

## TRADITION AND MODERNITY INTERTWINING IN THE RE-PRESENTATION OF PORTUGUESE MODERN ARCHITECTURE: The case of the Survey on 20th Century Architecture in Portugal Marta Lalanda Prista

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### Abstract

*The nexus between tradition and modernity is long-rooted in the intellectual and political discourses about a Portuguese architecture identity, either as a dialogue construed as a national specificity, or as a dichotomy that stresses different actors' distinct and even opposing cultural understandings and political uses of categories of culture and time. Recently, however, the history and critique of modernism in architecture has overcome the mainstream readings of its corpus, mitigating its orthodoxy, and disclosing long-standing relationships between modern architecture proposals and vernacular settlements. Such rereading has triggered a revision of Portuguese history of architecture, in particular regarding the gate-keeping conceptions of Portugal as an isolated and peripheral country, and the political stances of particular architectural productions. This paper aims to discuss the extent of the tradition-modernity bindings in the spacialisation of a Portuguese identity in architectural discourses. In this scope, it will look into the survey on the 20th century Portuguese architecture conducted by the Portuguese architects between 2003 and 2006, as an expression of how Portuguese modern architecture is being emically construed. Taking into account its process and outcomes, and its authors' purposes and reasoning, the paper will examine its modes and hues, evaluating the dynamics beyond the production of a history of architecture and its relating to broader processes of imagining the past and culture in Portugal.*

**Keywords:** Survey, History of Architecture, Heritage, National Identity.

The relation between modernity and tradition is a concern long rooted in Portuguese discourses about an architectural history and identity often related to erudite-vernacular and urban-rural correlations. It has been reasoned as a dialogue that construes a national fundamental and a dichotomy that emphasises opposing interests and powers in the social production of space. The argument rests on the idea that international models have been sensitively interpreted by spatial practices in-between erudition and vernacularism, both in the production of *historic* (e.g. Costa, 1995) and *modern* architecture (e.g. Ollero, 2001)<sup>1</sup>. Regarding the latter, the history of Portuguese architecture evinces some hues. Following on its

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<sup>1</sup> For purposes of clearer reading, the paper follows the terms globally used by IAP20's authors, using Modern to refer to the Modern Movement production, using Modernist to address previous aesthetics inspired by modernity, and using modern when reporting indifferently to the contemporary time, set roughly on the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

pioneers (e.g. Portas, 1978), the arguments of a geo-economic periphery and ideological resistance have stressed tradition and modernity as opposing narratives of distinct reasonings by conservative and progressive ideals. A key moment was set on the fifties, between architects' first national congress (1948) and their de-objectification of tradition in the Survey on Portuguese Regional Architecture (IARP) (SNA, 1961). Its understanding of vernacular was considered to have disciplined the revision of a conservative Modernism and grounded tradition-modernity bindings as a fundamental of Portuguese Modern architecture (Tostões, 1997).

Such orthodox history of Portuguese modern architecture has been challenged by critical analyses that question the grounds of the periphery and resistance arguments (e.g. Almeida 2008)<sup>2</sup>. Its place in the mainstream narrative of Portuguese architecture seems, however, to have been on hold until recently, when the international history and critique of modernism reviewed its relation to regional vernacularisms beyond the Anglo-Saxon hegemonic emphasis on universal rationality (e.g. Lejeune and Sabatino, 2010). New research in Portugal appears to be following up developments, deconstructing tenets by unveiling Portuguese architects' interactions with the outside world and the meanders of their ideological and political alignments. The 20<sup>th</sup> century seems nowadays to represent a maturation process of Portuguese architecture (e.g. Tostões, 2002). In an effort to understand the extent of these tradition-modernity bindings in today's *spacialisation* of a Portuguese identity in architecture, this paper presents a preliminary analysis of the latest *emic* construction of an idea of Portuguese architecture – the Survey on 20<sup>th</sup> Century Architecture in Portugal (IAP20).

