

“It just might be that by making a single new street, a single, wholly unnecessary street, be it wide or straight or, better yet, narrow, but operating like a fissure in the *quateroes*... The important thing would be that this new street remain within the neighborhood, shoehorned in if possible, in such a way that it made people’s journeys to and from school more fluid, that it helped them get to the corners and find the access points and above all that it sharpened both their perceptions and their uses of this immense and largely impenetrable neighborhood. Then maybe the public facilities you’re proposing for it could serve as quasi-clearings in the forest, milestones, or porticoes...and perhaps they’d make more sense.”

This is how, some months ago, I was beginning to think about Aida El-Attar’s senior thesis focusing on outfitting a neighborhood in Maputo, Mozambique, where she had spent a considerable amount of time. This may be one of those teachable moments that so rarely present themselves in our school, I thought, an opportunity to explore the most fundamental questions.

The engineers of the various NGOs operating in Maputo with whom Aida had worked deem it vital that the city’s neighborhoods be equipped with basic infrastructure for public health and delivery of services (running water and electricity) but they are continually stymied trying to thread those services through a thick maze of narrow passageways. Their solution consists of devising ditches lightweight and flexible enough that they can run down the middle of these passageways. On the other side the social service folks who work with them want nothing more than to outfit the neighborhood with the kinds of public facilities required to respond to residents’ needs and their sole criterion for situating those facilities consists of exploiting opportunities wherever they’re found. Do these two things, infrastructure and public facilities, have anything to do with one another?

For that to be true, it’s necessary to first inquire about the characteristics of the neighborhoods where these European benefactors operate. The physical conditions there shed a great deal of light on this question.

“Potser només que s'obris un carrer, un carrer que no cal que sigui ample i dret, millor encara, així d'estret i com un estrip en mig dels quarteroes. Però el que sí cal és que el facis circular per dins del barri, si pot ser pel mig perquè puguin sorgir les escoles, relacionar les cruïlles, orientar els accessos i en definitiva millorar la percepció i l'ús d'aquest immens barri ara massa impenetrable. Aleshores, els teus equipaments enfilats i posats com clarianes potser guanyaran un altre sentit...”

Així va ser com vaig començar a pensar, ara fa uns quants mesos, que el Projecte Final de Carrera de l'Aïda El-Attar Vilalta dedicat a equipar un barri de Maputo on ella havia fet una llarga estada, podia ser una d'aquelles rares oportunitats per discutir assumptes... habituals.

Els enginyers de les ONG que operen a Maputo i amb els quals l'Aïda havia treballat plantegen que és urgent dotar els barris de les infraestructures mínimes de sanejament i conducció de serveis (aigua i llum). Però l'estructura compacte de l'assentament ho fa molt difícil. Els assistents socials que els acompanyen, per la seva banda, volen aixecar equipaments necessaris per donar sortida al potencial de la gent i els proposen segons les oportunitat que troben. Un i altre assumpte, podrien tenir res a veure?

Quina és la naturalesa urbana dels barris on actuen els benefactors europeus? El treball d'aproximació analítica a la realitat material posa de manifest un panorama diàfan: com en tota gran ciutat crescuda acceleradament amb els excedents humans de tot tipus de circumstàncies (i tan habitual les darreres dècades a totes les latituds del

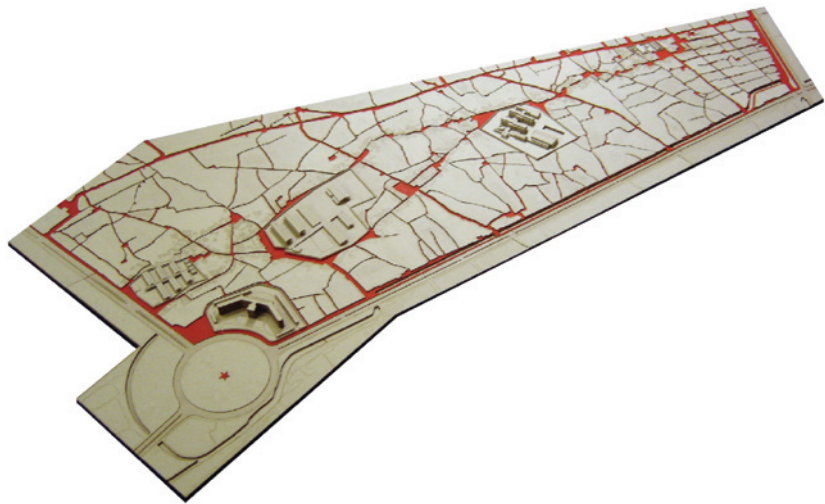
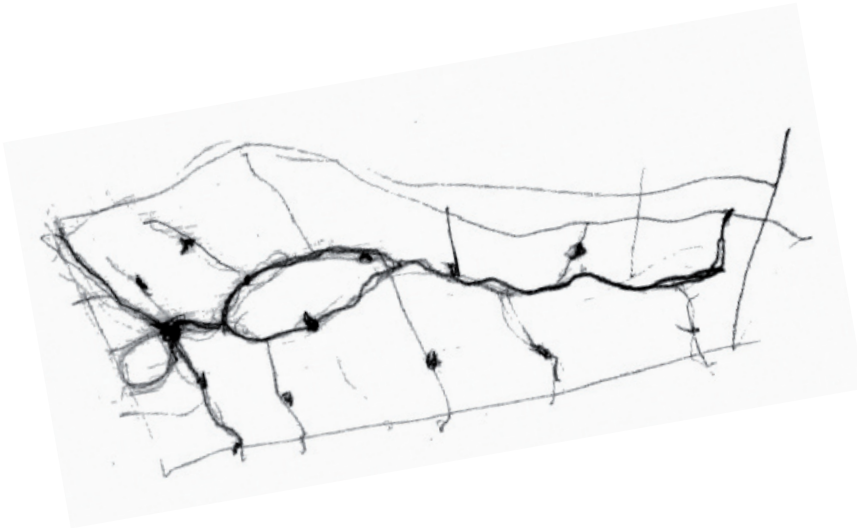


