

The Spatiality of Women's Struggle within Porto's Residents' Movement during the Portuguese Revolutionary Process (1974-75)

La espacialidad de la lucha de las mujeres en el movimiento de vecinos en Oporto durante el proceso de revolución en Portugal (1974-75)

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of women's struggle within residents' movements in the production and transformation of space in Porto during the PREC (the Portuguese Revolutionary Process of 1974-1976), analysing the spaces where these movements started, the issues they focused on, and how it related and acted within explicit and implicit views of family and gender relations in institutional approaches to housing development. It also considers how these were mirrored in housing policy options and design paradigms. In this way, by shifting the focus to women's struggle at the grassroots, looking at those who were both the recipients of houses and actors of an ongoing struggle, this research explores the intersection between class and gender in the processes of housing and urban development.

Keywords

Popular Movements, Organised Women, Public Housing, Participatory Architecture, Feminist Practices

Resumen

Este artículo explora el papel de la lucha de las mujeres dentro de los movimientos de vecinos en la producción y transformación del espacio en Oporto durante el PREC (el proceso revolucionario portugués de 1974-1976). El texto analiza los espacios donde comenzaron estos movimientos, los problemas que abordaron y cómo se relacionó y actuó dentro de visiones explícitas e implícitas de la familia y de las relaciones de género que los enfoques institucionales para el desarrollo de la vivienda proponían. También se analiza cómo estos se reflejaron en las políticas de vivienda y en los paradigmas de diseño. Así, al cambiar el enfoque hacia la lucha de las mujeres en las bases, mirando a quienes fueron tanto receptoras de viviendas como actrices de una lucha en curso, esta investigación busca explorar la intersección entre clase y género en los procesos de desarrollo de vivienda y ciudad.

Palabras Clave

Movimientos populares, Mujeres organizadas, Vivienda pública, Arquitectura participativa, Prácticas feministas

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Introduction

To this day, women in Portugal remain unrepresented in local and central government, and are likely to be waged workers in architectural firms rather than company owners or partners in much greater proportion than men.¹ Rebecca Peterson, Gerda Wekerle and David Morley have argued that this condition had as consequence the exclusion of women from the decision-making processes that result in the organisation of space, a condition that must be accounted for when studying women's relationship with the built environment.² Recent scholarship notes that space thus produced inherently reproduces existing patriarchal relations in society, and suggests that alternatives must arise from the inclusion of women in the construction of urban and architectural space.³ This paper discusses how this inclusion may result from the bottom-up organisation of the population by exploring a period in Portuguese history marked by strong popular movements around the question of housing.

The 1960s and 1970s in Portugal were marked by the rise and transformation of public housing policies, as well as by their continuous examination in research conducted by public institutions.⁴ These decades saw the country emerge from an authoritarian, corporatist dictatorship, through a short-lived revolutionary period marked by organisation and struggle for the right to proper housing conditions by the populations of overcrowded city centres or degraded and under-equipped social housing, and into a social democracy which, during its first years, followed a large-scale interventionist strategy of housing development.

The authoritarian regime that lasted from 1933 to 1974 was ideologically sustained by the idea of the traditional Portuguese family. Yet, from the late 1940s onwards and, particularly, from the 1960s, concerns with the transforming role of women in the family found its way into important pieces of research.⁵ However, the focus on housewives and their integration in the household did not reflect the reality of a great mass of women workers in the most impoverished strata of the population.⁶

In fact, during what is called the PREC (*período revolucionário em curso*, which translates to 'ongoing revolutionary period') of 1974-1976 in Portugal, it was made evident in residents' movements' documents that their main concerns fell outside their role within the space of the house.⁷ During this period, it was in particular working women who fought their way into the decision processes that led to the construction and transformation of domestic spaces. Through organised residents' associations, women not only participated in the claims for proper housing, infrastructure and transportation that accompanied the emergence of articulated housing policies in the country, but also played a vital role in the development of public local nurseries, healthcare centres, playgrounds, and cultural and social facilities, either through legal means or the occupation of vacant buildings.⁸ According to reports, newspapers and other documents produced by these popular organisations, the struggle for housing included the right to having a house, but emphasised the right to benefiting from social structures at a communitarian scale that were connected to the time spent in house chores after work, to the opportunity of even having a life outside of the house, to the choice of having or not having children.⁹ Healthcare was, in this instance, an important component of an integrated struggle with housing. Health centres were created by the populations in council estates which, with limited action and resources, worked towards educating and informing the population regarding health, prevention, and basic medical care. These efforts catalysed a complete strategic restructuring of healthcare, eventually resulting in the creation in 1979 of the National Health Service, today one of the strongest welfare elements in the country.

