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Urban legacies
of the late 20th century

CONFERENCE
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of the late 20th century

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	WEDNESDAY, 17	THURSDAY, 18	FRIDAY, 19
9:30		Parallel session Slot 1 T2 S1 T3 S1 T4 S1 T7 S1	Parallel session Slot 3 T1 S2 T2 S2 T3 S3 T7 S2
11:00		BREAK	BREAK
11:15	SIDE EVENT Lisbon Waterfront Buildings and Public Spaces	CLAIRE COLOMB *Keynote Speaker*	CHRISTIAN SCHIMDT *Keynote Speaker*
12:45		LUNCH-BREAK	LUNCH-BREAK
14:15		Parallel session Slot 2 T1 S1 T3 S2 T4 S2 T5 S1 T10 S1	Parallel session Slot 4 T1 s3 T3 s4 T6 s1 T7 s3 T8 s1 T9 s1
15:45		BREAK	
16:00		SPECIAL SESSION Ana Brandão, Jorge Bassani, Stefano Di Vita *Roundtable*	
16:30			
16:45	OPENING SESSION Tribute Vitor Matias Ferreira		BREAK
17:00			JEAN-LOUIS COHEN *Keynote Speaker*
17:30	BREAK	BREAK	
17:45	JOÃO PEDRO MATOS FERNANDES, GONÇALO BYRNE and RICARDO PAES MAMEDE *Roundtable*	MANUEL SALGADO and JOSEP ACEBILLO *Keynote Speaker*	
18:30			
19:15			

153 New Housing in Angola. From modernity to contemporaneity

The role of the Portuguese star system in Luanda's urban growth

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DINÂMIA'CET-IUL

ABSTRACT

The modern city of Luanda of the 1950s and 1960s has, since the beginning of the 21st century, been advanced as the "new Dubai" or "African Dubai", following the symbolic reaffirmation of power in the urban landscape. Today, emblematic architecture competes for the best views, with six- and 7-star hotels, luxury flats and offices, priced out of reach; this is in contrast with the modern legacy, outlining the distance between how modern architects have approached urban and housing problems and how to summarise today's urban strategies in Luanda. This article aims to (re)think modernity through housing, preserving cultural, social and architectural values of the inevitable link between Angola and Portugal, from neighbourhood units to iconic standalone buildings, some carried out by Portuguese architects between 1960-2020, some not: from the "African generation" and its involvement in the "modern Luanda", to the contribution of the Portuguese star architects in the "international Luanda" of the new millennium.

Today, Angola's modern heritage from the colonial period is overcrowded and degraded and successively gives way to the imposing verticality of the glass façades of the globalised world. Among others, "The luxurious Sky Center changes the face of Luanda" in 2013. Projects built, or not, take over the territory, fitting into the city's skyline and urban life, based on promotional videos and three-dimensional images of fantastic architecture close to the emerging Asian metropolis. The intention is to find examples that demonstrate the possible conciliation with modern heritage of the late colonial period by proving the formal and constructive logic of modern architecture and its viability to develop the "new housing in Angola", highlighted by the Portuguese-Angolan architectural path.

Keywords: Modern Architecture, Postmodern Architecture, Portuguese star-architecture, Luanda.

Introduction

This article reflects on Angola's modern heritage and discusses its relevance to housing research, bringing together recent projects developed by internationally recognised Portuguese architects. It begins by providing a working presentation of the modern Luanda of the '60s before embarking upon examining the connections between modernity and the contemporary. It tries to ascertain the role of the Portuguese star system architecture, and how it is enmeshed with the current urban planning strategies defined for the Angolan capital.

Although relatively short, the modem period was marked by intense planning and architectural activity and occurred at the same time as the Portuguese dictatorship regime known as Estado Novo.[1] The social condition that led to massive migration to the city of Luanda, the relationships with the local population and the natural characteristics of the city, were responsible for the specific conditions that enabled the development of a city in the capital of Angola during late Portuguese colonialism that is unique in the world (Rodrigues, 2014). In Luanda, the colonists' urban space and housing were taken over by the local population after independence in 1975. Angola entered into a civil war that lasted until 2002 and was witness to a colossal population flow from the interior of the country to Luanda. Since then, the euphoria of post-modernity and the city's verticalisation has come to dominate Luanda's new skyline, especially in the old urban centre and suburban areas. This situation has led to the demolition of pre-existing areas to build new housing with a higher real estate value.

Therefore, was modern Luanda planned simply considering the European population's best interests or was it compatible with autochthonous interests? And in the present day? Does the *international* Luanda promote encompassing the interests of the local population in general? The aim of this article is to analyse and acknowledge the existence of a self-established identity in the Portuguese-Angolan urban and architectural landscape practised in the two decades that preceded Angola's independence and the two decades of the ongoing 21st century.

Three case studies were selected to establish a cross reading between modernity and contemporaneity: #1: the Isle of Luanda as a place of exception due to its unique geographical characteristics; #2: the urban centre and the Largo Kinaxixe; #3: the South Expansion axis: Rua Amílcar Cabral. A conceptual analysis is launched on the feasibility and overlapping of the unfinished modern project and the demands of Angolan society in the new millennium, highlighting the characteristics of modern neighbourhood unity and postmodern condominiums. The

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1   *Estado Novo* is the name of the political, authoritarian, autocratic state regime that was in force in Portugal for 41 years without interruption, with freedom proclaimed with the Revolution of 25 April 1974. In 1975 the process of independence of the Portuguese African colonies began; however, Angola then started a violent civil war that would only end in 2002.

nature of such attachments to place is examined through a comparison vision between urban and architectural analyses of housing strategies in the late colonial period and the recent iconic works in Luanda proposed by Portuguese architects.

