

About the cover

Analysis of the Historical Center of Hospital Psiquiátrico São Pedro (HPSP)

The Historical Center of Hospital Psiquiátrico São Pedro, whose original size was 33 hectares, is now an area comprised of 13.9 hectares, located on Bento Gonçalves Ave., in the Partenon district, the geographical center of the city of Porto Alegre. The 19.2 hectares that have been subtracted throughout its 122 years of history and that represent 48% of its total area today are occupied by public and private institutions.

This magnificent center comprehends around 40 buildings, in a total of approximately 44,000 m² of constructed area, having the Centenary Building as its most valuable asset.

This building, constructed between 1884 and 1903, is composed of six bodies with two floors and basement, transversally interconnected by a long circulation axis. This generates five internal atriums, in a comb-like structure, resulting from the adoption of the panopticon, which is a model used in the 19th century to control large human contingents, such as prisons and boarding schools. Since 1927, the building has been through several remodeling works and reforms without interventional criteria, which have not changed the characteristics of the whole, and until today represents the greatest architectonic legacy from the late 19th century in the State of Rio Grande do Sul.

From the 1950's on, the Centenary Building was gradually vacated for patient housing, until reaching the current situation, in which great part of its area remains vacated or is being informally used. Nowadays, the building is in an advanced stage of deterioration, presenting infiltrations in several parts of the roof, falling masonry, generalized presence of termites, presence of fungi, detached painting and plaster, among several other problems common to abandoned historical buildings.

The Centenary Building and its surroundings were protected by law in 1990 (state level) and 1993 (municipal level). Their front and southeast side areas were registered as square by the Municipal Council of Urban Environmental Development in 2002.

The vast space of Hospital Psiquiátrico São Pedro provides the visitor with a feeling of chaos and perplexity. This feeling is intensified by the difficulty of reading its referential structures, a consequence of the poor ordering of flows and space hierarchy and random implantation of low-quality buildings over time, without a global planning. However, the exception to the rule of spatial disorder in the center is the empty frontal space along Bento Gonçalves Avenue. This empty space promotes the necessary distance to visualize the Centenary Building, placing it in a privileged position in the urban landscape. The result is a feeling of respect for such a magnificent architectonic structure, a striking element in the collective imaginary of our city.

Despite the privileged location and its magnitude, the Historical Center of HPSP reminds us of a city of exclusion or insanity, with a spatial organization both peculiar and hermetic. If the objective is to include, rehabilitate and recycle uses in a near future, we must create a dialogue between the cities inside and outside the walls, which may emerge based on the global understanding of the center and by valuing its main referential element, the Centenary Building.

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