- 1 Mizra & Nacey Research Ltd., "The Architectural Profession in Europe, 2020. A Sector Study," *Architects' Council of Europe*, 2021.
- 2 Rebecca Peterson, Gerda Wekerle and David Morley, "Women and Environments: An Overview of an Emerging Field," *Environment and Behaviour* 10, nº 4 (1978): 511-534.
- 3 Sara Ortiz Escalante and Blanca Gutiérrez Valdivia, "Planning from below: Using Feminist Participatory Methods to Increase Women's Participation in Urban Planning," *Gender and Development* 23, nº 1 (2015): 113-126; Zaida Muxí Martínez, *Mujeres, Casas y Ciudades. Más Allá Del Umbral* (Barcelona: Dpr-Barcelona, 2019).
- 4 Mariana Carvalho, *Investigação Em Arquitectura. O Contributo de Nuno Portas No LNEC (1963-1974)* (Coimbra: Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia da Universidade de Coimbra, 2012); Patrícia Santos Pedrosa, *Habitar em Portugal nos anos 1960: ruptura e antecedentes. Um caminho pelo interior do discurso* (Barcelona: Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, 2010).
- 5 Nuno Portas, *A Habitação Social - Proposta para a Metodologia da sua Arquitectura* (Porto: FAUP Publicações, 1959); Nuno Portas, "Funções e exigências de áreas da habitação," *Informação técnica* 4 (1969); Luz Valente Pereira and Maria Amélia Corrêa Gago, *Inquérito à habitação urbana* (Lisbon: Laboratório Nacional de Engenharia Civil, 1984).
- 6 According to data by the Portuguese *Organization of Communist Women*, 41% of women were workers in 1974, right before the start of the Revolutionary Period. Organização das Mulheres Comunistas, *As Mulheres e o Poder Local: contribuições para a reflexão e acção* (Lisbon: Edições Avante, 2003).
- 7 Charles Dows' research shows that a majority of claims by residents' commissions in Setúbal, Portugal, concerned social and cultural facilities: Dows, *Revolution at the Grassroots*.
- 8 Miguel Suárez and Palmela Cabreira's chapters in *Atas do IV Congresso História do Trabalho, do Movimento Operário e dos Conflitos Sociais em Portugal e III Conferência do Observatório para as Condições de Trabalho e Vida* (Lisbon: Instituto de História Contemporânea, 2020); Hipólito Santos, "Sem mestres nem chefes o povo tomou a rua," *Letra Livre*, 2014; Helena Vilaça, "As associações de moradores enquanto aspecto particular do associativismo urbano e da participação social".
- 9 Local newspapers, bulletins and reports developed by residents' associations were consulted in Porto's District Archive. A thorough account of the role of residents' associations in complementary questions to housing can be found in: Rodrigues, *Pelo direito à cidade*.

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For years after the consolidation of a representative democracy in the country, resident associations continued to work towards the organisation of residents and the necessary improvements in their neighbourhoods and were responsible for the construction of urban infrastructure and social equipment in council estates into the ninety-eighties.

However, at the at the level of architectural design, working women had a limited say. An exception lay in the SAAL, a participatory housing programme that existed during the revolutionary period through which residents' associations collectively had a say in the design process.¹⁰ The direct dialog between architects and future residents represented an opportunity for women to express their needs and aspirations for a new home. Simultaneously, this process reflected contrasts between residents' aspirations and architects' expectations.

Methodological Assumptions

Spatial arrangements play an active part in the organisation of women's place in social dynamics by structuring where, in whose terms and doing what women interact with members of their household, their local community and the city. These spatial arrangements are themselves the product of existing social structures and tend towards translating these existing gender dynamics into the spatial configuration of the built environment. In this duality, space must be read both as physical evidence of the context that produced it, where priorities, intentions and views of social life have been imprinted, and as a set of conditions, limitations and potentialities imposed upon those who use it.

