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NOTRE-DAME AND PAÇO DE SÃO CRISTÓVÃO: MEMORY AND RESIGNIFICATION POST-FIRE

NOTRE-DAME Y PAÇO DE SÃO CRISTÓVÃO: MEMORIA Y RESIGNIFICACIÓN POSTINCENDIO

NOTRE-DAME E PAÇO DE SÃO CRISTÓVÃO: MEMÓRIA E RESSIGNIFICAÇÃO PÓS-INCÊNDIO



Figure 0. Marks and scars of the fire in Paço de São Cristóvão. Source: Author's collection, 2021.

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ABSTRACT

This article comparatively examines the heritage reconstruction processes undertaken at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris and Paço de São Cristóvão, the historic seat of the National Museum of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, following the fires of 2019 and 2018, respectively. It seeks to understand how different institutional paths and architectural decisions reorganize heritage values, sources of authenticity, uses, and systems of public visibility. The study adopts a qualitative approach, combining historical and documentary analysis, theoretical review, and a comparative examination using a matrix applied to architectural projects, legislation, technical and institutional documents, photographic records, and communication materials. The findings show that, at Notre-Dame, centralized decision-making and the concentrated intervention timeframe produced a composite formal unity, combining documented medieval references for the nave and choir with the "Viollet-le-Duc state" adopted for the spire and the main roof structure. At Paço de São Cristóvão, interinstitutional governance and implementation through successive phases constitute an incremental process in which the conservation of the surviving fabric, the reconstruction of lost elements, the integration of notoriously contemporary structures, and new connections support the complex's reactivation as a museum, a scientific institution, and a public facility. The circulation of images also performs distinct roles: at Notre-Dame, it tends to stabilize a narrative of continuity and reopening; at Paço, it communicates successive stages and legitimizes an ongoing reconstruction. The study contributes to the debate on architectural restoration by demonstrating that post-catastrophe reconstruction operates simultaneously on material fabric, values, uses, and forms of public visibility, revealing the constitutive role of symbolic dimensions and communication processes in the contemporary reinscription of heritage.

Keywords: museum architecture, religious architecture, fires, heritage reconstruction, architectural restoration

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa comparativamente os processos de reconstrução patrimonial da Catedral de Notre-Dame de Paris e do Paço de São Cristóvão, sede histórica do Museu Nacional/UFRJ, após os incêndios de 2019 e 2018. O objetivo é compreender como trajetórias institucionais e decisões arquitetônicas distintas reorganizam valores patrimoniais, fontes de autenticidade, usos e regimes de visibilidade pública. A pesquisa adota uma abordagem qualitativa e combina análise histórico-documental, revisão teórica e exame comparativo, operacionalizados por meio de uma matriz aplicada a projetos arquitetônicos, à legislação, a documentos técnicos e institucionais, a registros fotográficos e a materiais de comunicação. Os resultados mostram que, em Notre-Dame, a centralização decisória e a temporalidade concentrada da intervenção produziram uma unidade formal composta, articulando referências medievais documentadas para a nave e o coro e o "estado Viollet-le-Duc" para a flecha e a grande cobertura. No Paço, a governança interinstitucional e a execução por frentes sucessivas configuram um processo incremental, no qual a conservação de remanescentes, a recomposição de partes perdidas, a inserção de estruturas contemporâneas distinguíveis e novas conexões sustentam a reativação museológica, científica e pública do conjunto. A circulação das imagens também assume funções distintas: em Notre-Dame, tende a estabilizar uma narrativa de continuidade e de reabertura; no Paço, comunica etapas e legitima uma reconstrução ainda em curso. O estudo contribui para o debate sobre restauração arquitetônica ao demonstrar que reconstruções pós-catástrofe operam simultaneamente sobre matéria, valores, usos e formas de visibilidade pública, evidenciando o papel constitutivo das dimensões simbólicas e comunicacionais na reinscrição do patrimônio.

Palavras-chave: arquitetura de museus, arquitetura religiosa, incêndios, reconstrução patrimonial, restauração arquitetônica

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza comparativamente los procesos de reconstrucción patrimonial de la catedral de Notre-Dame de París y del Paço de São Cristóvão, sede histórica del Museo Nacional de la Universidad Federal de Río de Janeiro, tras los incendios de 2019 y 2018, respectivamente. Su objetivo es comprender cómo distintas trayectorias institucionales y decisiones arquitectónicas reorganizan los valores patrimoniales, las fuentes de autenticidad, los usos y los regímenes de visibilidad pública. La investigación adopta un enfoque cualitativo y combina análisis histórico-documental, revisión teórica y una matriz comparativa, aplicados a proyectos arquitectónicos, legislación, documentos técnicos e institucionales, registros fotográficos y materiales de comunicación. Los resultados muestran que, en Notre-Dame, la centralización de las decisiones y la temporalidad concentrada de la intervención produjeron una unidad formal compuesta, articulando referencias medievales documentadas para la nave y el coro con el "estado Viollet-le-Duc" adoptado para la aguja y la gran cubierta. En el Paço, la gobernanza interinstitucional y la ejecución en etapas sucesivas configuran un proceso incremental en el que la conservación de los elementos remanentes, la reconstrucción de partes perdidas, las estructuras contemporáneas y las nuevas conexiones sustentan la reactivación del conjunto como museo, institución científica y equipamiento público. La circulación de imágenes también cumple funciones distintas: en Notre-Dame tiende a estabilizar una narrativa de continuidad y de reapertura; en el Paço comunica las distintas etapas y legitima una reconstrucción aún en curso. El estudio contribuye al debate sobre la restauración arquitectónica al demostrar que las reconstrucciones posteriores a catástrofes operan simultáneamente sobre la materialidad, los valores, los usos y las formas de visibilidad pública, y al revelar el papel constitutivo de las dimensiones simbólicas y de los procesos de comunicación en la reinscripción contemporánea del patrimonio.

