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Portuguese Social Housing under Dictatorship. A Morphological Analysis of Some Residential Agglomerations in Lisbon (1933-1950)

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Abstract

With the establishment of the New State in 1933 a new period was initiated in Portugal which was marked by the authoritarian will of a regime led by Salazar, who sought to recover the country from a deep inherited crisis. Socially, along with the improvement of living conditions and housing, which was especially needed in the larger cities at the time, there was always the intention of strengthening power by centering it with the government. This was also to be displayed through propaganda in an organized manner with the mission of congregating the population around the same ideas and thereby forging a new identity.

It is in this context that economic housing will be promoted, for which substantial investments have been mobilized over nearly four decades. A first phase aiming to identify the origins, ideologies and models, architectural and urban, is part of the ongoing research project to which this paper gives account.

Housing types and, eventually, the urban design of their agglomerations, are strongly representative of the ideology of the Regime. The Regime was centered upon the principles consigned in the 1933 Constitution of the Country, namely, the family, catholic religion and its moral principles, the ideological independence from other countries, etc. The control exerted over the complete process of social housing, and decades long results raises the suspicion that these actions were after all a method of recruitment and were undertaken to ensure a faithful elite, who were the beneficiaries of the houses.

On the other hand, the ongoing analysis studies the role of social housing agglomerations in the Master Plan of 1948 and for city expansion.

Introduction

This paper refers to a PhD research which is still under development and our aim is to shed light upon this particular theme of social housing under dictatorial regimes around the world within the respective period of time. This is due to their importance in the definition of urban design in multiple ways. These include inducting new urban forms relatable to those types of power assertions, most often monumental in nature, especially located in central cities of power in nations including Germany, Spain, Italy, but also in the countries of Eastern Europe.

The subject presented here is the social housing created under the dictatorship of Salazar in Lisbon between the years of 1933 and 1950. There are thirteen neighborhoods to be considered within this time period, of which we intend to focus on a selection given the present difficulty to access the official archives. We intend to present a few main ideas with this paper and thus contribute to the general discussion on the topic “urban design and dictatorships in the 20th century”. The research goals are: (i) to analyze and compare the study objects; (ii) to contribute to the knowledge and characterization of the dictatorial architecture and urban design as well as its history.

The methodology of the present research is based upon typo-morphological analytical methods¹ and relates to all scales or levels of intervention, ranging from the territory to the housing typologies. This includes projects and the architectural and urban evolution of the design, taking into consideration the plot and the generation of the elements of urban fabric. In addition, all contexts are important because of the possibility of discovering a deeper understanding and reading of a given urban landscape as a changing reality integrated in a broader environment. The final aim is to provide tools for further researches on similar objects.

Social housing under the dictatorship

The agglomerations of social housing were an initiative of Salazar regime and an important part of policies related to public works. Duarte Pacheco (1900-1943) was the minister for public works (1933-1936 and 1938-1943). He was responsible for many actions, strategies and public realizations, including that of Social Housing, known under the term of Economic Houses.² Visits to public work sites, as well as dedication ceremonies in general, were all part of political and propaganda strategies.

¹ Moudon 1994

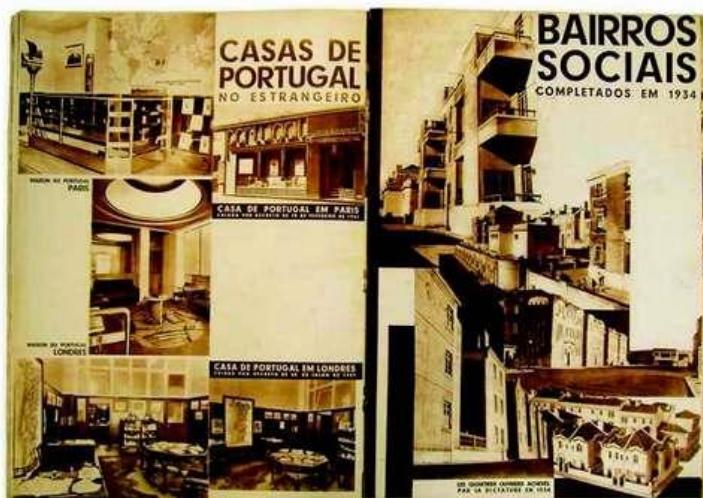
² G.E.O. 1993

Meanwhile, Antonio Ferro, a man who held complete confidence in Salazar, was responsible for conceiving the political propaganda of the regime, including expositions, contests and publications.³ The aim of the propaganda was to influence and shape attitudes as well as build a national identity with elements of popular culture as stylized by modern taste. Indeed, one leitmotiv was the campaign called “of good taste”, set by a very popular magazine, “Panorama”. But there were also more assertive ways of persuasion, for example through the SPN (later SNI) periodicals.



