



## Global (Sustainable) Commercial Urbanism and Culture

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# Global (Sustainable) Commercial Urbanism and Culture

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**Abstract:** The decision makers of western cities have utilized commercial urbanism to help improve urban livability for several decades. The upgrade and redesign of shopping areas as well as the modernization of small and medium size retail establishments appear central to this goal. However, the unpredictability of technological innovations, lifestyles, consumer demand, and the uncertainty of global and regional markets contribute to the difficulty in delivering the most adequate and long-lasting urbanistic solutions. To what extent can professionals and elected officials utilize local cultures and regional identities to craft urban policies and programs capable of enabling flourishing businesses with both positive impacts in local economies and urban cultures? The purpose of this paper is to revisit a series of urban planning research programs, which the author studied over the past three decades in the Iberian Peninsula, the Americas, and Macau SAR. The research methods comprised literature reviews, public policy and case study analyses, teaching and research engagements, residence periods, and extended visits in Portugal, the northeast and southwest of the United States, Latin America, and Macau SAR. The argument is twofold: First, globalization is simultaneously homogenizing commercial landscapes while contributing to environmentally damaging car dependent lifestyles; and second, professionals ought to establish localized and culture-based (sustainable) commercial urbanism programs capable of assuring the long-term success of cities. The key finding is that livability assurance guarantees and cultural patterns are highly dependent on each city's idiosyncratic characteristics such as size, place in the urban hierarchy, as well as historic roles performed in regional, national, and global dynamics.

**Keywords:** Urban livability, globalization, shopping districts, public policies, local economies, consumer preferences, cultural idiosyncrasies.

## INTRODUCTION

That markets are globally connected is an undisputed truth (Zakaria, 2020). The extent and how they are impacting urban territories is less consensual. Buying and selling are integral to the functioning of cities. However, where, when, and how those marketplace functions occur varies according to each country's laws and regulations, cultures, regional lifestyles, prevailing economic activities, educational levels, place and role in the urban system, level of connections to other cities and territories near and far, as well as the leadership roles performed by community residents, business and property owners, and elected officials.

Cities are shaped by a myriad of decisions. Some are small and inconsequential while others are bold and with long lasting impacts. Cities are also extremely dynamic territories in which specific neighborhoods acquire or lose urban functions, increase or decrease in population, experience urban decline or are regenerated, grow or shrink in economic activity, and act to modernize its infrastructure, public spaces, and built environment.

Commercial urbanism has typically been understood as a revitalization tool and utilized to regenerate central city neighborhoods and new commercial areas. Neighborhoods' decline tends to occur due to urban growth elsewhere. Business activity has limited loyalty to where it occurs. Therefore, community leaders are in a difficult position to help deliver and maintain the harmonious and social cohesiveness of urban territories, while enabling economic activity to take its course with the fewest negative externalities as possible. In such a context, how and to what extent can professionals and elected officials utilize local cultures and regional identities to craft urban policies and programs capable of enabling flourishing businesses with both positive impacts in local economies and urban cultures?

The purpose of this paper is to revisit a series of urban planning research programs, which the author studied over the past three decades in the Iberian Peninsula, the Americas, and Macau SAR. The argument is twofold: First, globalization is simultaneously homogenizing commercial landscapes while contributing to environmentally damaging car dependent lifestyles; and second, professionals and elected officials ought to establish localized culture-based (sustainable) commercial urbanism programs capable of assuring the long-term success of cities. The research methods comprised literature reviews,

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public policy and case study analyses, teaching and research engagements, residence periods, and extended visits in Portugal, the northeast and southwest of the United States, Latin America, and Macau SAR.

The paper involves tears, career choices, cities, globalization, academia, culture, discoveries, downtowns, shopping, mountains, sprawl, automobiles, retrofit, flights and relocations, and plenty of walking over more than thirty years. The paper is chronological and utilizes the author's career path threefold sequentially (Freestone, 2017): (i) to reflect on the placing of Portuguese realities in an international context; (ii) to provide an elucidation of how consumption in the United States occurs on wheels mostly independently of where it takes place; and (iii) to conclude with the realization that local and regional cultures have a critical role in shaping city-regions. The key finding is that livability assurance guarantees and cultural patterns are highly dependent on each city's idiosyncratic characteristics such as size, place in the urban hierarchy, as well as historic roles performed in regional, national, and global dynamics.