Housing strategies in Luanda over 60 years through urban planning

The collective housing challenge in the *Luanda do Futuro*

Mainly starting from the 1960s, Luanda was transformed into a huge urban-architectural laboratory in an experimentation of Western modernity, reflected in global visions of urban and territorial transformation or either in a series of standalone buildings around the city: in both cases, always surprising. (Rodrigues, 2015, p. 87). Mostly from the 1950s onwards, a project to rebuild and reshape the city fabric emerged in Angolan society, where European urban models had already been developed. Somewhat as a response to the Colonial War initiated in 1961, a belated attempt to implement the idea of a multiracial nation developed, leading a new phase of public investment for the modernisation of infrastructures, forwarding the planned urban expansion.

As Head of Urbanisation of the City of Luanda, Carvalho and his multidisciplinary team[2] had designed a master plan for the city (1963), defined by two main axes linking the city centre to the interior, (N-S and E-W) with their intersection coinciding with the 'civic centre'. Four circular routes established a good relationship between the main road system and the city's key element: the neighbourhood unit, announcing the Carvalho's futuristic vision about "Luanda Do Futuro" (Carvalho, 1962). This logical planning, drawn up following Athens Charter guidelines, was not only applied in the central areas; it was also used to plan new areas of urban expansion for housing.

Fig. 1 – Functional Outline of the Luanda Master Plan, 1963. Source: (FSC archive).

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2   The team consisted of more than six architects, including António Campino, Domingos da Silva, Taquelim da Cruz, Alfredo Pereira, Rosas da Silva and Vasco Morais Soares, three engineers, ten drafting technicians, a topographer, a model maker and a painter, according to the author's testimony.

Of all the proposed units, the most successful example is Neighbourhood Unit I, known as the Prenda neighbourhood. Built between 1963 and 1965, it was planned as an urban sustainable, self-sufficient settlement unit, based on three basic principles: hierarchy, nucleus and miscegenation. The typology went beyond the simple, functional solution and demanded interactions with the surroundings and expansion of the city. Overall, they reached a great level of construction and were able to relate the form coherently and logically, making it available in the service of a certain way of living. However, it had a dispersed formalisation, the result of a lack of systematisation in the construction process as an urban place. (Rodrigues, 2011, p. 147). It is interesting to add that it was thought of as a prototype of a new urban model to be applied in new areas of expansion, and has been put into practice in several points of the city (Milheiro, 2015, p. 215).
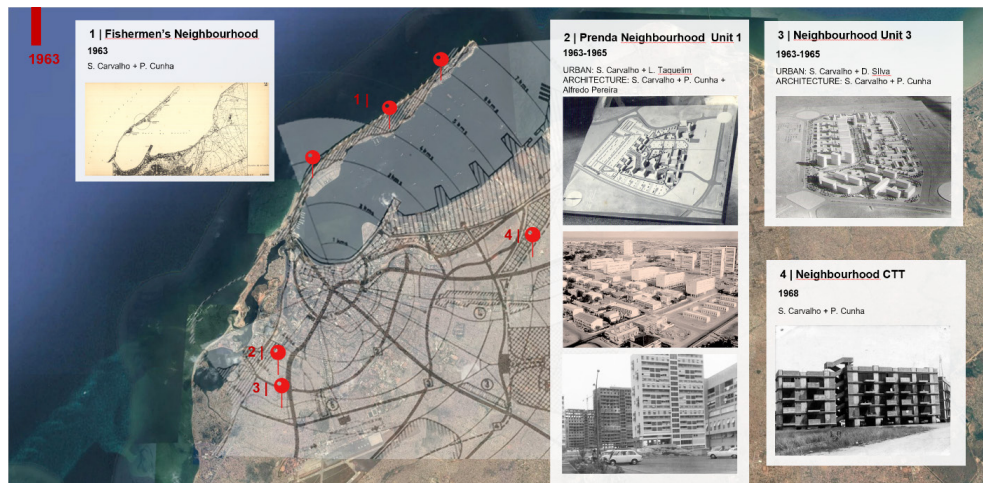

Fig. 2 – Mapping Modern Housing in Luanda, 1963. Source: Own creation based on (Google satellite 2020, master plan 1963; photos FSC Archive)

A new urban façade emerged from Marginal Avenue, with a distinct modern filiation, made its way to the areas surrounding the city centre in the upper city. Following the new avenues, we witness architecture by name architects or anonymous and modern architecture of excellent quality; brilliant opposite effects of full and empty contrasts of light and shade, sun' protection elements, protruding balconies, brise-soleils and ventilated roofing can be found in many residential buildings. The potential of concrete was considered nearly endless. The modern master plan, as most partial plans, were never completed or published. Nevertheless, modern ideas prevailed as a reference for the production and transformation of the city while they witnessed the manifestation of an allegedly more integrative Portuguese overseas policy. The recognition of the failure to implement modern colonial plans, their urban and social-political dimension, and the attempt to integrate Europeans and Africans to solve a common housing problem are unequivocal.

The international Luanda skyline of the new millennium.

Civil war followed independence and would last until 2002, followed by artificial prosperity in the exploitation of natural resources – mainly oil and gas and mines. It brought unsustainable demographic pressure to Luanda, driving enormous economic, social, political and also urban transformations with the desire to redesign a new "skyline", clearly seeking an international and global image. In 2015, the Luanda Metropolitan General Master Plan was published and is currently in progress, providing for urban planning up to 2030, based on three structural pillars: 1) Habitable Luanda 2) Luanda Bonita; 3) International Luanda (PDGML, 2015). Despite the 60 years between the two master plans, Luanda maintained the urban structure inherited from colonial urbanism, visible in the improvement and expansion of the main road axis and the opening of new ones, to renovate self-produced urban and suburban areas and, of course, the densification of central areas.

