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Celebrating the 30th anniversary of Docomomo
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PORTUGUESE STATE-SUBSIDIZED MULTIFAMILY HOUSING PROJECTS.

EMERGENT MODERNITY DURING THE MID 20TH CENTURY

Gisela Lameira, Luciana Rocha (Portugal)

ABSTRACT

In Portugal, the single-family housing model remained a preference for most initiatives of state-provided housing until very late in the first half of the 20th century. Philanthropic actions (1900-1930), related mainly to an 'industrial paternalism' that sought out inexpensive, simple and rapid investments, saw the model of the single-family as adequate for housing the working classes. With the arrival of the dictatorial regime of the *Estado Novo* (1933), the government passed legislation to advance a new social order, one in which housing was a key element. Although some neighbourhoods incorporated architectural features that enhanced comfort and living conditions, they continued as single-family, single-floor houses, designed in a sort of rural arrangement that was as far from anything resembling the traditional urban fabric on the scale of the modern city.

In the 1940s it became obvious that this housing model would be unable to provide housing for those in need of it. A new programme was then created proposing smaller rental apartments, aggregated in housing blocks. These neighbourhoods changed public housing in many respects: in the architectural language (introducing modern elements and approaches to design), the urban concepts (compliance with the Charter of Athens and, therefore, introducing communal green spaces), the infrastructure of the housing buildings (including well-equipped service areas: kitchen, laundry and sewing rooms, complete bathrooms and the independent living room), and in the social model arising from these urban arrangements. A sense of collectiveness started to emerge, introducing the notion of community as a social unit into the previously held idea of family that was so cherished by the dictatorship.

This paper focuses specifically on state-subsidized multifamily housing initiatives built between 1940 and 1960 and proposes the analysis of a set of urban developments constructed in Portugal. Given this architectural, urban, social and political context, we will approach these housing sets with one

research question in mind: how did these urban developments incorporate Modern Movement influences from foreign contexts?

The proposed paper is an extension of the research project entitled 'Mapping Public Housing: A critical review of the State-subsidized residential architecture in Portugal (1910-1974)', which focused on the role of the State as a provider of housing. [a project co-financed by ERDF and FCT, PTDC/CPC-HAT/1688/2014].

1. INTRODUCTION: A GENERAL APPROACH TO THE STATE-SUBSIDIZED HOUSING PROGRAMMES IN THE PORTUGUESE 20TH CENTURY

This article proposes the analysis of a set of multi-family housing buildings from different state-subsidized housing programmes that were implemented in Portugal during the first three quarters of the 20th century.

The first section will approach the main characteristics of each housing programme and the specific Portuguese context from the 1940s to the 1960s. It is believed that these urban developments incorporated Modern Movement influences from foreign contexts through different approaches and in different degrees: urban concepts, programme, architectural language, materiality, and typologies.

The second section will focus on these Modern Movement signs choosing some examples that were built in several Portuguese cities, disclosing distinct levels of development in terms of urban integration or architectural and construction quality of the buildings.

1.1. State-subsidized housing programmes in Portugal

In Portugal, the single-family housing model remained a preference for most initiatives of state-provided housing until very late in the 20th century. The first experiences in this field were *Philanthropic actions* (1900-1930), related mainly to the 'industrial paternalism' that sought out cheap investments,

and saw the model of the single-floor row house as adequate for accommodating the working classes.

The single-family housing model remained in place with the arrival of the dictatorial regime of the *Estado Novo* in 1933 when the government passed legislation promoting housing as a key element, although it was designed in a sort of rural arrangement. The first 'Affordable Houses Programme' (*Casas Económicas*, decree-law 23.052, dated 23 September 1933) proposed a gradual increase in the houses' scale by adding one story.

In the early 1940s, the instituted housing models proved insufficient in meeting the needs in terms of the dwelling. A new programme was then created, one proposing smaller rental apartments, aggregated in housing blocks. The 'Affordable Rent Houses Programme' (*Casas de Renda Económica*) originated with the intention to build affordable houses with funds from Social Security via *Habitacões Económicas - Federação de Caixas de Previdência* (HE-FCP)", in 1947. The 'Affordable Rent Houses Programme' was based on a specific regulation framework, namely Law n°2007, dated 7 May 1945, followed by decree-law 35.611, dated 25 April 1946. Offering the occasion to introduce multifamily buildings, the neighbourhoods built under this specific housing programme created a significant turning point in terms of public housing. This 'political' change allowed for the introduction of new city models and urban arrangements according to the Charter of Athens and the experimentation of different architectural languages. Relevant transformations can also be seen in the design of the typologies, increasingly involved with the 'minimum dwelling' ideals.