## **PART I – PLACING PORTUGUESE REALITIES IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**

Careers are not necessarily planned as they tend to be influenced by several factors, some under the control of self and others under someone else's. After high school, for some reason marine biology on the distant Portuguese islands of Azores emerged as the number one choice in my college application. This was during a time of turmoil due to the German reunification, the dismembering of the Berlin Wall, and farther away in South Africa, the end of the apartheid regime and the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. To put it bluntly, a family member cried because I did not apply to the extremely prestigious, centuries old, *Universidade de Coimbra* and instead applied for admission to an Urban and Regional Planning Licenciature program at the much younger *Universidade de Aveiro*, also in central Portugal.

I had been to the nearby city of Coimbra many times and the austere feeling of the university buildings on the *Alta de Coimbra* on top of a decent size hill overlooking the city and the Mondego river down below, as if they were the unifying elements of a fortification wall (Campos and Murtinho, 2017), protecting who knows who and with what purpose, did not appeal to me. Besides that Coimbra brought back

memories of visits to university hospitals, a sanatorium located in a recondite rural suburb upstream along the Mondego river, and later a regional jail. While I have only vague memories of who I visited at the two hospitals over the years, I remember with affection and compassion those who I visited at the sanatorium and the jail. In my subconscious Coimbra was not all bad, as I recall having my tonsils amputated at an early age at a local clinic on the downtown's edge (*baixinha*) and being given lots of pre-packed ice-cream, as well as visits to the *Portugal dos Pequenitos*, a miniature theme park in the *Santa Clara* neighborhood across the Mondego river built during the Estado Novo to enable all to visit the country's most emblematic monuments without having to travel outside of the city (Pinto and Delgado, 2019), and the *Quinta das Lágrimas*, a fountain with red spots on the sink's floor representing the place where *Dona Inês de Castro* had been tragically assassinated by the king's traitors.

Aveiro is flat, it possesses a lagoon, *Ria de Aveiro*, which has contributed to it being nicknamed the Venice of Portugal. Prior to attending college in Aveiro, I remember visiting it on our way to a relative's celebration in a locality nearby. However, Urban and Regional Planning appealed to me for its potential to help understand the territory, like Human Geography, but with the possibility of helping to shape and influence how decisions leading to the territory's occupation were made. The majestic horizon and vastness of the saltscapes adjacent to campus, as well as the city-region's fame as the bicycle capital of Portugal, proved to make for quite a rewarding five-year-rite-of-passage. Something that puzzled many planning students of my cohort was the large vacant site in the core of the city along one of the lagoon's canals; why was such a large site vacant and being underutilized as a parking lot? It was extremely convenient, located just down below from the city's cemetery near the city's cathedral and museum (Curado, 2019). As most of us who were not from Aveiro did not own a car and took the train or bus to go home on weekends, we could not fully comprehend the oversized parking lot, literally in the core of the city.

What do the previous examples have to do with globalization and cultural studies? In 1997, after having spent a semester as an Erasmus exchange student in Groningen, the Netherlands, as well as having concluded my undergraduate at the *Universidade de Aveiro* and being admitted to the Masters of Regional Planning, at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in the United States, halfway around the world, I

attended a conference about shopping malls and consumption organized by the Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota, with sessions also at the Mall of America (MoA). Minnesota's frigid winter weather was colder than Massachusetts' or so it felt. MoA was big, at that time the largest mall in the United States (Goss, 1999), built a short distance away from, Southdale in the Minneapolis suburb of Edina, known as the first fully enclosed and air-conditioned shopping mall in the United States. The Southdale Center was designed by architect Victor Gruen (Wall, 2005). The elevated skyways connecting most buildings in downtown Minneapolis proved to be extremely valuable for everyone working, residing, or visiting the city's core during the winter months and needed a pleasant indoor environment to walk to places. MoA was brand new, extremely big, booming with domestic and foreign tourists on charter flights from faraway places as Australia and Japan, and there was no evidence that such phenomena as "dead malls" or "retail apocalypse" would appear on the horizon. Instead, shopping and recreation were becoming part of a new trend in real estate, entertainment, and cultural development (Evans, 2002).

