

THE BARREDO'S URBAN RENEWAL STUDY

The third way in Portuguese Historic Cities urban conservation

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Abstract

The Barredo's urban renewal study established a turning point in the planning philosophy of the historic cities in Portugal. The previous plans for Porto historic core defined extensive demolitions of the urban tissue, mixed with a strategy of historic buildings renewal for touristic activities. These preceding approaches reflect the ongoing debate regarding the urban intervention in the historic environments, which followed two possible ways: the traditionalist, proposing the use of historic architectural elements in order to achieve a resemblance with the buildings of the past; or the modernist, which promoted functionalist strategies to solve the traffic and hygiene problems, resulting on the demolition of the outdated existing buildings.

The 1969's study, coordinated by the Architect Fernando Távora, introduced the social dimension, not only by adding the social sciences into the interdisciplinary working team, but also because the local inhabitants were considered as being so important on defining the character and significance of the place as the historic built environment. Concurrently, the traditional buildings which settle the urban environment are also considered as being so important as the monuments. This vision, which reflect the principles of the 1964's «Venice Charter», is undoubtedly a consequence of the personal and professional background of Távora, which participated in the 10th CIAM, and in the Portuguese Regional Architecture Survey. As pointed already in 1961 by Nuno Portas, his carrier gave visibility to an alternative way in the Portuguese Architecture, known as the third way, which was advocated by Távora since 1945, and is reflected on this renewal study.

The study did not produce direct results on the area. However, the new approach influenced directly the operation of the CRUARB office that applied these ideas in Porto Historic Centre after 1974. Further on, this interdisciplinary office played since the 1980's a role model for the Portuguese interventions in historical centres, disseminating indirectly the visionary concepts introduced by the 1969 study.

Keywords: Ribeira-Barredo; Fernando Távora; Porto Historic Centre; 1969 Urban Renewal Study.

Introduction

The 1969 Barredo's urban renewal study established a turning point in the philosophy of planning in the historic centre of Porto, cutting with the usual practice used in the Portuguese historic areas. The previous plans for the area promoted extensive demolitions of the urban fabric, which were mixed with a strategy of historic buildings renewal for commercial and touristic activities.

The 1969 study introduced the social dimension in these urban operations, not only by adding the social sciences into the interdisciplinary working team, but also because the local inhabitants were considered for the first time in the Portuguese context as being crucial on defining the character and significance of the historic landscape. Concurrently, the traditional buildings shaping the urban historic environment were considered as important as the monuments.

The study was coordinated by the architect Fernando Távora (1923-2005) and it reflects his personal and professional background. He participated in several CIAM's, including the fracturing 10th meeting held in Dubrovnik in 1956. Furthermore, it was one of the participants on the Portuguese Regional Architecture Survey (1955-1961), revealing the duality between traditional and modern which was present in the Portuguese architectural debate at the time. As pointed in 1961 by Nuno Portas, his carrier gave visibility to an alternative way in the Portuguese Architecture, which was already proposed in 1945 by Távora.

Is then possible to argue that this study represents a third way in Portuguese architectural practice, because it does not follow the traditionalist vision of the Portuguese house or the hygienist vision dominant in the new generation of modern architects. It further proposes a combined approach which represents a post-CIAM vision regarding the urban interventions in the historic city.

Background

The development of the study in the decade of 1960's is a reflex of the architectural and social debate which was progressively growing since the previous decades. The international vision of the Modern Movement was challenged by a younger generation which discovered a contextualist approach towards architecture and urban planning. Furthermore, the critics of the functionalist urbanism were backed up by the field of sociology, which pointed the decrease of the urban living vitality as a consequence of the Athens Charter urban zoning.

Additionally, Bernard Rudofsky organized in 1964 the exhibition «Architecture without Architects»¹, giving visibility to the usually neglected vernacular buildings, which were presented as a consequence of the plurality of the contextual environment.

This global perspective led to a renewed interest in the historic city and in the vernacular architecture. Concurrently, it was performed the revision of the heritage concept through the 1964's «Venice Charter», which included on it the traditional buildings, seen until then as a minor field of heritage.

This renewed interest on the traditional city and in the contextual approach allowed a favourable framework for the development of pioneer experiences on historic centres conservation and to the revision of the heritage laws in several European countries, with relevance to the Italian experiences developed since the 1950's (Albrecht & Magrin, 2015).