The *Ramalde* Residential Unit (Oporto, 1950-1954), the *Soda Póvoa* Neighbourhood (Vila Franca de Xira, 1953), and the *Caixas de Previdência* Housing Complex (Coimbra, 1965), stand out as relevant residential complexes built under this housing programme, particularly as they concern the incorporation of Modern Movement elements.

In Lisbon, the *Olivais* Neighbourhood (North and South) were mostly built under this programme, promoted by the Technical municipal office for Housing (GTH) and developed by HE-FCP. This neighbourhood consists of several cells designed by different authors and was one of the largest municipal housing initiatives in Lisbon.

Although the 'Affordable Rent Houses Programme' was the most relevant initiative in terms of construction of multifamily buildings, other state-subsided programmes can be mentioned, namely the 'Houses for Poor Families' (*Casas para Famílias Pobres*, 1945) and the 'Houses with Controlled

Rent' (*Casas de Renda Limitada*, 1947), as some of these initiatives engaged with the implementation of parcelled urban plans in Oporto and Lisbon.

The main objective of the 'Houses for Poor Families Programme' (Decree n°34.486 dated 8 April 1945) was to promote the construction of housing for very low income families within a simplified system with regard to the conditions required for the occupation of 'Affordable Houses'. As a relevant example, we can mention the case of *Rainha Dona Leonor* neighbourhood - 2nd phase (Oporto, 1952).

The Low-income housing unit neighbourhoods of *Pasteleira* (Oporto, 1957-1960), *Bom Sucesso* (Oporto, 1956-1958), and *Carvalhido* (Oporto, 1956-1958) were built under this programme, but specifically under the Improvement Plan for the city of Oporto, from 1956. This plan was supported by the Decree-Law 40.616 of 28 May 1956, implemented by the Municipality and supported by the State, and was intended to simultaneously provide housing solutions for inhabitants of old neighbourhoods in the city centre and to expand the city in a planned way via urbanization actions. Within ten years, from January 1957, the intent was to build 6000 dwellings.

In another line of action, the housing programme entitled 'Houses with Controlled Rent', from the mid-1950s, was centred on the issue of a prior fixing of the maximum total rent to be charged for apartments earmarked for housing. It was supported by Decree-Law 36.212 of 7 April 1947, followed by Decree-Law 41.532 of 18 February 1958 and Law 608 of 14 November 1973. It gave rise to well-known residential complexes in Lisbon, such as the buildings in *Estados Unidos da América* Avenue (1954) and the *Estacas* Neighbourhood (1949-1955).

2. CASE STUDIES: SIGNS OF MODERN MOVEMENT INFLUENCES

The assembled case studies were selected to exemplify some of the characteristics of certain signs of materialized modernity among different grades of architectural quality residential buildings.

The modern residential concept, generally aiming to valorise the domestic space, includes a set of common and unique elements. These contributed to its innovative formal and functional character and can be individualized and identified. Indeed, innovative solutions are observed in the urban context, the conception of façades, the development of new access systems, the articulation of several housing typologies, the organization of the functional programme, and in the experimentation with new materials.

2.1. Urban concepts

The *Ramalde* Residential Unit (early 1950s), built under the 'Affordable Rent Houses Programme' and developed by HE-FCP, is located near *Boavista* Avenue in the western part of the city of Oporto, occupying a lot of considerable size. The Municipal Council proposed a specific plan for the area, called the 'Ramalde Partial Urbanization Plan' (1948), including housing (106 blocks), commercial buildings, schools, and sports buildings. The plan also envisaged the existence of green areas and footpaths. The buildings would enjoy a rational layout so that their façades could benefit from the best solar exposure. The residential complex, very organized and cohesive from a morphological point of view, proposed a sort of autonomous modern garden city, following the principles of the Charter of Athens, which in the late 1940s was a novelty in Oporto.

The plan was organized along two main structuring axes, perpendicular to each other: one perpendicular to *Boavista* Avenue and another crossing the centre of the composition, outlining its centrality.