Palabras clave: arquitectura de museos, arquitectura religiosa, incendios, reconstrucción patrimonial, restauración arquitectónica

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, catastrophes that have struck historical monuments have made the tensions inherent in contemporary architectural conservation and restoration practices visible. The resulting damage compromises the materiality of buildings of high historical value and triggers processes of symbolic reconstruction and public reconfiguration of cultural heritage. In these circumstances, restoration transcends physical recovery and encompasses interpretive tensions, narrative choices, and institutional strategies to reactivate the monuments' public presence.

Recent literature on cultural heritage documents the expansion of the field of heritage interventions. Studies on conservation and restoration theory indicate that decisions about reconstruction, the upkeep of material marks of the catastrophe, and a formal recomposition combine historical, aesthetic, and social values attributed to monuments (Muñoz Viñas, 2005). Meanwhile, formulations on collective memory and places of memory help explain why the symbolic dimensions of heritage have become central in contexts marked by the widespread circulation of images and the intensification of disputes over cultural memory (Halbwachs, 1990; Nora, 1993). In this scenario, historical monuments act as devices to produce meaning and have their public visibility continuously reconfigured by institutional, media, and cultural processes.

The fires that occurred at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris in 2019 and at the Paço de São Cristóvão, the historical headquarters of the National Museum of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, in 2018, constitute paradigmatic episodes. Both monuments have great architectural and symbolic value, and after the fires, they became the object of extensive mobilization processes aimed at reconstruction. In the French case, this mobilization included the National subscription instituted by a specific law, large donations, and public and parliamentary debate on the spire's reconstruction (France, 2019). In the Brazilian case, it combined campaigns for heritage donations, the "Museu Nacional Vive" program, and cooperation of the University, the Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage [IPHAN], UNESCO, and public and private funders. Although they have different uses, the two cases share decisive aspects for comparative analysis: strong public impact, intense image circulation, and renewal of symbolic presence.

The originality of the article lies in the link between architectural analysis, conservation theory, and the symbolic dimensions of heritage visibility. Through historical-documentary analysis, theoretical review, and comparative examination operationalized by a matrix, the study identifies similarities and differences in the material, symbolic, and public reconfiguration of Notre-Dame and the Paço de São Cristóvão after the fires.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis understands architectural heritage as a cultural construct supported by historical selection processes, interpretation, and attribution of value. Monuments are preserved for their materiality, but also because groups and institutions recognize in them historical, aesthetic, symbolic, and use values that justify their permanence. Post-catastrophe reconstruction is therefore not

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an exclusively technical operation: it involves cultural, political, and social decisions about what to conserve, transform, rebuild, and make publicly readable (Riegl, 2016).

Alois Riegl (2016) offers the key axiological basis for this interpretation. Its memory values link the monument to the past, while the current values respond to the demands and perceptions of the present. Among the former, the historical value recognizes the asset as a unique and intelligible document, and the seniority value reflects its duration in the matter at hand. Among the latter, use value maintains its functional continuity, while art and novelty values respond to aesthetic expectations and to the visual integrity perceived in the present. This formulation shows that every intervention reorders hierarchies. However, by preserving certain attributes, it can reduce others and modify how the monument is recognized.

This interpretation is connected to the principles of the Venice Charter (ICOMOS, 1964), the Nara Document on Authenticity (ICOMOS, 1994), and the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS, 2013). The Venice Charter relates restoration to respect for the original material, authentic documentation, contributions from different periods, and the limits of conjecture. Nara broadens the sources of authenticity to include form, matter, use, function, tradition, context, and meaning. Burra, in turn, links conservation to cultural significance and legal change management. Together, these documents allow us to evaluate not only the final appearance of interventions, but also the evidence, values, uses, and decision-making processes that support them.

In addition, Muñoz Viñas (2005) allows us to understand conservation as a selective, negotiated, and communicative practice. Intervening implies choosing evidence, hierarchizing meanings, and establishing degrees of legibility. In post-catastrophe situations, such choices respond simultaneously to material and regulatory requirements, collective expectations, institutional positions, and narratives of loss, reparation, and permanence. Their contribution is used here to explain that values are not just identified: they are selected, communicated, and legitimized by agents with different forms of authority.

The public dimension of these decisions requires considering the image's contemporary centrality. Monuments affected by catastrophes begin to circulate intensively through photographic records, transmissions, recurrent frames, and institutional narratives. Benjamin (2015) helps us understand how technical reproducibility broadens exposure and shifts the reception of the monument beyond its immediate material presence. Debord (1997) helps us recognize that this circulation is not neutral, as images also mediate social and institutional relations. Marx (2013) critically situates this process by showing how socially produced relations and values can present themselves as evident properties of things.

The widespread visual circulation does not directly determine restoration decisions, but frames alternatives, intensifies expectations, and favors the stabilization of certain narratives. Images of fire, ruin, technical work,

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reconstruction, and reopening organize public sequences of interpretation, in which certain values become more recognizable than others. The reconstruction acts, thus, on the matter and on the ways of seeing, narrating, and legitimizing the heritage.

It is within this outlook that the article's comparative matrix is inserted, organized into four lines: institutional and decision-making; values, matter, and authenticity; use and heritage practices; and visibility and mediation. The circulation of images is considered a constitutive, but not isolated, dimension of contemporary legitimation: architectural devices, institutional decisions, and forms of public communication jointly contribute to re-inscribe the monument in the present. The comparison between Notre-Dame and the Paço de São Cristóvão therefore allows for an examination of how different contexts reorganize the relationships among matter, memory, use, authenticity, and visibility after the catastrophe.