The *Civic Centre* gave way to the *Business Centre*, following the urban, economic and commercial model of the Asian metropolis, blowing up the value of land and demanding new interventions, leading to irreversible demolitions. In addition, property speculation, overcrowding and degradation that characterises modern settlements throughout the city, occupied by Angolan families with few resources since independence, encouraged "justified demolitions". Since 2009, fostered by the National Urbanism and Housing Programme, new cities have emerged, the "new centralities" such as Kilamba, Sequele, Zango around 40 km from the centre of Luanda. The renovation of the bay is another of the significant strategic stakes in the renewal of the city, defining a very distinct image of modern Luanda built at the end of the colonial period.
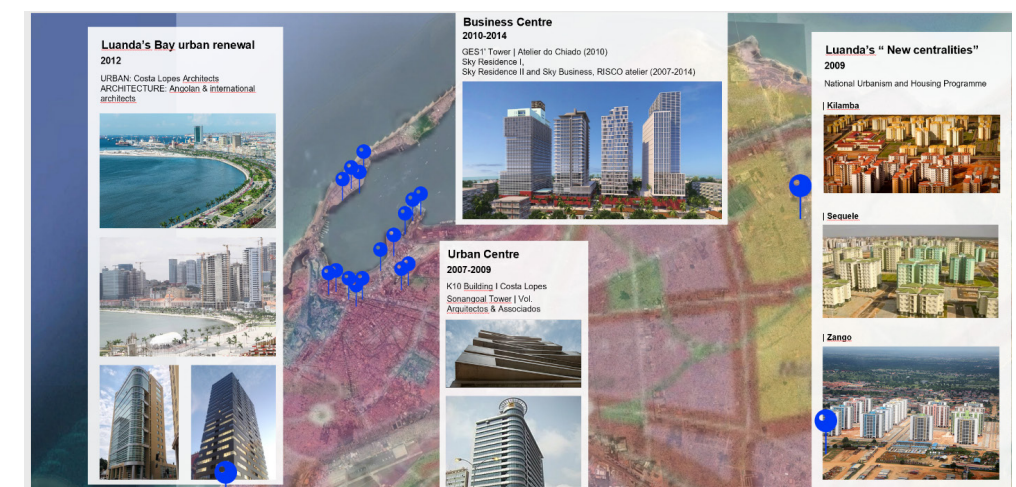

Fig. 3 – Mapping Postmodern Housing in Luanda, 21st century. Source: Own creation based on (Google satellite 2020, master plan 2015, photos google images)

Among others, "The luxurious Sky Center changes the face of Luanda" by *Risco* as well *Promontório's* proposals, are part of the architectural star-system participating in the new skyline for Luanda. Both architectural studios stand out for their commitment to undertaking projects in Africa, mainly in Angola and Mozambique. They are also exploiting the Asian territories emerging from oil profits as a strong internationalisation focus. The projects built, or not, take over the environment, fitting into the city's skyline and urban life based on promotional videos and three-dimensional images of fantastical architecture. Although it is one of the greatest expressions of new social and spatial asymmetries and precariousness, Luanda coexists with post-modern urban development aspirations imposed by the pressure of globalisation.

Case Studies

From island to Luanda's bay. The Fishermen's Neighbourhood (1963-1965) towards the luxury condominiums (2013-2015).

Known as *Ilha do Cabo, today* an extension of Luanda's bay has never lost its attraction for tourists, due to its privileged waterfront location. It's perhaps the best-known urban project requalification in Luanda, focusing on the new urban areas created through maritime landfills. However, it is still characterised today by a scattered urban structure, fragile and predominantly occupied by the persistent *musseques* contrasting with the sophisticated sets in new landfills.

Simões de Carvalho, with the collaboration of Pinto da Cunha, were not able to conclude the plan for the Bairro dos Pescadores (Fishermen's Neighbourhood) on the island of Luanda. It was a draft plan resulting from the Luanda Urbanisation Master Plan, which foresaw the island as the future major tourist and recreational area of Luanda to create new housing estates which were "more hygienic and comfortable" for the resident fishing population: "Axiluandas": Lelu-Luanda, Ponta y Sarga[3] (Carvalho, 1963). The two proposed clusters were organised by a well-defined road structure with total separation between fast and slow circulation through the separation of pedestrians and road traffic. The interest of this project lies precisely in how the concept of the family unit was organised, which would eventually give rise to a new urban city category. Two settlements were projected with a total of 500 dwellings for a maximum of 2,200 inhabitants (Rodrigues, 2014, p. 287).

