

From Royaumont to Caxinas: Fernando Távora and the Response to the Complexity of Reality

By Rui Seco *

Returning from the Royaumont Team 10 meeting, in 1962, Portuguese architect Fernando Távora published in the journal 'Arquitectura' his testimony, as observer in the encounter, reporting the impossibility of consensus between the participants. With somewhat disappointment, Távora related the big difference from the Charte d'Athènes era, three decades earlier, and expressed that "a formal conclusion, similar to that remarkable document, is absolutely impossible, almost foolish". Although he considered indispensable to achieve operative ideas that could synthesize and guide architectural practice, he stated that "times and dimensions have changed... Reality is more diverse (...) Knowledge about mankind has increased, societies phenomena are beginning to be understood, and simultaneously everything gets more complicated. It is a time of doubt and research, of drama and mystery (...), not a time to conclusions." These questions permeated throughout the intense program of the meeting. As Candilis presented his 25,000 dwellings masterplan for Toulouse, Coderch objected that for a single house he required six months to develop a project, moment that, according to Fernando Távora, synthesized the zeitgeist of the meeting. One decade later, Álvaro Siza, a former disciple of Távora, developed his plan for a small group of houses in Caxinas. A number of critics and historians state that there is a radical transformation in Portuguese city in the early 1970s. One of these authors, Paulo Varela Gomes, sustains that Caxinas is the turning point in that transformation. This article intends to perceive this change and to identify how the absence of references and absolute certainties, in that time of doubt and research, led to a new way of thinking and designing the city. Could this be read as an answer to Távora's concerns about the lack of a conclusion in Royaumont?

Introduction

In the turning of the 1960s, modern architecture was facing new issues and challenges, posed by a changing society. Three decades after the first CIAM meetings and declarations, in a deeply transformed world, modernist ideas were being questioned, as the results of its put in practice in many European cities' reconstruction after the II World War, creating new neighbourhoods and cities, were being criticized.

This paper intends to perceive the profound context change that occurred in that period, from the reading of a 1962 text by Fernando Távora in the Portuguese journal 'Arquitectura',¹ reporting his presence in the Royaumont Team 10 meeting.²

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1. The journal 'Arquitectura' was the main platform for divulgation and debate on architecture in Portugal, along with 'Binário', the other Portuguese architecture journal of the time. For an

It contextualizes this text in Távora's path and at the time it was produced, and relates it with the profound transformation of the Portuguese city that would take place in the following years.

Fernando Távora (1923-2005) was a Portuguese architect, born in Porto, that in addition to his design practice for more than 50 years, also taught and wrote about architecture, being strongly influential in the Portuguese context of the second half of the 20th century. He had a central role in the establishing of the 'Escola do Porto', an approach that developed a distinctive way of intervening in the territory, by valorising pre-existing structures and the history of places - Kenneth Frampton called it critical regionalism, Portuguese critics named it a third way, a synthesis between modern and tradition.³

From the considerations of Távora, with direct influence in his architecture, to the development of a collective awareness revealed in the rethinking and reutilization of design instruments from the pre-modernist urbanism, a single decade later, there was an important evolution of the Portuguese urban design, with notable expression in some specific examples.

Álvaro Siza, a former disciple of Távora, was one of the architects that created urban fabric with renewed design principles. His plan for a small group of houses in Caxinas, Vila do Conde, was highlighted by Paulo Varela Gomes, one of the Portuguese main critics and historians of this period, as a turning point in the Portuguese city transformation.⁴

The analysis of this intervention and of the design approaches and city concepts that were used in it and in other notable Portuguese urban projects of the period is here conducted with the intent to perceive this change and to identify how the absence of references and absolute certainties, in that time of doubt and research, led to a new way of thinking and designing the city. Could this be read as an answer to Távora's concerns about the lack of a conclusion at Royaumont?

Framework and Background

In order to understand the questions presented it is important to perceive the context in which Fernando Távora writes the text about the Royaumont meeting and its relation with the framework of his professional and personal path and his production. Three main bibliographic threads are important for this contextualisation.