This plan underwent several adjustments and was reduced to the construction of 26 collective housing buildings, carried out in a two-stage process, with the project being awarded to architect Fernando Távora. The relationship between the exterior space and the height of the buildings was carefully defined, apparently following the studies of Walter Gropius presented at the 3rd Congress of CIAM (*Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne*) in 1930.

The Low-income Housing unit neighbourhoods of *Pasteleira* (1957-1960), *Bom Sucesso* (1956-1958), and *Carvalhido* (1956-1958), commissioned by the Oporto Municipality, were built under the Improvement Plan for the city of Oporto, from 1956. Although being located on different sized lots and in distinct areas of the city, these residential complexes reveal similar underlying logics in terms of urban concept. While the housing blocks do not stand out in terms of architectural quality, they do in fact propose a new residential model, questioning the traditional street and the urban closed block as the structuring principles in the urban system.

The municipal land immediately outside the city limits was the primary option to build, and according to the Improvement Plan, the layout of the surrounding streets or the ones that would serve these residential units was meant to be fully coordinated with the urban fabric and the structure of the adjacent streets (existing or to be opened) defined by the Master Plan of Oporto.

The residential complex in *Estados Unidos da América* Avenue (1954) in Lisbon, a well-known residential set from the architects Pedro Cid and João Barros Vasconcelos Esteves, displays a more radical urban concept. *Estados Unidos da América* Avenue acts as the main axis of a rational composition where large buildings are placed parallel to each other, perpendicular to the main street, and smaller units stand at the back, configuring a U-shaped outdoor area. This complex was commissioned by the Lisbon Municipality, under the 'Houses with Controlled Rent' programme.

2.2. Access system

With respect to the access systems, it is noteworthy to highlight the distribution galleries in multi-family housing buildings for their experimentation and several solutions of exterior or interior galleries are identified. This system reveals its potentiality both for the economy of distribution, allowing the entrance to several apartments through a single vertical communication core, and for the development of more intense human relations.

The *Rainha D. Leonor* neighbourhood was part of the 'Houses for Poor Families' programme. The project was divided into two construction phases, with the second phase, concluded in 1955, consisting of 100 dwellings in 5 blocks of 4 floors with a distribution system with an outer gallery facing east.

This set stands out for its relationship between the access system and the dwellings. The distribution galleries excel both for the significant width, compared to the volume's depth, and for the near relationship to the daytime spaces, mainly the living room and the kitchen. As such, this area takes on multiple functions, such as a living space, storage or laundry area. In addition, it assumes a relevant social value, providing interaction among the inhabitants.

The Housing building designed by architect Nuno Teotónio Pereira at Soda Póvoa neighbourhood, in Póvoa de Santa Iria, was built under the 'Affordable Rent Houses Programme'. The project from 1953 consists of 2 volumes with 4 floors each, with a distribution gallery associating them. Formally, this access system is distinguished by the occasional connections to the buildings and relationship with the autonomous volume of the stairwell. From the functional point of view, it consists of an intermediate space, one of crossing and interaction.

Through the same 'Affordable Rent Houses Programme' the *Caixas de Previdência de Coimbra* neighbourhood (1965, 1st phase) was also built and commissioned by HE-FCP. This set, from Jorge Albuquerque, comprises 9 multi-family housing



Figure 1. *Urban Concepts*

Low-income housing unit neighbourhoods of *Bom Sucesso* (1956-1958), Oporto, Portugal, site plan. ©Oporto Municipal Archives and *Ramalde* Residential Unit. General Plan. 1st and 2nd phases. ©Departamento do Património Imobiliário do IGFSS, delegação Norte (top row)

Low-income housing unit neighbourhoods of *Pasteleira* (1957-1960) and *Carvalhido*, Oporto, Portugal, site plan. ©Oporto Municipal Archives (middle row)
Residential complex in *Estados Unidos da América* Avenue (1954), Lisbon, Portugal, site plan. ©"Bloco Avenida dos Estados Unidos da América", Revista Arquitectura, N 61, Dez 1957, p.18 (down row)

