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Architectural culture in Lisbon: the architecture course in the ESBAL and education beyond the classroom between 1974 and 1976. The case of *Bairro Portugal Novo*

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The purpose of this paper is to explore open questions for an investigation for a PhD which hopes to trace the history of the Architecture Department of the School of Fine Arts of Lisbon (ESBAL) – which later became part of the Technical University of Lisbon by the name of Faculty of Architecture (FAUTL) - between 1976 and 1986.

It is believed that this work will complete the analysis of contemporary Portuguese architectural culture that has been produced to this point. In particular, it adds a first reading about what happened in the architecture course in ESBAL and in the *ateliers* in charge of the SAAL-Lisbon process between 1974 and 1976.

1. The architecture course in ESBAL and education beyond the classroom between 1974 and 1976

During the revolutionary period, architectural education in Lisbon was driven by two key events: the suspension of architecture classes in the ESBAL, the only School, in the country, to provide architecture education, besides the School of Fine Arts of Porto; and the

enthusiastic participation of young aspiring architects in the SAAL-Lisbon operations. In this period, students hold diverse views about their School's future, although inspired by the same revolutionary ideals. Its discredited structure sustained various points of view. But the institutional importance of the School was clear – and the most destabilizing factor in the debate.

The turning point that decided that the School would close its doors, rather than reform and remain open, would be the result of a political statement – as well as the logical consequence of the gradual abandonment of a less ideological faction in favour of its own desire to make way to an outdoor campus.

The 25 April, a student victory

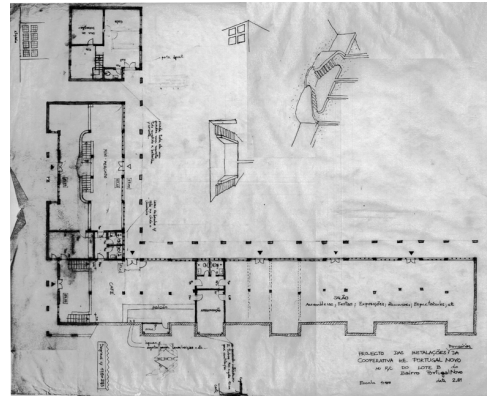
To better contextualize these events, it is necessary to go back to the late 1960s and early 1970s - a period marked by war, and both weak and permeable, in a political and cultural sense.

In 1972, architecture students maintained that the School's pedagogical rigidity and authoritarianism was inadmissible ("OTê

1. Site shot of SAAL Quinta do Bacalhau/ Monte Coxo. Behind it, the building *Olaías*, of Tomás Taveira, with ten floors.
Photo: Nuno Matos Silva



2. Floor sketch -1 assigned to services. The allocation of the service function to the floor -1 proposed to match these buildings to a typology of current housing



e o Porquê”). In this context, they did not fight against prohibitions or for freedom of expression but opposed to a social habit of apathy and institutional bureaucracy.

The events studied by Gonalo Canto Moniz signal the Lisbon students' unwillingness to conform to the narrowness of leaders that were aligned with the establishment. Canto Moniz describes, in particular, the different reactions to the implementation of experimental schemes in 1970 - dashed experiences, in the case of Lisbon - and the episode of “concourse for professor” of Nuno Portas, induced to resign, despite the esteem he garnered among his pupils (Moniz, 2011, pp. 536 and 537).

Leonor Matos Silva describes the enthusiasm of Professor Tomás Taveira's proposals, especially after returning from his first trip to the United States, in 1972. In fact, the “cult of imagination” and the disclosure of James Stirling's work among students took advantage of this open field – being his initially enlarged popularity its sign (Matos Silva, 2011, p. 33).

The students were wishful for engaged, active figures, willing to compromise with them¹, and especially who would spearhead an insurgency. With the Revolution of the 25

April 1974 and the withdrawal of the inert faction of the School' structure, the student body, on behalf of “people's power” - and with the collaboration of some older members - organized and took the lead. The “students in transit” (“Esclarecimento. O que se passou na última Reunião Geral dos Alunos em Trânsito”, n.d.) met often and enthusiastically discussed how to avenge a May 68 that had never happened.

The sense of commitment with the country

The hypothesis developed in this study was based on a first interpretation which concluded there were two tendencies in the School's revolutionary debates: one of an ideological and disciplinary nature and the other concerned with the urgencies of the country.