### **The Survey on 20th Century Architecture in Portugal (IAP20)**

In 2003, the Portuguese Order of Architects in consortium with the Ministry of Culture and the Fundació Mies van der Rohe was granted European funds to conduct a nationwide inquiry on architecture built during the last century.

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<sup>2</sup> The work of Pedro Vieira de Almeida is groundbreaking in this respect. The reference to *Apontamentos para uma Teoria da Arquitectura* (2008) is to be understood as illustrative, since it gathers essays from different dates.

Celebrating the IARP's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the new inquiry focused on the erudite production, aiming to promote the social and political recognition of modern architecture's values. Inspired by its predecessor and carried out until 2006, IAP20 was methodologically built upon fieldwork, assembling six teams of architects to operate in six different regions of Portugal<sup>3</sup>. Sign of the times, teams set off equipped with georeference devices and computers to build a digital database according to a record-sheet previously designed<sup>4</sup>. Also differently, they counted on a list of reference buildings to organise itineraries, assembled by research in journals and monographs, and added suggestions of the municipalities' technicians. Alike their predecessors, teams could adapt preparatory guidelines according to regional specificities. Nevertheless, a balance between times, spaces, functional and aesthetic types of 20<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese architecture should be accounted for.

Three seminars scheduled the works of the Survey. The first gathered coordinators and international experts to discuss concepts and methodologies; the second reunited the whole team to present and test instruments; and the third was open to the public, presenting partial results<sup>5</sup>. The collective work was afterwards released in an on-line database and published in print (Afonso, 2006) and CD-Rom (OA-CDN, 2006) formats, in April 2006<sup>6</sup>. These translate the 120 thousand kilometres

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<sup>3</sup> Scientific coordinator: Ana Tostões; North Region: Sérgio Fernandez (coord.), Inês Calor, José Manuel Capela, José Miguel Brás Rodrigues, Paulo Monteiro and Pedro Araújo; Centre Region: José Bandeirinha (coord.), Gonçalo Canto Moniz, Isabel Bolas, José Manuel Oliveira and Susana Lobo; Lisbon and Tagus Valley Region: João Vieira Caldas and José Silva Carvalho (coord.), Conceição Corte-Real, João Santa-Rita, João Alves da Cunha, Miguel Judas, Pedro Garcia da Fonseca and Sofia Curto; South Region: Michel Toussaint and Ricardo Carvalho (coord.), José Manuel Rodrigues, Patrícia Bento d'Almeida, Rui Mendes and Vítor Mestre; Azores Region: João Maia Macedo (coord.), Manuela Braga and Mafalda Vicente; Madeira Region: Luís Vilhena (coord.) and Pilar Luz.

<sup>4</sup> The record sheet includes fields such as: location, authorship, dates, transformations, conservation status, urban setting, functional type, contemporary function, legal protection, bibliographic references, and a space for observations on its technical, social, contextual, historical and cultural features. Its digital form also included the possibility of attaching pictures and drawings, besides the processual data (numeration, region and author of survey). Database is available at: <http://www.iap20.pt>.

<sup>5</sup> The first seminar was held in Lisbon on February 2004 with the participation of Maurizio Pla, António Pizza, Luís Hornet, Nuno Grande, Xavier Costa, Wilfried Wang and Vittorio Lampugnani. The second seminar took place in Abrantes on July 2005. The final seminar occurred in Coimbra on November 2005. Also, to promote IAP20 results, there was an exhibition held in Istanbul during the UIA Congress (2005).

<sup>6</sup> There are significant differences between database, CD-Rom and book. The first two include more complete records, while the last presents a selection of buildings with simple data; the last two include supplementary information like thematic routs, architects'

trodden, the 299 counties visited, the 82 thousand pictures taken, and the six thousand records created. Teams acknowledge some inaccuracies and gaps, considering it to be an open work, a basis for future research and updates. Indeed, IAP20 is not presented, not represented as history. It is mostly seen as a database which the authors regret not having been given the time to reflectively analyse before the release of results<sup>7</sup>.

