



Social housing policies in Portugal over the last 25 years - three study cases

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Abstract:

Theory of the Portuguese contemporary of architecture had based fundamental concepts on the answers given to the lacks verified in the 1970s when the Carnation Revolution (1974) happened. In those years, Housing subject was deeply debated among the architects, foreseeing the resolution of the dramatic situation of Portuguese society of that time.

After the SAAL program, launched in the revolutionary period, between 1974 and 1976, other programs were framed, giving continuity to the housing policies built under the democratic Constitution text (1976). This article focuses three study cases, presenting the architectural features that resulted from the applications three different political lines. The article aims at reflecting about a temporal arch of 25 years, analyzing as main cases, a new intervention in the outskirts of Lisbon located in Sargento Abílio neighbourhood, the renovation project of the Lagarteiro neighborhood built in the early 70s in the limits of Porto municipality, concluding with an intervention in the historical area of Porto in Tomás Gonzaga street, close to the borders defined by UNESCO as Humanity Heritage.

Keywords: Social Housing; Sargento Abílio; Lagarteiro; Tomás Gonzaga



1. Introduction

This article aims at presenting a vision about Social Housing in Portugal in the last 25 years. To reflect on this theme, three study cases designed by the author of the paper will be presented. Those interventions were projected in different moments, corresponding to different visions and policies about housing. The temporal period which frames the projects can be defined by the demands of the democratic process consolidation, after the entrance of Portugal in the European Union (at the time CEE) in

1986 and the challenges of the present time, featured by the global economy and its effects on the housing policies.

By the time of the Portuguese Carnation Revolution (1974), housing was one of the most important subjects of the social debate in the 1970s. Industrial investments launched in the late 50s under the development programs, resulting from the Marshall plan, implied a rural exodus to the main Portuguese cities namely Lisbon and Porto. In the 70s the situation was dramatic, featured by a large concentration of slums, over occupation and an old housing stock. The situation involved and motivated architects in the resolution of the country necessities, their contribution was relevant to a general conscience that housing should be considered as a fundamental right of all citizens, as it was quoted in the Democratic Constitutional Text of 1976.

In a certain way, the debate and the research about housing made by the architects on the 70s supported the definition of theoretical bases for Portuguese contemporary architecture. Those bases were published as the main subject of several publications of that period, being the issue 'Portugal An 2', published in L'Architecture

d'aujourd'hui in 1976, a remarkable moment of cultural dissemination, and an opportunity for presenting Portuguese architects and their architecture in an international approach.



Figure 1. 'Portugal An 2', in L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui, 1976

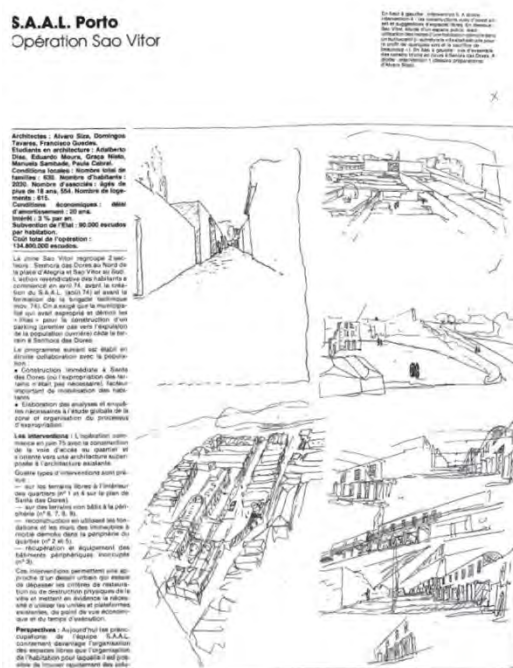


Figure 2. Álvaro Siza, SAAL Porto, Operação São Vitor in 'Portugal An 2', in L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui, 1976



Among Fernando Távora, Gonçalo Byrne, Hestnes Ferreira, Vítor Figueredo, was also Álvaro Siza, presented as a prominent figure. Several projects by Siza, integrated in the Ambulatory Support to Local Residents program, so called as SAAL, were published. This public program had been launched in the revolutionary period, between 1974 and 1976 by Nuno Portas when he was the Secretary of State for Housing and Urban Planning, having the participation and involvement of communities as main strategy.