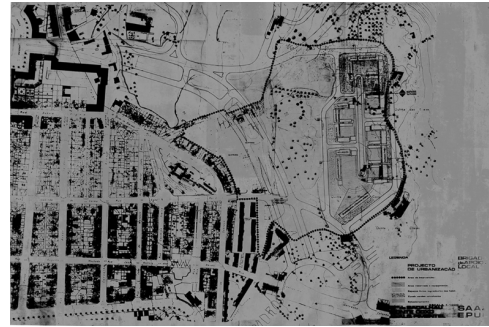
In fact, the vast majority of students who initially turned up in concentrations believed in democratization, in the reintegration of teachers, in a School as a means for serving the people, in the resolution of their interrupted learning careers – all of this with the methods of the time, based on a general idea of democracy.

3. Photography of Child playing in the slum of *Quinta do Bacalhau*

Photo: Nuno Matos Silva



4. Project insertion plant for SAAL *Quinta do Bacalhau/Monte Coxo* over the limits of the slums. Delimitation for the Insertion area



Student groups (“nucleus”) are created to debate, for instance, the “participation of technicians, teachers or not, as a possibility to guarantee the technical quality of the work as to produce a truly democratic opening (...)”; the nucleus “Environment and Urbanism” - which is well-attended - produces a text which proposes a definition for architect which says he has the responsibility of the “abolition of housing needs” (“Esclarecimento. O que se passou na última Reunião Geral dos Alunos em Trânsito”, n.d.).

Refusal to participate in the institutional SAAL

As research deepened, this study concluded, however, that what is happening on the other side of the debate does not oppose the idea of an instrumental school; on the contrary, it defends a “school system” which is based on imported ideological texts. Therefore, there is a heightened awareness of the institutional power of ESBAL, or of the potential of ESBAL as a striking body in the history of the country, and that’s where all of these speeches have their origin.

Therefore, for the group most ideologically committed, all efforts should be channelled

into a disciplined association of the School to a particular political quadrant - namely one that distinguishes the productive forces from the ruling class (“ESBAL Arquitectura. Estrutura de ensino”, 1974)

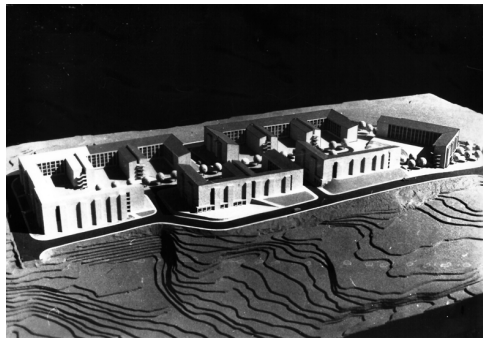
The extremism of this position is witnessed and discouraged by Pedro Vieira de Almeida in the newspaper *Expresso* in three consecutive articles (Vieira de Almeida, 1974).

Still, there will be a radical gesture that expresses the belief that it is possible to return to an “authoritarian” system, which opposes Vieira de Almeida’s points of view. This opposition also reacts to the gradual resurgence of the teachers themselves, in the corridors - and especially to a School draft proposed by Nuno Portas that, consistent with his earlier posture, brings an idea of “reform” which is, itself, ideologically rejected.

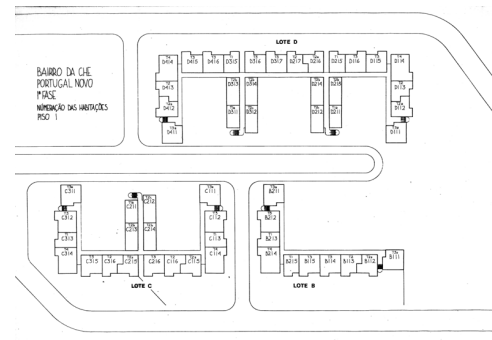
In fact, the most radical faction of students believed, referring to the School, that “no transformation, no restructuring of school equipment can provide a remedy and only the strategic perspective of its destruction can end the crisis of the university.” (“Os aparelhos Escolares e a Luta de Classes”, n.d.).

5. Model photography of SAAL Quinta do Bacalhau/Monte Coxo. West front

Photo: Nuno Matos Silva



6. Drawing with the numbering of the apartments for the first construction phase



Architecture classes were therefore suspended

Regarding the succession of events and the above-mentioned positions, we believe that non-formal participation of the School of Fine Arts of Lisbon in the SAAL Lisbon process is due, among other reasons, to a proposition put forward by the more radically politicized students.