Firstly, the analysis of Fernando Távora's work, held by numerous authors, due to his importance in Portuguese contemporary architecture, both as a practitioner and as an influencer.

insight at the approach on the city on these journals, see: R. Seco, "Antes do Recomeço: a Cidade nas Revistas *Arquitetura e Binário*" *Cidades, Comunidades e Territórios* 32 (2016): 133-143.

2. F. Távora, "O Encontro de Royaumont," *Arquitetura* 79 (1963): 1.

3. K. Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 313-327.

4. P. Varela Gomes, "Arquitetura, os Últimos Vinte e Cinco Anos," in *História da Arte Portuguesa* (ed.) Paulo Pereira (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1995), 547-577.

Daniele Vitale, Max Risselada, William Curtis and César Portela, among others, within an international scope, wrote about Távora, relating his architecture with the specificities of Portuguese isolation, culture and ancient values, addressing his international relations and his interactions within Team 10, and emphasizing his role in the definition and establishment of the ‘*Escola do Porto*’ movement and his relation with figures like Carlos Ramos, Álvaro Siza, Sérgio Fernandez and Eduardo Souto de Moura.⁵

Several Portuguese authors wrote about Távora’s work and influence as well, creating a solid documentary base on the theme, notably Alexandre Alves Costa, Bernardo Ferrão, José António Bandeirinha, Francisco Barata, Manuel Mendes, Gonçalo Byrne and Eduardo Fernandes, who analyzed multiple aspects of his architecture, writings and principles, and the evolution of his perspective throughout his life and career.⁶

Secondly, it is of major relevance the thinking of Fernando Távora himself, whom, from his early years, reflected on the context in which he worked, the confrontation between a radical modernity and an everlasting rurality, between an open and varied world and a country closed upon itself, between a solid and stable knowledge about construction and the quick development of new techniques.

His architecture is the result of his perception of the contradictions and conflicts of the complex world he lived in, which he also registered in his writings. ‘*O Problema da Casa Portuguesa (The Problem of the Portuguese House)*’ and ‘*Da Organização do Espaço (The Organization of Space)*’ are particularly

5. D. Vitale, “Fernando Távora: Correspondences and Fictions,” in *Fernando Távora Permanent Modernity* (ed.) José António Bandeirinha (Guimarães: Associação Casa da Arquitectura, 2012); M. Risselada, “Fernando Távora in the context of Team10,” in *Fernando Távora Permanent Modernity* (ed.) José António Bandeirinha (Guimarães: Associação Casa da Arquitectura, 2012); W. J. R. Curtis “Memória e Criação: O Parque e o Pavilhão de Tênis de Fernando Távora na Quinta da Conceição 1956-60,” in *Fernando Távora Permanent Modernity* (ed.) José António Bandeirinha (Guimarães: Associação Casa da Arquitectura, 2012), 26-37; C. Portela, “Perfil de Fernando Távora” *DPA Departament de Projectes Arquitectònics UPC* 14 (1998): 14-17.

6. A. A. Costa, “Caption for a Drawing by Nadir Afonso,” in *Fernando Távora* (ed.) Luiz Trigueiros (Lisbon: Editorial Blau, 1993); B. Ferrão, “Tradition and Modernity in Fernando Távora’s work 1947/1987,” in *Fernando Távora* (ed.) Luiz Trigueiros (Lisbon: Editorial Blau, 1993); J. A. Bandeirinha, “Fernando Távora: Permanent Modernity,” in *Fernando Távora Permanent Modernity* (ed.) José António Bandeirinha (Guimarães: Associação Casa da Arquitectura, 2012); F. Barata, “La Regla y la Excepción. Dos Proyectos de Távora para Porto,” *DPA Departament de Projectes Arquitectònics UPC* 14 (1998): 54-63; E. Fernandes, “The Tectonic Shift in Fernando Távora’s Work in the Post-CIAM Years,” in *Revisiting Post-Ciam Generation: Debates, Proposals and Intellectual Framework. Proceedings* (ed.) Nuno Correia, Maria H. Maia and Rute Figueiredo (Porto: CEAA/ESAP-CESAP, 2019), 120-134; J. B. Távora, “Tradição e Modernidade na Obra de Fernando Távora 1947/1987,” in *Fernando Távora* (ed.) Luiz Trigueiros (Lisbon: Editorial Blau, 1993); M. Mendes, “Fernando Távora: O meu caso,” in *Fernando Távora Permanent Modernity* (ed.) José António Bandeirinha (Guimarães: Associação Casa da Arquitectura, 2012); E. Fernandes, *A Escolha do Porto: Contributos para a Atualização de uma Ideia de Escola*. PhD Thesis (Portugal: University of Minho, 2011).

