</b>
Parcel A	T0	36,93 m2
	T1a	81,09 m2
Parcel B	T1b	69,39 m2
	T1c	67,79 m2
	T1d	67,79 m2
Parcel C	T1e	87,22 m2
	T1f	92,19 m2
	Multifunctional area	16,91 m2
Parcel D	T1g	81,06 m2

**Tabel 1** – Dwellings distribution

It is supposed that when intervention became concluded, it will contribute to stabilizing the image of the place, recovering some aspects related to the genealogy of territory. As a whole, the proposition will establish a relationship with the former urban landscape of the 18th century, featured by narrow archetypal buildings with roofs of two slope faces.

Despite, the urban improvement generated by the physical intervention in Tomás Gonzaga Street, it should be highlighted the importance of preserving housing in the historical center of Porto, as a way to balance the worst aspects of tourism, associated with thematic urbanism, which hides the fundamentals that had supported the previous attractiveness of places.



**Figure 6–** Plans, Sections and Elevations of the project for Tomás Gonzaga Street

## 5. Conclusion

Some of the plots integrated in the Houses of Heritage program are now under construction. Tomás Gonzaga Street, for instance, is under building process competition preparation. It's expectable to extract conclusions about the success of those investments in a short period of time.

It should be reinforced the possibilities opened by the program to support single people exposed to social vulnerability. Nevertheless, the program is also innovative, not only because it's opened to middle class people, but also because it introduces the mechanism of Supported Housing Rent as a strategy to increase the cohesion process and social diversity in the urban fabric of the city historical center. In the Portuguese context, the program represents also a shift in the territories selected as well as in the scale of interventions. Particularly in a moment of high demand of real estate in the historical centers, due the investments resulting from foreigner capital in the sector, the program presents itself resilient to the speculation. From the social point of view the program aims at contributing to renew the population, and to improve vacant areas and buildings.



For Porto City Hall, Houses of Heritage also represents a possibility for controlling the image and the characteristics of the city in the sequence of the urban renovation in progress.

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