METHODOLOGY

The research adopts a qualitative and comparative approach to examine two contemporary heritage reconstruction processes after fires. The choice of Notre-Dame and Paço de São Cristóvão stems from their historical and symbolic relevance, as well as from the possibility of examining, in different institutional contexts, different strategies for conservation, reconstruction, use, and resignification.

The procedure combines historical-documentary analysis, theoretical review, and comparative examination of a corpus comprising architectural projects, intervention reports, heritage legislation, technical and institutional documents, photographic records, images in public circulation, and communication materials produced during the reconstruction processes. In the French case, the corpus brings together legislation, reports, and institutional documentation on Notre-Dame (Cour des Comptes, 2020; Diocèse de Paris, 2024; France, 2019). In the Brazilian case, it includes projects, reports, and technical documents related to the reactivation of the Paço de São Cristóvão and the National Museum (Hereñú + Ferroni Arquitetos Ltda. & Atelier of Architecture and Urban Design, 2022; Hereñú + Ferroni Arquitetos Ltda., Soares & Freire, 2023, Hereñú + Ferroni Arquitetos Ltda., Soares, Portugal, 2024; IPHAN, 2023; IPHAN, 2024a).

The analysis uses a comparative matrix organized along four lines. The first examines the institutional and decision-making paths of each process, considering forms of governance, the agents involved, temporalities, and intervention methods. The second observes values, matter, and authenticity, paying attention to historical, antiquity, use, art, and novelty values (Riegl, 2016), as well as to sources of authenticity and cultural significance mobilized in the decisions. The third analyzes use and heritage practices, considering continuity or functional transformation, circulation, accessibility, infrastructure, and modes of monument reactivation. The fourth examines visibility and mediation, through the circulation of images, recurrent frames, institutional narratives, and

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architectural and interpretative devices associated with monuments after the fires.

The study does not directly measure public opinion or survey local communities. The term "public visibility" designates, in this article, how institutions, media, projects, and spatial devices propose, repeat, and stabilize certain readings of heritage. The analysis therefore considers both the materiality of the interventions and frameworks through which their decisions are communicated and legitimized.

The collation examines how the two cases responded to fires through distinct institutional and architectural paths, reorganizing matter, memory, use, authenticity, and visibility, as summarized in the comparative matrix.

CASE STUDY

Notre-Dame and Paço de São Cristóvão have different roles, funding scales, and governance structures. However, they share a critical event with far-reaching repercussions, extensive material losses, and the need to publicly legitimize choices regarding conservation, reconstruction, and transformation.

The fire at Notre-Dame on April 15th, 2019, occurred during roof work and destroyed the spire, much of the wooden structure, and sections of the roofs of the nave, the choir, and the transept. The preliminary investigation ruled out evidence of a criminal origin. It maintained as a working hypothesis a short circuit in temporary electrical installations connected to the roof or a badly extinguished cigarette left by workers, neither of which was definitively confirmed (Europe 1, 2019). The French state quickly centralized the response through specific legislation, international financial mobilization, and the creation of a public body to carry out the work. In the following months, contemporary proposals for the spire and roof circulated widely, broadening the debate's visibility, but institutional decisions progressively narrowed the field of alternatives. The option, summarized in the public and institutional debate by the expression *à l'identique*, was oriented towards the recreation of the historically consolidated image of the cathedral. This operation can be read, in a Brandian line, as a search for its potential unity, but which remains stressed by the plurality of documented historical statuses (Brandi, 2004). The spire and large roof recovered the "Viollet-le-Duc state," while the nave and choir referred to the documented medieval state.

In Paço de São Cristóvão, the fire on September 2nd, 2018 caused the collapse of the roofs and a large part of the floors and interiors, resulting in a significant loss of the collections. However, the facades, masonry, and several remnants remained intact (Figure 1). The official investigation identified a short circuit in the air-conditioning system installed in the building's auditorium as a probable cause (Federal Police, 2019). The first actions involved expert review, rescue, shoring, stabilization, and protection of the surviving elements. Unlike in the French case, the process began to respond simultaneously to the

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Figure 1. Fire at Paço de São Cristóvão, historical headquarters of the National Museum of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Source: Author's collection, 2018.

palace's recovery and the reconstitution of the National Museum as a scientific and museological institution. Conducted by the National Museum / UFRJ in conjunction with IPHAN, UNESCO, funding institutions, and design teams, it was structured in successive and connected fronts: emergency consolidation, recovery of facades and roofs, preservation of the assets, implementation of infrastructures, intervention in interiors and gardens, reconfiguration of the Alípio de Miranda Ribeiro Annex, and museography work.

The paths produced different responses. At Notre-Dame, decision-making centralization, liturgical continuity, and the strength of a consolidated historical image guided the reconstruction towards a documented formal recovery. At Paço, the extent of the losses and the need to update the museum's operations led to a convergence of the conservation of remnants, the recomposition of lost parts, the insertion of distinctive contemporary structures, museological reorganization, and new infrastructure. These differences underlie the comparison outlined in the following sections.