Student collaborators of SAAL Lisbon

The participation of architecture students in the process of SAAL-Lisbon - which is to have an effective expression, despite the antagonism of the School - is therefore the product of unique stories whose common factor is the desire to act and a restlessness both jovial and moral.

This is the framing for the decisions of Manuel Lacerda, João Ribeiro de Carvalho, Sebastião Formosinho Sanches and Nuno Matos Silva as to what to do before an early decisive change in their academic route.

Manuel Lacerda has been an active voice of the student struggles since high school. As such, he did not depart from ESBAL during the crisis. Still, he witnessed Nuno Portas when

he launched the SAAL at *Laboratório Nacional de Engenharia Civil* (LNEC) and, via Jorge Luis Bruno Soares, connected to the project of *Quinta das FONSECAS*.

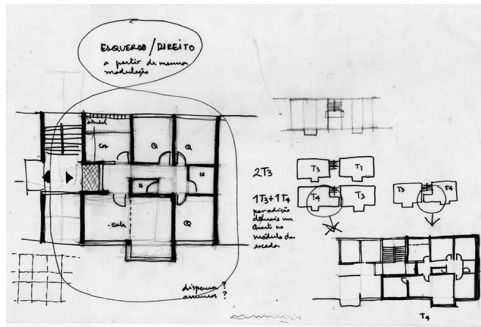
João Ribeiro de Carvalho departed from the internal political quarrels of the School and demonstrated his commitment to the processes of *Bairro Dona Leonor* and *Quinta do Alto* by the hand of Jorge Soares de Oliveira.

Sebastião Formosinho Sanches also accompanied the political involvement of colleagues while participating in the project of the *Quinta das FONSECAS* and *Quinta da Calçada*, of Raúl Hestnes Ferreira.

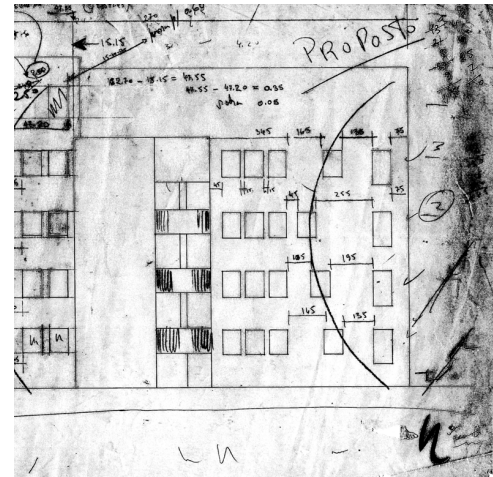
Abstention is not at all the case of Nuno Matos Silva whose digression from the School and the integration in the Quinta do Bacalhau, attributed to Manuel Vicente, is both a training opportunity and a possibility for the realization of romantic ideas:

"When I went to a meeting at the School, I asked: 'What are you doing here? The Revolution is out there!' And was applauded. 'Things are happening!' - That irreverence ... A guy didn't care about the struggles of MRPP and PC [political forces]. What was going on in Chelas interested me much more. (...)

7. Study for different typologies (housing) for SAAL Quinta do Bacalhau/Monte Coxo.



8. Study for the facade for SAAL Quinta do Bacalhau/Monte Coxo.



Toé (who is the son of Sena da Silva) had a motto that reminded him of Guinea. He said: 'It is education what makes a school, not the school that makes education'. And the example he gave was the baobab, under which, in Africa, there was lots of teaching. And I subscribed fully. (...)

Manuel Vicente had already appeared at the School, there had been a meeting... I suspected, I heard something; I empathized with him, with his staff, and I came up there. (The guys grabbed whatever came. For those whom it provided work, employment, it was amazing).

I offered myself to Manuel, after summer, and then something extraordinary [took place] which was Manuel Vicente to accept me in a team that was working in slums - which was something that I thought was going to do the rest of my life." (Matos Silva, 2014)

To some extent, all of them were *activists in the action*, as Nuno Portas was – an important figure, always present in the inside speech; Nuno Matos Silva in particular - in an ideologically hostile *entourage* - was especially sensitive to a type of Christian militancy led by the JUC (Catholic University Youth) - which had also been directed by Nuno Portas - and, in particular, by CASU (University Social Action Centre) that was

casually sitting on *Quinta do Bacalhau* - one of the three cores stalls, together with *Alberto Pimentel Street* and *Monte Coxo*, who have given rise to the CHE (Economical Housing Cooperative) *Quinta do Bacalhau/Monte Coxo*, from which the *bairro Portugal Novo* results.

