

From Industry to Tourism:
The Case of LX Factory in the Alcântara Neighbourhood
(Lisbon)

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The tourism phenomenon is seen by several authors as a regenerating force (Brito-Henriques, 1996; Tiesdell, Oc & Heath, 1996), which neutralizes the process of degradation by introducing new functions, creating employment and income and attracting a young population with new models of behavior and consumption. In Lisbon, these relations between tourism and urban regeneration have strengthened and acquired new forms especially since 2007, on the one hand with the emergence of new incentives and financial instruments for tourism promotion within the framework of regional policies, on the other thanks to the regulatory flexibility introduced in the legal regimes of urban conversion, real estate leasing and tourist accommodation (Tulumello, 2015; Barata Salgueiro, Mendes & Guimarães, 2017; Safara & Brito-Henriques, 2017).

As part of the tourism development that Lisbon has been experiencing in recent years (at least until the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic), one of the emerging neighbourhoods is Alcântara, a former industrial district that is currently

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undergoing a process of urban regeneration. In the desirable hypothesis of a return to normality, Alcântara has good conditions to develop as a tourist destination, thanks to a series of factors: Its diversified tourist resources; Its dynamic image, “trendy”, but still authentic; Its barycentric position between two “strong” areas (the historic city and Belém); Its good accessibility, still being strengthened; The rapid increase in the accommodation supply.

Located in the western part of the city and lapped by the Tagus River, Alcântara is probably the best district in Lisbon for the re-enactment of the industrial era (Vidal, 2015), thanks to its buildings, its activities and its “lifestyles”, now recovered according to the formula of reuse of abandoned industrial and port structures (Gelbman, 2007; Chmielewska & Lamparska, 2012;). As a reaction to the growing tourist demand, the number of accommodation facilities (especially apartments for tourist use) has multiplied. If in fact the presence of tourists in Alcântara was rather sporadic until a few years ago, it became part of the daily life of the neighborhood. Besides, Alcântara district is easily accessible: it is well served by various means of transport such as city buses, trams and trains, and the metro will reach Alcântara within a couple of years. In this scenario, further tourism development is at least likely to happen.

An important role in the tourist development of Alcântara has been played by the LX Factory, a former industrial area of around 23.000 m², where important companies were located. LX Factory is considered as a successful experiment of reconversion of an industrial complex into a multifunctional space, which preserves the former “factory atmosphere”, although according to a contemporary formula. Inaugurated in 2008, the LX Factory hosts about 200 design offices, art ateliers, start-ups, shops, restaurants, cafés, night clubs, co-working spaces, and even a hostel, with a total employment of about a thousand people. Before the pandemic, it also used to host

workshops, concerts, cultural activities and a Sunday market of vintage and biological products.

A previous research based on a questionnaire that was administrated in the spring of 2018 to a sample of 303 tourists visiting Alcântara (Zarrilli, Brito & Cappucci, 2019) showed that LX Factory was by far the main tourist attractor of the neighbourhood. In this contribution, we will try to deeper investigate what we may call the “LX Factory phenomenon”, in terms of tourist image, flows, motivations and assessments. At this aim, the results of the aforementioned questionnaire have been cross-checked with those of another one that was administrated in January 2020 to a sample of 30 shopkeepers located in LX Factory. Conclusions will allow us to understand LX Factory main issues, both from the clients’ and the shopkeepers’ perspective, regarding the commercial activity, the current image, the people who used to visit it, and their opinion about the neighbourhood.

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