The SAAL created an idealistic sense of realism among Portuguese architects, which can be considered as a tool for understanding people, locations, materials and technical solutions.

2. PER – Special Re-housing Program. Sargento Abílio Neighborhood, Lisbon - 91 dwellings, 1998–2002

After the SAAL program, other public initiatives and programs were launched to solve the housing lacks. Special Re-housing Program (PER) was the biggest and the most relevant one, having as main goal supporting municipalities of Lisbon and Porto metropolitan in slum eradication. Through this program, inhabitants were re-housed in controlled costs dwellings, preferentially in the same areas of the slums. This program was available between 1993 and 2003, under the coordination of the INH Housing National Institute (Instituto Nacional de Habitação — now called IHRU).

Namely in Lisbon municipality, PER was used as an opportunity for planning several areas of the city where municipal plots were located, introducing new facilities and connections with the city itself.

Sargento Abílio neighborhood was projected for 91 dwellings under the

PER program in 1998. The intervention plot was located in the middle of heavy infrastructures, such as the old aqueduct from the 18th Century, the regional train line and the urban highways that connect Lisbon with its metropolis. The area had been occupied by temporary houses, which were already demolished when the project was initiated.



Figure 3. Sargento Abílio Neighborhood location. © Google earth



Figure 4. Sargento Abílio Neighborhood before the intervention. © CML archives

Housing cooperatives and private buildings defined the environment of that neighborhood, which had grown in the proximity of Calhariz de Benfica historical cluster. The intervention was based on a clear urban typology created by row blocks and a square, which structured three different types of public space.

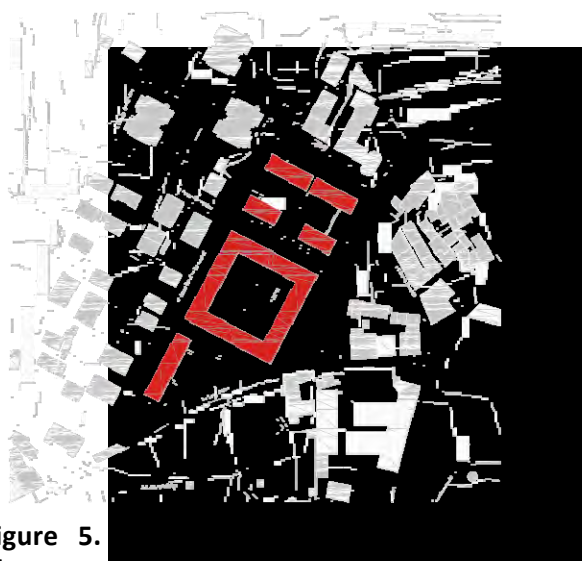


Figure 5. Plan.

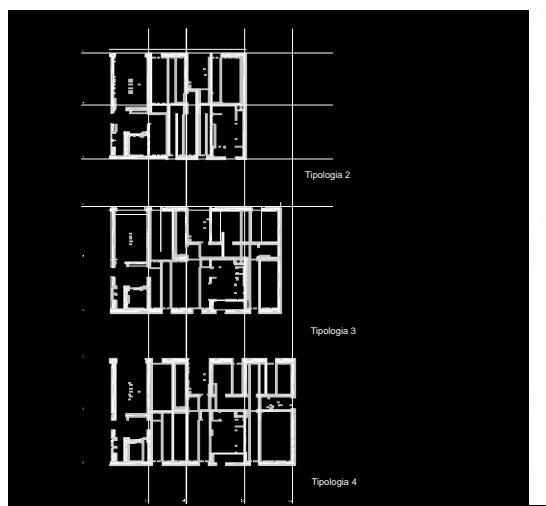


Figure 6. Sargento Abílio Neighborhood Plan.