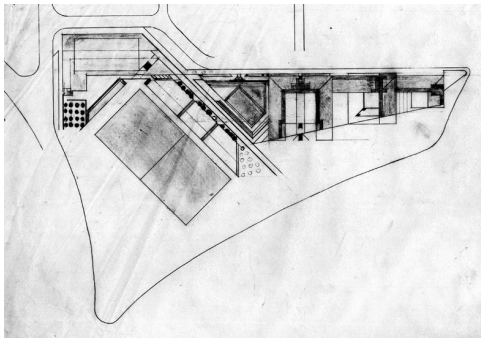
2. The case of the *Bairro Portugal Novo*

The architecture of Manuel Vicente for CHE *Quinta do Bacalhau/Monte Coxo* clearly and expressively collides with the implicit and contentious assumptions of the SAAL. Although he was a lover of the confrontation of ideas, Manuel Vicente did not subscribe to any ideological or programmatic design for his architecture.

Moreover, in the case of SAAL, he disagreed with the idea of buildings "closer to the Third World" held by Nuno Portas (Portas, 2013):

"Manuel was a fighter against the idea of 'homes for the poor'; they could be great but they could never be so if they'd stick to this connotation. In that site, we must do something that can withstand the ten floor Olaias building, he said. He started with five meters tall plus the four floors that could be done cheap, and, moreover, putting a duplex on the top to get the maximum height without a lift." (Matos Silva, 2014) (figs. 1 and 2)

9. Study for school equipment by António Marques Miguel for SAAL Quinta do Bacalhau/Monte Coxo. West front



10. Photography of the arrival of the caterpillar for the construction of the project for of SAAL Quinta do Bacalhau/Monte Coxo. Photo: Nuno Matos Silva



Manuel Vicente coloured his work with individualism and an irreverent pleasure for living and designing. These aspects of his work and other peculiarities attracted young students of architecture who he ended up accepting as collaborators without discretion throughout his life².

We will take the case of the *Bairro Portugal Novo* in Nuno Matos Silva's point of view, since the subject is already framed by this article, but above all because of the preponderance that Matos Silva had in developing this project, notably in the follow-up phase of the work.

Responding to students

The burden of ending the slums of *Quinta do Bacalhau, Monte Coxo* and *Rua Alberto Pimentel* was awarded to architects who were appointed to the zoning of UNOR (Territorial Units) by the Lisbon Urbanization General Plan of 1967. Consequently Manuel Vicente had already a preliminary development plan with the arrival of the 'brigade' (group of young collaborators)³ to the site.

The urgency of better housing was striking (fig.3) and the team decided to begin solving

the three most serious problems - water, sewer and trash - in parallel with a survey of the composition of the families who were to receive such benefits:

"We started doing this survey (fig.4) and then engaged ourselves in bringing water closer to the people, bring electricity – because they used oil lamps, the sewer was not collected, there were bins at the doorstep, people came and leaked onto hills..." (Matos Silva, 2014)

Project - Design

In the *atelier*, Manuel Vicente integrated the collaboration of Pedro Ferreira Pinto and Teresa Carvalho and other architects who were still students. In the first sketches, the structural lines that Vicente would later develop were drawn:

"We will emphasize this face to the Olaias", he'd say... And then he would make it more complex, richer, with a sense of assembly. He worked like if he was sewing, not with pencil - whether to study the apartment, whether the buildings and urban complexes. And he makes it interesting, with some degree of complexity - because there are T1 solutions that have a central gallery, then there are homes that have a gallery

ahead, there's some others on top... Everything, by the playing of volumes that one's doing - sober and solid bark, marked by huge accidents on a neutral plane, with fenestration facing the outside of the neighbourhood and the traffic, and some very open frames inside that are UU, like combs, but also galleries, public areas - with a complexity that has 'a hand', has design, has trait, is not obvious, is not something by 'ruler and square'. He could have done the Portuguese pombalino type, always the same. But no – it is a regular misalignment. And this complexity is the very mark of Manuel, but it is very beautiful and strong. A few years past, and despite so much decay, it keeps its force.” (Matos Silva, 2014) (figs. 5 and 6)

Project - Development

At first, the voluntarism of the young colaboradores sent to work as a brigade on the ground was agreed with their chief architect - the Revolution had to reach those who needed it most. However, as José Bandeirinha mentions, the case of SAAL operations would be determined by “the weight of experience and professional maturity” of the architects in charge (2007, p.125) - and in the case of *Bairro Portugal Novo*, it was crucial to ensure that the project would be materialized.