Fernando Távora

The strategic vision embodied in the 1969's study is undoubtedly influenced by the principles of the «Venice Charter», but also by the personal and professional background of Távora. His graduation as architect was made during the end of the 1940's and the beginning of the 1950's in a modernist architectural

¹ In the New York City Museum of Modern Art – MoMA.

environment at the Porto School of Fine Arts. He is also recognized as being one of the founders of what is known as the Porto's School of Architecture (Fernandes, 2010). Alongside, his practice as architect reveals a miscegenation between modernist and traditional influences, which represents one of the major characteristics of his work. This dichotomy is expressed in the project of the Santa Maria da Feira Market, that was presented on the 10th CIAM and on which he crossed the modernist spatial concepts with the vernacular roof shapes.

Other Portuguese architects² attended this symbolic CIAM, which critically reviewed the modernist visions of architecture and urbanism. Those architects presented the «Plan of a Rural Community in *Trás-os-Montes*» that was in accordance with some of the Team X presentations and reveals their involvement in the Portuguese Regional Architecture Survey which was undergoing and on which Távora was one of the regional team leaders (Maia & Cardoso, 2014). The plan presented at the CIAM was the architecture degree thesis of Arnaldo Araújo and it allows to perceive the growing number of graduation projects approaching this thematic in the Porto School of Fine Arts, which started with the pioneer thesis of Octávio Lixa Filgueiras, other of the participants in this CIAM and also a team leader in the Regional Survey (Almeida & Cardoso, 2007).

The Regional Architecture Survey expresses the new concept of heritage under development and reinforces the vernacular influences present in Távora's work. Additionally, the survey also introduced a timid social perspective recurring to the support of an anthropologist which was included in the global team.

It is also possible to root this contextualist vision in the work of Carlos Ramos, teacher and head of Architecture in the Porto School of Fine Arts. As wrote by Maia:

(...) the Olhão workers' housing development, designed by Carlos Ramos circa 1925, made a clear reference to vernacular architecture of that region. Carlos Ramos, who Pedro Vieira de Almeida identified as the root

² The Portuguese team was composed by the architects Viana de Lima, Fernando Távora and Octávio Lixa Filgueiras, by the trainee architects Arnaldo Araújo and Carvalho Dias and by the architecture student Alberto Neves.

of his concept of critical internationalism, travelled through Portugal with the geographer Orlando Ribeiro and together they worked on a private survey of national architecture. (Maia, 2012, p.252)

The practice and vision of Carlos Ramos can be pointed as the seed which helps to understand this place rooted approach which is encouraged by the Porto's School. Furthermore, he also is on the genesis of the attempts developed in the Portuguese Architectural context in order to overpass the conflict between nationalism and internationalism. In this framework, the text «*O Problema da Casa da Portuguesa*» [the Problem of the Portuguese House], wrote by Távora and first published in 1945, presents the emergence of an alternative, rooted in Carlos Ramos by employing '(...) *tradition in the construction of modernity.*' (Maia, 2012, p.253)

For a Portuguese Architecture today (...) a serious, concise, well-oriented and realistic work is required, whose studies could perhaps be grouped into three orders: a) the Portuguese environment; b) the existing Portuguese Architecture; c) the World Modern Architecture and their construction possibilities. (Távora, 1945)

The work of Távora is exactly an example of the alternative path for architecture as pointed by Portas in 1961, which is implied as a third way³. This background, based on the new concepts of heritage, critic of modernism and with a social perspective, is crucial to understand the innovative approach developed by Távora in the 1969 study for Porto.

Porto's Historic Centre Renovation background

In the study, Távora critically reviewed some of the plans developed for this historic neighbourhood between 1949 and 1962. Three plans are presented: «*Estudo de arranjo e salubridade da zona do Barredo, Ribeira e Escadas dos Guindais*» [Arrangement and salubrity study for the Barredo, Ribeira and

³ Was not possible to identify when this implicit Third Way was clearly denominated. However, Távora expressed it in a 1986's interview (Fernandes, 2010, p.99).

The attitude towards traditional fabrics embodied on these plans was current in the Portuguese context, where the generality of the Urban Plans still suffered from the hygienist perspective as pointed by Margarida Souza Lôbo (1995). According to this author, it is also possible to identify some conservationist interventions, focused however on the monuments or on the 'typicality' of their surroundings, revealing exclusively historical-touristic concerns and ignoring the social component.