DEVELOPMENT

Reconstruction outlines and redistribution of values

At Notre-Dame, the adoption of medieval references for the nave and choir, and the "Viollet-le-Duc state" for the spire and the large roof, resulted in

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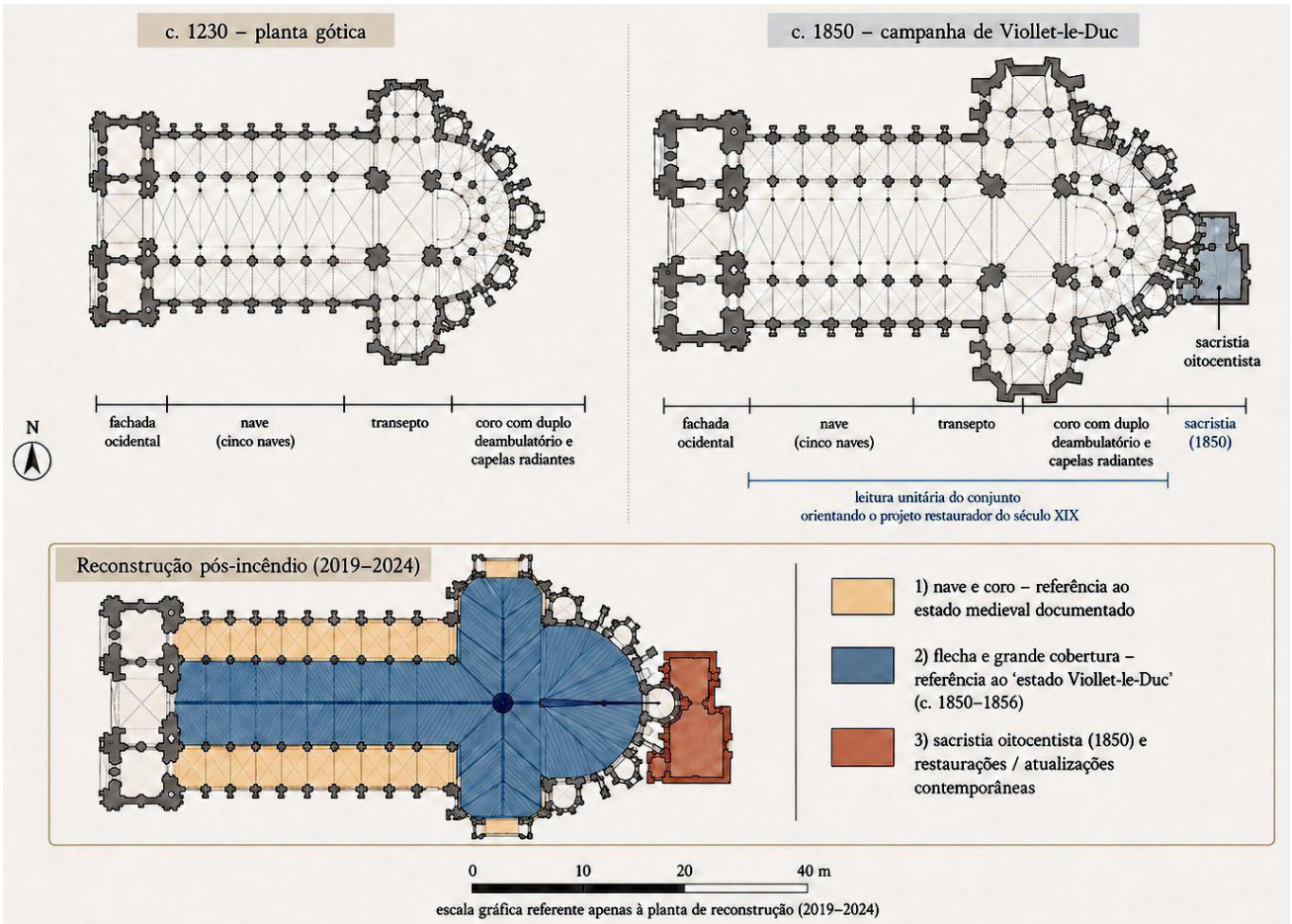


Figure 2. Notre-Dame de Paris: Historical references and summary of the reconstruction (outline). The representation distinguishes the documented medieval references for the nave and choir, the "Viollet-le-Duc State" for the spire and the large roof, and the restored and updated 18th-century sacristy. Source: Prepared by the Author, 2026, based on Guilhermy and Viollet-le-Duc (1856) and the Établissement public chargé de la conservation et de la restauration de la cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris (2024).

a visual unity that does not conform to the homogeneous reconstruction of a single historical moment. It is a documentarily sustained, selective composition, in which different temporalities are brought together under a continuous and immediately recognizable heritage image. The intervention thus subordinates the visibility of novelty to the recomposition of the cathedral's consolidated figure, reinforcing its historical and artistic values and preserving the continuity of liturgical use (Figure 2).

This formal continuity, however, coexists with a significant perceptual transformation of the interior. The cleaning of surfaces and, above all, the reconfiguration of artificial lighting reduced areas of penumbra and contrast, increasing the luminous homogeneity and spatial legibility of the nave. The comparison between the records of 2007 and 2025 shows that the permanence of the architectural configuration did not prevent the creation of a new, cleaner, and visually controlled environment (Figures 3 and 4).

In Paço de São Cristóvão, the extent of the losses and the simultaneous reconstitution of the building and the institution displace novelty to another sphere. Instead of remaining mostly contained in discrete systems, it becomes legible in the new structures of circulation, reception, infrastructure, and museological support. The reconstruction not only seeks to recompose a previous architectural figure but also to make an ensemble