Previous work by this author examined the spaces of public housing development in the city of Porto, Portugal to identify pervasive spatial patterns that may influence social dynamics in one way or another, and which may be indicative of a particular way of viewing family and communal life.¹¹ This prior research used syntactic analysis of built space to find clear transformations in design paradigms during the revolutionary period and the transition to social democracy.¹² This paper will contextualise the results in light of women's movements, drawing on popular newspapers, architects' reports, documentaries and existing literature to explore the role of women in the transformation of the urban environment.

Housing Conditions in Pre-Revolutionary Porto

The demand for housing, improved living conditions, and public urban services and infrastructure was one of the major people's struggles that arose during the Portuguese revolutionary period. Brochado Coelho categorises these struggles in five groups, each related to the specificities of different housing arrangements and conditions: SAAL residents' associations; inhabitants of overcrowded sublets; the squatting movement; the struggles of council housing tenants, and others.¹³

In Porto, these struggles can be traced back to the city's industrialisation process, which sparked a massive influx of people it was unprepared to accommodate. The SAAL in Porto was deeply connected to the populations living in *ilhas*, a type of dwelling developed by industrial capitalists to house their workers, taking advantage of Porto's deep but narrow lots. These dwellings were effectively removed from the urban space, hidden behind the façade of bourgeois buildings, and connected to the street only through an exterior corridor which went through the main building.

While these typologies were rare in the central core of the city, speculative sublets were pervasive in this area. Families - often more than one - shared small and unsanitary houses, bedrooms, or other spaces with no access to running water,

10 *Ambulatory Service for Local Aid, Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local*, created by the Law DD4630, from August 6, 1974. This programme was created to the initiatives of ill-housed communities by creating incentives through the municipalities to their collaboration in the transformation of their own neighbourhoods, through direct discussion between architects and residents' associations. The SAAL has been thoroughly studied throughout the last decades. For a thorough understanding of the process that lasted for approximately two years, see: José António Bandeirinha, *O Processo SAAL e a Arquitectura no 25 de Abril de 1974* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2007).

11 Catarina Ruivo, *Design Paradigms in Porto's Public and Cooperative Housing in and Around the Portuguese Revolutionary Period: A Systemic Approach Grounded on Spatial Analysis* (Lisbon: School of Architecture, Lisbon University, 2021); Catarina Ruivo and Tasos Varoudis, "Organising Family Life: An Analysis of the Spatial Organisation of People and Activities in the Household," in *Proceedings of the 12th International Space Syntax Symposium* (Beijing: International Space Syntax Symposium, 2019).

12 Julienne Hanson, "Urban transformations: a history of design ideas," *Urban Design International* 5 (2000): 97-122; Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

13 Mário Brochado Coelho, "Um Processo Organizativo de Moradores (SAAL Norte - 1974/76)," *Revista de Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 18/19/20 (1986).

kitchen, or toilets. These sublets were often rented at highly speculative prices to families that could not access the formal housing market.¹⁴

In face of this scenario, in 1956 a plan was put in place for building twelve housing estates in Porto in ten years.¹⁵ This plan, connected to an expansionist strategy of city growth, sought to reach towards neighbouring municipalities while directing services and commerce into the city centre.¹⁶ Freeing up the overcrowded and overwhelmingly poor areas of the city's historical core required public investment in social housing and, furthermore, the adoption of long resisted collective housing blocks.¹⁷

The plan rehoused one-fifth of *ilhas'* residents in ten years. In approximately two decades, around 8,300 families were relocated to new estates, built in what were, at the time, suburban areas with no adequate services or urban infrastructure.¹⁸ Families were frequently removed from the local community in which they were rooted, with whom they shared a communal life that had the street as its locus. Displaced from the urban centre and torn from their communities, the populations relocated in council estates were doubly segregated, which was tougher on non-employed residents dependent on local relationships, such as women and the elderly.¹⁹

Simultaneously, the estates were spaces of social control.²⁰ Council housing rules made it possible to evict families whenever they were deemed undeserving of their houses, which included political activity, but also all types of behaviour seen as morally unfit. Homes were periodically inspected, and overseers watched over the estate.