Nevertheless, IAP20's results objectify Portuguese architecture built during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, enunciating an architectural landscape of the past. As the postmodern epistemology of sciences brought the material and social worlds together, the objective-subjective dichotomy was reviewed and the history-memory distance was narrowed. The past was reasoned as a social and intellectual construct, meaning that heritage was no longer a matter of truth, but of interpretation and proposition. In the study of architecture, this development meant an acceptance of its meanings to be the entanglement of different histories (e.g. Whyte, 2006), written by looking at architecture as representation, as praxis, as product, and as a space for performance (e.g. Lees, 2001). Within this theoretical framework, IAP20 can be considered *one* expression of a "historical culture" (cf. Rösen 1994). It is *one* means through which *one* group produces and disseminates *one* past, putting into practice an emic narrative that informs and is informed by society's collective historical conscience. Given the form and contents of the published results, IAP20 furthermore approaches a "landscape of memory" that leaves out the cultural processes that build space as place, to take it as an inscribed surface in time (cf. Küchler 1993). What this paper proposes is therefore a reading of this landscape as a construct of the past, looking into IAP20's outputs and its authors' reasonings<sup>8</sup>. It will focus on three chief ideas repeatedly stressed: (1) the open work status; (2) the pursuit of time-space-type representativeness; and (3) the promotion of public awareness of the values of modern heritage. This reading must

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biographies, a 20<sup>th</sup> century chronology (CD-Rom) or essays about Portuguese modern architecture (book), but they are only a sample of 516 buildings of the total number of records in the database.

<sup>7</sup> The publication of results was speeded up to meet the European funding conditions.

<sup>8</sup> These include the database, the published materials and work papers, as well as interview with ten members of the teams, and the analysis of their individual researches and publications. The research has suffered some setbacks as, to date, there are no materials published other than the outputs, the original database is inaccessible, the on-line search works poorly, and access to the archive still awaits approval.

nevertheless be understood as a preliminary construction, on the one hand resulting from a still ongoing research, on the other hand because structured over the partial landscapes produced by the IAP20 published materials<sup>9</sup>.

### **The pen work status**

All over, IAP20 is stated more as a starting point than as a finished product. The idea was that researchers would continue to update the Survey under supervision of a scientific committee<sup>10</sup>. This exculpates shortcomings, but mainly borrows a sense of humility to a work in the process of being intellectually *democraticised*. Whether or not the plan will materialise remains a question. But regardless of the future, a particular landscape was already produced due to the symbolic power of its enunciation. Two aspects must be stressed here. First, a survey is a methodological instrument appropriated from positivist fields of knowledge that lend a sense of objectivity to research (cf. Dehaene 2002). Not entering epistemological debates, IAP20 is scientifically confirmed because it *is* a survey. Plus, its unremitting association with IARP, however symbolic and affective it may be<sup>11</sup>, guarantees a line of continuity with an enterprise that is strongly and long rooted in Portuguese architects' history and identity as a class (e.g. Portas 1978). Not by chance, IAP20 was launched simultaneously to IARP's 3<sup>rd</sup> reprint and its authors' attribution of honorary membership by the Order. This was the National Year of Architecture, at the eve of the homologation of architects' exclusivity to practice architecture. There is some sort of corporative subtext in IAP20 that its promoters do not forget to recall (cf. Afonso, 2006b).

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<sup>9</sup> Namely, the book, the CD-Rom, the brochures, the outdoors, and the news on *Boletim Arquitectos*.

<sup>10</sup> After 2006, the Order made some initial efforts to complete records, normalise fields, and solve flaws. Now, arrangements are being made in order to continue the database in articulation with Docomomo Iberia.

<sup>11</sup> According to interviewed authors and published materials, IARP is an inspiration and a source of pride, IAP20 being considered complementary and the continuity of a romantic tour of discovery.