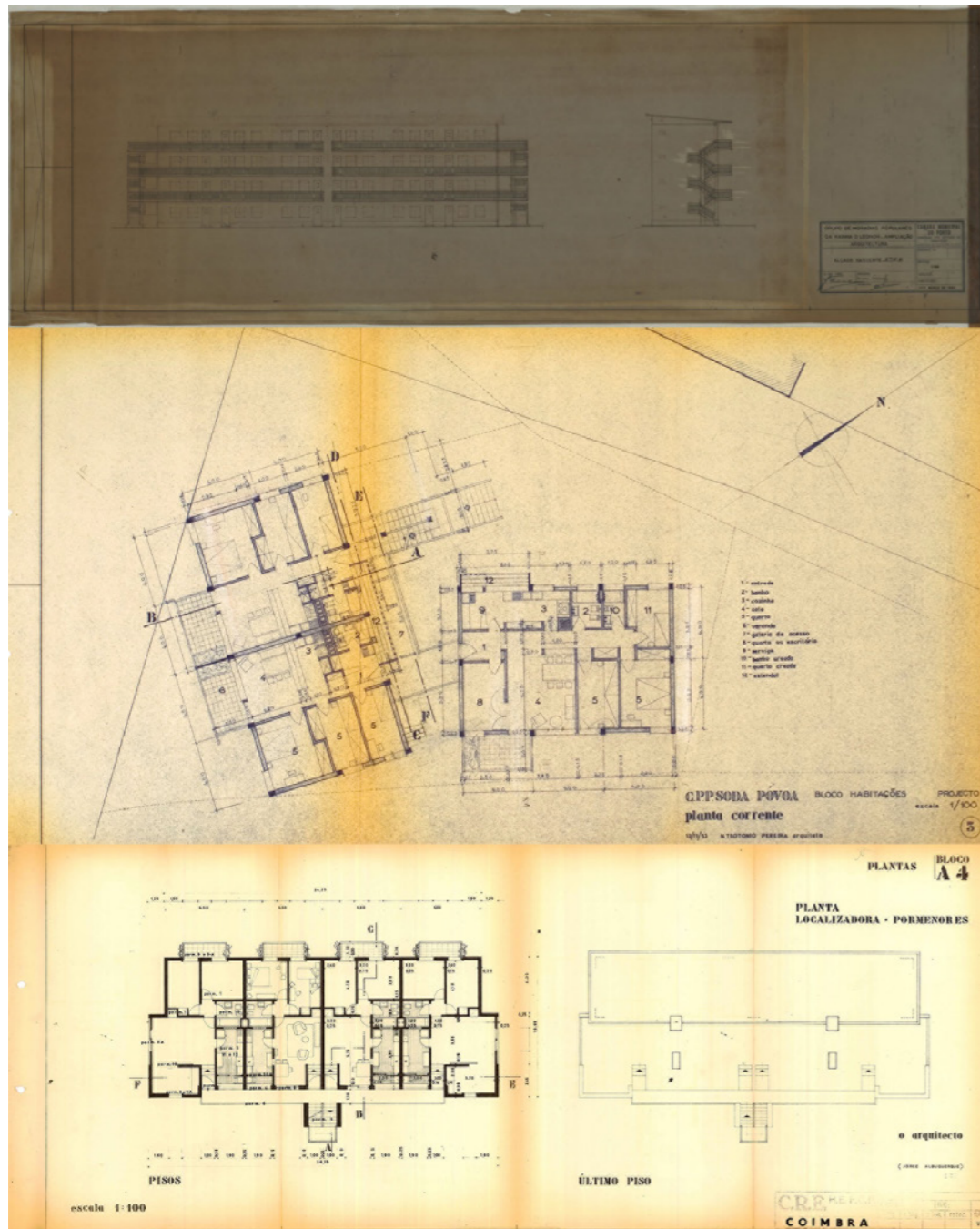


Figure 2. Access system
 Rainha Dona Leonor Neighbourhood, 1st and 2nd phases, Porto, Portugal. east and north elevations © Oporto Municipal Archives (top row)
 Soda Póvoa neighbourhood, in Póvoa de Santa Iria, Portugal. Type floor plan © Nuno Teotónio Pereira collection, SIPA/IHRU (middle row)
 Caixas de Previdência de Coimbra neighbourhood, Coimbra, Portugal. Type Floor Plan, Type B © IGFSS Porto archive (down row)

buildings with 4 and 8 floors, combining two distinct access systems: by vertical communication core and by distribution gallery. The larger buildings are composed of two entrance cores consisting of the main staircase on the façade and two interior elevators providing access to 3 dwellings per floor, each. In contrast, the remaining smaller buildings have an outer gallery and a central staircase, which allows the access to 4 dwellings per floor. This case stands out for its difference in height between the gallery and the dwellings, guaranteeing greater privacy in the interior spaces. This is mainly a crossing space, given the size, the configuration and the relationship with the adjacent spaces. However, it also serves as an extension of the interior service spaces.