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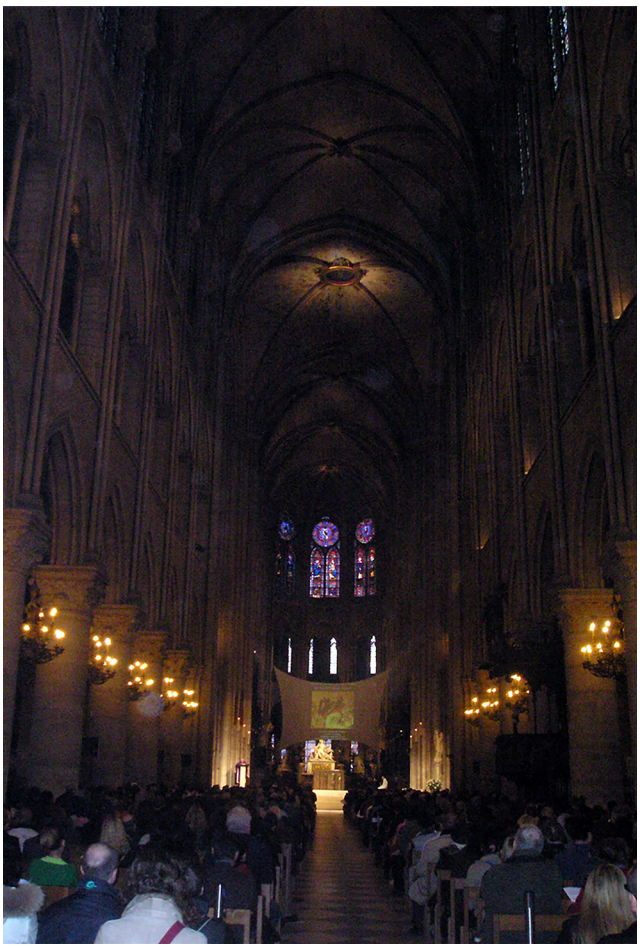




Figure 3. Central Nave of Notre-Dame before the fire and the recent cleaning process, with greater penumbra and contrast. Source: Author's collection, 2007.

Figure 4. Central Nave of Notre-Dame after restoration, with lighter surfaces and greater luminous uniformity. Source: Author's collection, 2025.

whose scientific, museum, and public functions have been profoundly interrupted operable again.

This combines the conservation of remnants, the recomposition of lost parts, and the insertion of distinctive contemporary structures. Certain traces of the fire remain as evidence of the material rupture, while other spaces receive treatments necessary for security, conservation, and new museological functioning (Figure 5). The scar, therefore, is neither a homogeneous guideline nor a value in itself: its permanence results from interpretative choices that can broaden the building's historical legibility, but also involve the risk of aestheticizing the catastrophe.

The comparison shows distinct redistributions between historical, antique, use, art, and novelty values. At Notre-Dame, novelty remains largely integrated as a technical and perceptual update at the service of historical, liturgical, and formal continuity. At Paço, it manifests itself more explicitly in the contemporary system of support for museum use, formed by connections, access, routes, infrastructures, and the reconfiguration of the northern sector. These devices make the assembly operable again and allow parts of the fire-induced rupture to remain readable. In both cases, reconstruction rearranges hierarchies of value; what varies is how this redistribution is materially expressed, publicly mediated, or visually contained.

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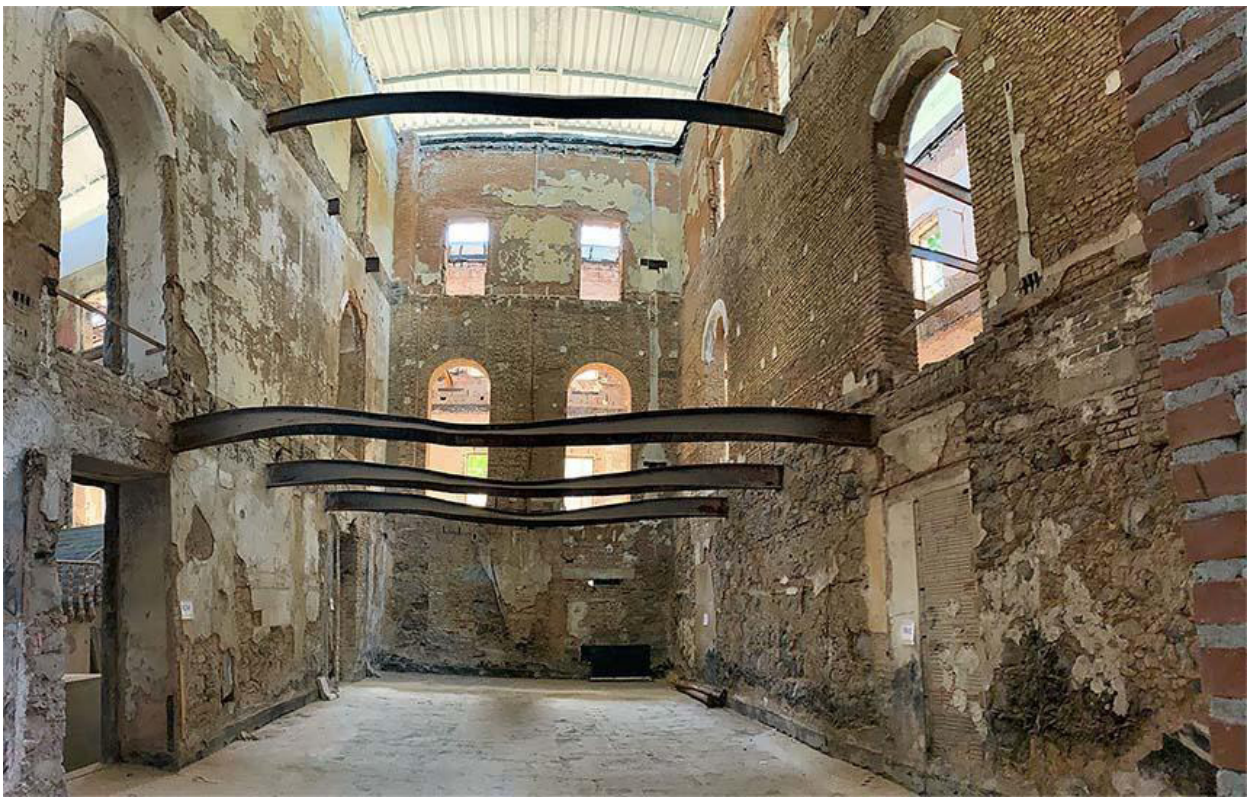


Figure 5. Marks and scars of the fire in Paço de São Cristóvão. Source: Author's collection, 2021.