A second aspect concerns the authorship of IAP20. On the one hand, there is the formal and institutional frame. IAP20 was promoted by the official representatives of the Portuguese architects, and supported by a major international institution of architecture, the national government and the European community. There are no doubts about their symbolic power to conduct this survey. On the other hand, IAP20 summons a professional and intellectual authority on architecture. From the start, the scientific head of the survey is a renowned name in the historiography of the 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture in Portugal. Further, when assembling the teams, she invited architectural scholars settled and with acknowledged work on the different regions of inquiry to coordinate them. Each of these, in turn, selected a team mainly from their professional acquaintances, both in the academia and practice. And a significant part of these fieldwork members were either developing, or came to develop, doctorate researches mostly related to the Portuguese Modern Movement. Their authority to speak of modern architecture in Portugal is hardly contestable in a world where expertise and specialisation organise labour and science.

### **The representativeness argument**

Asserted the legitimacy of IAP20's actors to propose an architectural landscape, one may try to understand what this landscape is. Documents, published materials and authors stressed IAP20's methodology to be based on the fundamental criterion of representativeness, regarding time, geographies, authorships, functional types and aesthetics. The subjective and tricky criterion of quality would mediate such plurality<sup>12</sup>. This methodology intended to prevent teams from following personal biases. Furthermore, by introducing a weighting factor that favoured peripheral times, spaces and types, IAP20 expected to override history's attention to the "usual suspects" and provide a more democratic landscape. However, two outcomes defy the purposes. On the one hand, the produced landscape put on a par architectures with distinct roles in time and space. Despite some records including small descriptions, they do not provide a relational

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<sup>12</sup> Deliberately, the "quality" factor was left out of this argument because of its complexity of analysis and the paper's focus on the enunciation of history.

context. Along with the prevailing visual presentation of items, this brings IAP20 closer to a catalogue of buildings that objectifies, if not aestheticises, architecture. On the other hand, in order to establish an overall coherency, series of inquiry were defined a priori by a correspondence between seven periods of time and its architectural types and aesthetics. This set the team's pace and, though it was not to be followed to the letter, still suggests the survey's proximity with the Portuguese orthodox history of architecture. In this sense, IAP20 outputs resemble a confirming statement<sup>13</sup>.

Notwithstanding, teams availed the given freedom of action. Their partial inquiries manifest regional differences and particular interests. Such subjectivity was neither a surprise nor a problem, as the IARP's experience had shown architects that it was an inherent drawback that simultaneously favoured the plurality of insights. Yet, the partial landscapes selected to publicise the work dilute the regional subjectivities. For instance, summaries on regional findings highlight that: the North is heavily built in line with the Oporto School; Lisbon concentrates modernity's different experiences; the Centre echoes its marginal place in-between poles; the South is divided between a traditionally structured inland and an urban, developed coastline; and the archipelagos stand out by its original architectures, despite or because of its marginality (cf. Afonso, 2006a; Tostões, 2006)<sup>14</sup>. These formulations also tell a story; but one whose timeline is measured by the core centres and the mainstream narratives of history.

A comparative analysis of the on-line and published records provides additional insights. For example, the prevalence of the North, Centre and Lisbon regions in the book can be explained by their area and population; just like the proportionally higher presence of the archipelagos might be attributed to the representativeness criterion. Still, the second-place of Madeira's capital county in a most-quoted ranking is surprising. In an effort to highlight marginal settings, Funchal rises above its representativeness in

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<sup>13</sup> Emphasis should be put on the *outputs*, as interviews with the authors revealed insights and reflections not expressed by the IAP20's published results.

<sup>14</sup> Synthesis also grounded on the regional coordinators' presentation in the Coimbra Seminar.

the country<sup>15</sup>. On the contrary, Sintra's county is highly underrepresented in the publication despite its significant present in the database<sup>16</sup>. Representativeness does not seem to have worked equally among the different regions.