significant texts, as well, naturally, as ‘*O encontro de Royaumont (The Royaumont meeting)*’, the central subject of this paper.⁷

A third bibliographic thread, also important for this thematic, is the study of Portuguese urban development in the period under consideration.

In this field, several historians and critics have analysed and written about the Portuguese city, like Nuno Portas, on his own and together with Manuel Mendes, who described the evolution of the 1960’s and 1970’s, both in the disciplinary ground and in the non-formal, *casual*, urban growth, mainly focused in the two metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto.⁸

As other authors like Paulo Varela Gomes, José Manuel Fernandes and José Lamas, they identified the development of new ways of designing urban fabric by a generation of skilled and well-informed architects, such as Álvaro Siza, Nuno Teotónio Pereira, Vítor Figueiredo, Manuel Salgado, José Charters Monteiro and Manuel Vicente, among others, in some cases in association with foreign colleagues, like Vittorio Gregotti and Aldo Rossi.⁹ Their propositions reviewed modernist urban models and solutions and their focus in the implantation of isolated buildings, rehabilitating the shaping of urban form and the reuse of urban elements like the street, the square and the city block.

These main bibliographic contributions enable a perception of the context in which the report about the Royaumont meeting by Fernando Távora was published – taking in fact active part in it -, with the loss of the previously solid references that supported urban design in the post-war period, and frames the subsequent developments that took place in Portugal in the following years.

From this comprehensive perception, the paper develops a detailed reading of Távora’s text, basing not only on his description and observations about the meeting but also on the findings and insights that he advances and the over-all sense which crosses through his writing.

Távora’s perceptiveness is here the base point for an interpretation of those fundamental changes in Portuguese city, the following and final stride of this study, in which are analysed noteworthy case studies.

7. F. Távora, “O Problema da Casa Portuguesa,” in *Cadernos de Arquitectura* #1 (Lisbon: Editorial Organizações, 1947); F. Távora, *Da Organização do Espaço* (Porto: FAUP Publicações, 1996).

8. N. Portas, “A Arquitectura da Habitação no Século XX Português,” in *Arquitectura do Século XX: Portugal* (ed.) Annette Becker, Ana Tostões and Wilfried Wang (Lisbon: Prestel, 1997); Portas and M. Mendes, *Arquitectura Portuguesa Contemporânea: Anos Sessenta/ Anos Oitenta* (Porto: Fundação de Serralves, 1991); Portas and Mendes, *Portugal: Architecture 1965-1990* (Paris: Editions du Moniteur, 1992).

9. Op. Cit.; J. R. G. Lamas, *Morfologia Urbana e Desenho da Cidade* (Lisbon: F.C. Gulbenkian/J.N.I.C.T., 1993).

‘The Royaumont Meeting’ Report

In July 1963, the ‘*Arquitectura*’ journal published a report about the Royaumont Team 10 meeting by the Portuguese architect Fernando Távora (Figure 1), classifying it as a testimony.¹⁰

