

# TRADITION AND MODERNITY. THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE SURVEY ON REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE<sup>1</sup>

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## **The Survey**

Carried out between 1955 and 1960 by a number of modern architects in Portugal, the survey of regional architecture, commonly known as the ‘Inquérito’, was promoted by the Portuguese Architects’ Union and received official support from the government.

The surveyors divided the country into six geographical zones and a team of surveyors was assigned to each. In the introduction to *Popular Architecture in Portugal* [Popular Architecture in Portugal], the authors describe that practical reasons led them to establish that each team have three individuals: two young architects who would complete the field work, and a senior architect who was in charge of the team.

The authors describe also the duration and the means of transportation used during the field work: In three months of travel the six groups covered about 50.000 kilometres by car, scooter, on horseback or on foot. They stopped in hundreds of villages where they took about 10,000 photographs, made hundreds of elevation readings, prepared drawings and took thousands of written notes”. In addition, they also inform us about their methods: “once in possession of

this material they all began the work of arranging, classifying and systematically analysing, a task which took over a year to complete.”

According to them, “it was possible to begin to make sense of such a vast amount of material”, as it began to be organised into photo files and detailed drawings and when the typologies were distributed on maps and their characteristics registered in grids.

From this compilation of materials resulted the 1961 publication *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*, which was subsequently reprinted in 1979, and again in 1988 and 2004.

### **Background and framework**

Ten years after the publication of *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*, José Augusto França (1970: 106-108) discusses the survey in a text which, for the first time, establishes the history of the problem of the *casa portuguesa* [Portuguese house] and establishes a link between both<sup>1</sup>.

Later, the same author clarifies the contextual background of the survey and links its origins to the 1st National Congress of Architecture in 1948 (França, 1974).

In this Congress, modern architects reacted against the *casa portuguesa* and the notion of *Portugueseness* in architectural language (França, 1970; Portas, 1978), thus paving the way for the publication of a series of texts which demonstrated the error on which these ideas were based.

The importance of the journal *Arquitectura* [Architecture] in the historical context of the survey was underlined by Nuno Portas (1978). By the late 1940s, some young architects had assumed control of this journal, and in it introduced their critique of functionalism while publishing new ideas and approaches to architectural design.

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<sup>1</sup> This link was later followed by several authors with different points of view.

It was in this journal that in 1947, Keil do Amaral published the article *Uma Iniciativa Necessária* [A Necessary Initiative]. In this text, Keil defends the importance of collecting and surveying the Portuguese architecture of different regions of the country. The publication of the results of the survey would provide “students and professionals of construction [...] the basis for an honest, active and healthy regionalism”. In other words, he formulates the idea of the Inquérito.

Nuno Portas (1978) makes reference to the text of Fernando Távora, *O Problema da Casa Portuguesa* [The Problem of the Portuguese House], published in 1947, in which he criticises the *casa à antiga portuguesa* [old Portuguese-style house]. Távora also argues for increased knowledge of Portuguese architecture, including the architecture of the folk house which being “more functional and less fanciful”, could provide a lesson to the architects.

Later, Pedro Vieira de Almeida and Maria Helena Maia (1986), without questioning the paternity attributed to Keil, reminds us of the prior existence of a number of previous official and unofficial surveys on popular architecture, to which the idea of the Inquérito was also indebted.

Among them, Vieira de Almeida recalls the *Inquérito à Habitação Rural* [Survey of Rural Housing] which was completed at the end of the 1930s by agronomists and counted on official government support. According to the author, the survey’s results denounced the miserable living conditions of the inhabitants of these houses, in a clear challenge to the dominant discourse of the time. Inevitably, the third and last volume of this publication did not pass censorship remains unpublished (Almeida and Maia, 1986).

On the other hand, the survey conducted by the Portuguese architects was characterised by a detachment from social concerns. With the exception of the Trás-os-Montes team who, perhaps because of the extreme poverty of the region, paid more attention to the living conditions of the local populations (Almeida and Cardoso, 2002).

### **The link to geography and anthropology**

It was precisely the team leader of zone 2, Lixa Filgueiras, who, in 1986, makes a new contribution to what we know of the antecedents of the survey, particularly in relation to the anthropological and geographical fields which came to influence the work carried out by the teams assigned to the northern zones of the survey. Filgueiras offers a description of the cultural entourage existent at the time in the Escola de Belas Artes do Porto [Oporto Fine Arts School], directed by Carlos Ramos, who was in charge of selecting the members of the teams assigned to the northern zones.

