

Optimistic Suburbia – Large housing complexes for the middle-class

The special dossier *Optimistic Suburbia – Large housing complexes for the middle-class* brings closure to the cycle initiated with the International Conference *Optimistic Suburbia – Large housing complexes for the middle-class beyond Europe*, which took place at ISCTE-IUL from 20 to 22 May 2015. This conference integrated the research project “Homes for the biggest number: Lisbon, Luanda, Macau” funded by Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (Principal Investigator: Ana Vaz Milheiro, PTDC/ATP-AQI/3707/2012, 2013-15). Research aimed to survey, catalogue and contextualize housing projects in Lisbon, Luanda and Macao, built between the 1960s and the 1980s, which stood out for large-scale, large area occupation and high number of people housed. The existing housing and urban models were identified and the changes after 40 years of use were mapped in order to understand how it adapted to the urban and social current conditions and to support future interventions. Three case studies were chosen to sustain the research arguments: the Prenda Neighbourhood Unit n.1 (Luanda, Angola, 1961-63), comprehending 28 buildings and 1150 apartments in 30 hectares, for an estimated population of 3.300 inhabitants; the Portela Neighbourhood (Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Portugal, 1965-79), with an area of 50 hectares, designed for 18,500 inhabitants spread over 199 residential plots and 4503 dwellings; and the buildings of STDM - Society of Macao Tourism and Recreation (Macao, China, 1978-84), comprising three blocks for 625 families. The conference was organized within the context of this project, issuing a call for papers around 6 sessions chaired by research team members, where 46 works were presented by researchers from 23 different institutions, with 5 international keynote speakers, 8 workshops and an exhibition. Among these presentations, a few authors were challenged to submit a paper to *CIDADES, Comunidades e Territórios* with a view of integrating this dossier. Our intention was to showcase a few works complementary to our own but from a different perspective and going beyond our case studies. In order to achieve this goal, the call was specifically directed to researchers outside the project “Homes for the biggest number”. Invited researchers are working on similar topics (Broes; Caramellino; Dehaene; De Vos; Renzoni), and also departing from different primary sources and analysis methodologies, such as the media (Costa; Silva) or the arts (Alves). The results are now published.

“Negotiating the Post-war Italian City. Shaping Public Spaces and Facilities through Housing Complexes for the Middle-class: 1950s-1970s”, Gaia Caramellino and Cristina Renzoni offer a viewpoint over the post-war Italian city from Turin, focusing on the relationship between large-scale housing complexes devoted to the middle-class and collective spaces and public facilities. This work combines results produced by the research project “Architecture for the Middle-class in Italy, 1950s-1970s: for a Social History of Dwelling” (funded by the Italian government through the FIRB_Futuro in Ricerca programme, aimed at supporting emerging scholars), coordinated by Caramellino, while research performed by Renzoni within the research team Officina Welfare Space, where she worked on the spatial legacy of Welfare State policies in post-war Italian cities and territories. Caramellino currently lectures at Politecnico di Milano and Renzoni is a lecturer at Politecnico di Torino.

The following article takes us to a different European geography, the city of Antwerp, in Belgium. Tom Broes and Michiel Dehaene author “Real Estate Pioneers on the Metropolitan Frontier. The works of Jean-Florian Collin and François Amelinckx in Antwerp”, proposing, as the title indicates, a more biographical focus, bringing us closer to two pioneers of the Flemish property boom. As indicated in the abstract, the paper studies the close relationship between the production of the very different forms of ‘mass housing’ built in Belgium: low- and high-rise, inner-city and suburban. The object of study integrates a PhD programme that Broes is developing under Dehaene’s supervision at the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Ghent, where they are both faculty members.

Also focusing on Antwerp are the two case studies presented by Els De Vos in her article “Modernist High-Rises in Post-war Antwerp. Two Answers to the same Question”: Luchtbal-estate (arch. Kuyck, 1954-62); and Kiel-estate (arch. Braem, 1953). The central subject is the modernist rise buildings and their diversity: programmatic, aesthetic, technological. In this article, De Vos recalls that from 1978 onwards, migrant families and other

vulnerable groups started to inhabit the social rental houses, resulting in neighbourhoods characterized by a high level of multi-culturalism. The author thus portrays the current status of these neighbourhoods departing from the premises of the Modern Movement. The issue of the dwelling in 1960s-1970s in Belgian Flanders and its spatial appropriations had already been touched upon her PhD thesis, published in 2012. De Vos lectures at University of Antwerp.

Rui Seco focused on the Portuguese architectural and urban planning culture in the post-25 Abril Revolution period to produce “Antes do recomeço: periódicos especializados e debate sobre a cidade”. He analysed the international feedback of journals such as *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*. However, the article moves from the past to the future: the anticipation of this effusive moment in Portuguese architecture that served as a motto for a systematic reading of the journal *Arquitectura* in the period before the 25 April Revolution. He revisited debates, international references, and projects. Rui Seco completed a MA in architecture about urban design in Portugal during the 20th Century and is working on his PhD at University of Coimbra.

The 1974 revolution is also the starting point for the article presented by Leonor Cabral Matos Silva, “Recording the optimistic. An audio-visual approach to the city of Lisbon by its architecture school in the 1980s”. The author analysed three videos (“Tedium”, “The Place Where I Was Born”, and “Harbour Station”) that reproduce pedagogical experiments that took place at Lisbon School of Fine Arts between 1976 and 1986. The paper resorted to primary sources not yet disclosed – namely testimonies and documents – that directly relate to Lisbon’s architecture course, configuring the background research for her PhD thesis, “Cultura arquitectónica em Lisboa: um olhar a partir da ESBAL/FAUTL no período de 1975 a 1990”, nearly concluded, at DINÂMIA’CET-IUL, University Institute of Lisbon.

The dossier wraps up with a proposal emerging from the arts and their relationship with the contemporary city. Its scope is wide. It begins with the 1960s and concludes in the eve of contemporary times. Margarida Brito Alves put forward “Casas em série, construções temporárias e lotes vazios. Subúrbios e arte contemporânea”, considering the transfers between art and architecture, as stated in the abstract. Brito Alves is concerned with the way art critically operates in ‘constructed realities’, both in architecture and/or urban planning. The author currently lectures at Universidade NOVA de Lisboa. Her studies in Art and Architecture date back to her PhD thesis “O Espaço na Criação Artística do Século XX”, published in 2012.

The overview granted by this dossier is expected to cover the multitude of disciplines intersecting research architecture, especially regarding objects such as collective housing.

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