

“Shape as an Ideology.

An analysis between shape, meaning and interpretation of urban design: the case of Tróia and the Condado neighbourhood in Lisbon”.

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Abstract

The contemporary metropolis tends to seem mostly affected by the phenomena of social disintegration and inequalities. The modernist utopia of progress, freedom and equality did not take place and there are many examples of urban peripheries around the world that remind us of that. Despite initial good intentions, these areas continue to increase, to experience situations of isolation from the rest of the city and show disturbing situations of degradation.

Given this context, the focus of this paper will be on Tróia's urban project and the Bairro do Condado's social housing project in Lisbon, where both cases present the same morphology and project, although with totally different results.

On one hand, we have the Garden City of Tróia, built and designed for upper-middle class vacationers, while on the other we have the Bairro do Condado neighbourhood, representing one of the most stigmatised areas of Lisbon, particularly due to deviant behaviour, criminality and environmental degradation.

The first question that immediately comes to mind is: Why did a project based on the concept of "Garden City" like Tróia, thought to enhance and improve the inhabitants life quality, not work in a context like that of Bairro do Condado?

Some people, such as the author Heitor regarding the Bairro do Condado's case, attribute the cause of deviant behaviours mainly to the urban design and "wrong" shapes of the place and some others, on the contrary, think that the architecture assumes a neutral position and see the inhabitants of these places solely responsible for their own degradation and marginalisation.

In this regard, can the urban design influence the behaviour and degradation verified in these places?

To what extent must the needs of the inhabitants be interpreted and registered? And to what extent it is possible to present suggestions for improvement without falling into ideological impositions?

These are some of the questions that will be further developed in this paper, in order to raise the matter on the current role of design and discuss what kind of action should be taken against the spread of old and new forms of marginality. This paper intends to present a first analysis and a work in progress regarding this issue. In a nutshell, the contents will be organised as follows: 1. An introductory part that will address the

theme of modernity, particularly the concept of garden city in Portugal, and introduce case studies. 2. A second part presenting the case studies at hand: the city of Tróia and the Bairro do Condado neighbourhood in Lisbon, depicting a comparison between two realities (state of the art and other examples in Europe). 3. A third part presenting the research line (based on the collection of data obtained through bibliographic review on the topic, field observation, data archive and initial interviews with the project managers) and some proposals for the future.

Keywords: Modernity; urban design; neighbourhood; democracy

1. Introduction and contextualisation:

The theme developed in this work puts the role of design in the contemporary city at the heart of the matter.

After the Industrial Revolution, we witness the propagation of new ideas and concepts in the artistic and cultural scope throughout Europe that would form the Modernist movement and try to break with the previous schemes: the freedom and independence of the arts, progress and a better quality of life for all are some of the principles behind that movement, as well as the new urban aesthetics.

In this respect, we can say that the research of this new generation of architects does not aim to be a mere form issue, but it also tries to find an alternative that can give “a concrete dimension to individual and collective *welfare*” (Secchi, 2011:85).

However, despite initial good intentions, we only need to walk through the streets of our cities to perceive the serious democratic deficit that invades our cities. Along with the proliferation of shopping centres, private condominiums and highly protected residential quarters, comes simultaneously the growth and segregation of the urban outskirts to the level that the geographer Ash Amin, in an inaugural speech in the University of Cambridge (March 2012), stated that up to 2030 <<*almost half of the world's population will live in precarious and degraded conditions in forgotten urban interstices*>> (Sampò, 2012:3).

In respect to this contradiction, one of the most frequent examples are the public residential quarters (or social housing): from Les Hauts de Rouen in France to Zen in Palermo, passing through Scampia in Naples or Chelas in Lisbon. These neighbourhoods may be considered as the result of ideas and representations of the 21st century's society (Secchi, 2011), as a response from institutions to the housing problem and, in general, they represent the will to create a more just concept of city for all, even though, it was from these same examples that surfaced the cliché relatively to the concept of modern city as “fallen” cities (Peretti, 2010), which are often associated to the utopias of designers and blamed for generating new ghettos.

This work aims to investigate the dynamics of this contradiction and to understand why the so desired social progress envisioned by the Modernist movement did not happen. From the initial conception of the projects at hand to the effective use of the built environment, there has been an attempt to understand this diversity which reminds us that, like the sociologist Alfredo Mela stated:

“The capabilities of spatial orientation and the resulting images of the space (...) vary in a non-marginal way among the various individuals when they also belong to the same cultural universe. Besides, these differences become deeper when there is a confrontation between the perception and the use of the space by individuals that belong to different cultural universes” (Mela, 2006:293).

In this regard, is it possible that, in some cases, the lifestyle and needs of the inhabitants had been idealised?