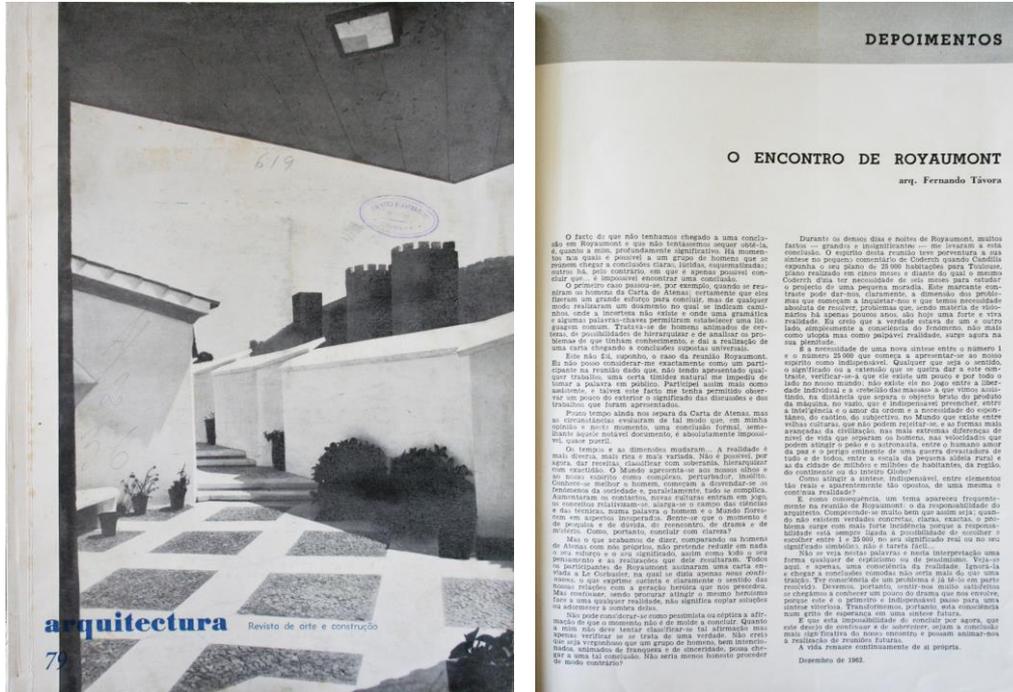


Figure 1. Cover of ‘*Arquitectura*’ and “*The Royaumont Meeting*” Report
Source: *Arquitectura* #79.

It was a single page text, with no images, which ‘*The Royaumont Meeting*’ in which Fernando Távora expressed his ideas about the meeting and the impossibility of obtaining conclusions or gathering consensus between the participants.

Although having already previously participated in other CIAM meetings, Távora wrote that he considered himself a mere observer in this encounter, looking from outside to the work presented and the discussions that took place, and being in this position he reflected about the differences between then and the time of the Athens Charter, three decades earlier, when “*it was possible for a group of men to reach clear, lucid, schematized conclusions*”, indicating “*paths where uncertainty does not exist*”.

For Távora, and despite the relatively short time that since then had elapsed, circumstances had evolved in such a way that reaching “*a formal conclusion, similar to that remarkable document, is absolutely impossible, almost foolish*”.

In his words, “*times and dimensions have changed... Reality is more diverse, richer, more variegated. It isn’t possible, for now, to give prescriptions, to classify with certainty. The world presents to our eyes as complex, disturbing, unsettling.*”

10. Távora, “O Encontro de Royaumont,” 1963, 1.

*Mankind is better known, societies' phenomena are beginning to be understood, and simultaneously everything gets more complicated. (...) One feels that it is a time of search and doubt, of reconnection, of drama and mystery. How, therefore, to conclude clearly?"*¹¹

This perception, though, did not make him consider the situation pessimistic or sceptical: *"In my view, one should not try to classify such a statement but only check whether it is true. I don't think it is a disgrace that a group of well-intentioned men, driven by frankness and sincerity, can come to such a conclusion. Would it not be less honest to do otherwise?"*

Távora valued the efforts of the *Athens' men*, the heroic generation, and their significance, their thoughts and their achievements, as the men of Royaumont also did, all signing a letter to them, or more specifically to Le Corbusier, stating *"nous continuons"*.

To continue in that innovative spirit, to persevere without relaxing or copying their solutions, was their understanding of their relationship with the older generation.

This was not, however, a simple and consensual path to follow, as Fernando Távora expresses, reporting one episode that, in his view, could synthesize the spirit of the meeting.