“We were taking too long there and Manuel one day realized this and made a radical intervention like: ‘Let’s get out of here... If we want to be their friends, we have to move forward with the project.’” (Matos Silva, 2014)

Nuno Matos Silva and colleagues were then in charge of developing the basic architecture plan. Nuno focused on the housing (fig.7), Agostinho Xavier de Andrade on the facades. (fig.8) António Marques Miguel studied a school complex to the adjacent ground (fig.9).

Construction or “The Architecture of the city”

The second turning point for the progression of the work was the beginning of earthmoving works (fig.10).

The construction was processed in the traditional way, i.e., by competition for contractors - and not as pointed out by the

prepositions of the SAAL program, or by initiative of the residents in any kind of self-construction or even direct assignment. Manuel Vicente also did not believe in community participation in the construction process. In 2007, in a film by João Dias, he would said: “On top of all that misery, they still had to organize themselves in order to have a house?”; Nuno Matos Silva continued the work of monitoring along the same lines: “There were many meetings (no more than in any other work) and when it was over, the villagers came in their coveted homes” (2014).

In a second project phase for the apartments’ detailing which was assigned to Nuno Matos Silva, he reported a disagreement with a proposed amendment to the kitchens, without changing the structure in order to make better use of the little space that was assigned to them. Manuel Vicente reacted and did not allow the advance of the changes: “The functionalist babble caused him chicken skin” (Matos Silva, 2014).

At the same time, Matos Silva recalls that Vicente would recognize ‘modern’ colleagues: “one thing that Manuel liked to say was that the GTH [Technical Office for Housing in Lisbon] screwed up many times, but always strived for the best ideas, they always had the best architects to collaborating. The urbanism and architecture of north and south of *Olivaís* [Lisbon] was the best one knew, he said” (Matos Silva, 2014) thereby recognizing the contribution of the different looks towards architecture.

Bandeirinha states that the outcome of the SAAL can be considered as “an architecture of the 25 April” (Bandeirinha, 2007, p.13); Manuel Vicente does not put himself aside the circumstantial experimentalism of the SAAL but he ultimately follows his intuition. Manuel Vicente, an admirer of Rossi, tries to illustrate, with his architecture, that: good architecture, first of all, qualifies the city. The Bairro Portugal Novo is an example:

“The so-called ‘popular participation’ in some SAAL projects began, as for me, after the architects left! That was when some residents began to pay back and to cover the marquise, to replace the windows, painting their way... However,

in the case of Portugal Novo, what is striking is that, if one faces the three buildings erected side by side, the strongest, despite the increase mischief, is the Bacalhau. There are components of that architecture - such as those tidy in 'foothills', as those huge holes on the facade, with four/five stories tall - that give them an amazing strength. The quality of the architects comes to surface, period." (Matos Silva, 2014)

Final Notes

This article has demonstrated how the SAAL-Lisbon program can be one of the key features for understanding the teaching and learning of architecture in Lisbon during the revolutionary period.

Given the collected testimonies, there are two key ideas that prevail today as a legacy of this experience, both of which are related to the SAAL customer. First, the SAAL processes offer alternatives to a school of architecture that closes, providing a real experience and intense learning, particularly by direct contact with the residents of the slums. Second, the SAAL program effectively enables this population to realize the theoretical ideas of the "right to the city," or the right to remain living in the same place but with better conditions.

This would be a rigorously academic idea if it would have been restricted to an internal school debate like the one that occurred in ESBAL between 1974 and 1976.

¹ It is also remarkable the enthusiasm caused by Pedro Ferreira Pinto in a significant group of students.

² Cf. testimonies Seminar Manuel Vicente: 15 edifícios na rota do Oriente (resp. Ana Vaz Milheiro, ISCTE-IUL, Lisbon, April 14, 2010)

³ Nuno Matos Silva states that the composition of the team is, among others: Agostinho Xavier de Andrade, Afonso José Baptista e Elisa (social worker).

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