The case study presented here is the urban project of Tróia, based on the concepts of Garden City from 1970, and the Bairro do Condado (Lisbon), which was subject to the reproduction of the same morphological project employed in Troy in 1980.

The garden city.

Among the several modernist experiences that try to give an answer to the problems of the industrial city we also find the Garden City, certainly one of the strongest ideas of the 19th century, which is opposed to the continuous development of the 18th century metropolis, as well as to the “linear city” model (Calabi, 2008).

This model of the ideal city was designed particularly by Ebenezer Howard in the late 19th century and had as objective to create a city attuned to man, comprising the services and comforts of urban life with the benefits of life in the countryside. This type of design had to take into account all the aspects of human life, respecting the primary requirements of the individuals. In this regard, a plan to create small-scale inhabited sites or single-family houses came up, contrasting with the great buildings in the centres of the cities, surrounded by green interconnected zones with services, commerce, recreational activities, industrial sites, etc. with the purpose to make these zones self-sufficient.

It is due to city concepts such as this, for example, an attempt would be made to confer greater quality of life to some of the new public initiative neighbourhoods.

The Garden City is presented as a socially valid solution because, on one hand, it would eliminate the uninhabitable slums of the industrial outskirts using low cost lands at the expense of the distance from the great urban centres. Moreover, the targeted public could take advantage of the benefits from the countryside without having to abdicate from urban life and their work at the factory (Calabi, 2008).

2. Case Studies.

“Tróia, Garden City”.

This project is part of a development plan in the Peninsula of Tróia for tourism purposes, conceived by the architect Francisco da Conceição Silva around 1970, even though it represents only a small part of the initial project. The enterprise occupies an area of 40 hectares to north of the peninsula of Tróia, located to the south of Lisbon, between the River Sado’s estuary and it aimed at being the first leisure city in Portugal (Leite, 2007).

The intention was to build a true city designed to accommodate the upper-middle class employed in industrial activities between Setúbal and Sines, but, due to the events of the Revolution of 25th April of 1974, it never came to develop the city life environment as it was originally planned.

The plan intended to build a place on a territorial scale, integrated in the landscape and that would only use local materials, including itself within the modern proposals that

were flowing since the beginning of the 20th century throughout Europe, although it presented some new adaptations based on Portuguese tradition (Leite, 2007).

The project had as underlying concepts those of a civic centre, multi-functionality and, above all, to facilitate an intense community life through many public spaces (photo 1).

Therefore, not only services related to tourism, but also sports, shopping and cultural infrastructures, spread throughout the several areas. From a morphologic point of view, the proposal intended to reconsider the idea of building a block consisting of series of buildings (max. 4 storeys) around semi-closed gardened squares on both sides (photo 2 - 3), but only one of these blocks' construction was completed (Leite, 2008).

From an aesthetic point of view, the chosen morphology tries to break with the old standards used until then, promoting a new image and concept of housing that could reach people through the communicative capabilities of architecture.

Although it was never completed, Tróia's experience will be the only built example of a utopian leisure megacity in Portugal (Leite, 2008).

Bairro do Condado - Lisbon.

The Bairro do Condado, known as “Zona J” (photo 4), occupies an area of 36,76 hectares in the parish of Marvila (eastern zone of Lisbon) and is part of a public promotion housing plan approved in 1964, whose main objective was to develop a multifunctional and socially diversified urban structure, integrated within the rest of the city (City Council of Lisbon, descriptive memories).

The target groups were mainly labourers and public officers, but after the turmoil and occupations that occurred in 1975, it was necessary to re-accommodate the returnees from former colonies and other citizens due to the beginning of the eradication of slums. There was at least the will to integrate and to develop this zone, through interventions and modern projects that could rescue and give more dignity to the most “fragile” part of society, and therefore to limit situations of disorder and contrast as well.

The winning project for Zona J belonged to architect Tomás Taveira, a previous employee of the architect Conceição Silva, and it was constructed in three phases: the two first constitute the central part (with 1306 dwellings) composed of nine towers with 13 floors, 15 rows of three storey building and 20 rows of eight storey buildings,

between 1979-80. The third part was comprised of secondary buildings, in 1981 (photo 5).

From a morphological conception point of view, according to the architect Taveira, the project was based on Tróia's example. The idea was to reproduce an environment built for upper-middle class people, with an innovative architecture (as in the case of Tróia), common areas such as the courtyards between the buildings and the galleries that intertwine the apartments, single and geometric lines that give continuity to the neighbourhood in order to improve the inhabitants' quality of life, many of whom used to live in precarious conditions or shacks.

At the project level, the model chosen presents an up-to-date revisited version of the modernist principles, which tried to create a separate neighbourhood in regard to services and infrastructures and to promote a community life through common squares between buildings and a system of galleries (photo 6).

The expected achievement was interrupted and fragmented in its development, deviating itself considerably from the original proposals.