Use, connections and transformation of heritage practices

In both cases, the use value contributes to the definition of architectural choices, but operates in different ways. In Notre-Dame, the intervention reestablishes the continuity of worship, visitation, and the cathedral's civic presence, without altering its primary role. The technical and environmental upgrades, subordinated to the monument's formal and symbolic permanence, support the resumption of these practices. The reopening thus represents less a reprogramming of the building than the institutional and liturgical reactivation of historically consolidated uses.

In Paço de São Cristóvão, the reconstruction of heritage practices is more comprehensive. The complex must once again function as a museum, scientific center, and public facility, subject to new requirements for security, accessibility, collection conservation, circulation, air conditioning, and reception. The use value ceases to mean only functional continuity. It begins to organize the intervention itself, requiring a system capable of articulating preservation of architectural reading, risk reduction, separation of flows, and incorporation of technical support (Lobo & Werneck, 2024).

The Bendegó room integrates this system as a space for welcoming, guiding, and redistributing visitors to the exhibition circuits (Figure 6). The permanence of the meteorite, survivor of the fire and symbol of the museum, combines material continuity, memory of the catastrophe, and anticipation of the reopening. In the north sector, the old stair tunnel was incorporated into the

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Figure 6. Sala do Bendegó as a space for welcoming, orientation, and connection with the exhibition circuits. Source: Author's collection, 2025.

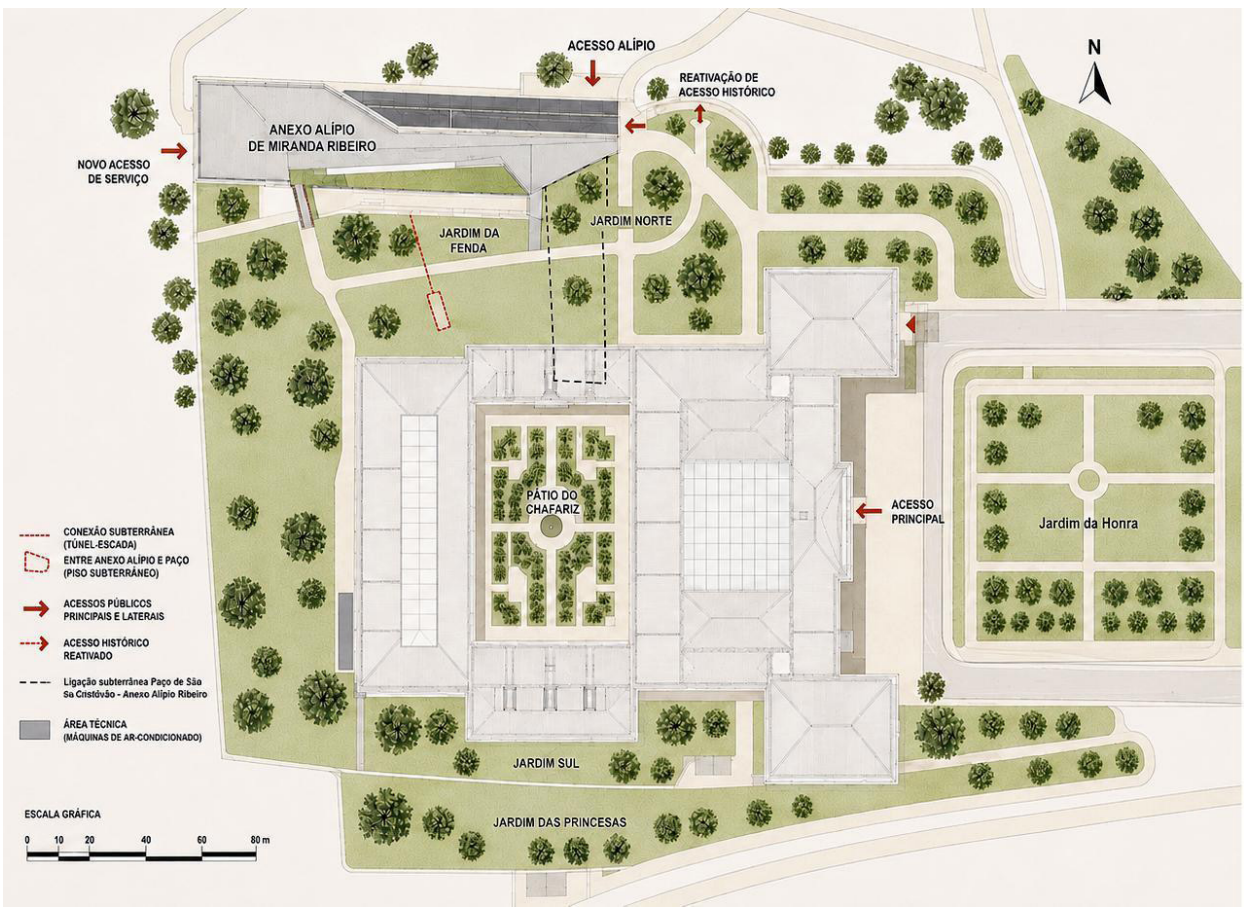


Figure 7. Paço de São Cristóvão and Annex Alípio de Miranda Ribeiro: Layout of the complex's entrances, gardens, and connections. Source: Prepared by the Author, 2026, based on the work of Hereñú + Ferroni Arquitetos Ltda. et al. (2022), Hereñú + Ferroni Arquitetos Ltda. et al. (2023) and Hereñú + Ferroni Arquitetos Ltda. et al. (2024).