And so, as my knowledge of urban development (McFarlane, 2010) increased and I visited other cities on the East Coast (Barnett, 2020), I realized that many downtowns had been suffering a long and painful death as economic activities relocated from central areas to the suburbs, in conjunction with the "white flight" residential move to the suburbs as well as the rise of automobiles for daily transportation (Wells, 2013). This reality was quite different from what I had experienced in the small country of The Netherlands, which possesses great bicycle and walking facilities, parks, greenways, well signalized rural trails, and nicely integrated and extremely multimodal public transit networks (e.g. streetcars, buses, trains) (Männistö-Funk and Myllyntaus, 2019).

The large vacant land parcel in downtown Aveiro was an example of the Portuguese version of the North American Urban Renewal Program, also known as the "federal bulldozer," which wiped clean countless blocks of supposedly blighted properties in the city centers of many North American cities in the 1960s and 1970s. The downtowns of medium size regional cities such as Coimbra and Aveiro were quite vibrant and attracted many visitors from their hinterlands (Nieto *et al.*, 2016; Friedman, 2014), as most city magnets were in the central areas and both cities also possessed good public transit accessibility. The first regional

hypermarkets had been built in the late 1980s and early 1990s and had not caused too much city center decline, as had been occurring in the North American cities for decades. In addition, Portugal's privileged location in Southern Europe had a very urban and cosmopolitan culture of sidewalk cafés and an intense utilization of open spaces in cities. Nonetheless, the Portuguese Ministry of Economy initiated a retail modernization and commercial urbanism program to help modernize family-owned retail establishments and to spruce up city center commercial areas.

My Masters thesis examined the impact of this program in the medium size cities of Coimbra and Aveiro (Balsas, 2020). The contextual overview of the US reality, and the detailed analysis of parallels and differences among the US, the UK, and Portugal, appeared to have been welcomed back home, as a follow up commercial urbanism program featuring European Union funds was launched to advance said public policy goal. The British city center livability framework, known as Town Center Management (TCM) (Otsuka and Reeve, 2007), was especially useful in making sense of the critical dimensions needed to improve the Portuguese city centers. That framework's foci on accessibility, magnets, conveniences, and governance collaborative practices enabled the identification of sub-variables, which provided the fine-grain details needed to make sense of transformative realities, as well as to make further recommendations of what was lacking and could be of help to the overall city center revitalizations (Maliene *et al.*, 2022).

## **PART II – CONSUMPTION ON WHEELS IN THE UNITED STATES**

Early on, the understanding of a hierarchy of shopping malls as real estate investment products ranging from the many small and medium, to the few regional and large, and the unique and extremely large buildings, with typological and architectonic similarities and commonalities across the globe (mostly southern and central Europe, the UK, and the US) was quite revealing (DeLisle, 2005; Garfield-Abrams *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, and inspired by the 1997 conference in Minneapolis and the visit to the Mall of America, I decided to conduct a comparative study of MoA and the Colombo shopping Center near one of the ring roads encircling the capital of the country Lisbon, which had opened in 1997.

If from this initial reflection it starts to transpire the beginning of an embryonic approach to global studies,

here it will materialize slightly more as I will review how, on the one hand, malls tend to rely on a similar formula (i.e. convenient and comfortable shopping environment), which end up delivering sameness (i.e. “if you have seen one, you have seen them all”); and on the other, malls also have to possess, at least, a unique and differentiating architecture and the right tenant mix to keep attracting a clientele with slightly distinct shopping and consumption interests (Coleman, 2006). What would be more differentiating, and simultaneously bolster the nationalistic sentiment of the metropolis’ shoppers and visitors than celebrating the Portuguese Discoveries enterprise during the XVth and XVIth centuries, while claiming that while America was christened after the Italian sailor Amerigo Vespucci, actually Christopher Columbus was of Portuguese origin, as defended by a history scholar and totally embraced by the Colombo Shopping Center investment group?