When Georges Candilis presented his 25,000 dwellings masterplan for Toulouse-le-Mirail, Coderch objected that he needed six months to develop the project for a single small house, in a strong contrast that Távora felt gave the dimension of the problems that architects faced: *"I think the truth was in both sides, simply the awareness of the phenomenon, no longer as utopia but as a tangible reality, now appears in its fullness."* (...) *"It's the need for a synthesis between the number 1 and the number 25,000 that starts to present to our spirit as indispensable. Whatever is the meaning, the significance or the extension that one could give to this contrast, it will turn out to exist all over our world."*

Architects responsibility was a thematic that arose at the meeting as a consequence of these questions, in face of the absence of a concrete, clear, accurate truth, and the need to make options, real or symbolic.

With somewhat disappointment for this impasse, Távora considered that achieving a synthesis would be indispensable in the future, and stated that the awareness of the problem was already a step towards it, which should be transformed in a cry of hope.

"Life is continually reborn from itself", ends Távora his testimony.

As an Observer, Looking from the Outside

In 1962 Fernando Távora was no longer a young architect. At the Royaumont meeting, he had turned 39 years old and was an already experienced practitioner, with several and diversified built work, some of it of considerable scale, like the Ramalde housing neighbourhood (Figure 2). He was a teacher in the Porto Faculty

11. Op. Cit.

of Architecture for twelve years, and he had published significant architecture writings, like “*O Problema da Casa Portuguesa*” (1945).¹²

He also had already attended the CIAM congresses in Hoddesdon, in 1951, in Aix-en-Provence, in 1953, in Dubrovnik, in 1956, and in Otterlo, in 1959.¹³ In Dubrovnik, he presented collectively, with Viana de Lima, João Andresen, Arnaldo Araújo and Octávio Lixa Filgueiras the project for a rural community, and in Otterlo, two of his most recent projects, the Vila da Feira market and the House in Ofir,¹⁴ that were positively appraised in both situations.¹⁵



Figure 2. *Ramalde Housing Neighbourhood*

Source: Rui Seco, 2009.

For these reasons, it is somehow surprising the statement Távora makes in his report that he could not consider himself exactly a participant in the Royaumont meeting, “*given that, not having presented any work, a certain natural shyness prevented me from speaking in public*”, having then remained taking part as an observer, which “*permitted me to look from the outside the significance of the debate and the presented work.*”¹⁶

This purely honest and transparent, slightly disconcerting, statement, undoubtedly also reflected other circumstances of Távora’s singular path.

12. Távora, Op. Cit (1947).

13. As reported Ferrão in “Tradition and Modernity in Fernando Távora’s work 1947/1987,” in *Fernando Távora* (ed.) Luiz Trigueiros (Lisbon: Editorial Blau, 1993).

14. Bandeirinha, “Fernando Távora: Permanent Modernity,” in *Fernando Távora Permanent Modernity* (ed.) Bandeirinha (Guimarães: Associação Casa da Arquitectura, 2012).

15. The positive impact of these projects among the young generation in the meeting is described by Risselada in “Fernando Távora in the context of Team10,” 2012.

16. Távora, Op. Cit.

From the mid 1950's, Távora had participated in the '*Inquérito à Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*', an architectural survey carried out in Portugal by the Architects' Association in the search for a true Portuguese architecture, in which he recognized rural architecture of the northwest region of the country, gaining a deep knowledge of the popular building types, techniques and materials, and of the relation between settlements, orography and the natural conditions of the territory.¹⁷

This was an important experience for the architect, guiding him in the response to both collective and individual questions, that he had formulated since '*O Problema da Casa Portuguesa*', and triggering new developments in his practice, such as the two buildings he presented in Otterlo and others like the Tennis Pavilion in Quinta da Conceição, in Matosinhos, and the Seia Gas Station, projects in which he explored the reuse of modern materials and new construction technologies, developing a sense of synthesis with the ancient modes of building that redefined his architecture and its grammar.¹⁸

Another important stage for Fernando Távora was his extensive trip through the United States, Central America and Asia, in 1960, months after the Otterlo meeting and the declaration of the end of the CIAM. Backed by a scholarship, this expedition had the purpose to visit the main North-American architecture schools, where Távora contacted important professors such as Louis Khan, Paul Rudolph or Kevin Lynch, and enabled him to visit architecture, which he does thoroughly all over his route – Mies, Gropius, Khan, S.O.M., Lloyd Wright -, describing and registering his impressions in a travel journal. From the U.S., he heads to Mexico, crosses the Pacific and heads to Japan, to attend the World Design Conference in Tokyo, returns through the Middle East, Egypt and Greece.¹⁹ Frank Lloyd Wright particularly impresses him, more than other modernist masters, but he also observes traditional architecture and the distinct ways of living, ancient and contemporary, of people in diverse parts of the world, recognizing and reflecting upon the differences.