Portugal 1934, SPN publication, poster with Almada Negreiro's design. It was intended to highlight the government's achievements. Source: Secretariado da Propaganda Nacional.

Portugal 1934. Lisboa: SPN, 1934. (BNP, existing copy)



A page of the same publication showing social housing. Source: Secretariado da Propaganda Nacional. Portugal 1934. Lisboa: SPN, 1934. (BNP, existing copy)

³ Acciaiuoli 2013

Architecture and urban design were considered, as in other dictatorships of the same period, major tools for the assertion of power. The projected new neighborhoods were also intended to solve some housing problems arising from the increasing number of immigrants from the countryside who were living in slums on the immediate surroundings of Lisbon. Also many areas of the city itself were in a degraded state, some being without water supply infrastructure or even efficient sanitation constructions.⁴ However, the evaluation of the results achieved during the duration of the Program of Economic Houses was successively negative in nature.⁵ Despite the tendency of triumphalism, the government regime was confronted with the reality of failure and was forced to adapt legislation to new strategies, as can be seen in the legislation itself. The years 1933 (Decree-Law No. 23 052) to 1945 (Law No. 2 007), saw some important redefinitions of the general regulations, such as for the intervals and especially the housing types and the conditions for acquisition or rent.

The results of the first period can be seen as an attempt to create a mix of an urban/rural village. Since these new neighborhoods were located on the rural and fertile surroundings of Lisbon, the rural remains such as olive trees and water pump have survived to the present day.



Bairro da Encarnação, Lisbon: the persistence of ancient olive trees and water pump engine in public spaces. Source: Photographs by author, 2013.

The case of Lisbon

Lisbon is an ancient town that developed from the historic center of the Middle Ages and expanded during the course of the centuries. By 1930, there were two major foci of industrialization: Alcântara, on the west side, and Xabregas/Beato, on the east side of the town limits near the Tagus riverside. In the year of 1933, there were some blocks of worker housing promoted by industrialists,⁶ and the two neighborhoods of the previous Republican initiative (from 1919), Ajuda and Arco do Cego were still in construction. These were the first neighborhoods to be completed by New State and presented as a conquest against the ineptitude of the previous republican regime.⁷

The neighborhoods are identified in the map of Lisbon Master Plan (1948) by Étienne de Groér and we can distinguish those of state initiative and those originating from municipal