Equipped with new research methods and the field work conducted in both Minnesota and Lisbon, I wrote and presented a comparative paper at the 1998 conference of the International Geographical Union (IGU) in Lisbon. A revised version of that paper was published in a newly launched journal *Passages – Journal of Transcultural Studies* (Balsas, 2001) with renowned scholars on the editorial board. To my surprise, and the surprise of other authors who had their papers either accepted for publication or under consideration by the journal, I was told that *Passages* had been terminated by the publisher, but that my paper would still be included in the last issue of the journal.

I felt sorry for the editors, at least one of them a young Assistant Professor who had just published a book on globalization (Bamyeh, 2000; Ritzer and Ryan, 2002), and who I had met at the 2000 Conference “*Going Public with Spirituality in Work and Higher Education*” at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, after starting my doctoral program, but also extremely delighted that my paper would still make it to the pages of the journal. In that comparative paper, I concluded that Portugal could brag about having discovered America, but given the quickly approaching ascendancy of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the Information Revolution enabled by the internet’s ubiquity, we would surely not only be impacted by the localized European version of the American Dream of Mass Consumption, but also by the “click till you drop” opportunities (and challenges) of virtual e-commerce (Hänninen *et al.*, 2021).

Fast forward two decades later, in the US the dying and desolated downtowns of yesteryear appeared in the form of dead-malls in the outer ring suburbs of many Eastern and Midwestern cities. Ferreira and Paiva (2017) have reported similar phenomena in the Lisbon Metropolitan area. Sure, the market might be reaching a saturation point in the large metropolises of Lisbon and Porto, but the phenomenon needs proper contextualization in the medium size cities outside of metropolitan areas (Accordino and Adhikari, 2022).

On the one hand, Coimbra not only possesses the first generation of shopping centers and hypermarkets built in the 1990s in an expansion area southwest of the city, on a valley near the city’s stadium, but now it also has a relatively new shopping center connected to the highway system farther north across the Mondego river, also on a hill side overlooking the imponent buildings of the *Universidade de Coimbra* and the city’s traditional shopping area down below, as if the “education castle” had been paired with an equally high up on the sky “shopping cathedral” mirror-like institution (Berman, 2011). On the other, Aveiro built a state-of-the-art city center shopping center (Coleman, 2006), where, during my college years, stood a large vacant and expectant parcel of land occupied as a temporary parking lot (Bowman and Pagano, 2004).

Why does this matter to cultural studies? And especially for the new *Global Journal of Cultural Studies*? The first realization is that the “open access” (CC BY) format of the new journal will surely enable “publications till readers’ (everywhere) drop” and one hopes that Lifescience Global will not terminate the new and well-intended scholarly outlet. Secondly, the wider circulation of ideas will not necessarily bring forth a nightmare of consumption for the masses, but instead promote more just and sustainable consumption within a subverting cultural approach to reuse (Crocker, 2018; Jackson, 2021), which does not result in the untimely “dead-mall” syndrome of yesteryear nor let researchers lose sight of the distinct spatial scales of that phenomenon’s impacts. With these observations I am not condemning public policies for not having been able to control the less positive consequences of too many large shopping formats.

Instead, I posit that the “dead-mall” phenomenon ought to be better studied and that it also needs to take into consideration the “dead-store” trends, the globalization of commodity supply chains, the offshoring of production and services out of western countries to other parts of the globe, and the ubiquity of

ICTs, which are resulting in just-in-time and omnichannel retail innovations (Scharoun, 2011; Urry, 2014; Hänninen, 2021). The US market's domination (and that of other globalized markets, which rely on US Style retail and wholesale formats) by a small number of well-known retail corporations (e.g. Walmart, Target, Macy's, Staples, OfficeDepot, etc.) has contributed to the homogenization of the commercial landscape and the spread of similarity in retail goods availability across the country (if not the western world).