The contact with these distant and contrasting realities will shape Távora's vision, changing his perception of the Portuguese context, in which he develops his work, and of the complexity of reality - as he puts it in his text - in a broader sense.

His architectural work of the following years reflects these experiences, with the development of an approach based on the context - the particular characteristics of each situation - and a rich cultural knowledge, leading to the development of specific, unique, design solutions.

17. The "Inquérito à Arquitectura Popular em Portugal" was performed between 1955 and 1960. Fernando Távora coordinated Rui Pimentel and António Menéres in the team that surveyed Minho, the northeastern area of Portugal.

18. Projects presented in L. Trigueiros (ed.) *Fernando Távora* (Lisbon: Editorial Blau, 1993).

19. About the 1960 World Design Conference in Tokyo, see: T. Iguchi, "Reconsideration of the World Design Conference 1960 in Tokyo and the World Industrial Design Conference 1973 in Kyoto: Transformation of design theory," in *5th International Congress of International Association of Societies of Design Research* (Tokyo Kouto-ku: Sibaura Institute of Technology, 2013). Projects presented by: Trigueiros, *Fernando Távora*, 1993.

Távora seeks his path that he follows on his own. As for his presence with Team X, he does not return to the several meetings that take place in the following years.²⁰

Responding through Practice

In the report about the Royaumont meeting, Távora stated that he found deeply significant the lack of an attempt to obtain conclusions.

This shows in fact a new context, a different framework that architects faced at the time and that would endure. Modernity would not take a unique course, heading to the development of common answers for all situations, people and geographies, it would pursue different paths, and that began to be perceived and acknowledged. That was the deep significance that Távora realized.

His practice would reflect his perspective, “*from a deep and vital immersion in reality*” as Alexandre Alves Costa wrote, “*without producing new models, each work represent[ing] a course of reflexion which from the site includes the whole city and on the site establishes the form, each form*”.²¹ With this perspective, integrating architecture in a broader order of the world, as part of a process immersed by cultural awareness, Távora created masterpieces of architecture, like the Santa Marinha Hotel, in Guimarães, or the Rua Nova House, also in Guimarães, the Law School Auditorium, in Coimbra, and the Casa dos 24, in Porto, among other work.

He also took a prominent role in redefining the way of intervening in Portuguese historic city centres. His work in Barredo, a degraded neighbourhood in Porto, from 1969 onwards, preventing an intervention that would impose a radical transformation through the demolition of the urban fabric to create wider public spaces and new buildings, and promoting the rehabilitation of the existing constructions and the permanence of the residents, was fundamental for developing a paradigm shift, towards the valorisation of the ancient city and its structures, the importance of inhabitants and of their sense of belonging and community.

This methodology would be replicated, under his guidance, in Guimarães, a few years later, resulting in a well-succeeded restoration of the old city urban fabric that constituted a reference in Portuguese urban intervention and had a positive influence in the practises used in the whole country, such as the creation of local technical offices, integrating architects, social workers and other technicians, who maintained direct contact with the inhabitants involving them in regeneration processes based on continuity and rehabilitation.

20. Until 1977, fourteen meetings would take place, seven of them still in the 1960s: Risselada and D. Van den Heuvel, *Team 10 Meetings: List of CIAM Congresses (1947-1959) and Team 10 Meetings (1960-1981)*, 2006.

21. A. A. Costa, *Dissertação para Concurso de Habilitação para Obtenção do Título de Professor Agregado (...) Memórias do Cárcere, Desastre de Sofia ou Memórias de um Burro* (Porto: ESBAP, 1982).