2.3. Architectural language and materiality

The modern buildings have strong architectural language and materiality mainly resulting from the diversity of materials along with the combination of traditional materials and new application techniques. Also, the “Five points towards a new architecture”, defined in 1926 by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, were fundamental for the constitution of a new lexicon.

In a brief approach to the building techniques, of particular note is the intrinsic connection between the structural system and the form/function of the buildings, and the progressive introduction of materials such as reinforced concrete and glass. In the *Caixas de Previdência* housing complex (Coimbra, 1965), signs of modernity can be identified in the language and materiality, both by the diversity of the materials and colours, and by the volumetric composition of the ensemble and the absence of ornaments. In the larger buildings especially noteworthy is the use of elements such as the flat roof, the horizontal windows, the projected balconies and the marking of the floor slabs in the façades. But this demand for modernity is even more evident in the smaller buildings, characterized by the design of the distribution gallery, as well as the volume of the stairwell and the indentation in the side elevations. In addition, the lower finish stands out with a base in stone, whereas the upper finish is notable for its combination of flat and inclined rooftops. Regarding the coating materials, it is important to mention the diversity of textures and materials used in the distribution gallery, in the wall of the common staircase and in the side elevations, highlighting the grille for ventilation in the laundry.

The *Estacas* neighbourhood, located in cell 8 of the *Alvalade* neighbourhood in Lisbon, was designed by Ruy d’Athouguia

and Sebastião Sanchez between 1949 and 1955, under ‘Houses with Controlled Rent’ programme, commissioned by the Lisbon Municipality.

In this case the relationship with the “Five points towards a new architecture” is evident, namely, the supports, the roof garden, the free design of the floor plan, the horizontal window and the free design of the façade, although may not have a direct relation.

The buildings are supported by “pilotis” and present a flat roof as a reference to the roof garden. In addition, it also seems clear the intention to design a “free façade”, by retreating the glazed plan, as well as the attempt to include “windows in length”.

The “free plan” appears here due to the absence of load-bearing partition walls as a part of the structural system.

2.4. Typologies

The spatial organization of most apartments associated to state-subsidised housing developments faces the challenge of reducing and simplifying the programme of the household, mainly through the introduction of multifunctional spaces and the elimination of unnecessary circulation spaces. The modern concept of the common living room, in some cases combining several functions, shows up in most solutions (in some cases including cooking).

The execution of the Low-income housing complex of *Carvalhido* started in June 1957 with the construction of 264 units. This neighbourhood was followed by a much bigger intervention, the building of the *Pasteleira* Housing Complex, which comprised 600 dwellings, whose construction started in April 1958. The *Bom Sucesso* project, for example, contained only 128 units.

The proposed typologies in these three complexes, although sharing the same principles regarding the compactness of the floor plan, reveal some differences in terms of the apartment distribution, resulting from different options in the access systems. In the apartment design of the *Carvalhido* and *Bom Sucesso* units, for example, the living room/kitchen acts as the central distribution area. This solution allows the design of a three-bedroom apartment in only 46 square meters. The same solution can be found at the *Rainha Dona Leonor* Neighbourhood - 2nd phase (Oporto, 1952).

The *Pasteleira* buildings develop a different solution, although being also designed with similar minimum areas. Each floor has two apartments with a kitchen, one bathroom, one common living room, and a varying number of bedrooms. Al-



Figure 3. Architectural language and materiality
Caixas de Previdência de Coimbra neighbourhood, Coimbra, Portugal. Details. Type B © Maria Tavares, 2012 (top row)
Estacas Neighbourhood, Lisbon, Portugal. General views, 1958 © Lisbon Municipal archives (down row)

though having roughly the same floor space as the *Carvalhido* and *Bom Sucesso* solutions, these apartments allowed for distinct spatial organization, probably more consistent with Oporto life style habits at the time: an independent kitchen near the entry and a sheltered common living room.