Schumacher's "creative destruction" proved that for the economy to flourish certain businesses will decline and vanish, others will adapt and transform to new circumstances, and others yet will be created with new entrepreneurial business models (Kumar, 2017; Helm *et al.*, 2020). It is unlikely that in the history of humanity society was ever so globalized and connected as during the third decade of the first millennium. Similarly, modern society had also never been so immobilized under lockdown conditions as during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lashgari and Shahab, 2022). The US has experienced many boom-and-bust cycles (Chatzinikolaou and Vlados, 2022). The three most recent ones were the 2000 dot-com, the 2008-2010 global financial crisis, and the 2020-2022 COVID-19 pandemic.

As the old saying goes, "when the US economy sneezes, the rest of the world catches a cold." The three major crises were followed by the 9/11 attacks, austerity urbanism in southern European countries and Ireland, while the COVID-19 pandemic reached worldwide proportions, paradoxically killing more people in the US than in China, where theoretically the pandemic had its inception. The pandemic questioned the viability of cities, and especially of their core areas (Glaeser and Cutler, 2021). As with earlier crises the disenfranchised individuals suffered disproportionately from the negative consequences of the pandemic (Kleilein and Meyer, 2021). However, in environmental terms, the pandemic revealed that planet earth experienced an unprecedented change in its global metabolism, which not only temporarily reduced pollution levels but also demonstrated that there is a correlation between unsustainable lifestyles, wasteful and inefficient economic systems, and greenhouse gas emissions, which are all contributing to dangerous social instability and global climate change (Diffenbaugh *et al.* 2020).

Nonetheless, the large metropolitan areas of the Sun Belt (Balsas, 2019; Rice *et al.*, 2022), such as Los

Angeles, Phoenix, Las Vegas, Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, Atlanta, and Miami still possess very dynamic land use and retail markets boosted by a model of single-family homes and high car-privilege, not only at the expenses of everybody else, but also increasingly contributing to dangerous climate change phenomena (Fields and Renne, 2021). The theory of neighborhood succession conceptualized in the 1940s under the auspices of the Chicago School of Social Ecology, and refined in the post-WWII period (Berry, 2008), has taken a completely different shape in the vast sprawl dominated metropolis of Sun Belt's "kino capitalism" (Dear and Flusty, 1998). Yet, many of these cities also possess some of the most modern retail formats in the country, side by side with a range of other retail establishments, from regional shopping centers to outlet malls, ethnic markets, and lifestyle centers (Miller and Laketa, 2019; Kirk, 2023).

The hot and dry weather of the US southwest has contributed to opening shopping malls with centralized pedestrian areas designed with water-based cooling strategies, surrounded by vast parking lots (ÓhUallacháin and Leslie, 2013). However, sprawl-based development causes extremely long commute distances between where one lives, works and shops, which makes automobiles the dominant transportation mode (Kimball, 2014). Despite those spread out and spatially segregated suburbs, "miracle mile-type" of main-street segments have gained traction in the core areas of the Phoenix's suburban municipalities, such as Mesa's Main Street, Tempe's Mill Avenue, Scottsdale's Old Town, and Glendale's Main Street (Lang *et al.*, 2008).

### **PART III – THE DIFFERENCE CULTURE MAKES**

During my five-year Assistant Professor appointment at the University at Albany, SUNY I taught a course entitled "Global Urbanism and Culture" in which we explored contemporary debates on globalization, global urbanism, and culture (Stevenson, 2013; Hutton, 2015). The course covered a series of themes central to cities, culture, planning, and public policy, including among others: The role of culture in fostering multicultural cities, the relationships between urban sustainability and environmental planning, the geography of culture, the creative class, cultural industries, the arts and culture sector, local economies and place identity, cultural policies and urban regeneration programs, local and regional resilience networks, public space, local heritage, sense of belonging, community development, and global futures

(Lancione and McFarlane, 2021). Said course benefited directly from the teaching and research experience accumulated during my ten-year residence period in Tempe, AZ. Phoenix's horizontal cityscape was directly linked to a vibrant Hispanic culture. While New York State's political capital, Albany, lives in the shadow of one of the nation's truly global and cosmopolitan cities, New York City, its financial ambitions and frustrations resultant from an unprecedented cultural *mélange* (Pieterse, 2019).