3   CARVALHO, Fernão Simões; CUNHA, Pinto. Memoria Descriptiva *del Plan General de Urbanización de la Ilha deLuanda. Comissão Administrativa do Fundo dos Bairros Populares de Angola*, 1963. Archivo Simões de Carvalho.
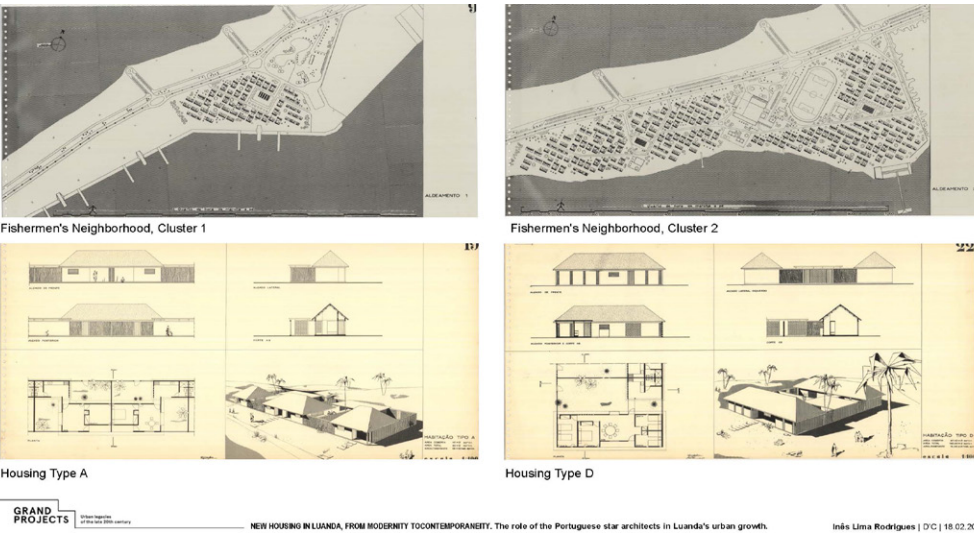
Fig. 4 – (from left to right) Fishermen's Neighbourhood, Cluster 1, Cluster 2, Housing Type A and Housing Type D, Luanda, 1963. Source: FSC Archive)

Although the urban and architectural quality of the project is unquestionable, we only have knowledge of the construction of the model homes. The modern urban configuration and the genesis of the dwelling (basic cell + patio) claims community aspects of the family model adapted according to a tropical climate, defining criteria of adaptability and minimum energy cost. The use of industrial construction systems ensures the economic viability of the project. However, the project has never been realised. Even today it is recognised that part of the population of the musseques closest to the coast resort to fishing as a guarantee or complement to subsistence (Viegas, 2015, p. 223), highlighting the relevance of this case.

Fig. 5 – Fishermen's Neighbourhood, photos of the model houses. Source: Own creation based on (Google satellite 2020, Fishermen's Neighbourhood plan 1963 and photos, source: FSC Archive)

From the suspended project of modernity, the island is again the target of planning through huge investments in the first decades of the 21st century. Verticality will inevitably have to be increased to create attractive programmes for foreign investors, promoting an international image of progress in the globalised world. Mixed-use plots have been made available to investors, and the real estate market has become even more attractive, promoting luxury closed condominiums, unsurprisingly supported by private facilities. The flats are aimed at Angola's emerging middle class, with the added value of being close to the centre of Luanda, linked to land by the bridge and one of the capital's most important tourist spots. In the most western plot, acquired by a housing cooperative, Portuguese star-system architecture stands out in a shortlist competition in 2015. At least *Risco* and *Pro montório* have participated, although neither won. A partial vision of 3D images of *Risco*'s proposal allows highlighting the concrete racing balconies and the contrast with green ceramic tessellation on the facades, exploiting the best views.

The concrete racing balconies, accentuating the horizontal, characterise *Promontório's* proposal. In addition to the condominium facilities, located in a compact 3-storey podium built into the volume, it promotes street retail at ground level, an activity still persistent in Angolan culture. The *brutalist* proposal brings closer the modernity that seemed renounced by contemporaneity. The materialisation of each floor in a mass that moves in an independent way reaching a free composition is close to Palmas 555, by Madaleno, Wiechers and Abiega in 1975; today it is an iconic building in Mexico City.

Fig. 6 – (from left to right): Buildings in Luanda's Bay, Risco (2015); Coop BAI, Promontório (2015) - Las Palmas 555, Associated Architects (1975). Source: Own creation based on (http://www.promontorio.net/; https://www.archdaily.mx/)

The winning proposal was that of the study by *CostaLopes*, directed by Angolan architects with a background in Portuguese architecture schools.[4] Curiously, the next lot is giving rise to the Dyeji building, built by the same studio. However, it can be seen from satellite photos (2020), that after 5 years, the majority of the other 57 lots planned for parcel 3 have not yet been built. This is certainly a reflection of the lack of investment proved by Angola's economic crisis, aggravated by the current pandemic.

4   https://www.costalopes.com/

Fig. 7 – Overlapping ignored modernity and realised postmodernity. Source: Own creation based on (https://www.costalopes.com/, FSC Archive)

Kinaxixe Square: from an open public square to a private centre

Largo do Kinaxixe has a preferential location in the upper part of the city; it was an urban space of excellence from the modern period, from the post-modern to the present day. In 1963, the Partial Plan for Kinaxixe showed an open square defined by the central zone that included one of the Modern Movement's most remarkable works. The Kinaxixe market by Vasco da Costa Vieira, recognisable as a huge box elevated on pillars, consolidated one of the main squares in the city centre. It had two large courtyards inside the ventilated facades, protected from the sun through vertical blades that caused the building to be fully sustainable (Rodrigues, 2015, p. 86). In the surroundings were several notable examples of housing, including the building by Luis Taquelim, a huge block of well-defined, horizontal lines on the facade with a ground floor based on pillars and covered by a vast flap that invited social gatherings.
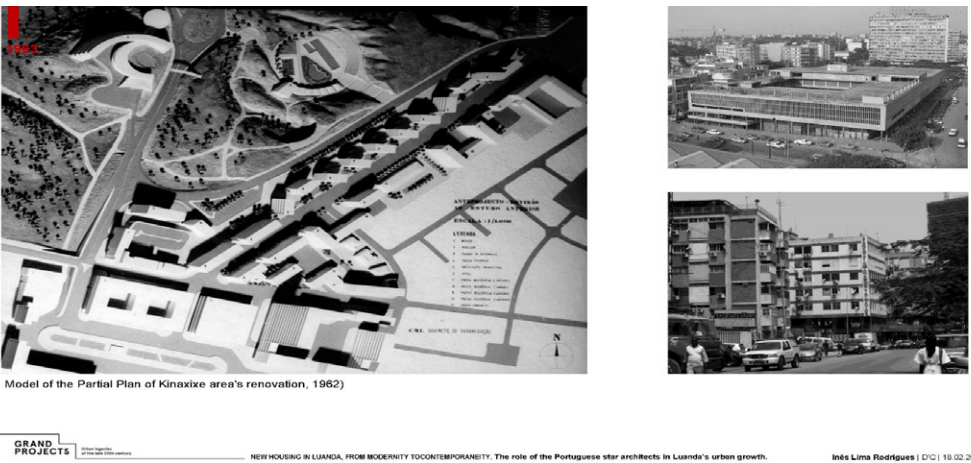