The Spatiality of Residents' Movements and the Specificities of Women's Struggles

The residents' movement that arose in response to these conditions has been thoroughly researched and analysed in its historical, sociological and political nature.²¹ Reclaiming the right to proper housing, they were part of a larger set of strong social movements that marked the period immediately after April 25th's military coup (figures 1 and 2). By putting an end to an authoritarian state and its repressive legal apparatus, the revolution effectively freed the population from the political police, censorship, and the prohibition of free association.

While the highly gendered ideology of Portugal's dictatorship relegated women to the private sphere, and women's – and particularly working women's - movements were limited in the country, the Portuguese revolutionary period provided impetus for the mobilisation of women around non-gender specific issues such as housing. This type of women's activism should not be overlooked, as it functions in a twofold manner: first, public activism has historically functioned towards the undermining of women's traditional domestic roles, and second, it may function as a catalyst for women's organisation around gender issues within a larger movement.²²

In the Portuguese revolutionary period, “[p]opular power became ‘to a large extent, women’s power’”.²³ The role of women in all forms of urban movements was made clear in the variety of documents they produced, even though residents' associations were often formally headed by men.²⁴ The struggle for women's emancipation was explicit in residents' bulletins where it is possible to find passages that condemn women's characterisation as “docile, men-dependent, with an inferior intelligence and weak actions”²⁵. Similarly, these bulletins would address the issues of contraception and women's double burden.

In parallel, the problems faced specifically by women are pervasive across leaflets, newspapers, and written claims by different types of resident organisations. This

14 João Queirós, *No Centro à Margem* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2015); Marielle Christine Gros, *O alojamento social sob o fascismo* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 1982).

15 Porto's 'Improvements' Plan' (*Plano de Melhoramentos da Cidade do Porto*) was established in 1956, 'Decree-Law 40616', 1956.

16 Vítor Oliveira, *A Evolução das Formas Urbanas de Lisboa e do Porto nos Séculos XIX e XX* (Porto: Universidade do Porto, 2013).

17 Throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, the regime had explicitly opposed collective housing as something foreign to the Portuguese identity, proposing instead small, single-family typologies as a symbol of moral family values.

18 Virgílio Borges Pereira, *A habitação social na transformação da cidade: sobre a génese e efeitos do “Plano de melhoramentos para a cidade do Porto” de 1956* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2016); João Queirós, “Precariedade Habitacional, Vida Quotidiana e Relação Com o Estado No Centro Histórico Do Porto Na Transição Da Ditadura Para a Democracia,” *Análise Social* 206 (2013): 102–133.

19 Maria João Freitas, “Os Paradoxos do Realojamento,” *Territórios e sociedade* 20 (1994): 26–35. Teresa Costa Pinto, “A Apropriação do Espaço em Bairros Sociais: O gosto pela casa e o desgosto pelo bairro,” *Territórios e sociedade* 20 (1994): 36–50.

20 Virgílio Borges Pereira and João Queirós, *Na ‘Modesta Cidadezinha’: Génese e Estruturação de Um Bairro de ‘Casas Económicas’ Do Porto (Amial, 1938-2010)* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2012).

21 Dows, *Revolution at the Grassroots*; Vitor Matias Ferreira, *Movimentos Sociais Urbanos e Intervenção Política. A Intervenção Do SAAL (Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local) Em Lisboa* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 1975); Rodrigues, *Pelo direito à cidade: o movimento de moradores no Porto (1974/76)*; Santos, “Sem Mestres Nem Chefes o Povo Tomou a Rua.”

22 Andrea Simoes, *‘Gendering’ the Transition: Women’s Movements in the Spanish and Portuguese Transitions to Democracy* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 2006).

23 Simoes, *‘Gendering’ the Transition*, 143; quoting Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, politician and Portuguese prime minister between August and October of 1979.

24 Sofia Brás, “O Movimento de Moradores Do Bairro de S. João de Deus Em 1974,” in *Atas Dos Encontros Da Primavera 2019* (Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 2020).

25 Bulletin, Residents' Commission of Bairro do Leal, Porto in Rodrigues, *Pelo direito à cidade*.



Figure 1. Residents General Assembly, Arrábida, Campo Das Pedras. Photograph by Alexandre Alves Costa, 1976.



Figure 2. "The worker's son has the right to a nursery". Photograph by Alexandre Alves Costa, date unknown.

paper will now look at the spaces from which resident organisations arose, in particular council housing and the *ilhas*.