At the time, Orlando Ribeiro had held a series of master classes in that school and accompanied the students on a trip with the purpose of completing the field work for their class.

Orlando Ribeiro was the geographer who published *Portugal, o Mediterrâneo e o Atlântico* [Portugal, Mediterranean and Atlantic] (1945), a remarkable portrayal of the country which influenced the geographical division of the country into six zones for the purposes of the survey (Ollero, 2001).

Later, the same students participated in the fieldwork and surveys in the north of the country, and also collaborated with the team of Jorge Dias, the most important Portuguese anthropologist, of the time, working on the material that he had made collected.

Filgueiras (1986) adds that another immediate consequence of these influences was that for the first time, a dissertation on architectural theory was accepted for the completion of a degree in Architecture. Titled ‘*Urbanism: A Rural Theme*’, the work was defended by Filgueiras in 1954 and resulted in his selection as coordinator of the team assigned to zone 2 of the survey.

Following in the footsteps of Lixa Filgueiras, Arnaldo Araújo, another member of zone 2 team, presented in 1957 the “the second different thesis”, addressing the issue of rural habitat (Filgueiras, 1986).

It is based on this work that Pedro Vieira de Almeida and Maria Helena Maia (1986) draw attention to the fact that it is precisely Arnaldo Araújo who, together

with Viana de Lima, Fernando Távora and Filgueiras, will launch an integrated study for an agricultural community in Trás-os-Montes, which was presented by the CIAM team from Porto at the Tenth Congress in Dubrovnik in 1958.

Ana Tostões (1997[1994]:165) highlights the importance of this work, directly connecting it to the ongoing survey “for the revision of international method condensate in the approach of the authentic forms of life as an inspiration of architecture”.

For Manuel Mendes (1987), the approach to the survey by both teams assigned to the north is characterised by a more anthropological and less functionalist vision of space and of architectural forms. Later, he will defend that “...the report adopts a territorial approach forms of settlement and life-styles brought about by the take-over of space: land, built environment, buildings” (Mendes, 1990).

This characterisation, however, is one that Pedro Vieira de Almeida and Alexandra Cardoso specifically restrict to the analysis done by the zone 2 team in the region of Trás-os-Montes, an analysis that “largely hinged on ethnological approach”. The authors also consider that this work is the “the richest and most complete of the whole survey” (Almeida and Cardoso, 2002).

### **The relations with the political regime**

The final press proof of *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal* was presented to Salazar himself, and he was particularly interested in the results of the survey conducted by the Architects’ Union.

In fact, according to Nuno Portas (1978), “a curious coincidence of misunderstandings or false pretences” have contributed decisively to the achievement of the survey. While the government believed this action would reinforce the aspects of *Portugueseness* in national architecture, the architects intended instead to “trap an explosive documentary” which would demonstrate the existence of as many ‘traditions’ as there were regions.

The same idea is conveyed in the preface to the 2nd edition of *Arquitectura*

*Popular em Portugal* (Direcção da AAP, 1979), further reinforcing the claim that the equivocation have been intentionally kept by the architects to ensure the continuation of financial support from the government, crucial to the implementation of the project.

The same text also clarifies the role of Francisco Keil do Amaral, who launched the idea of the survey and given a decisive impetus to its realisation when he was president of the Architects' Union.

According to these authors, due to the state of disrepair of many of the surveyed structures, Keil felt a great sense of urgency in the completion of the survey and the registering of the country's vernacular architecture. At the same time, Keil also considered that this survey would constitute an important instrument by which to debunk the myth of a single "national style" (Direcção da AAP, 1979). Following the fall of the political regime in 1974, there is a marked increase in the interpretations of the survey as an act of resistance against the architectural impositions of the regime.

In fact, the very notion that the regime held some sort of 'architectural control' is not consensual. Following Pedro Vieira de Almeida's discussion on this point, the existence of the imposition of a specific architectural language by the Salazar regime has been questioned (Almeida and Maia, 1986; Almeida, 2004).

This author argues that the idea of a "national style or styles", as imposed by the government, constitutes a basic misunderstanding of the Inquérito.