Fig. 8 – (from left to right): Model of the Partial Plan of Kinaxixe area's renovation (Simões de Carvalho,1962); Mercado Kinaxixe (Vasco Vieira da Costa, 1958); housing estate in the surrounding area (60's). Source: (FSC Archive, google images, @InesLima)

The plan was never carried out, and despite the social pressure, economic values spoke louder, and the market was demolished in 2008. The modem masterpiece would give rise to a sizeable five-storey commercial building framed by two residential and office towers of about twenty-five floors. In 2010, when I visited Luanda, the Cuca building was still standing and was recognised as a symbol of the city. Unfortunately, the demolition of the Kinaxixe market caused a shake-up of its foundations, justifying its destruction in 2011.[5] The fate of the Cuca building has been that of many others. The city lost a public space and take-over of a private spot. Simultaneously, the GES 1 Building (ESCOM group) designed by *Atelier do Chiado* stood out in the urban landscape, moving the new business centre of Luanda along Rua Marechal Brós Tito.

Fig. 9 – Demolition of the Kinaxixe market and construction of the new Kinaxixe's complex (2010). Source: (google earth)

5   In one of the "new centralities" up to 40 km from Luanda's centre, residents of Cuca were resettled in Zango.

Four years later, Sky Residence II and Sky Business Buildings, designed by *Risco*, reinforced the verticality. The luxurious Sky Center changes the face of Luanda, with a cost of US$135 million. The architects argue that the "tropical modern" romantic is not compatible with the demands of post-modernity: "investors, because they have an idea of modernity that involves 'gloss' and 'glass' and users because they do not accept, for example, views obstructed by a fixed "soleil breeze".[6] However, the horizontal lines of the 22 floors on the façade of the Sky Residence II, interspersed with vertical blades "will shade the windows and allow optimal conditions of comfort inside". Isn't this a brise-soleil?

Fig. 10 – Sky Residence II and Sky Business, Risco Atelier (2007-2014). Source: (https://www.risco.org)

Rua Amílcar Cabral: the N-S axis expansion, highlighted by the standalone housing building.

Rua Amílcar Cabral is one of the central N-S axes announced in modern plans extending to the south. It connects the Marginal to the airport and is one of the most emblematic buildings of Modern Movement collective housing in Luanda: the *Servidores do Estado*' building. In 1955, parallel to the avenue, Vasco Vieira da Costa projected what is assumed to be an autonomous residential block, supporting the idea of building in a manner that adapts to and supports the land's natural slope, the intersection point of which acts as a hinge, allowing the necessary ventilation. To control excessive sunlight onto the western façade, the one facing the avenue, Costa made huge frames with exposed concrete, ripped off by mobile shutters that act as a brise-soleil, transforming the space from the balcony in a flexible environment, which can be open or closed, and at the same time constitutes the protective skin of the building (Rodrigues, 2015, p. 88).

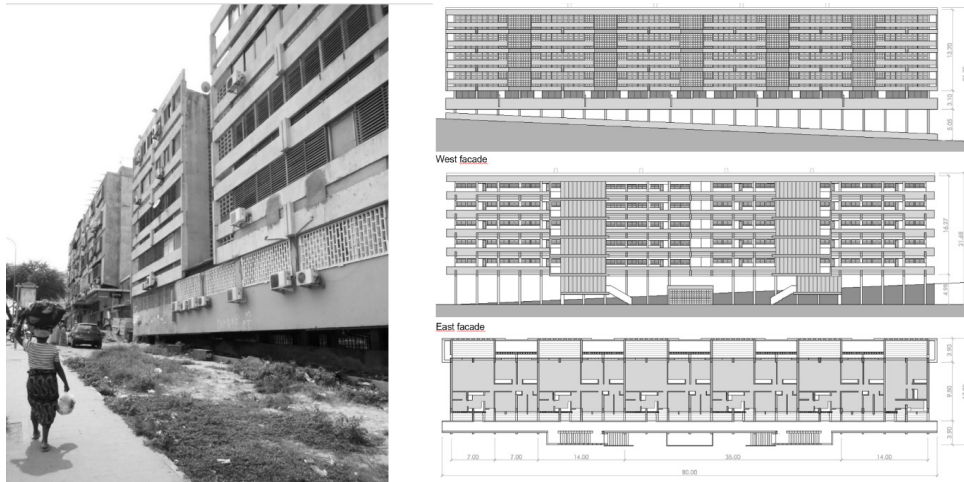6   https://www.risco.org/projects/sky-residence-ii-e-sky-business_15

Fig. 11 – Building Servidores do Estado, Vasco Vieira da Costa (1955). Source: (@InesLima, 2010)