Also at the University at Albany, I taught another course on "International Urban Planning," which placed special emphasis on (i) the theory and practice of planning in various parts of the world; (ii) how world cities have become important actors in a globalized economy; (iii) the relationship between nation states, urban policy and mega-region protagonism; (iv) the role of technology in influencing international urban development; and (v) the role of urban sustainability in shaping planning discourses and practices. These two teaching engagements, together with the graduate and undergraduate courses on "Community Development and Neighborhood Planning," were critical to realize that communities do not exist in isolation. They are shaped by urban plans, programs and a panoply of legal rules and "make believe democratic" procedures, which influence the type of built forms and the assortment of goods and services offered to residents, workers, and visitors. However, communities also develop, nurture, and cultivate their own endogenous cultures, which are more or less socially and territorially cohesive and connected to the outside world, depending on natural elements, historic factors, level of wealth, and the leadership empathy and proclivities of those who influence the business, political, educational, cultural, and religious scenes (Phillips, 2015).

"Walkable Cities: *Revitalization, vibrancy and sustainable consumption*" explains how cities in the Iberian Peninsula and the Americas have been conducting urban revitalization processes where walkability improvements have contributed to strengthening their downtown and midtown centralities and various other urban functions, including vibrancy, livability, partial eradication of homelessness, pedestrian and bicyclist safety, tourism, and sustainable consumption (Balsas, 2019). A culture of professional management is critical to the revitalization of city centers and the planning of expansion areas in cities. Urbanization is now a global phenomenon (Berry, 2008; Lancione and McFarlane, 2021). The high levels of education in the western world brought

forth in consonance with Florida's (2017) "creative class" conceptualization appear to have resulted in a new "urban crisis" and in more socially fractured, spatially segregated, and gentrified cities.

The prevailing idea that developing countries still look at the US for urbanistic models and planning tools and techniques to help them deal with high rates of growth is becoming nonsensical. Instead, the large metropolises of Latin American countries such as Mexico City (Mexico), São Paulo (Brazil), and Buenos Aires (Argentina), all have simultaneously time tested public markets as well as some of the latest commercial innovations in the form of suburban regional malls (Gasca-Zamora, 2017), walkable shopping streets (e.g. Faria Lima street in São Paulo; Calle Florida's pedestrian street), and retrofitted industrial areas converted to shopping and leisure (e.g. the Arcos District open-air outlet mall in Buenos Aires). These appear to co-exist nicely with traditional and independent street retail formats and municipally-owned public markets such as those in the Zócalo historic district of Mexico City, the *Mercado Municipal de São Paulo* (Vieira, 2019), and the *Mercado de las Pulgas* in Buenos Aires's Colegiales neighborhood.

The high number of informal stalls selling food, drinks, and other goods on the sidewalk and in many other public spaces in most Latin American cities has precluded the emergence of the well-known food deserts commonly found throughout North American cities (Hansen *et al.*, 2014). In the global north the reliance on laws and regulations to tax all economic activities as well as a car-centric lifestyle has forced retail establishments out of central locations of cities and towards large sites in their outskirts, where buildings tend to have quite large footprints and are surrounded by ample space for surface parking lots (ÓhUallacháin and Leslie, 2013).