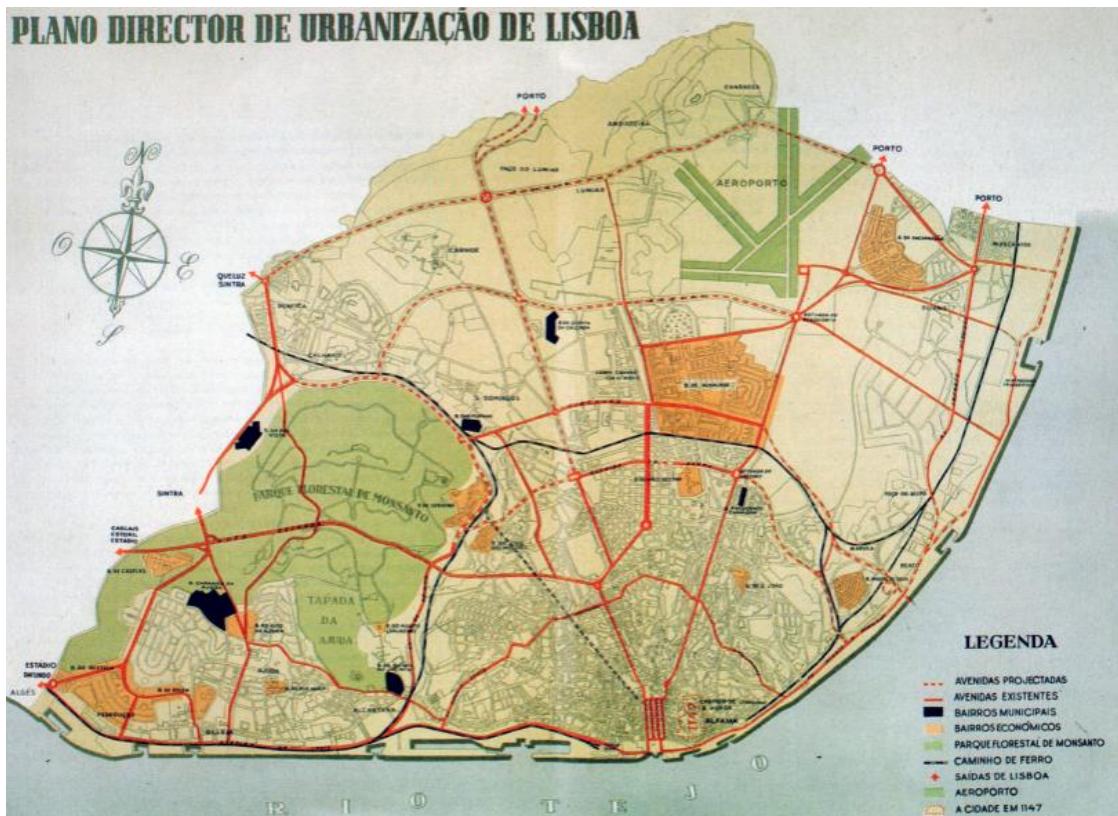
⁴ Moreira 1950

⁵ Baptista 1999

⁶ Rodrigues 1979

⁷ Ferreira 1994

responsibility. Some already existed and others were in construction or were just planned, but we must highlight the given place to social housing in town planning.



Lisbon Master Plan, by Étienne de Groer, 1948.

Source: GEO, COTA DP 1272 V/HIST 320-G SL 223 P/HIST 150-G.

Housing typologies

The idea of a family house on a private plot with a garden is not an innovative conception and is commonly associated with social health, peace, as well as the best model of capitalist control over the working classes, originating from the nineteenth century.⁸ The preference for single family houses instead of collective housing is a transverse view on Economic Houses Program from the very beginnings till 1950 and we can perhaps consider a deeper reason for the persistence of this model, even nowadays when it comes to suburban housing choices.

Although there are previous legislation, Decree-Law No. 23 052, 1933, allowed for the effective start of the Program. The Decree states that the projects are to be carried under the mighty control of the State and defines all guidelines, partnerships, financial conditions, etc. Above all, the new settlements to be built would be fully built by the Ministry of Public Works, and they must also manage projects and the intervention of municipalities to become responsible for all the urbanization and infrastructure of new neighborhoods across the country.⁹ Housing types were there defined according to classes: A and B, types 1, 2 and 3, ground floor or two-storied twined houses (later, the classes C and D were introduced, with the same sub-types).

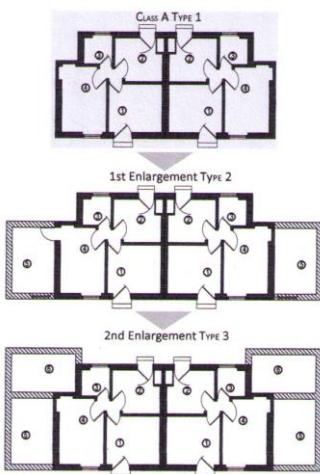
⁸ Batista 1999

⁹ DGEMN 1999

These categories were intended to be evolutionary housing designed for different social classes of family owners and family size. The candidates, who were only allowed to be public employees and permanent staff members of government departments or municipalities as well as a certain percentage set aside for members of the national unions, were carefully chosen. They were chosen not only for their ability to pay the rent which was expected for a term of 20 years until the full possession of the property, but also upon their moral behavior. Furthermore they had to pass through the politic police (named P.V.D.E., later, P.I.D.E.), as can be seen in the archived documents (IRHU, Forte de Sacavém Archives).

Type A, with only a ground floor, was the most common type found in the first neighborhoods located in Lisbon and Oporto. This is perhaps due to the fact that the house matched the ideal way of life of the Portuguese people, as seen by the dictatorship:

“The problem of the great mass of the population of the country [...] no one supposes that will be solved in a moment, but nobody is surprised that it constitutes the maximum problem of national restoration. In implementing this thought, today precisely we will begin the work of economic house, the house of the poorest, safe house, independent, arranged like a nest. — Home of the working family, modest home, humble, Portuguese.”¹⁰ A touch of anachronism and vernacular suggests that the XIX century French solutions approach was taken into consideration and offered models by that time,¹¹ this can be seen with the Linear City of Arturo Soria¹² and the Portuguese rural/vernacular architecture that was built¹³. This approach can also be seen in the common presence of green, sometimes with pergolas in front and cultivated backyards.