Council Housing as a Locus of Popular Struggle

The design of council estates in Porto was directly connected to disciplinary concerns and institutional research, as architects who worked in council cabinets for housing development were also researchers and active participants in architectural debates. As such, these spaces translated, to an extent, the clear disciplinary focus on housing from the 1940s onwards, throughout which two pervasive concerns can be identified: housing as something that is not limited to the apartment and, instead, functions at two scales, and the transforming role of women in family and society and how this should translate into design.²⁶ However, while architects had claimed the importance of common spaces and public equipment in light of these concerns from the 1940s, public equipment was rarely built in housing estates until much later, when the country's political context was deeply transformed. Apartment design was not subject to the same constraints, and the built designs better translate the concerns held by architects.

The apartments where working class families were rehoused in the late 1960s and early 1970s were diverse, often architecturally complex layouts (figure 3). Where a stable shared set of spatial characteristics could be found, they appeared to reflect the same concerns and solutions that were proposed throughout architects' encounters, written production, and institutional research. These apartments were characterised by the association of the kitchen and living room, creating a highly integrated, albeit small, social pole where kitchens took on a central role. They generally lacked the clear functional definition of spaces introduced earlier by modernist housing, where functional sectors were clearly defined. Instead, the private sectors of council housing often established a close relationship with common areas, which could, in almost every case, be used as a transition space towards the kitchen.

These layouts had great spatial fluidity: rooms often had more than one entrance and functional sectors could not be defined. This may be related to the layouts' small size, as is clear in examples where kitchens were open to the living room when both rooms are too small to constitute single enclosed spaces. This fluid articulation of rooms and the centrality of the kitchen in the layout are design choices coherent with an idea of the house as a collective space, where domestic activities - many of which were spatially bounded to the kitchen - were not individualised. Nevertheless, while

26 Portas, *A Habitação Social - Proposta Para a Metodologia Da Sua Arquitectura*. Porto: FAUP Publicações, 1959; Portas, *Funções e exigências de áreas da habitação*; Valente Pereira and Gago, *Inquérito à habitação urbana*. Santos Pedrosa, *Habitar Em Portugal Nos Anos 1960: Ruptura e Antecedentes*.



Figure 3. Model plans of two council estate apartment layouts: Bairro do Contumil, founded in 1975, architecture project signed by architects Alexandre Alves Costa and Manuel Teles; Bairro do Bom Pastor, founded in 1970.

the new houses may have provided space for a domesticity shared by the family, the communal aspects of housing estates were still lacking. These housing layouts were built in vacant lots at the back of existing buildings, often displaying a strong outer boundary, with buildings turning inwards into large courtyards, and a few paths made the connection between the interior of these spaces and the primary urban grid (figure 4). Schools, playgrounds, sports facilities, and other collective spaces designed by architects were rarely built. Simultaneously, exterior spaces, in most case numerous and large, did not support the same type of socialised domesticity lived in *ilhas* and sublets in the city centre, lacking the washing basins and airers that were common in those spaces. Buildings were dispersed throughout the available lots, dividing the estates' residents into different and smaller spatial groups. Green spaces existed in many of these estates but were either circled by streets or located at the rear of buildings where they could not be easily accessed.

While not planned in design, in practice this represented a shift from a shared domesticity to a private one. If, in the *ilhas* or overcrowded sublets, domestic work was shared, or at least done in the company of others, this was connected to the impossibility of carrying it on in small, unequipped houses. Instead, women used communal washing basins, hang their clothes to dry outside, and spent time together on the streets where their children played. Once relocated to larger houses



Figure 4. Estates of Porto's Improvements Plan of 1956, over 1960's map.

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in a foreign environment, the connection to a world exterior to the house was lost for non-employed women and domesticity redefined as individual for all of them. The house became, for the first time, the centre of these families' lives.

Research conducted years after families moved to their new homes observed that the new houses invited a more intense family life.²⁷ The authors detected a growing investment in the house, with which families were, in their majority, happy. However, to women who had shared their daily lives with others, being the ones almost exclusively in charge of domestic work and taking care of children now represented isolation from the world outside the home.