In 2019, the *Promontório* office completed its first residential project in Luanda,[7] the result of a competition launched in 2010. The Assalto Moncada 4 building confirms the land's inflation in the centre and the inevitable change in urban typologies of the colonial era. It's 70 compact units are optimised to an efficiency ratio of 85% across 16 floors, in addition to the commerce on the ground floor. With an underground car park, all the facilities complement the four dwellings per floor, occupying the two ventilated fronts (NE-SW). The assumed module and the marking of the concrete slabs contrast with warm tones that cover all the facades, tiled with *Viúva Lamego* fluted and hand-painted *azulejos* in customised shades of green, which, together reflect the hues of the city's warm light.[8]
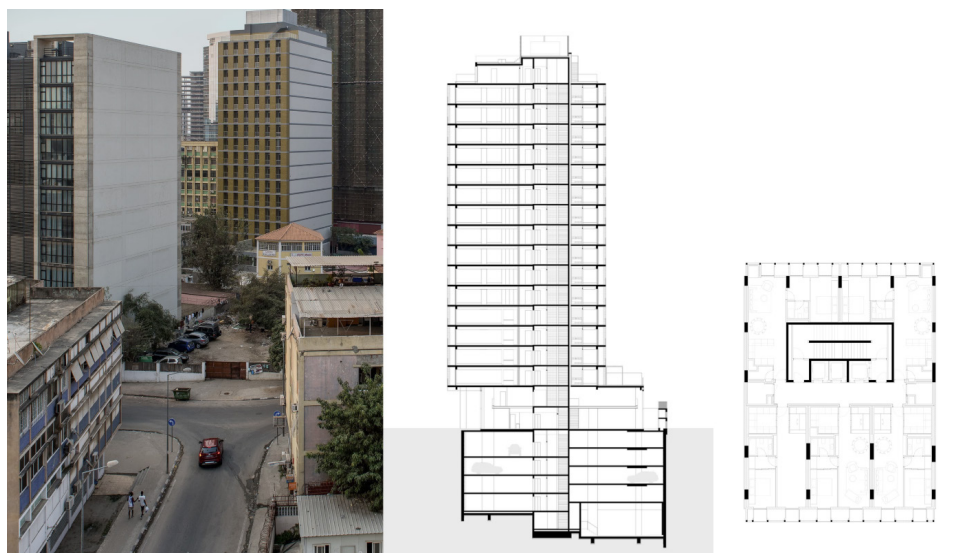

Fig. 12 – Building Assalto Moncada 4, Promontório (2010-2017), Source: (http://www.promontorio.net)

7   Shopping Avenida was the other work built in Luanda between 2013-2016 (out of 12 proposals presented between 2010-2017).

8   Assalto Moncada 4, Luanda, Angola, 2017 – 2010, Source: (http://www.promontorio.net)

These two cases of housing, located on the same avenue, 60 years apart, are both based on the principles of the Modern Movement, in particular with regard to the natural ventilation of the flats. While Vieira da Costa explores the horizontality of the block, placed parallel to the avenue, Assalto Moncada 4 accentuates the necessary verticality imposed by the high price of land in the 21st century. However, they are a clear example of the evolution and vividness of the principles of modernity at the entrance to the 21st century.

4. Discussion

Rethinking the modern is an essential task when some issues raised 100 years ago are once again pressing. However, now it is reclaiming areas outside the great axes of circulation (Central Europe, France and the United States) with a highlight on peripheral countries. A new awareness emerges of Africa's certainty in the (re)knowledge of modern heritage, a theme in which Portugal undoubtedly played a representative role (Lagae, 2000). The proposals and questions exposed to Angolan modernity show this relevance: in the modern period and post-modernity. In both times, Portuguese architects have participated in the "Luanda do Futuro"; through public and private initiatives or by participating in competitions allowing the entry of the Portuguese star system.

The strength of Angolan modernity is representative of the transcontinental transversality of this movement born in Europe, at urban, architectural, economic and social levels. Nevertheless, the unfinished modern project is today degraded and overcrowded. Prenda is now a degraded neighbourhood in terms of its formal, architectural and social composition, overcrowded, changed, due to decades without maintenance and basic sanitation. Today, the local population sees it as an urban and architectural model desired for the city of the future, justifying its dissemination and warning of its urgent need for conservation (Milheiro, 2015). The fate of the Prenda unit is also that of most of. The resilience of these ensembles persists due to the rigour of the architecture, adapted as it is to the tropical climate and the exiguity of constructive options.

Besides the *sustainability* of the buildings, *collectivity* and *miscenisation* of the population were also encouraged. Modern architecture not only looked at the place but adapted itself to the site. The general degradation of modern architecture is essentially due to the building›s occupation after independence; the lack of knowledge of this heritage value and colonialist heritage (Goycoolea, Núnez, 2011) and mainly the huge property speculation, led to irreversible demolitions of modern masterpieces. Since the end of the armed conflict, excessive and increasingly disordered growth has disfigured Luanda's urban landscape. Post-colonial Luanda is also the Luanda of global capitalism, fragmented into musseques, luxury condominiums, new cities, old buildings, office towers, power, ostentation, rubbish and much misery.

The Luanda of the 21st century follows Dubai as an urban model, with the symbolic reaffirmation of power in the urban landscape, originating the repetition of similar projects; extravagant shapes to highlight the power of luxurious and sophisticated buildings (offices, housing, museums and other facilities). The multiplication of these skyscrapers has meant that they have lost their character as branded buildings, but rather become a successive repetition in the urban landscape.