1. Secció típica del barri de Maxaquene

1. Typical section of the Maxaquene neighborhood

2. Scale model and proposal outline

2. Maqueta i esquema de la proposta



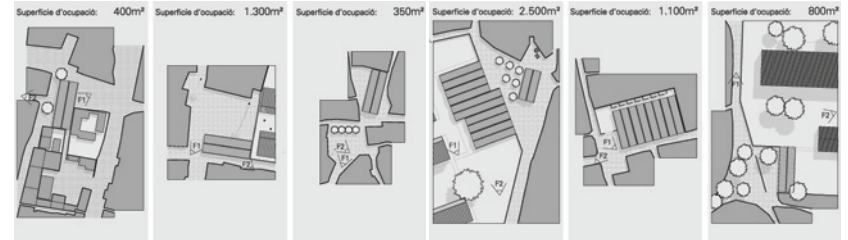
The city that lies beyond its colonial and post-colonial districts (which themselves make up an ever smaller portion of the whole) is organized around two basic typologies: broad, straight avenues and everything else. Together the broad avenues form a comprehensive grid over a vast region in macro formations of a minimum of 1.5 miles square. Government institutions then gravitate toward these avenues, often setting up shop around clearly visible traffic circles. In reality they are thoroughfares for thru-traffic en route to farms, airports and other strategic locales.

What remains is the city of the common folk. As in any large city the world over that in recent decades has been bursting with the human surplus born of every conceivable circumstance (famine, war, agrarian reform...), unregulated growth inevitably becomes the operative model. What one ends up with are huge, variegated honeycombs of homogeneous, illegal/extra-legal self-built settlements. They achieve greater and greater levels of saturation until they come to represent an impenetrable network of social groupings and clans (*los quarteroes*). In the midst of this maze only the schools are large enough venues to stand apart with their simple pavilions surrounded by expansive patios and ringed by high walls. Like enclaves amidst an inscrutable tangle of alleyways, they appear to be both the only large landlords and the central institutions of the society. Why not look to them, as well, to develop my hypothesis about creating a new street?

I've often been struck by the way architecture schools produce dozens, even hundreds of final projects of remarkable variety in terms of subject and location, but rarely do the proposals reaching the commissions ever focus on structural issues affecting the neighborhoods where they're sited, and even less so if they're sited in far-off societies with weak national development schemes. The place Aida chose for her final project and where she ultimately completed it, the Maxaquene A neighborhood, forms part of the 80 percent of housing in the Mozambican capital of Maputo that is self-built. That was something well worth pausing to consider.

Translation: Philip Kay

món), el creixement dit informal resulta el farciment inevitable d'una ciutat que en els seus districtes no post-colonials (ja ara, la immensa majoria) funciona combinant dos tipus elementals: la gran avinguda rectilínia i la resta. La suma de grans avingudes malla a l'engròs un territori immens (en formacions macro de 2x2 km com a mínim) i sobre elles graviten les institucions de l'estat (sovint damunt enormes rond-points ben visibles). Són carreteres per les circulacions de pas vers explotacions, aeroport... La resta, la ciutat de la gent, en la mesura en que s'estén sobre una plana, és un rusc immens, indestriable, homogeni i intercanviable d'assentaments il·legals/al·legals en autoconstrucció arribats a graus de saturació diversos, sovint excessius... Els primers són elements clarament identificables en els seus components. Els segons, en canvi, presenten un gra insondable d'agrupaments, socials i de clan (els quarteroes). Enmig d'aquest laberint, uns únics grans



3. Seqüència d'equipaments vinculats a l'espai públic

3. Series of facilities linked to public spaces

recintes interiors, les escoles, destaquen amb els seus pavellons voltats de grans patis i tanques. Enclavats enmig del mar inescrutable dels carrerons menuts, semblen els únics grans propietaris i també les institucions de referència...

Sovint m'ha cridat l'atenció que cada curs, a l'Escola, es fabriquen desenes per no dir que centenars de projectes final de carrera amb una notable varietat de temes i llocs però molts pocs cops les propostes que ens arriben a les Comissions són qüestions estructurals relacionades amb els barris on es situen, i menys encara a països llunyans amb societats que presenten escenaris d'urbanització fràgil. El lloc on ella volia fer i ha acabat fent el seu PFC, el barri de Maxaquene A, és part del 80 % d'hàbitat autoconstruït que caracteritza la ciutat de Maputo, la capital de Moçambic. Valia la pena aturar-se i pensar.

4. Maputo's urban morphology and placement of the Maxaquene neighborhood
5. Sections of the Maxaquene neighborhood's main and secondary streets
6. Orthophoto of the current state of the Maxaquene neighborhood

4. Morfologia urbana de Maputo i situació del barri de Maxaquene
5. Seccions del carrer principal i secundària del barri de Maxaquene, Maputo
6. Ortofoto de l'estat actual del barri de Maxaquene