1.1 A comparison between the two realities.

Despite the attempt to enhance and improve people's quality of life through an innovative project, Zona J finds itself in a state of physical and living degradation that stigmatizes its dwellers even more.

It is in this area that we can find the worst indicators in town when it comes to criminality, vandalism and transgressive behaviour in general. The outside spaces, such as the squares between buildings, but especially the inner streets and galleries, are the main target of vandalism or illegal activities favoured by poor visibility. For this reason, many residents began to occupy and delimit portions of community space among themselves in order to control it (Madeira da Silva, 2013). It is easy to find closed parts of galleries or witness the misappropriation of parts of public space like small courtyards or gardens.

These types of behaviours do not occur in the case of Tróia — the outside spaces are well maintained, as well as the buildings, green spaces and galleries.

There are no signs of vandalism. It is also worth noting that, unlike Tróia, Zona J has a permanent population (about 7000 people) with a large proportion of unemployed. In addition, the neighbourhood finds itself isolated from the rest of the city — in fact, the busy streets do not help to establish the networks and the result is a single class "island" formed almost exclusively by population sectors with low economic resources.

In the architect Teresa Valsassina Heitor's perspective, the life quality degradation found in this neighbourhood is mainly due to the project's morphology. In her study titled "*A vulnerabilidade do espaço em Chelas*" (The vulnerability of space in Chelas, 1999), the author uses a syntactic approach, i.e. based on the assumption that the morphological language used has a direct impact on the residents' behaviour, rendering the space more vulnerable. The author highlights a number of variables like the size of buildings, the repetitiveness of the forms, etc. as the cause for the deviant behaviour shown by the population, referring in particular to the acts of vandalism and the lack of care towards the surrounding environment. In this regard, Coleman (1985) considers that *<<the aggressions against the built spaces reflect the dissatisfaction towards the housing quality and the habitat model produced and, particularly, towards the exaggerated size of the habitation complexes, the lifelessness and uniformity of the architecture, the inadequacy of the solutions applied to the habits and needs of families and the lack of surveillance conditions>>* (Heitor, 1999:14-15).

On the other hand, there are those who, like the author of the "Zona J" project Tomás Taveira, advocate the project as an innovative (based on Tróia's project, being modernist but integrating an/a interpretation/critical review), well thought-out and built idea, and particularly claim that people were satisfied with the solution found (Taveira, 2015) and that the condition of degradation is the result of a community of people (especially in the beginning) who did not know how to care for the environment and reproduced the pre-existing dynamics.

With the generational change, in the words of the architect, we don't have that situation anymore. The fact that the project was able to reproduce a model used in another context proves it worked, responding to the needs of those people, performing their "dream" of living in the same conditions as the wealthier classes, from an environmental point of view and of the apartments' characteristics (many of which are

duplexes). Nevertheless, the problem of distance (physical and cultural) between social classes still persists; the current situation does not appear to have had significant changes, at least in terms of the inhabitants' marginalisation, degradation and concentration of transgressive behaviours.

Another example that further highlights this problem is the case of the construction of Scampia's social housing project (photo 7) in Naples, which, in turn, is based on the residential-touristic project (photo 8) of Villeneuve-Loubet (Cote d'Azur - Nice).

Naples - Villeneuve Loubet.

As I mentioned earlier, the similar examples in Europe and throughout the world are many, especially between the decades of 50 – 60.

An emblematic case which shows this kind of contrast is the social housing project of Scampia in Naples, particularly the residential area known as "*Zone 167*" (This term refers to the Decree-Law n.º 167 of April 18th 1962, which states provisions to facilitate the acquisition of constructible areas for building economic houses) or "*Vele*" (1963-1975). It corresponds to a complex of seven large buildings (3 of them being demolished between 1997-2003) in the form of sails, which would serve as economic houses for people with poor economic resources. The project takes us back to a previous experience in Villeneuve Loubet (1960), a project created with the purpose of promoting luxury tourism, composed of large buildings in the form of sails around a bay equipped with a tourist port (Marine des Anges) and tourism related services.

This example makes the ideological dimension of the projects more evident. It is not just a matter of simple civil architecture, it wants to go beyond that: the magnificence of the buildings and the symbolism of the sails (as if opened towards the future), promote the new modern society through the architectural masterpiece.

Despite the fact that the context is totally different (not only in terms of social composition but also from the geographical point of view, in the French case, the sails were built around a port, in the Italian case, in the hinterland of the city), as well as the purpose of the buildings, both cases represent a project and, therefore, a common concept of "dwell".

There was an attempt to interpret those typical modernist movement concepts such as social progress, although, as in the case of "*Vele*" in Scampia, it ended up being the

most emblematic example of degradation, turning itself into a ghetto separated from the city and a centre for criminal activities like drug trafficking.