Fitting into the urban strategy defined for Luanda's bays, "condominiums" find the ideal territory by benefiting from unique geographical conditions for very attractive for luxurious apartments. Moreover, the proximity to the centre and a free environment giving total formal autonomy in plots around 1000 m2, with construction areas 20 times higher, are incredibly appealing to the property market. The proposals promote new luxury apartments, complemented by several private facilities, ensuring the best views over the bay (which it is almost impossible not to have). The target is a privileged, Angolan "emerging middle class", with the wide spread of the housing areas (440-800 m2), the number of condominium services, naturally with their monthly bill, allows for an "emerging" but not middle-class resident profile.

From home to the metropolitan area, from individual to the collective, (re)thinking the modernity of the Fishermen's Neighbourhood would allow access to the necessary infrastructure and decent housing (40-150 m2) according to the home and lifestyle of those who still live there in precarious situations, instead of the persistent *musseques*. In the Assalto Moncada 4 building, a reinterpretation of modernity allows a "verticalisation with history" by Promontório. Examples demonstrate conciliation with colonialist heritage, proving the formal and constructive logic of modern architecture, and still viable today. The pillar of internationalisation can be interpreted with a recent interest in modern architecture and its tourism potential. Perhaps the example and notoriety given to iconic modern buildings, from the organisation of visits to its advertising exploitation through merchandising strategies, can encourage Angolan entities to understand the city's success by the preservation of its modern identity.

It is well known that the neighbourhood units were a modern failure concerning their construction since none was fully developed. Further, it is also true that Luanda followed several modern interventions, expressed mainly in isolated, standalone modern buildings, from modernity to the present day. We hope that organisations such as the recently approved Docomomo Angola will support and encourage some of these proposals. But above all, the tools must be found to disseminate their homes' heritage inside the population, even if they are run-down.

The main question, however, remains: what does it mean to be at home in the city in the twenty-first century?

Indeed, it must include an understanding that the urban and the domestic, the public and the private, the individual and the collective, the political and the personal, are not opposing concepts but constructions that link the subject to the city's spatiality. The coexistence and self-sufficiency of urban neighbourhoods as well as small local businesses (avoiding commuting to large commercial areas), collective parks and gardens for walks, ventilated and well-lit dwellings; questioned in the modern housing system, forgotten by history in some, proved to be primordial in the current times of the pandemic. The current pandemic will shape our lives as it challenges our conception of home and city. Perhaps rethinking modernity with a postmodern vision can contribute in some way.

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is that this narrative was constructed on the premises of modernization, revealing its dark side: the superimposition of one culture over others. This is, most likely, the central aspect of colonization and, as so, we tend to agree with Solà-Morales (*ibidem*) statement of colonization always been architecture's destiny.

At this point, we could recover the discussion on the museum entrance, between DGPC and the architects. We wrote that it was defended by the first that the project proposal for the museum entrance location, pushed back inside the plot, potentially lead to the subordination of the museum. For an American architect like Mendes da Rocha, conscious of the importance of the moment of "the discovery of America" to the American native cultures, this interpretation made no sense. We must remember that the project did not understand the museum has inscribed inside a limited defined territory but has part of a broader public place that included other monuments. All the territory is the experience of going to the museum and should be meant to be seen. That is also why we cannot recognize in it any sort of prevalence of one side over the others. There is no front and no back. Consequently, the suggestion used by DGPC of an eventual subordination could only be understood in terms of cultural differences, or even colonial prejudices.

We have questioned if this public place could be read in a strategy of continuity with the city and its history, and suggested that, in its previous expectant *vague* condition, kept an evocative power. If our suggestion is valid, what did this space evoke? To what part of history does it address to follow a strategy of continuity? What aspects does the project call to appear? One that seems particularly evident is the once presence of the river in its soils and the subsequent XVIII-XIX century landfill. The proposed empty levelled terrain is cleared of obstacles and left as fluid as possible for one to cross it. The museum volumes appear like posing (or floating) on it. The only truly relevant obstacle present to urban fruition is a continuous concrete quay type wall, that retrieves and redraws the ancient Rua do Cais da Alfândega Velha (customs street). Even there, a set of stairs and ramps, integrated into it, guarantees the transition towards Rua da Junqueira – once a path by the beach, where the wild *Juncus* spread across the landscape lowland –, slightly located above the museum ground floor level. The second aspect of this evocation is the water presence on top of the auditorium. It is there symbolically placed, to remember us of the once-forgotten river presence and the lands there reclaimed, as a memory of something that is not known, but that is being made known. Here, the memory of the past seems to prevail over the present.
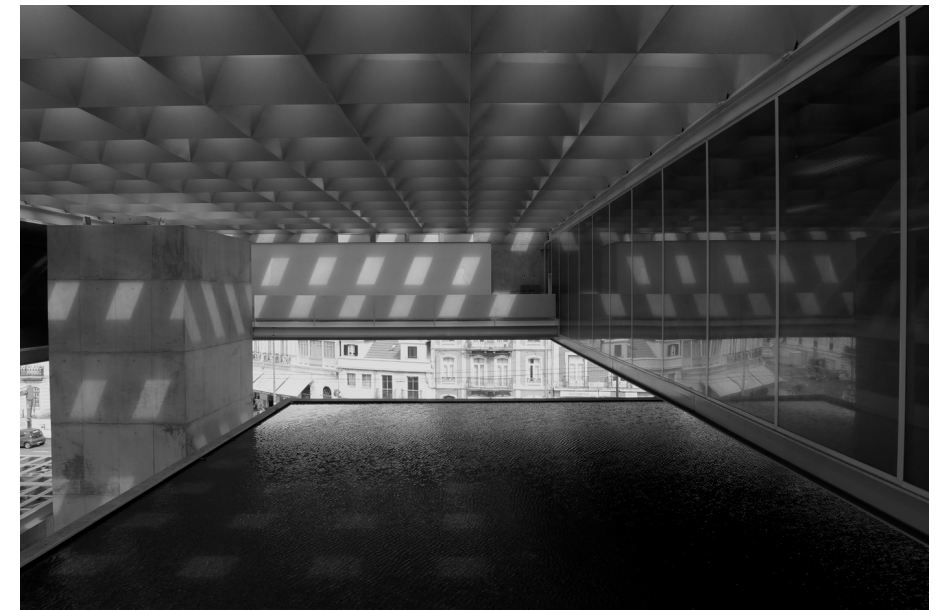