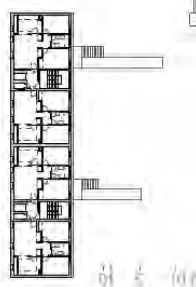
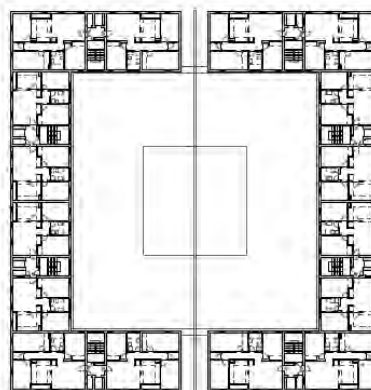
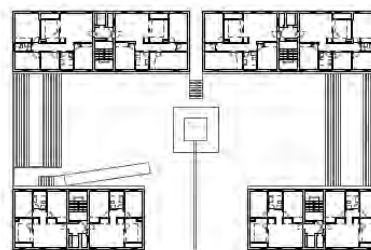


Figure 8. Sargento Abílio Neighborhood typology Plan.



Figure 7. Sargento Abílio Neighborhood during construction. © CML archives

The mediation between surrounding areas and the interior of the blocks was reached by buildings deployment and its architecture, featured by the white tectonic skin in the external relation and by three different colors qualifying the sequence of public space in the core of the intervention.

Housing types were designed giving priority to two-room apartments. This base was enlarged for three and four-room apartments. A simple division between social and intimate areas organized the three types of plans.



Housing buildings were treated as pieces of a domino game, allowing the definition of the urban public space sequence.

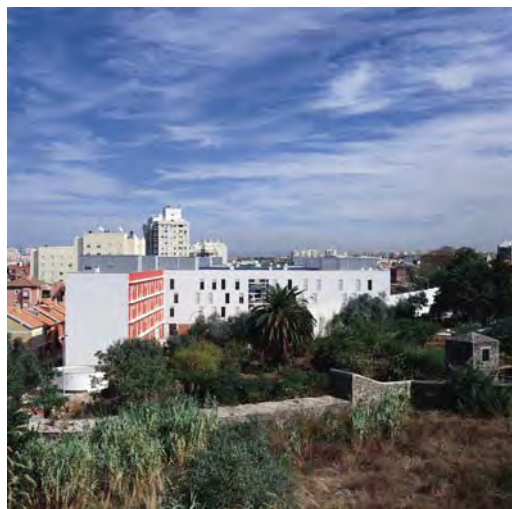


Figure 9., 10. and 11. Photos of the Sargento Abílio Neighbourhood.
© F. Oliveira

3. IBC – Critical Neighborhoods Initiative. Lagarteiro Neighborhood Renovation, Porto. 2008–2016

In 2005 the Critical Neighborhoods Initiative program (IBC) was launched with the aim at reverting some shortcomings of the previous processes mostly in terms of participation and integration of communities. The aim of this program, coordinated by the IHRU—Housing and Urban Renewal Institute (Instituto da Habitação e da Reabilitação Urbana), was to define guidelines for interventions in urban areas with critical factors of vulnerability. Three priority cases were defined, two of them located in Lisbon metropolis, the third one was the Lagarteiro neighborhood located in Porto. The program, which involved all the twelve ministries and local agents, aimed at defining a rigorous plan of interventions, which included the rehabilitation of the public space and buildings. It was also foreseen that a social development program would be launched simultaneously.

Lagarteiro neighborhood was built in the early 70s by the municipality, under the same model repeated in several City Hall interventions of that period. By the time of its construction, the neighborhood was included in the Improvement Plan (Plano de Melhoramentos) that the municipality had launched in the late 50s for re-housing people that lived in precarious condition in several worker's houses that existed in the center of the city, so called as 'islands'. Four-storey row buildings, surrounding basic facilities such as a primary school and a sport enclosure, featured those interventions. In Lagarteiro case, people were displaced from the city center to the outskirts of the municipality in the East side of Campanhã valley.