Design of Class A types, ground floor. Source: The author.

*Bairro Amial, Oporto,
Class A Type. Source: Photograph
by the author, 2013.*

¹⁰ Salazar 1935, 325

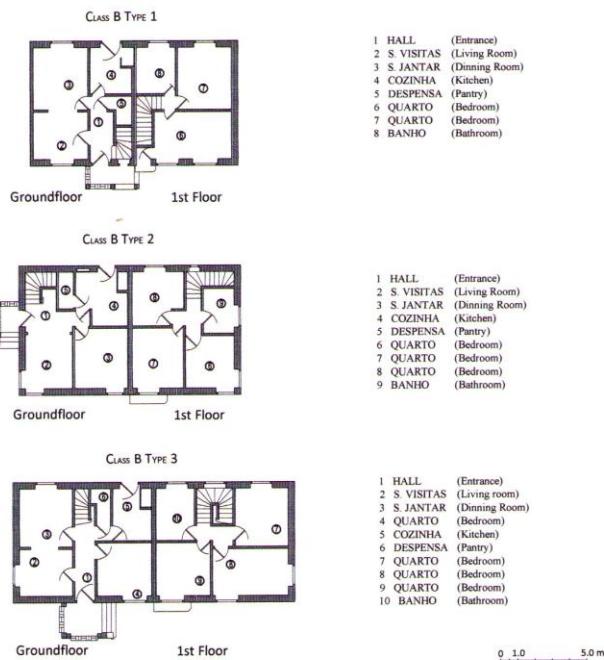
¹¹ Dezès, 2001

¹² Soria 2004 [1894]

¹³ A.A.P. 1980

The two storied house, with the same classes and types, can be considered as an evolution of the Class A ground floor house, even though Class A ground floor house was abandoned after the creation of Decree No. 28 912 due to “the poverty aspect they offer, after all, which constitutes unpleasant and discordant note for citizens, used to live in the middle of high buildings.”

This model of two levels, internal stairs, kitchen and living/dining space on the ground floor and the bedrooms/bathrooms upstairs is perhaps the most common type which can be found in a wide variety of areas ranging from French social solutions or British neighborhoods “By Law”¹⁴ to the popular architecture and the historic city building itself.