The Portuguese situation follows the international current practice. The exception can be found on a few pioneering studies carried out in Italy in the 1950's and 1960's, namely in the city of Bologna where the social component was also one of the basic elements in the historic city rehabilitation strategy (Albrecht & Magrin, 2015). The Bologna Plan was completed in the same year of the study of Fernando Távora and its urban intervention was instituted in the 70's and 80's as a good-practice case study and spread throughout Europe (Flores, 1998).

The 1969 Study

The «*Estudo de renovação urbana do Barredo*» [Barredo's Urban Renewal Study], was coordinated by the Architect Fernando Távora in the Housing Services of the Porto City Council⁴ between 1968 and 1969 and presented in May of this last year.

The study selected the social and physical depreciated neighbourhood of Barredo, inserted in the core of the Porto's historic area, on the slope located between the Douro River and the Cathedral neighbourhood (figure 2). On it 14 blocks were identified (figure 3), from which two were selected as pilot studies (Q.I and Q.III). Despite being a City's Council study, it established the bridge with the Academia and with the population. The work was developed based on

⁴ The complete description of the Housing Services was: *Câmara Municipal do Porto, Direcção de Serviços de Habitação – Repartição de Construção de Casas.*

previous surveys made by the social services students between 1963 and 1968 (addressing the social and economic dimension) and by the architecture students of the ESBAP [Porto Fine Arts Superior School] during the academic year of 1967/1968 (addressing the physical dimension).



Figure 2. *Foto 9 – Vista geral da zona* [General view of the area] in (Távora, 1969, p.001)

It is important to stress the role of Octávio Lixa Filgueiras, colleague of Távora in the Porto Fine Arts School, where both were teachers. The humanist vision of Filgueiras towards housing design lead him to propose a discipline of Analytical Architecture [*Arquitectura Analítica*] where his students conducted several urban surveys since 1961 (Almeida & Cardoso, 2007, p.33) and which Távora used for the 1969 study.



Figure 3. *Mapa 1 - Zona, Sector e Quarteirões* [Map 1 - Area, Sector and Blocks] in (Távora, 1969, p.087). The dark hatched blocks are the selected as pilot studies.

The surveys unveiled a terrific framework of excessive densification, with entire families living painfully in one room. This overcrowded framework was aggravated by the ruinous state of conservation of most buildings and by the absence of minimum basic sanitation conditions.

The philosophy underlying the intervention is based on understanding that renewal implies innovating, giving a new life to the existing built structures, as Távora stated in the study:

We believe, firstly, that the physical and social morphology of the sector must be changed by a dynamic, secure and permanent process of renewal at all levels, thus giving the word renewal its true meaning, which is to continue innovating, in a constant movement of modification for better conditions, but respecting the positive values that may exist and that should not, therefore, be destroyed.

(...) And in these few words, renewal (or continue innovating⁵) with a global and open spirit, contains the whole essence of the option we have chosen to guide our proposal. (Távora, 1969, pp.46-47)

This means that the character of the place, socially and physically, must not be disrupted. But it also means that when new design proposals are needed, they should be made compatible with the pre-existing structures, refusing false mimetic solutions.

In this sense, Távora expresses his complete agreement with the principles of intervention proposed by the architect Luís Cunha in a project developed to fill an urban void located in a street of the Porto historic core [*Rua do Cimo do Muro*]:

It will be therefore the criteria of sensitivity to the fundamental values of the landscape that will guide the conception of the new construction and not only the historical reconstitution, in this case impossible, or the affirmation of modernity by modernity. (Távora, 1969, p.43, citing Luís Cunha)



Figure 4. *Quarteirão Q III. Planta do Nível 2: Estado atual e proposta* [Q III Block. Level 2 Plan: Current situation and proposal] in (Távora, 1969, p.110)

⁵ In the original words: '*renovar significa continuar-inovando*'.

The detailed projects for the two pilot-study blocks manifest a strategy based on the reduction of the density of occupation and on the refurbishment of the buildings, improving their living conditions through the introduction of toilets and reorganization of the dwellings inner space (figure 4).

At the urban scale, the study approached this sector as being inserted on a region and as constituting a living part of the city. Thus, it proposed the requalification of the sector's public space, fundamental to improve the local urban image, and, consequently, the quality of life. It also envisages the improvement of the connections with the neighbouring areas, aiming to overcome the ghetto situation previously identified (figure 5).