Figure 12. Lagarteiro Neighbourhood and the Campanhã valley. ©Google Earth



Figure 13. Lagarteiro Neighbourhood in the 1970s. © CMP Archives



Figure 14. Lagarteiro Neighbourhood in 2009. © J.C. Simões

The main idea of the intervention was to connect the neighborhood inside itself, and with its surrounding areas. The most demanding part of the project was the surgical intervention in the core of the neighborhood, aiming at introducing a street for connecting both sectors of the cluster separated by different topographic levels.

Natural granitic pavement, both in roads and pathways, was the main material used in the public space renovation. This material establishes a relationship with the concrete walls, projected as a device to control the accidental topography inside the neighborhood. The main interventions in buildings were based in energy efficiency improvement, throughout facades renovation, stairwell closure and roof changed, replacement of all windows and doors, new nets of water, electricity, communications, and gas supply.



Figure 16. Lagarteiro Neighbourhood in 2016. © J.C. Simões



Figure 15. intervention scheme (before and after). © J.C. Simões



Figure 17. Lagarteiro Neighbourhood entrances, 2016. © J.C. Simões



4. Housing Renovation at Porto Historical Area. Tomás Gonzaga Street – 8 dwellings Porto 2016-/...

Considering the huge development of the tourist sector in the last few years, Porto municipality decided that social housing investments should be also done in the center of the city as a way to control gentrification and maintain the popular atmosphere of Porto historical areas considered by UNESCO as Humanity Heritage since 1996.

The intervention on Tomás Gonzaga street, still under project phase, is located close to the borders of UNESCO delimitation, in the parish of Miragaia, close to Saint Peter’s Church considered National Monument, and the Customs House designed by the French architect Jean-François Colson in 1859.

Vertical narrow buildings built in several layers opened to the Douro river feature Porto façade, as a legacy of the 18th century based on the plan launched by João de Almada e Melo as mayor of the city.

The intervention area integrated several kinds of buildings, some of them in ruins. Looking at the area from the river, a granitic masonry building standing itself, together with a granitic small construction at the bottom of the plot. The intervention was designed aiming at preserving these two buildings.

Two new housing volumes will be settled on each side of the area. Also a multifunctional building was proposed on the limit of the intervention.



Figure 18. Porto Humanity Heritage delimitation by UNESCO



Figure 20. Tomás Gonzaga Elevations.



Figure 19. Intervention area from the Douro riverfront. © PTP



Figure 21. Tomás Gonzaga sections.



The new housing buildings were designed following a grid of granite slabs, which organizes the windows, contributing to emphasize the vertical reading of the set.

The North elevation was composed taking into account some existent elements, and was adjusted to the shape of the proposed volumes. Two-steel grid doors allow reaching the houses entrances, providing visual connections between Tomaz Gonzaga street and the river.

Eight dwellings will be displaced by the plots, some of them designed in duplex. Typologies with one bedroom, living room, kitchen and bathroom are the base of the project.



Figure 22. Project of the model, view from the Douro riverfront. © Renata Sousa



Figure 23. Project of the model view from Tomás Gonzaga Street. © Renata Sousa

5. Conclusion

The study cases presented in this article allow understanding relationships between different conceptions of social housing policies and the way architecture figure out solutions to operate in different contexts and demands. Starting from a new intervention in the outskirts of Lisbon, passing from a renovation project in a neighborhood of the 70s, and concluding with an intervention in the historical area of Porto, a temporal arch was traced showing how social housing programs were managed over the last 25 years in Portugal.

Social housing projects compel architects to work on a low budget, as a condition for discovering essential solutions to solve basic needs of people.

A sense of realism is always present on those interventions. In the Portuguese case, the legacy of the debate, which happened in the period of the 1974 Revolution, allows a continuity of the theoretical discourse about social housing, transforming those programs into a kind of laboratory to rehearse the fundamentals of architecture, as such, a good basis to reflect on the 'locality' and 'Modernism' as a contribution to this seminary.

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