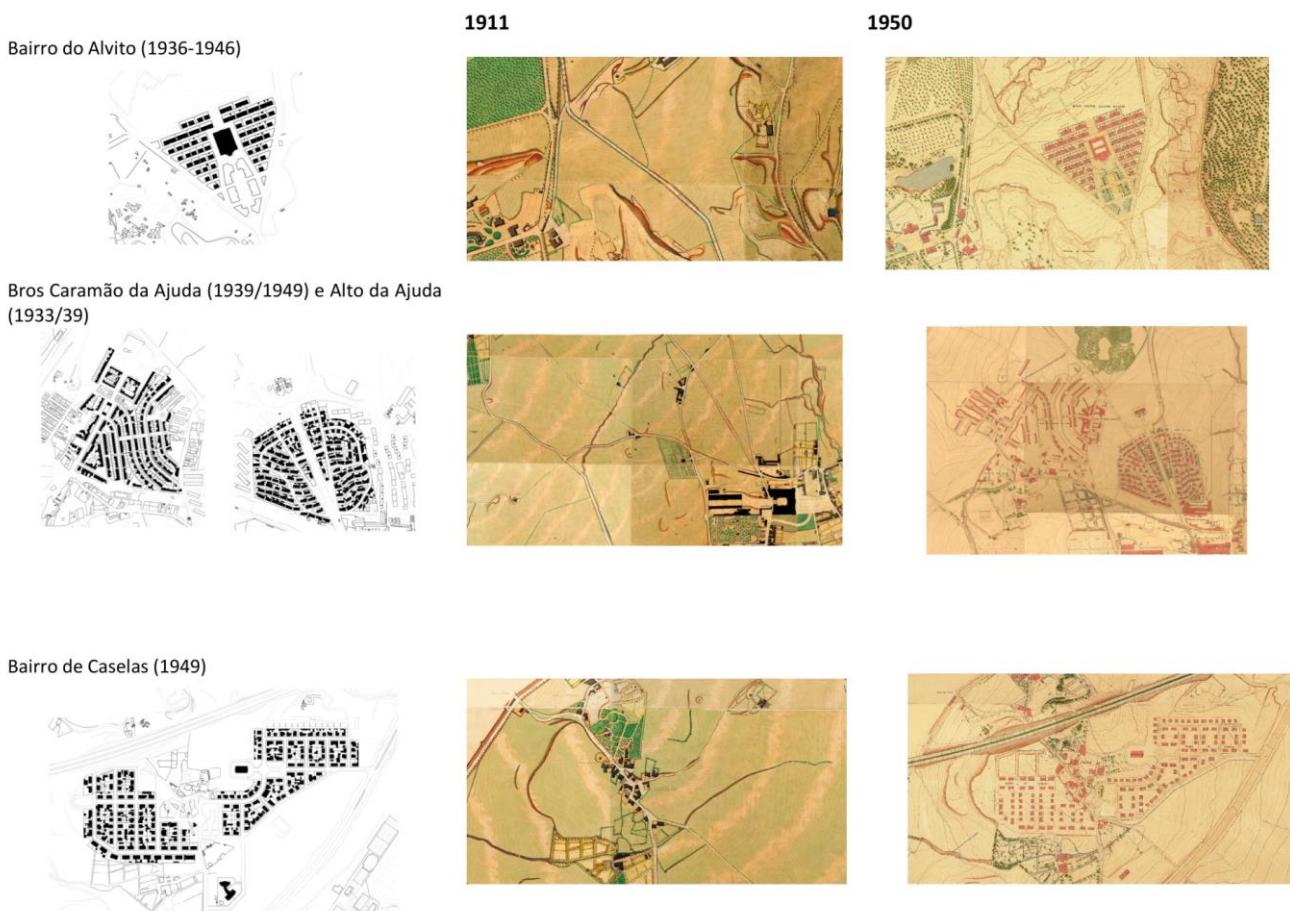
Design of Class B types, two storied houses.
Source: The author.

Bairro da Encarnação, Lisbon. Class B type, blocks of two storied houses.
Source: Photograph by the author, 2013.

The study also includes the comparison of different neighborhoods from the considered time period, with special attention given to (i) the urban design on contrast; (ii) the territory's initial occupation and evolution, from 1911 to 1950.

¹⁴ Benevolo 1981

urban design / cartographic analysis



Example of study of comparative and chronological evolution. Source: Author over maps: Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa PT/AMLSB/UROB-PU/05; CML (2012). Lisboa interactiva - Cartografia Temática. Retrieved from <<http://lx1.cm-lisboa.pt/lxi/?application=Lxplantas>>

Conclusions

At this phase of the research, we can already arrive to some conclusions as well as add some opened issues to the theme. The answer to the question about which urban design models have been followed in Portugal is usually focused on Garden City principles. However, we consider that this topic is still an open question, depending, namely, of comparisons with urban designs of other dictatorships, especially Spain and Italy, but also Germany.

Salazar, as President of the Council of Ministers, reinforced the power of the New State by concentrating the legislative function in government and controlling the Parliament, most notably by excluding political parties and free elections.¹⁵ Housing policy was a part of the complete reorganization of the country which at the time was set on a severe economic crisis. We can assert that the design of that policy was directly dictated by the general ideas of Salazar on the themes of family, poverty and rural values of a (mostly) forged cultural

¹⁵ Rosas 2013

Portuguese identity. Naturally, he was allergic to every modern and collectivist architectural idea. Only after 1948, with the I Congress of Architecture, has there been an opening up to the modern movement and multistoried housing.

Control was effective, not only through legislation (and the Censorship Commission) but through the analysis of documents (of D.G.M.N.E., the responsible organism of housing promotion), we can also testify to the total concentration of governmental decisions to the Minister of Public Works himself: Duarte Pacheco and his successors, after 1943.

The characteristics of the Economic Houses Program, with the objective of maintaining very low densities and having provided housing to a select number of chosen families, would never solve the general and increasing problem of housing, especially in Lisbon and Oporto. By 1950, some publications had evaluated the overall situation¹⁶ and, in the sixties, another epoch arrived for the urban design, with the new generations of architects, planners and engineers.

English version revised by Karl Eckert

¹⁶ Moreira 1950

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