The usable areas of the apartments located in *Estados Unidos da América* Avenue, a 'Houses with Controlled Rent Programme' residential development, are quite distinct, as well as the targeted inhabitants. Each central staircase/elevator opens up to the entrance to two apartments, each with two bedrooms, a com-

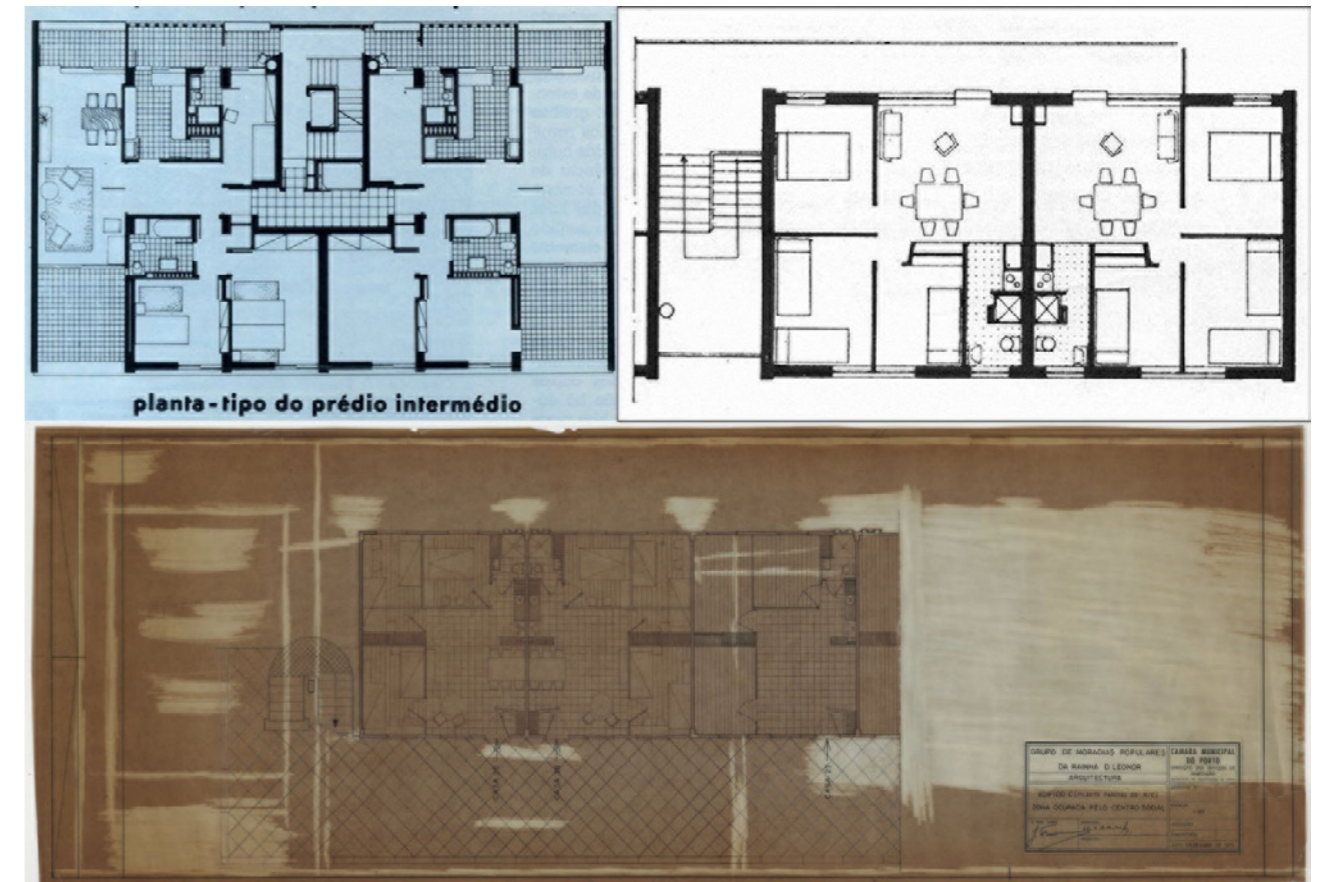


Figure 4. Typologies
 Residential complex in *Estados Unidos da América* Avenue (1954), Lisbon, Portugal, type floor plan. © "Bloco Avenida dos Estados Unidos da América", Revista Arquitectura, N 61, Dez 1957, p.18 and Low-income housing complex of *Bom Sucesso* and *Carvalhido* (1956-1958), Oporto, Portugal, type floor plan. © Oporto Municipal Archives (top row)
Rainha Dona Leonor Neighbourhood, 2nd phase (1952), Oporto, Portugal, type floor plan. © Oporto Municipal Archives (down row)