Another observations can be made out of a comparative analysis of times and spaces. The preponderance of records for the early century in Lisbon, followed by the North and Centre records rising between the twenties and the sixties, when the South records gain weight, right before Madeira standing out in the seventies, designs some sort of Portuguese urbanisation timeline that is confirmed by the more nationally distributed entries in the last two decades. Indeed, urban planning was taken into account, though it represents a small part of IAP20's records. Examining the functional types of the listed buildings, it is possible to infer the State's preponderant intervention in the countryside from the predominance of public equipments in the survey's records. Housing is mostly expressive in urban areas and less represented decades. But, despite this reflecting an overall view, some authors underlined how this generated a misrepresentation of the regions' a-synchrony, namely because these buildings were centrally produced and thus aligned with the mainstream production.

Two other findings may be pulled out of this line of analysis. The first addresses aesthetics. The history of Portuguese spatial planning may explain the preponderance of the nineties, sixties and fifties in IAP20's published book, even balancing the representativeness criterion. But the fact that its formal aesthetic evokes the most valued tradition-modernity bindings in the Portuguese history of architecture should be noticed. On the contrary, the Portuguese House that for so long generated controversy among the Portuguese architects is given poor visibility compared to its contemporary eclecticism and Modernisms. More notorious, the Emigrant House that equally called architects' attention is almost absent, despite its acknowledged presence. In fact, authorship beyond architects was

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<sup>15</sup> The book selection included around half of Portuguese counties, but Madeira region is represented by 4/5 of its counties. Funchal is the 7<sup>th</sup> biggest city in the country, but its county occupies the 24<sup>th</sup> place in terms of population.

<sup>16</sup> Sintra has one single record in the book, out of the 53 records in the database. Other counties, like Aveiro, present a 2/3 ratio.



comprised by IAP20, but anonymous architecture is mainly accepted in the South region<sup>17</sup>. The second finding concerns the idea of architecture as building. Although several of the IAP20's authors find such definition to curtail architecture's reasoning as the construction of territory, fabrics like belvederes deserve residual records and bridges, for instance, enter the category of "work of art".

Overall, the partial landscapes produced by IAP20 did not split from the hegemonic history of Portuguese architecture, focused on objects, authorships and the main centres of production. Even when its authors evoke IARP to parallel a romantic discovery, they seem less interested in challenging the mainstream narrative than in discovering its hidden pearls<sup>18</sup>.

### **The modern heritage**

One last chief idea is stressed by IAP20's authors and documental materials. The purpose was to record the 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture in Portugal on a public database to raise awareness of its values and urge its protection. Thus the regard for one last criterion of inquiry: the state of conservation. For the heads of the survey, modern heritage is a development resource that operates materially in spatial planning, economically in tourism, and symbolically in cultural policies (cf. Roseta, 2006). They also highlight the sense of collectiveness and endangerment implied in the concept of heritage (cf. Lowenthal, 1985). The first is built on the acknowledgement that history lasts until yesterday, thence heritage remits to a continuous time, not antiquity. The second refers to the risks of disaffection, as the secularity and perishable materiality of modern architecture are indicted of misinforming society on its value as heritage. What the existence of IAP20 seems also to confirm is that architects are not

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<sup>17</sup> Half of IAP20's records with no authorship refer to the South region. The participation of Victor Mestre in this team should be underlined as his work is known to have substantially contributed to the study of vernacular architecture in Portugal.

<sup>18</sup> The "discovery" of the work of architects like José Dias Pires Branco, around Fundão county, or Gomes da Costa in the Algarve conforms enthusiastic memories of the survey's authors.

only aware of their power in enunciating architectural heritage, as they have realised its effectiveness to depend on a social and political resonance. This explains why IAP20 set out to sensitise public opinion, local powers and economic agents.

It would be an overstatement to speak of IAP20 as the first effort to treasure the 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture in Portugal. In the mid-century, Portas (1961) had already pleaded in favour of a modern historiography that would help prevent its destruction; and after the Architects Association was created (1978), its journals resumed the claim, publishing articles on the early-century eclecticism and Modernisms that originated a "Heritage in Danger" section<sup>19</sup>. What is distinct in IAP20 is its formal and institutional investment, though by 2003 legislation had already broadened the concept of monument to include quotidian built space, and international dispositions had already extended heritage from history to memory, from nation to community basis<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, Docomomo International had been created (1988) to disseminate knowledge and promote protection of the Modern Movement heritage, opening Chapters worldwide, including the Docomomo Iberia (1993). Its relation with the IAP20 is unsurprisingly close: most buildings enrolled in Docomomo's inventory are listed in the IAP20; the latter's general coordinator is now the chair of Docomomo International; and a member of Lisbon's team is now the Iberia Chapter's vice-president.