New urban extension was not a field of work which Távora explored in this period as much as architecture and rehabilitation of historic centres. For lack of interest or opportunity, he did not pursue the development of new urban solutions created from scratch. He designed a study for Castelo do Queijo, in Porto, in 1960, and ten years later a study plan for Matosinhos, both of them not implemented, and not as innovative as his other work of the time.

Creating all-new solutions, all-new city, was not the first interest of Fernando Távora, whose vision and methodology were shaped by the idea of “*maintaining an architectonic order with universal value*” integrating “*the particular and circumstantial architectonic object and (...) its immediate relationships*”, using again Alves Costa’s interpretation.²²

A Turning Point in Portuguese City

In the European context, Portugal had a late industrialization process, mainly from the 1950’s on, which quickly changed the country’s economy and demography, concentrating the population in the industrialized cities of the coastal strip, which was not matched by the urban development and the construction of housing. This generated a severe lack of dwelling in the major cities, estimated in several thousands of houses in the 1960’s and 1970’s.

In a time when in other European countries the post-war reconstruction had already been accomplished and the adopted modernist urban models were criticised and no longer considered an optimal answer to urban growth, this scarcity was one of the most serious problems of Portuguese society. Contrarily to their European colleagues, Portuguese architects had to respond to this absolute necessity and to create housing and new urban fabric, facing the lack of valid models, without conclusions, in “*a time of search and doubt*”, and in a “*complex, disturbing, unsettling world*”, recovering Távora’s words in his Royaumont testimony.²³

In this context of uncertainty, a series of new urban design experiences was developed in Portugal, producing solutions for new city extensions which a number of historians and critics that analysed this period, like Paulo Varela Gomes, José Manuel Fernandes and José Lamas consider to be examples of a new urbanism, based on the return to the city, reinventing urban spaces considered more suitable to promote social interactions between residents, like the street, the square, the block, the boulevard, the ‘*ilha*’, the ‘*vila operária*’ and the patio.²⁴

In the mid 1970’s, after the 25th April 1974 Revolution, a large number of neighbourhoods and collective housing settlements was developed all over the

22. Costa, Op. Cit.

23. Távora, Op. Cit.

24. From these experiences José Manuel Fernandes emphasizes the “return to the city” (J. M. Fernandes, “Da Afirmação da Geração Moderna aos Novos Territórios da Intervenção Arquitectónica 1958-74,” in *Portugal Contemporâneo* (ed.) António Reis (Lisbon: Publicações Alfa, 1990)); José Lamas highlights the social purpose in the reinvention of urban spaces (Lamas, Op. Cit., 1993).

country, especially in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto, involving a significant pool of teams of architects, working directly with the residents on housing programmes that sought to respond quickly and straightforwardly to the massive housing problems.²⁵

Before this overall shift of methodology and design approaches, some neighbourhoods had already showed a distinctive conception, a possibility of a *synthesis*, as Távora put it, on urban design after the drop of the modernist models. The Alto do Restelo neighbourhood, by Nuno Teotónio Pereira, Nuno Portas, Pedro Viana Botelho and João Paciência and the Telheiras housing settlement, by Pedro Vieira de Almeida with Augusto Pita, both in Lisbon, are two relevant examples of new conceptualizations of urban space.²⁶

According to the architecture historian Paulo Varela Gomes, however, Álvaro Siza was the first architect to develop a new concept of city design, which turned the page to a new decade, in a small group of houses in Caxinas, Vila do Conde.²⁷

From Porto as Fernando Távora and ten years younger, Álvaro Siza had been his pupil in the School of Fine Arts, where he studied architecture, and then had worked in his studio for three years, developing a strong relation with him, both personal and professional, that remained for life.²⁸ Siza's early works, like Quinta da Conceição and the Boa-Nova tea house, were clearly influenced by Távora, whose perspective and methodology would permanently influence him.

The project for Caxinas, developed by Álvaro Siza with António Madureira, Francisco Guedes de Carvalho, Francisco Lucena and Adalberto Dias from 1970 to 1972 (Figure 3), was the first of a set of small neighborhoods that Álvaro Siza designed in the beginning of the 1970s, developing distinct lay-outs and space conceptions for each one.