This contrasts vividly with the Iberian urbanism model exported to other parts of the world (Barreiros, 2022), where municipally-owned public markets received practically the same level of care as other public and religious buildings. Macau's SAR public markets (e.g. *Mercado Vermelho* and *Mercado São Lourenço*) are good examples of that concern with building markets in central residential neighborhoods to meet those population's needs not only in terms of food but also of community centralities; deconcentrated satellite city hall functions, public libraries, and sports facilities as is the case of the new *Mercado de São Lourenço*. This is not only a question of adequate

commercial urbanism and public policies, but it is above all a question of urbanistic culture, protecting commercial cultural landscapes, enabling sustainable and cohesive livelihoods, positive human emotions, and a tendency to trust that the public sector will deliver on the citizen's expectations (Montealegre and Sánchez, 2019; Zuev and Simpson, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

This past summer, in the impossibility of revisiting the Colombo Shopping Center in Lisbon, I did spend time in downtown Coimbra and was able to realize that the commercial urbanism measures implemented in that part of the city, almost two and half decades ago (Balsas, 2020), have given limited results as my pseudo fieldwork discovered a high number of closed down independently owned retail establishments (Saraiva *et al.*, 2019), unkempt built environment, and badly damaged public spaces adjacent to the main squares of the *baixinha*.

The extensive walking through the narrow city streets of *baixinha* during a weekday afternoon and casual but in-depth conversations with the owners and employees of several businesses revealed inadequate business models, a morphologically rich but almost impenetrable built environment, which contributed to desolated pedestrian city streets. The cause could also be attributed to university students having exams or already having left town for the summer holidays, and tourists having yet to rediscover Coimbra's *baixinha* after the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. A few hints demonstrated that a more central area of bars and restaurants was still active and attracting customers for lunch and student night parties.

In Aveiro, the centrally located shopping center seems to be having a catalytic effect, bringing in customers not only to its own businesses but also to the businesses located in the two- or three-block-range adjacent to it. Because of the *Ria de Aveiro* and the sizable *Parque do Rossio*, Aveiro's city center feels more open than the medieval traditional shopping district of Coimbra. Coimbra, however, has not been immune to the city's ambitious urban renewal, which demolished several buildings on Avenida Central, just north of the classical *baixinha*, to create a connection for the region's MetroBus. Said site has been vacant for several decades; however, it does not have the urbanistic organicity of the adjacent small square of *Terreiro da Erva*. Planning professionals in Coimbra can surely review a few commercial urbanism best

practices from Aveiro, not to mention Phoenix's light rail system, or Macau's *Praça do Leal Senado*.

D. Pedro's tragic revenge of the traitors for the assassination of Dona Inês de Castro as well as the order to pay homage to the (lifeless) queen is well known in Portuguese lore and cultural studies. The Aveiro saltscapes have also seen much better days; nonetheless, the few cultural, touristic, and health treatment projects launched in the last decade or so appear to be a good sign of their assured existence. The *Universidade de Coimbra* as well as the traditional shopping area of the city, the *baixinha*, have both withstood the test of centuries of existence. The future will tell whether the new top of the hill shopping center overlooking the city of Coimbra as well as Aveiro's city center shopping center will be part of the next generation of dead-malls.

Similarly to Marinic's (2015) analysis of the Houston Galleria and the Toronto Eaton Centre, I contend that the two newest malls in central Portugal exemplify two distinct models of commercial urbanism and urbanistic culture. The former exemplifies the first half of the paper's argument that globalization is simultaneously an example of what Cachinho and Paiva (2021) call a "fast time regime" responsible for homogenizing commercial landscapes, while contributing to environmentally damaging car dependent lifestyles; while the latter can be considered a commercial anchor to Aveiro's city center revitalization, emblematic of a "slow time regime."

The shopping center in downtown Aveiro was built there because land had been made available and the business and elected officials had the foresight to establish a localized (sustainable) commercial urbanism program capable of assuring the long-term success of the city center. Finally, the larger context of celebrating one's own idiosyncratic cultural characteristics (Cheshmehzangi, 2020; Howard, 2022), while not losing sight of size, place, and rank in the urban (and real estate) hierarchy system, as well as historic roles performed in regional, national, and global dynamics seems to prove that Portugal not only built a theme park but many cities, which have inspired several generations of investment, professionals, and scholars of national and international stature.

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