It was in these council estates, which remained at the time distanced from urban life, that the first manifestation of the spontaneous residents' movement took place. Spatially, the same conditions that socially segregated and stigmatised these populations provided the focus for this mobilisation. If their first demands were centred on the abolishment of the strict regulations and consequent behavioural control that resulted in frequent evictions, which were aggravated and facilitated by the inward-facing morphology of the estates, soon, residents began demanding public transportation and road infrastructure, as well as the unrealised schools, day-care and social centres that worsened life conditions and hindered the creation of neighbourhood relations.

The lack of articulation of the estates with the surrounding city and the absence of social facilities to serve them was explicitly stated as a problem that affected working women most of all, as explicitly noted in residents' claims. For example, a statement in *Caderno Reivindicativo Das Comissões de Moradores* reflected on the condition of working women, forced to leave their children alone, and demanded: "1) The construction of social centres in the estates; 2) That we are given all aid in the construction of day care, playgrounds and sports fields; and 3) That healthcare installations are constructed."²⁸

The translation of gender issues in participatory architecture

Like council housing residents, the populations living in *ilhas* and other overcrowded areas quickly began organising within their neighbourhoods for the right to proper housing. Women were the protagonists of the squatting movement that resulted in the eventually successful occupation of vacant houses in several council estates, as well as of empty buildings in all areas of the city for the creation of social services and facilities.²⁹ The domestic sphere had grown to encompass the right to a shared, socially, and culturally fulfilling life, as is shown the *Boletim: Comissão de Moradores de Massarelos*, describing the future uses of an occupied warehouse: "A DAYCARE CENTRE – where [our children] can stay safe. SOCIAL SPACES – where all of us can talk, discuss so that we feel like a true family. REUNION ROOMS – where we can vent and make decisions. ROOMS FOR FILMS AND PLAYS – so that we can acquire culture through films and plays that enlighten us and are for us an example. LIBRARY – so that we can also profit culturally and intellectually. A GYM – where our children can play sports".³⁰

Squatting was a prevalent form of urban resistance during the revolutionary period, but it was never made legitimate. Nevertheless, the intensity of political struggle by residents' associations had an impact in institutional action and the legal apparatus, namely through the development of a variety of public housing policies to respond to the specificities of different populations.

One of these was the SAAL, which assisted direct action by the communities of slums and *ilhas* with technical support, and provided a legal framework for the

27 Freitas, *Os Paradoxos do Realojamento*; Costa Pinto, *A Apropriação do Espaço em Bairros Sociais*.

28 *Caderno Reivindicativo Das Comissões de Moradores*, 1977.

29 Rodrigues, *Pelo direito à cidade*.

30 *Boletim: Comissão de Moradores de Massarelos* 1, Porto (no date), 3.



Figure 5. The front of a SAAL housing development, decorated with potted flowers and other plants: Bairro de S. Victor, founded in 1975, brigade headed by architect Álvaro Siza.



Figure 6. The back of a SAAL housing development with air-drying clothes: Bairro de S. Victor, founded in 1975, brigade headed by architect Álvaro Siza.

realisation of their aspirations. Simultaneously, however, it was constraint-ridden, making these populations' housing dependent of legally acquired inexpensive lots in the areas where they lived. These were often located in the back of existing blocks and not large enough to provide proper living conditions to the number of families previously housed in cramped, overcrowded *ilhas*. Furthermore, there was a difference between working women and architects, the latter often men³¹ and predominantly belonging to a wealthier class,³² which translated into an outsider character in their approaches to community and family life.

While the way of life of the populations of *ilhas* was generally accepted by architects as positive in its communal dimension - the neighbourly relations established within these urban spaces, the strength and definition of those small urban communities - the life schemes and aspirations of the populations within the domestic environment were in some cases described by architects as reflecting bourgeois values such as conservatism, the cult of private property, and the perpetuation of gender roles. Reports written by SAAL architects detail several conflicts and the resulting back and forth process between architects and residents. In reports from July and December of 1975, architects voiced complaints to residents' insistence on dividing children's rooms by gender and resistance to open plans "to facilitate domestic work and avoid that the kitchen became the *gynaecium* where the woman works while the man reads the paper and smokes a cigarette in the living-room [...]".³³