The residents from this neighbourhood are strongly stigmatised because of the negative image that the area gained at that time. It is common to hear a comparison between the "Paradise of Angels" (Marine des Anges – Villeneuve Loubet) and the "Paradise of the Junkies" (Vele, Scampia).

3. First conclusions and study proposal.

It is clear that, despite the willingness to improve the situation in these places, even today a devalued and deeply stigmatised environment remains, often presenting the typical characteristics of a ghetto. In the cases cited, the idea is to deploy architectures with a strong ideological connotation, in the hope that it will have an impact on people's behaviour so that they try to create a "better" society, the so much desired developed society with a superior quality of life, etc., but the results obtained were not exactly the results expected.

However, this does not imply the failure or the end of a movement, on the contrary. According to Roland Barthes (1963), modernity has not yet been concluded; *<<architects and town planners can give a fundamental contribution. In order for that to happen, not only they have to become the representatives of a society's values, but also the tool of its transformation, progress, freedom and equality>>* (Secchi, 2011:65, translation by author). However, the problem that arises is: how can one present suggestions for improvement without falling into ideological impositions?

Those projects designed for, or better-suited in contexts like Chelas, seem to take the form of an ideology, namely of ideas and concepts of "dwelling" considered as ideal and that, deployed in different and often marginalised and punished contexts, they could re-qualify the environment and life of the inhabitants. In other words, imaging the way like these people should or would like to live *a priori*, may lead to turn the design into the "imposition" of a predetermined lifestyle (without questioning those people's real needs).

As Heitor stated, the great, busy streets (in a neighbourhood with a large percentage of unemployed), the common galleries between buildings and the neighbourhood's

physical separation from the rest of the city are some of the controversial urban choices, considering the social context of reference, that didn't help the integration of this marginalised group with the rest of the city and that have somehow reflected in the dynamics and social behaviours that take place there. If, on one hand, it is true that the appropriation of a space and an individual's definition of his own goals and purposes form the basis of the possibilities that the environment provides, as well as their ongoing redefinition relatively to the available means, personal capacities and real possibilities, it is also true that the individual does not act simply as an observation device, as there is always a person and feelings behind that act of observation (Mela, 2006).

Having said that, can one say that these two positions tend to idealise the design and image?

On one hand, it seems excessive to consider the forms as "wrong" or responsible for the existing degradation, but, on the other, to think that the people are entirely responsible for their own marginalisation, stating this way that the project which worked in other contexts (apart from Tróia and Chelas, as reported by the author, the same project was also applied in Vila Nova de Santo André and in Algeria) did not work because people did not understand the project nor how to care for the environment.

Given this context, and in order to try to understand what are indeed the differences between the two contexts, this research proposal is to inquire the everyday use of the built spaces, starting from project's design (idea and proposal) to the concrete use in both cases, establish a comparison between them and to investigate the possibilities of involving directly the people interested in area development proposals or in future projects.

About democracy and participation.

Democracy means participation, but the issue that still generates debates is how we should act.

A very interesting example was the experience of the project "Favela-Bairro" (1999-2001), born as an alternative to the demolition of the slums in Rio de Janeiro and the consequent construction of social housing projects, proposing the transformation of these areas in real neighbourhoods based on the existing infrastructures and

development. The most innovative part of this plan consisted in the close collaboration between an interdisciplinary group of professionals (namely architects, engineers, sociologists, social workers, media professionals, etc.) and the residents' associations. The solutions proposed by the professionals were always discussed with the residents, which would lead the first ones to modify the initial project several times, until they could find the most compatible solutions with everyone's needs.

Although the project had a brief "life" period (two years), the people involved have participated enthusiastically and after the local successes verified, it became an international experience. Is it possible that, as the author of the Favela-Bairro project states (the architect and former president of the Municipal Chamber of Rio de Janeiro, L. P. Conde), the environment is more valued by the people when their participation is recognised (Conde, Magalhares, 2001).

Photos.



1. Partial view of the buildings of “Tróia, Garden City”, photo realized by the author in 2014.



2. Original project of “Tróia Cidade Jardim” (1970), photo realized by the author, in 2015, at the Municipality of Grândola.



3. Map of project really built of “Tróia, Cidade Jardim”, photo realized by the author, in 2015, at the Municipality of Grândola.



4. Partial view of the buildings of Bairro do Condado, photo realized by the author in 2014.



5. Plan of implantation of “Bairro do Condado” granted by Studio Taveira in 2015.



6. Partial view of gallery in Barrio do Condado, photo granted by Studio Taveira in 2015.



7. Partial view of the building “vela” of Scampia, Face Magazine, 2013 .



8. Partial view of the building of Marine des Anges (Villenouve – Loubet) photo realized by Federico Jardini (www.federicojardini.com).

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