But to be clear, the role IAP20 takes on in the protection of the 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture falls into the category of pedagogy, not conservation. It aimed the education of non-architects on the value of modern architecture to prevent its degeneracy. This purpose is particularly explicit in the intended articulations with the city councils. Indeed, scrutinising the records of the Directorate-General of Cultural Heritage database, the relations became manifest. In Lisbon region, for instance, around 1/5 of the processes for heritage protection regard the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though homologated cases are

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<sup>19</sup> Particularly expressive are the first years of *Jornal Arquitectos* (1981-1987) and the series of articles "For the Study of Modernist Architecture in Portugal" by José Manuel Fernandes in *Arquitectura*, 132 (1979) to 138 (1980).

<sup>20</sup> In this respect, the Portuguese Law on Cultural Heritage (1985) and the Charter of Cracow (2000) are important documents.

scarcer, and most of them are enrolled in the IAP20 inventory. Half of these processes were initiated or reanimated after the survey started. In less central regions, the number of processes diminishes, but its simultaneity with IAP20 inquiry is higher, in Algarve reaching  $\frac{3}{4}$ . Significant is the fact that, overall, legal protection of the Modern Movement and its critical alternatives' buildings was exclusively initiated after the launch of IAP20. Until then, processes referred to the early-century eclecticism. So, IAP20 might be considered a step forward.

Still, away from the main urban centres, investments in the Modern Movement heritage fell somewhat short. In fact, official agencies revoked motions for protection on the basis of degeneracy and lack of national value, sometimes suggesting a municipal classification. Tensions around what is and is not heritage thus require further research that takes into account the social resonance of its values in local communities.

### **Final comment**

Considering the form, the content and the purpose of IAP20, but keeping in mind that the paper presents a partial reading of a still ongoing research, an overview observation could be made. The 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture in Portugal seems to be under a new process of "periodisation", understood as the formal patterns that structure history's narrative (cf. Zerubavel, 2003). The survey's methods, criteria and outputs introduce the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a new historical time by putting on par its distinct dates, geographies, functional types and aesthetics. Because ruptures, repetitions or declines are hardly stated, the architectural landscape of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is put forward in a historical continuum. The lack of discontinuities formally homogenises the 20<sup>th</sup> century by a process of assimilation. It is not that Modernism and the Modern Movement became synonyms, as IAP20's authors are quite assertive in distinguishing them. But one and all now fall under a broader category of *modern* that stands for the architecture produced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (or most of it).

Not being history, as repeatedly stated, IAP20 does not debate on the tradition-modernity bindings within this architectural landscape, but that does not mean the fundamental dialogue is absent. Looking into the buildings chosen to celebrate the end of IAP20 in *Boletim Arquitectos*, n.159, for instance, the space-type representativeness does not match a time-aesthetics representativeness. Emphasis is put on architectures which the database describes as expressive of the Modern Movement principles but deeply rooted in place and plastically eloquent of vernacular and erudite art. Its authorships include the "discovered" architects, but not the star-system, implicitly suggesting the tradition-modernity dialogue to be a cross-cutting way of doing architecture in Portugal. Quite differently, however, the buildings chosen to publicise IAP20 in nationally spread outdoors included the Portuguese House, Art Deco, Modernist and Modern architectures, and even contemporaneity. Mostly signed by well known architects, including the Pritzker Siza and the Brazilian Niemeyer, these buildings are closer to the orthodox history of Portuguese architecture, perhaps because aiming at a wider social resonance. Architecture's landscape of memory thus seems to depend not only on who produces it, but also on whom it is being produced for. It is in this entanglement that heritage can be examined as a social and intellectual construct.

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