If, in most cases, SAAL architects' concerns reflected the socially progressive values pervasive within the discipline at the time, these sometimes appeared removed from the reality of the communities for whom they were to provide technical support, where women's aspiration for a differentiated kitchen and the families' desire for separate rooms contrasted with the lack of personal space that they had previously experienced. Necessarily, the significant increase of interior areas represented not only an increase in space, but a transformation of the configurational attributes of the house and the ways families could occupy and experience it. Similarly, it represented a transformation of the relationship established between the house and the exterior. The house was no longer so overcrowded and dysfunctional that the street afforded the most inviting space. The isolation this could represent for non-employed women was frequently countered by the creation of a services sector

31 Brigades of the 10 built SAAL projects in Porto had 52 men and 16 women. Men lead every brigade, with one registered instance of a women architect in joint leadership.

32 Manuel Cabral and Vera Borges, *Profissão: Arquitecto/a* (Lisbon: Universidade de Lisboa, 2006).

33 1975's report by Porto's SAAL technicians. *Relatório Da Brigada de Chaves de Oliveira*. SAAL Norte (December, 1975; July 1975).

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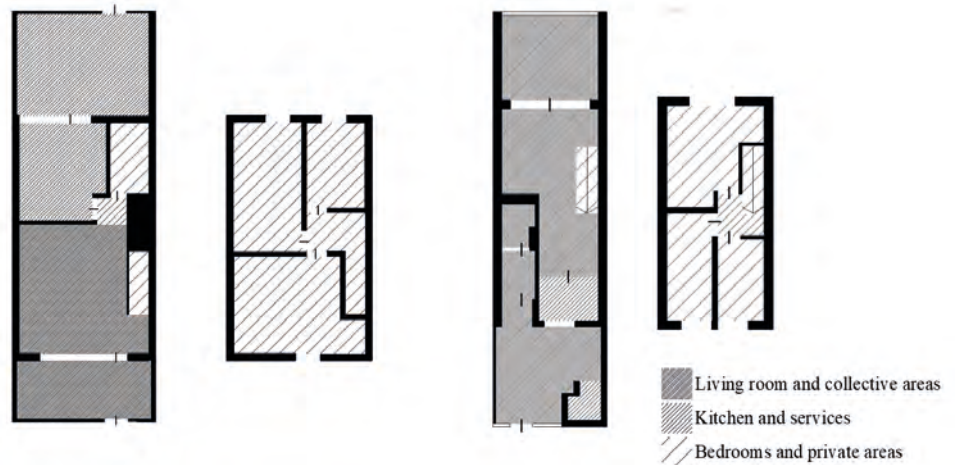


Figure 7. Model plans of two SAAL apartment layouts: *Bairro da Maceda-Acácio*, founded in 1975, brigade headed by architect Alcino Soutinho and *Bairro de Francos*, founded in 1976, brigade headed by architect Rolando Torgo.

in the house with its own entrance and yard, where outhouses, airers, washing basins and other indicators of domestic work could often be found (figure 5, figure 6).³⁴ In this way, domestic work was extended to the house's exterior spaces and local relationships were facilitated for women who could be in contact with their neighbours throughout the day.

Simultaneously, unlike council layouts where area constraints facilitated the creation of poles of social potential including the kitchen, the service sector in SAAL houses was often disconnected from the centre of family life. These layouts displayed a greater separation of functional sectors through the distancing of bedrooms from the collective areas of the house, offering a sense of privacy unavailable to residents in their past living arrangements (figure 7).

While this was not the case everywhere across the country, SAAL developments in Porto stand out for their absence of communal spaces in the public areas of the estates.³⁵ This seems to result from a convergence between architects and future residents, the latter dismissing the construction of these spaces and the former seeking to re-interpret the pre-existing ways of life and types of neighbourhood relations in space in these layouts and opposed, at least in intention, to the idea of a collectivist ghetto.³⁶