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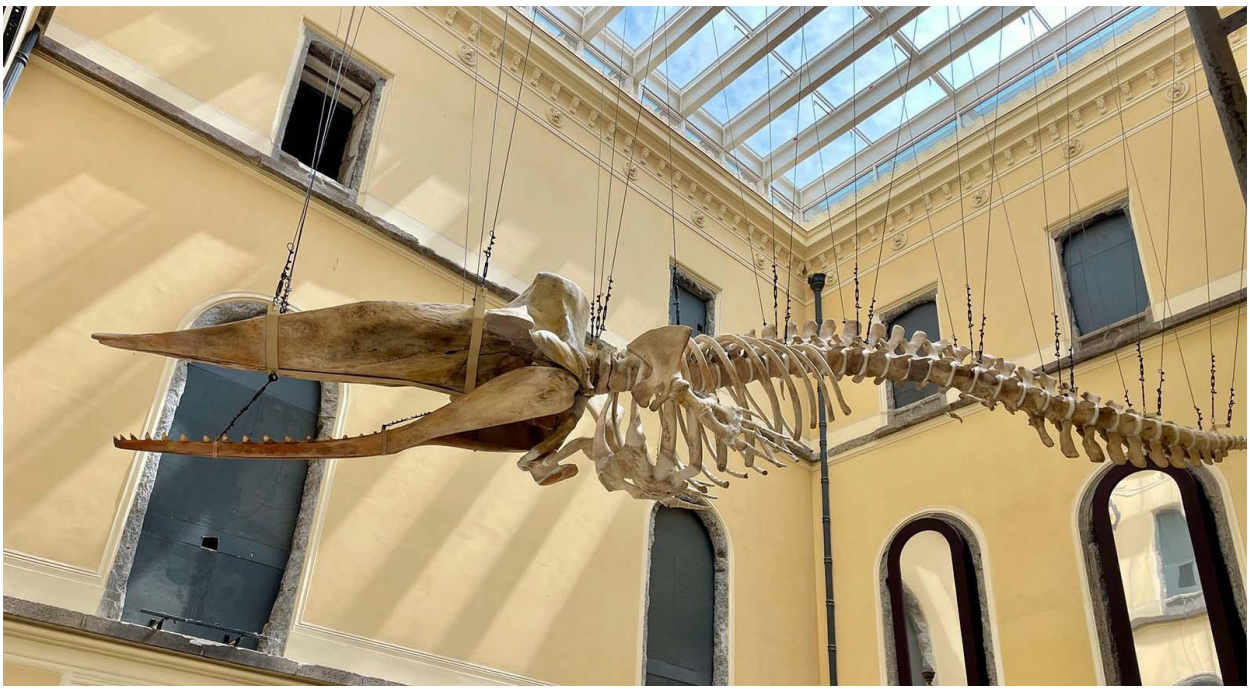


Figure 8. Paço de São Cristóvão (National Museum / UFRJ). Staircase hall with contemporary zenithal closure and redistribution of the internal route. Source: Author's collection, 2025.

new functional organization as a service access, connecting the Annex, by the Jardim da Fenda, to the new Jardim Norte, on the ground floor of the Palace, without making the direct connection between the Alípio de Miranda Ribeiro Annex and the historic building.

The Alípio Annex and the reconfiguration of the northern sector constitute the same architectural and territorial operation. The annex has auditoriums, technical areas, staircases, services, and the substantive part of the contemporary supports, allowing the main body to be allocated predominantly to museological functions while preserving its spatial intelligibility. The new underground link connects the Annex to the vertical corridor of the Palace's North Block. The old stair tunnel integrates this system as a service access between Jardim da Fenda and Jardim Norte (North Garden). The external ramp, new entrances, reactivation of the historical entrance, and routes through the gardens reorganize the relationships between Paço, Anexo Alípio, and Quinta da Boa Vista (Figure 7) (IPHAN, 2024b).

The annex's upper slab creates the Jardim Norte and converts an old service area into a space for walking, sitting, and observing the Palace. Its central opening introduces daylight and ventilation, exposes the historic slope, and leads to Jardim da Fenda on the lower level. The slope thus ceases to act only as a limit and begins to integrate the ensemble's architectural experience and historical interpretation. The operation expands the presence of the Palace in the landscape and concentrates in distinguishable contemporary layers part of the support, maintenance, transport, and reception systems (Hereñú + Ferroni Arquitetos Ltda. et al., 2022; Hereñú + Ferroni Arquitetos Ltda. et al., 2023; Hereñú + Ferroni Arquitetos Ltda. et al., 2024; IPHAN, 2023).

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The zenithal closure of Pátio da Escadaria integrates this restructuring as an infrastructure of protection, environmental qualification, and museographic support (Figure 8). The roof modifies the ambiance of one of the Palace's main intersections. It links the entrance, the Bendegó Room, the Salão da Escadaria (Staircase Hall), the ticket office, the Memory Room, the café, and the exhibition circuits. Its insertion remains legible as a contemporary intervention, highlighting the tension between preserving the historical space and the new operational requirements.

The comparison, therefore, shows different forms of the action of use value. At Notre-Dame, religious, civic, and visitation practices are reactivated under a principle of functional continuity. At Paço, the recovery of the use depends on the construction of a new network of circulation, infrastructure, museography, and relationship with the landscape. The intervention not only restores interrupted roles, but also redefines the spatial and technical conditions under which the National Museum will once again operate as a scientific and public institution.

Circulation of images and stabilization of narratives

The public circulation of images assumed different roles in the two processes. In both cases, the fire records converted the catastrophe into a visual event with far-reaching repercussions, without being able to attribute the architectural decisions to the images in isolation. It occurred amid losses, amid the amplification of expectations, and amid the public legitimization of institutional interpretations built during interventions.