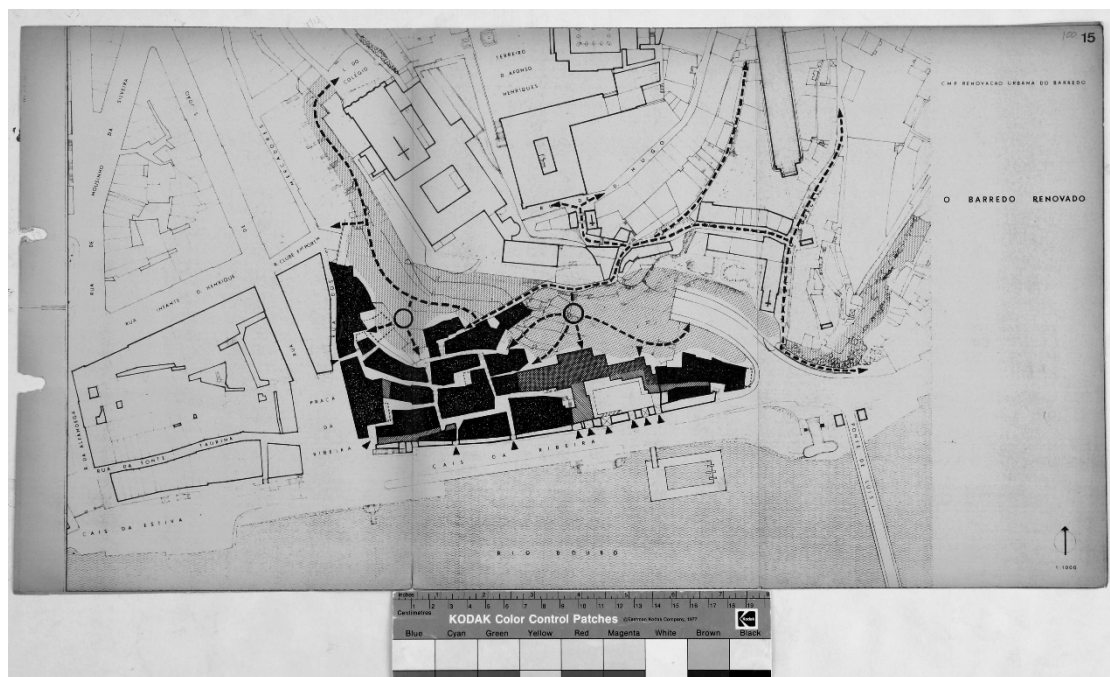


Figure 5. *Mapa 15 – O Barredo renovado: Proposta de ligações com a zona envolvente* [Renewed Barredo: Proposal of connections with the surrounding areas] in (Távora, 1969, p.100)

The influence of the study

The new approach of Távora towards the urban planning of Portuguese historic centres also embodied a defiant attitude to the policy established by the authoritarian regime that ruled the country at the time. This can both explain the reason why the study was not implemented in the epoch and why it established the basis for the new operations which started in Porto immediately after the April's 1974 revolution, which established the democratic regime in Portugal. It made possible the application of the study's approach by the CRUARB – *Comissariado para a Renovação Urbana da Área de Ribeira/Barredo*, an office created in September of 1974 to lead the urban renewal operation in the Historic Centre of Porto. The CRUARB applied the multidisciplinary strategy and expanded the previous intervention area to the Ribeira quarter, as suggested in the 1969 study. In the early years of the office, Távora collaborated as consultant of the operation along with other renamed architects, like Siza Vieira. Further on, the multidisciplinary approach implemented by the CRUARB office was used since the 1980's as a model for the interventions in the Portuguese historic centres, disseminating indirectly the visionary concepts introduced by the 1969 study (Flores, 1998).

Conclusion

The visionary study coordinated and presented by Fernando Távora in May 1969, results from his previous personal and professional experience in the field. It was later consolidated as a model for Portuguese interventions in historic centres and, above all, incorporated the most advanced spirit of its time.

It is clear by the philosophy of intervention applied that it corresponds to a humanist and pragmatic approach, avoiding both the dogmatism of nationalism and internationalism. It also reveals the crossing of tradition and modernity which was characteristic of Távora and its colleagues, and which emerged as a third way in the Portuguese architectural debate and practice. The expression

«continue innovating» used by Távora in the Study represents exactly this approach.

Moreover, the social integration, the conservation of the existing urban context and the attitude towards heritage, are in line with the revision of the modern movement advocated by the younger generations of architects. Is then possible to affirm that this study was clearly in the front line of the historic centres' conservation of its time.

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