Instead, a new urban solution that opposed the old bourgeois centre should be born of the ways of life of the existing working class, one which reinterpreted the neighbourhood relations of proximity and frequent encounter of *ilhas*, as well as the creation of a collective identity.³⁷ However, due to legal and temporal constraints, much could not be achieved. The SAAL programme existed only during the two years of the revolutionary period. It met increasing resistance throughout this period in the form of bureaucratic hindrances by the municipalities, difficulties in conducting expropriations, and lack of funding or wage payments. From 1976 it gradually disappeared, leaving houses unbuilt and neighbourhoods incomplete. Consequently, the existing developments turn inwards, and houses were often hidden away in the backs of existing lots. Often, a few openings control all accessibility between houses and the urban fabric from which they are removed (figure 8). However, without social equipment or urban infrastructure in SAAL developments, the residents were pulled towards the outer city and encouraged to use spaces outside their working-class cluster, thus countering the *a priori* segregating character of their housing morphologies. Similarly, without communal equipment, the windows and yards that open directly to the exterior spaces where neighbours circulate created the possibility for non-purposeful co-presence. If, as seen, this affected mostly women who related to their neighbours while remaining inside their homes conducting domestic work, in some cases, this also resulted

34 These housing developments were visited several times throughout a period of 5 years between 2016 and 2021.

35 Jorge Figueira, *Escola do Porto: um mapa crítico* (Coimbra: Edições do Departamento de Arquitectura da FCTUC, 2002).

36 Presentation by a SAAL Brigade in 1975. Brigada Leal, *Apresentação No 1o Encontro SAAL Norte*.

37 Siza Vieira and S. Victor's technicians, "The proletarian ilha as the base element of the urban tissue," *Lotus International* 13 (1976): 80-93.



Figure 8. Plans of two SAAL housing developments: Bairro do Leal, founded in 1976, brigade headed by architect Sérgio Fernandez and Bairro das Antas, founded in 1974, brigade headed by architect Pedro Ramalho.

in the creation of differentiated spaces within the neighbourhood that impacted gendered relations: a second entrance was introduced in the back of the houses, resulting in an extension of this separation of collective and service areas to the space of the neighbourhood.

Conclusion

Women maintain a smaller representation than men in local and central power in Portugal today and are less likely to be office owners. If, in this way, women remain removed from most decision-making positions, this was undoubtedly the case in the period studied in this paper. However, integration in popular organizations, direct action, and political struggle made it possible for women to become practitioners, contributing to shaping the urban environment and creating a city more adjusted to their needs and aspirations. In these actions and efforts, progress against the boundaries of the legal, interaction with both architects and institutional power (the two often not seeing eye to eye), and the intersection between class and gender were made evident.

If, even during the dictatorship, there existed institutional and disciplinary concerns with housing and its interaction with gender relations at different scales, actual projects were limited by institutional decisions. A paradigmatic example of this is the systematic neglect of the construction of communal equipment and facilities for the socialization of domestic work or development of neighbourhood bonds in public housing. In this context, it was only collective action by popular organisations where women played major parts, and which understood housing as a collective project, that finally pushed towards the creation of communal spaces – of education, healthcare, recreation, culture – and infrastructure.

Simultaneously, the SAAL in Porto, both in its process and in its results, further translated the complexities of this process. The inclusion of residents in the decision process of the design of their own houses revealed contradictions between architects' and residents' expectations of gender relations and family and neighbourhood life. At the same time, bounded by legalization in a process that often suffered from intentional institutional obstacles, this programme continued to struggle with constraints like those found by council housing before 1974. With the SAAL's intervention in Porto limited, in its practice while not in its concerns, to the space of the house, much of what was achieved by popular organization during this period regarding the construction of a neighbourhood that provided support for working women, could not find translation in a programme that was designed to give residents the tools to build their living environments.

CATARINA RUIVO PEREIRA

The Spatiality of Women's Struggle
within Porto's Residents' Movement
during the Portuguese Revolutionary
Process (1974-75)

La espacialidad de la lucha de las
mujeres en el movimiento de vecinos
en Oporto durante el proceso de
revolución en Portugal (1974-75)

Figures Sources

Figure 1. Assembleia Geral da Arrábida, Campo das Pedras. Photograph by Alexandre Alves Costa, 1976, in Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril, University of Coimbra.

Figure 2. Photograph by Alexandre Alves Costa, no date, in Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril, University of Coimbra.

Figure 3. Author's drawings over plans in Porto's Historical Archive.

Figure 4. Author's drawing based on maps in Vítor Oliveira, *Avaliação Em Planeamento Urbano* (Universidade do Porto, 2011).

Figure 5, 6. Photographs by the author.

Figure 7, 8. Drawings by the author.

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