At Notre-Dame, the image of the flaming spire brought together the rupture and reinforced the element's centrality in the cathedral's silhouette and public recognition. The circulation of contemporary proposals for the spire and roof initially made a field of alternatives visible, but institutional decisions later restricted this field. During the works, the panels installed around the site connected historical documentation, diagnosis, research, construction techniques, and valuation of the *métiers du chantier*. The work thus also became a mediation device, in which artisanal knowledge and contemporary instruments of control were presented as foundations of heritage continuity. With the reconstruction of the spire, the re-roofing, and the resumption of worship, the public narrative progressively shifted from loss to the recovery of the cathedral's iconic presence. In this process, as Poulot (2019) observes, the real challenge was to transform collective communion in the face of the drama into a heritage project, turning Notre-Dame into a civic heritage space capable of sustaining, beyond the initial shock, new forms of recognition and public legitimation.

At Paço de São Cristóvão, institutional communication operates within a longer, still-open temporality. The image of the burning building established a representation of national loss. At the same time, the records of the rescue, the remnants, the recovered facades, and the successive fronts of work began to document the continuity of the process. Bendegó acquired particular

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Comparative matrix of post-fire reconstruction layouts			
Dimension	Notre-Dame	Paço de São Cristóvão	Comparative results
Institutional and decision-making path	state centralization; specific legislation; progressive restriction of alternatives	interinstitutional governance; implementation by fronts and cycles; integration between building and museum	concentrated decision and political temporality × articulated and incremental process
Values, matter and authenticity	documentary composition of historical states; visually restrained novelty	distinguishable remnants, recompositions and insertions; selective permanence of scars	Composite formal unit × stratified readability
Heritage use and practices	liturgical, civic and visitation reactivation	museological, scientific, technical and public rescheduling	functional continuity × reconstruction of conditions of use
Visibility and mediation	restitution of the icon; narrative of crafts, reconstruction and reopening	institutional survival; work in progress; "National Museum Lives On"	stabilization of a recovered figure × legitimization of a reconstruction still in progress

Table 1. Synthetic comparative matrix of post-fire reconstruction systems. Source: Prepared by the authors, 2026.

symbolic strength by bringing together material survival, memory of the fire, and expectation of reopening. The "National Museum Lives On" denomination, disseminated through spatial devices and institutional and digital media, shifts the focus from the building's reconstruction to the permanence of the scientific, educational, and museological institution. This communication is linked to a form of governance that declares transparency and participation as conditions of legitimacy. However, these principles depend on mediation, public accountability, and the continuous review of the narratives presented.

The comparison, therefore, reveals different temporal and communicative regimes. At Notre-Dame, the images after the reopening tend to close the public sequence of the catastrophe by the recovery of the icon and its uses. At Paço, they continue to present stages, remnants, and anticipations, legitimizing a reconstruction still in progress. Public visibility thus participates in the contemporary re-inscription of monuments by selecting what will be shown, which conflicts will remain noticeable, and which interpretations will acquire greater stability. The main contrasts between the institutional paths, value redistributions, uses, and visibility regimes of the two cases are summarized in Table 1.

CONCLUSIONS

The comparative analysis between Notre-Dame de Paris and the Paço de São Cristóvão shows that post-catastrophe heritage reconstruction simultaneously constitutes an operation on the subject involved, reorganizing values, and practicing public legitimation. The two cases share a critical event with far-reaching repercussions and a need to reinscribe the monument in the present. However, they respond to this requirement along different institutional and architectural paths, whose contrasts the comparative matrix specifies.

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At Notre-Dame, the centralization of decision-making by the French state, specific legislation, and the progressive restriction of alternatives produced concentrated temporality, guided by the recovery of the cathedral's consolidated historical image. The adoption of documented medieval references for the nave and choir and the "Viollet-le-Duc State" for the spire and the large roof resulted in a composite formal unity, documentarily sustained but not following the homogeneous recovery of a single historical moment. The novelty remained subordinated to the stability of the inherited figure. Technical and perceptual updates, including the transformation of the interior lighting system, were incorporated in a controlled way, while preserving the liturgical continuity and the monument's civic presence.

At Paço de São Cristóvão, interinstitutional governance, implementation across successive fronts, and the connection between the building's recovery and the reconstitution of the scientific institution constitute an incremental, ongoing process that remains open. The reconstruction combines the conservation of remnants, the recomposition of lost parts, and the insertion of different contemporary structures. This operation favors a stratified reading, where different historical layers and certain marks of the fire can remain as interpretable evidence, without the scar constituting a homogeneous guideline or a value in itself. The use value ceases to mean only functional continuity. It begins to organize the intervention, requiring infrastructures, connections, and museological supports that enable the contemporary operation of the museum, the scientific center, and the public equipment.

The public circulation of images also operates differently. At Notre-Dame, it tends to close the sequence of the catastrophe by the recovery of the icon, the resumption of uses, and the stabilization of a narrative of continuity and reopening. At Paço, it operates in a still procedural temporality, communicating stages, remnants, and anticipations and reaffirming, through formulas such as the "National Museum Lives On", the continuity of the institution beyond the loss of the building and the collections. In both cases, public visibility does not constitute a mere aftereffect of the intervention: it integrates its legitimation by selecting what will be shown, framing the values mobilized, and favoring certain interpretations, without eliminating the conflicts or alternatives that the processes went through.

The study contributes to the debate on architectural restoration by showing that symbolic and communicative dimensions are not external to material decisions, but participate in the re-inscription of heritage in the present. Reconstructing implies defining relationships between matter, memory, use, authenticity, and visibility and establishing which continuities, ruptures, and temporalities will remain publicly readable. As a limitation, the research examines institutional, architectural, and visual frameworks but does not directly measure their reception among communities or user groups. This dimension may, in later studies, expand the understanding of the forms of recognition, negotiation, and contestation of heritage interventions.

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