According to Vieira de Almeida, the discovery of diversity and the absence of specific aspects of Portuguese architecture is a direct consequence of the fact that the teams departed for field work "militantly willing to read this diversity, everything that in the national territory was irregular and disjointed". This is the attitude that the preface to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Arquitetura Popular em Portugal* legitimises historically through the "deliberate and circumstantial strategy of counter an alleged official interpretation" (Almeida, 2008:108).

### **The methodology**

The methodological issue is one of the problematic aspects of the survey and, in addition to the contents of its published results, one of the aspects that has received least scholarly attention, since most texts are limited to merely describing factual aspects of the survey and analysing its antecedents and consequences.

Indeed, Vieira de Almeida (1986) is the first author to focus on the survey itself, highlighting the issue of a total absence of common methodology among the survey teams. This will be confirmed by Nuno Teotónio Pereira (1987), one of the team leaders, in the preface to the third edition of *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*.

In contrast, while recognising the diversity of results, Ana Tostões (1997[1994]:160), basing her argument on a document allegedly written by Keil do Amaral, argues for the existence of a prior plan and guidelines common to all groups, “in order to ensure the unity of the work.” These guidelines were based on the recognition of: “current materials and processes in the construction (...), urban structuring (...), weather influences(...), influence of the economic (...), influences of the social organisation (...), habits, practices and other conditioning factors (...) and expression and plastic value of the buildings and the urban settlement” (Keil do Amaral quoted in Ollero, 2001).

Later, Rodrigo Ollero (2001) makes reference to yet another document, which, according to him is also by Keil do Amaral. The document consists of the outline of a letter, written to the teams of the north, which, according to Ollero, “reveals a misunderstanding between the teams of the north and of the south about how the work should be done, especially about the dimension and capacity of what they had to do it, in a way very different from the one that ended up being made”.

Indeed, Manuel Mendes (1987) has defended that the work of the teams in the north was differentiated by a careful approach to spatial values, although we have doubts as to whether this was actually a decision taken by the teams, or whether this is the author’s own interpretation.

### **The consequences of the survey**

Understood from the beginning as being able to provide “the basis for an honest, active and healthy regionalism” (Amaral, 1945), the survey had a great influence on the development of architectural culture in Portugal.

Undertaken at a historical turning-point, both national and internationally, when the critical review of some of the principles of the modern movement, the survey will allow modern architects to recover national history and tradition, which “the architects began to use more freely, without feeling they are betraying the basic principles of modern architecture, some traditional elements that were previously considered unclean and therefore proscribed ...” (Pereira, 2000).

Indeed, after the survey comes a “*third way*” (Portas, 1961) which uses tradition in the construction of modernity.

Commonly cited examples of this third way are the house of Ofir, by Fernando Távora (Portas, 1961), the house of Afonso Barbosa and HICA’s<sup>2</sup> inns by Januário Godinho (Portas, 1978; Tostões, 1997[1994]), the house of Ruben A., by João Andresen (Tostões, 1997). Similarly, the architectural works of Viana de Lima (Fernandez, 1988 [1985]; Almeida and Maia, 1986), Nuno Teotónio Pereira, Nuno Portas, Álvaro Siza and many others are also identified as representative of this third way.

On the other hand, Manuel Mendes stated that the study of vernacular architecture has brought a new equilibrium “that had been deformed by the technological enlightenment of the Modern Movement: the harmony between space, architecture and the life of the inhabitants, the relation between transformation proposals and the existing landscape” (Mendes, 1990).

The rationalism, functionality and connection with the landscape found by the architects in traditional regional architecture had a decisive influence in the directions taken by subsequent Portuguese architecture.

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<sup>2</sup> HICA is the way in which the Hydroelectric of Cávado is referred to.



However, the way in which they built modernity in direct liaison with tradition can vary.

According to Nuno Portas (1978), there are differences of interpretation between the survey teams, “one more cultural, more instrumental or tactical, the other” that “announce the split, that during the 1960s ... divided the supporters of CIAM from the critics of CIAM”, a division that will come into focus precisely on the relationship between tradition and modernity and in the different manners in which it was understood.