Fig. 4. Lake over the auditorium roof in the Annex building
Source: Costa, Nuno Tavares da, 2015. Bak Gordon Arquitectos's archive

All these particularities (together with others like the scale and dimension of the building, its opaqueness, or even some constructive aspects) have contributed to a sense of strangeness in the museum presence. At the same time, this presence is strangely familiar to us Portuguese, like something long known. Ana Vaz Milheiro (2015, p. 62) identifies some aspects of the project that are close to our culture: "…a contained formality, a pragmatism shown in functional terms, a dominated construction technology…" But Milheiro also noticed that this "contained formality", close to Geoge Kubler's idea of a *plain architecture*,[7] is, in fact, a "prodigious and demiurgic gesture", that reveals a conviction on the relationship between the building expression and its monumental scale and the existing fragmented urban structure (*ibidem*, p. 64). The pragmatism of the elementary volumes is motivated by the programme simplicity – a container for coaches and carriages. "Only its constructive domain is exuberant," says Milheiro, and uncommon among us, we should append. Nevertheless, the museum, and particularly this *Piazzetta*, awakens strange sensations, as it keeps and demonstrates a peculiar uncozy character. This strangeness is definitely and directly dependent on the museum heritage and cultural context.

"Having arrived in Lisbon, Mendes da Rocha acted like a foreigner" (*ibidem*, p. 68). He consciously risks a sort of estrangement effect by planning on a different sedimented community, provoking (and promoting) the conflict of the new with what we could classify as a more archaic culture. If we consider this on a hypothetic level, then the museum strangeness experience could also be read through the 1919's well-known Freud's analysis of the "Uncanny": "It may be true that the

7 Kubler, George (1972). *Portuguese plain architecture: between spices and diamonds, 1521-1706.* Middletown: Westerley University Press, 1972.

uncanny is nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition" (Freud, 1919, p. 15). Although Freud concludes that not all that meets this assumption is uncanny, in the museum project there is indeed a kind of a redemption effect. Something that wants to overpass the colonization experience of its traumatic past (shared with the Portuguese) and uses it to suggest a superior moral alternative.

Escape from history to the overburdening sense of the past was a preoccupation of the modernist avant-gardes, formed at the beginning of the last century. Their main concerns were the construction of a new society, a new way of living, social and collectively founded, where architecture was intended to be useful, like a tool. Like a machine as Le Corbusier proclaimed. The estrangement mechanism and the uncanny, as Anthony Vidler (1992) puts in his essays, was an instrument of disturbance used to recall the individual and the collective to a state of consciousness. Yet, if tradition was to be ripped off from its haunted memories and references, then architecture (particularly the house), become an instrument of "generalized nostalgia" (Vidler, 1992, p. 64), an object of a collective memory "for a never-experienced-space". But if the uncanny has encountered its aesthetic place after the two post-Great Wars, the concept dangerously degenerated into new kinds of obscurity and obliviousness, pushing again society to the same alien condition. Architecture (and the other arts) couldn't continue investigating the modern propositions, as they been suddenly interrupted by totalitarian events and the national and international conflicts of the first half of the XX century. The time after-WW2 brought, however, a renewed sentiment on the importance of memory. A sentiment on which history grows integrated with the creative process, aware of the university of human knowledge.

Mendes da Rocha formation is founded and developed in those times, particularly by the presence of Vilanova Artigas. Yet history, for him, is not to be read in the dogmatic plan, untouchable and unquestioned. Neither on an individual perspective, but rather to be politically criticized towards the progress of civilization. Culture is not built upon copy and repetition but on transformation and criticism. For him, the estrangement condition is indispensable to all kinds of art, including architecture. It is in its essence, yet it doesn't rise from the architecture itself, but lies on the conflict of one's subjectiveness and occurs in the moment of perception. This civilization, the Western civilization, dealing, in a political sense, with its dangerous forms of populism as a side effect of the increasing multiculturalism – where the relation with colonialism is forever present in the migrants –, is the civilization where the individual is in a permanent conflict with himself: "despairing at the speed at which the whole world is transformed yet aware of the need to live with others, with the other" (Solà-Morales, 1995, p. 122), of that which is radically strange. Architecture is nowadays captured on this idea of being public but by the interest of its individuality.

In this world, memory is a right at loss. And if the images of this memory are part of our conscious, together with our feelings, forming what we commonly know as subjectivity, then remembering better is. The museum *Piazzetta* confront us with our classic cultural education and our insecurity, because it is not dominated by architecture (left to be used freely), despite resting in the shade of its overwhelming presence. It stands as a different kind of *terrain vague*, unlike the ones resulting from demolition or abandonment, a construction of memories committed to designing the city, in its unpredictability, resisting the mechanical and unconscious way of seeing, seeking beyond it. As Solà-Morales (1995, p. 123) concluded, on the continuity of the "passing of time and the loss of limits".

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