mon living room, bathroom and a generous service area, with kitchen, maid's room and laundry area, similar to the typical bourgeois apartments popular in the 1940s. The common living room is the key compartment in this plan. It connects both façades, articulating large balconies. These dwellings stand out for their clearly defined division of service, common, and private spaces.

3. CONCLUSION

In most residential solutions associated with state-subsidized housing programmes implemented from the 1940s to the 1960s, we can observe the renewal of the instituted patterns

associated with the promotion of public housing carried out through collective housing, which focused on the building's language and experimentation with a set of typological models. The housing programme was fully reviewed through engagement with international references, namely with those most associated with the Modern Movement paradigm. The degree of innovation or the overall architecture quality of the built examples appears to be profoundly connected with the authorship of the projects. This is quite remarkable in the solutions found in the 'Affordable Rent Houses Programme', with the involvement of architect Fernando Távora (Ramalde Residential Unit) or architect Nuno Teotónio Pereira (*Soda*

Póvoa neighbourhood), in each case through solutions that bring tradition and modernity together, or more radical examples fully committed with the Modern Movement's ideals, either in terms of urban concept, architecture language or typology design, such as the ones that were proposed under the housing programme 'Houses with Controlled Rent', from the mid-1950s, that originated the buildings in *Estados Unidos da América Avenue* (1954), designed by architects Pedro Cid and João Barros Vasconcelos Esteves, and the *Estacas Neighbourhood* (1949-1955), designed by architects Ruy d'Athouguia and Sebastião Formosinho Sanches, in Lisbon. These last two are considered fine representative examples of the architecture of the Modern Movement in Portugal.

The solutions proposed by the 'Houses for Poor Families Programme', under the Improvement Plan for the city of Oporto are quite interesting because they assimilate the Modern Movement paradigm under fewer resources. With regard to urban concepts, although following some of the Charter of Athens principles, the achieved urban model is not strong enough to promote the articulation with the pre-existent urban fabric. Nevertheless, the typological concept revealed by the apartments is particularly efficient, clearly focused on the minimum dwelling design. Also, the access through distribution gallery seems to be an economic system that adjusts to the specific needs of these programmes, serving as an extension area of the interior spaces.

Therefore, we may conclude that the multi-family residential complexes built under the state-subsidized housing programmes served as an important experimental field in architecture, mainly for a generation of architects who sought to innovate and establish a modern language influenced by international references in the Modern Movement. In fact, some of the most paradigmatic concretizations in Portugal in this field are not isolated cases but are ones that are part of large public programmes whose resulting architectural production is disseminated all over the country.

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BIOGRAPHIES

Gisela Lameira (Portugal, Viseu, 1978) is an architect and researcher at Atlas da Casa (Housing Architectural design and forms of dwelling) of the Centre for Architecture and Urban Studies (FAUP, CEAU). Her research includes the development of studies on Architecture and Urban Theory and History, specifically on the genesis and transformation of multi-family housing in Oporto. She completed her PhD in 2017, with the thesis "The Oporto Collective Housing Building". Topologies, typologies and housing models in the 1st half of the XX century". Currently, she is a member of the FCT research project "Mapping Public Housing: a critical review of the State-subsidized residential architecture in Portugal (1910-1974)".

Luciana Rocha (Portugal, Santa Maria da Feira, 1983) is an architect and researcher at 'Atlas da Casa' of the Centre for Architecture and Urban Studies (CEAU/FA/UP). Her PhD thesis (2016, FAUP) focused on the recognition and characterization of modern multifamily housing buildings in order to promote their safeguard from a number of representative examples in Oporto (1948-1961). The main goal was to develop instrumentation to guide future interventions. In the scope of this research, she attended the Techniques et Sauvegarde de l'architecture modern laboratory at EPFL. Currently, she is a member of the FCT project "Mapping Public Housing: a critical review of the State-subsidized residential architecture in Portugal (1910-1974)".

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