

“Globalization and worldwide enclosure have resulted in a blurring of borders not only between the global and the local but also between mobility and immobility.

In the way of former nomadic civilizations, we are witnessing a sort of topological turnaround whereby for the first time on a universal scale differences no longer exist between exterior and interior, between inside and outside.”

Paul Virilio

## **URBAN SEAM**

### **Niterói Port Area, Brazil**

Urban seam: this project is based on a delicate operation within a highly consolidated urban tissue and infrastructure, identifying its residual and degraded spaces, “stitching” them and re-injecting new functions, uses and spatial cohesion into the whole.

The proposed design actuates in different scales and modalities of urban recycling, bringing along true benefits to both local community and the entire city. The area will work as a buffer between the richer and the poorer districts of Niterói, physically segregated nowadays.

The old and abandoned port structures (buildings, storages, patios and quays) are articulated together in the form of new public spaces, re-opening the waterfront and re-integrating the sea and this part of the city. The symbiosis between the old and the new will happen in such way that the interior and exterior spaces will be subverted into ambiguous and poly-functional areas, with the old warehouses’ covered and protected facilities actuating side-by-side with the open-air ones. Some of the area’s original features will be kept active in part of the time, together with the new ones (e.g. the wheat mill still working while the area beneath its cargo tracks is used like a garden).

This concept deals closely with the maintenance of the site’s genius loci principles, since the characteristics of this port area are kept not only in its physical body, but also with fractal souvenirs of its initial uses and “soul”.

### **Form and Space Organization**

After determining the areas available for interventions, it was noticed that the site contained distinct smaller spaces organized within a L-shaped general region totally facing the bay. Those areas were divided into 3 main sub-areas joined by a pedestrian route which also worked as a bikers and tram path.

Each one of the areas will be treated as different entrances to the project’s area, exploring their specific urban situations looking forward to connecting the existing community infrastructure to the new public spaces and amenities created.

### **.Pattern and Axis (*the needles*)**

Special locations and architectural landmarks were identified as relevant focusing points to be visually and functionally tied together, in order to establish a spatial connection in the area and an efficient way to recycle the urban network as a whole.

The area was then placed over a square pattern whose modules could be easily designed to fulfill the needs of each area, like the sport fields and gardens.

As a way to break the uniformity and visual “boredom” of the pattern, a series of virtual linking axis was established, connecting the important points of focus chosen and overlaying the grid. The axis were used as guidelines to setup a dynamic division between the sub-areas and to generate the form of the new architectural and urban features (e.g. bridge and wooden decks).

### **. Housing (*the sewing thread*)**

The small voids in the area will be provided with 3 new housing typologies, joining the new public spaces and the existing community. The new housing blocks were located strategically to bring life into several points inside and along the new squares.

Each typology was designed to house specific portions of the population, such as small families and young couples with different social and economical conditions, reinforcing the area's characteristics of transition between the city's richer and poorer districts. This maneuver tries to democratize the access to low-price and quality housing close to Niterói's downtown and public transport lines to Rio.

### **Transit and Road Design**

Niterói in the next years will be passing by huge transformations concerning its connection with other surrounding towns and within its own districts with the implementation of both subway and tramway systems.

One line of each system was configured to serve the community focused in this project, bringing new population incomes and making new commercial and businesses facilities economically and socially feasible.

The tramway line will be connecting the area directly to Niterói's downtown, linking the new squares' commercial and leisure facilities along the shoreline until the fishermen community of Portugal Pequeno (Little Portugal). The route proposed in this project uses an old existing trail (already used by local residents) to create a new promenade exclusive for pedestrian and biker's use combined with the lower speed and silent technology of modern urban trams.

The street linking Little Portugal to the new public areas will be treated with “traffic-calming” techniques (partially retaining undesired heavy traffic incomes, with free access only for the trams), enabling a wider set of possible uses to its space, such as local and religious festivals or children outdoor activities.

## **Functions and Community Integration**

### **.The Buildings**

The concepts of building recycling had their parameters extended, being treated not only as empty shells looking for new contents, but using them as tools to globally integrate the whole area.

Their uses will range from fish and groceries markets in the old port to galleries with convenience stores for the local population, amenities for the fishermen communities and specific commerce and repair services related to the area's naval use.

Some of the old buildings will keep their initial functions, now working together with more appropriate ones, according to their location and architectural characteristics. This principle is easily exemplified with the old ice factory (with a huge windowless façade facing the sea) that served the fishing-boats early in the morning will now be used after sunset as a projection screen for films and as a background for small theater presentations. To fulfill the technical needs of this new feature, an abandoned ferryboat was restored and placed in front of it to work as a balcony, snack bar and projection-room for the cinema. Its proximity with the sea makes it possible to watch the screen from regular boats, creating a kind of maritime drive-through.

Next to the small square formed around the entrance to the uphill community and favela was created a small sports complex using the spaces beneath some old metal warehouses (indoor activities) and around them (outdoor). The ones with side walls had sections made on them to freely integrate their interiors with the outdoors, inserting the complex and the parks around them inside a continuum spatiale (continuum space) system.

### **.The Marinas**

Taking advantage of a proper geographic situation with protected and calm waters, it will be created along the new quays series of small marinas and docks, making better docking and repair areas for local fishing and personal boats. The new rental docking spaces will create numerous jobs for the local unemployed fishermen and stowers.

## **The Urban Context (*the rip*)**

Niterói is the former capital of the State and its second most city (just after Rio de Janeiro). It is located in the eastern border of Guanabara Bay and linked directly to Rio de Janeiro (in the western border) by a bridge.

As part of Rio's metropolitan area, Niterói has a very important social and urban role due to its geographical presence as an intermediary/articulation zone between Rio de Janeiro and its inland towns.

The area focused in this design is probably the kernel of this mechanism, linking the eastern inland towns with Rio de Janeiro and Niterói. Although, the area's scale of influence goes into a more detailed realm than the macro and regional ones inside the local urban analysis, being also an important part of Niterói's inner organization.