Sérgio Fernandez noticed in 1985 that another consequence of the survey was the interest generated among the students of Escola Superior de Belas Artes do Porto (ESBAP), which had as teachers the leaders and other participants of teams of the northern zones. This situation had pedagogical effects (Fernandez, 1988[1985]). The interest in issues related to rural housing came to be reflected in the presentation of several theses, like those of José Dias and Sérgio Fernandez on communities in Bragança and that of José Forjaz about a village in the Alentejo (Almeida and Cardoso, 2002).

Moreover, this experience would be exported to Mozambique, where José Dias and José Forjaz had important technical and administrative responsibilities in government and António Quadros, a painter and poet who also hailing from ESBAP, exerted a unanimously recognised cultural influence. Pedro Vieira de Almeida and Alexandra Cardoso (2002) even suggested the hypothesis that “this multi-functional approach with anthropological and ethnographic roots” had come to influence the implementation and development of “communal villages” in Mozambique.

In fact, in his thesis, Arnaldo Araújo had already argued that it was in the “effort for analysis and detection of specific needs of specific populations, as well as committed to local proposals for intervention” that could “come to settle the basis of a 'new regionalism' (Almeida and Cardoso, 2002) that the Portuguese architect, without having to abandon or reduce (and without being able to do so) his relations with the universal lines (technical and aesthetic) of modern

architecture, should be close to the realities of his people, to interpret their virtues and build a rooted Portuguese architecture” (Araújo, 1957).

The interest in popular architecture which characterises the survey has its roots in other countries, such as the avant-garde Catalan group GATEPAC that in the 1930s published several examples of vernacular architecture in its journal (Toussaint, 2009).

However, the survey is actually avant-garde in its conception and in its systematic implementation.

Note that, as inventoried by Michel Toussaint (2009), both the survey and its publication predated the famous exhibition at MoMA and the book / catalogue by Bernard Rudofsky *Architecture without Architects* (1964). *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal* is also present in the bibliographic references of *House Form and Culture* by Amos Rapoport (1969).

The influence of this work in the five volumes of *Arquitectura Popular Española* [Popular Spanish Architecture] by Carlos Flores published in the end of the 1970s is also well-known.

Indeed, Nuno Teotónio Pereira (2000) notes that one of the most immediate consequences of the survey was its contribution to the expansion of the concept of ‘architectural heritage’ to the popular architecture and urban settlements. It is thus undisputed that the Survey on Regional Architecture is an important record of a rural reality that almost immediately disappeared.

On the other hand, the photographic collection that had been published, provided a renewed formal repertoire of architectural elements which had the unexpected consequence of being appropriated for tourism and have come to appear in the many ‘typical’ constructions in the coastal parts of the country, producing a result antithetical to that originally intended.

### **The current importance of the survey**

The enormous spoliium consisting of notes, drawings and photographs produced during the survey, constitutes an important record of a Portugal that has already

disappeared.

As noted by Nuno Pereira Teotónio (1987), this documentation can support approaches directly related to architecture, but may also constitute an important source of information for other research areas such as history, anthropology, sociology and photography.

With regard to architecture, the survey “constitutes an important point in the history of Portuguese architectural culture as a historical testament of its time representing a serious challenge to our current critical conscience” (Almeida et al. 2009).

At this moment, we have begun to work on a research project within CEAA in the field of architectural theory and criticism, which makes use of the survey as a main working document. The research project, titled *Popular Architecture in Portugal: a critical look*<sup>3</sup> is based in the premise “that the critical discussion of the Inquérito maintains all its relevance, now that the themes of the vernacular and regionalism have again entered into professional discussions” (Almeida et al. 2009).

However, the present text has no other pretension other than to begin to objectivise the real contribution to the study and understanding of the survey and its significance in Portuguese architectural history. With this objective in mind, we attempt a first provisional analysis of the historiography of the Inquérito, identifying chronologically the various contributions and their authors.

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<sup>3</sup> This project, directed by Pedro Vieira de Almeida and funded by FCT [Foundation for Science and Technology] began in April 2010 and will continue until March 2013. A preliminary clarification of the development of this project has been published by CEAA in April, and it also marks the launch of the research work (See Almeida, 2010). In this project, the approach to the survey will be structured and structuring in keeping the study in constant critical dialogue with the architecture of today and in constant interaction with theoretical elements connected to the expressiveness characteristic of some of the modern erudite languages, maintaining in parallel the vernacular and the contemporary.

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