

Water and Culture Heritage. The Legacy of the Portuguese SPA Architecture

H G Pinto

Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal.

Introduction

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Scientific knowledge is the base for the correct safeguard and appreciation of thermal heritage.

The scientific studies contribute to divulging and consolidate the knowledge of the evolution of architecture as an essential support of thermalism, and the outputs for intervention strategies in different Portuguese Architecture of Spas.

From the important roman thermal bathhouse of Chaves to the international affirmation of the thermal heritage linked to the first and oldest thermal hospital in the world Caldas da Rainha, the spas legacy in Portugal, is the result of many strategies (from programming, drawing, constructing, using) and divulging of the waters. The biggest revolution occurred in mid-19th century, when the architectural programs transform the bathing area to other complementary functions. However, the great thermal heritage belongs to the 20th century, justified through great investments, and when thermalism represented an important activity in the context of communities, either in health care, or as an economic strategy for the affirmation of a small town or the consolidation of a city (Estoril, Curia, Vidago, Pedras Salgadas).

There was, in fact, a consolidation in Portugal of an innovative model layout of thermal territory in the past century: an enclosed park and with life of its own. Parallel to this model layout, there is a development of other thermal spaces, whose equipments are distributed by the community, through different private or corporate initiatives, where, aside from the bathhouse, the territory is completed with other buildings essential to the thermal practice.

Conclusion

Aware of their importance in a life-valuing and healing process, becomes essential for the rites of the aquistas, and exquisite for socialization or conviviality that would course through the regular users of the water springs.

Presently, this heritage, related to hydrothermal resources, to architecture, to therapeutic equipments and accessories, to the surrounding green areas and to the traditional practices and uses, becomes an added asset for the revival of thermalism in Portugal. Its conservation is also a competition factor for the thermal resorts, as a cultural asset, which is a reason that legacy has been taken up as a strategic element in the acting of some agents.