Caxinas replaced "*the obsession with internal space and building materials*" by the "*concern with the shape of urban space, in the manner of street and (small) square.*"²⁹

25. A specific housing program was created by the new government to rapidly answer to the lack of dwelling, the SAAL (Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local) giving origin to new settlements all over the country: Bandeirinha, *O Processo SAAL e a Arquitectura no 25 de Abril de 1974*, 2007).

26. Alto do Restelo (1972-75) and Telheiras (1973-74) were promoted by Lisbon Municipality through EPUL (Empresa Pública de Urbanização de Lisboa), a public housing company.

27. As stated by Gomes, "Arquitectura, os Últimos Vinte e Cinco Anos," 1995, 547-577.

28. Álvaro Siza Vieira, born in 1933 in Matosinhos, near Porto, studied architecture at Escola Superior de Belas-Artes do Porto [School of Fine Arts of Porto], where Fernando Távora taught, from 1949 to 1955, being his student. From 1955 to 1958 Siza worked in Távora's studio, where he began the project for the Boa-Nova tea house that he would carry on developing on his own. Their friendship would develop, being colleagues in architecture teaching, travelling, working and thinking on architecture, their role in society and as professionals. In the 1990s, they joined their studios, along with a few other colleagues, in the same building, designed by Siza in Aleixo street, in Porto area of ancient Foz.

29. Varela Gomes, Op. Cit.

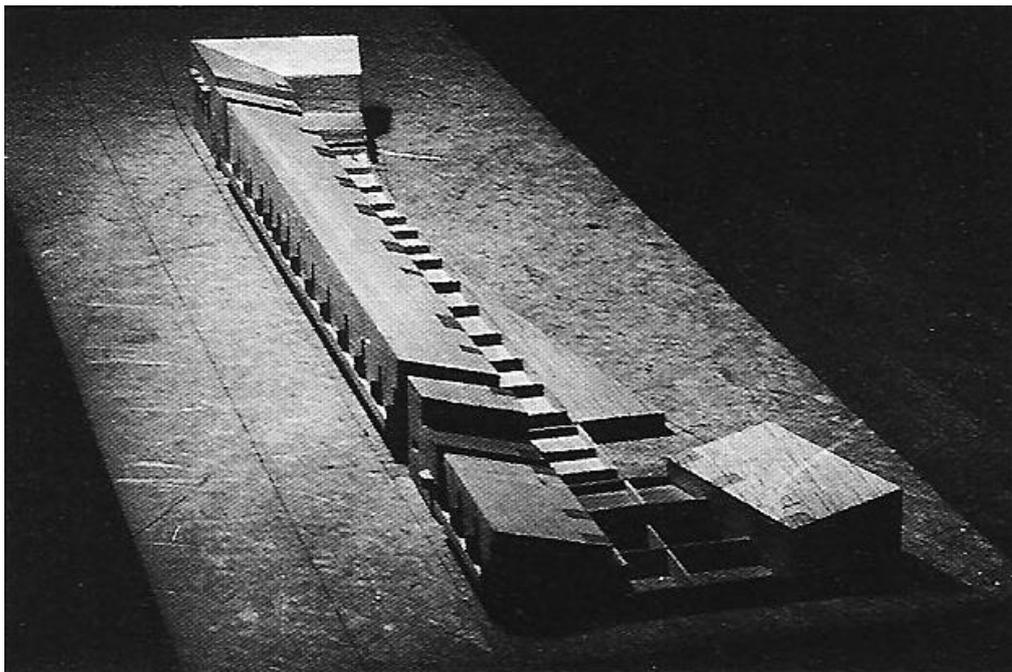


Figure 3. *Caxinas Model*

Source: Álvaro Siza's Archive, 1970.

Under the inspiration of Robert Venturi's 'Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture', Siza defines a "new way of looking at the relationship between architecture and urban space" and "a radical architectural grammar revolution", sustains Varela Gomes.³⁰

The rethinking and reutilization of the cities' traditional urban space and typologies is fundamental in that new focus on urban shape. In Caxinas, Siza designs a single quarter, which relates directly with the streets, accompanying the space with the buildings façades, creating continuity in mass, and the whole shape of the block, somewhat organic and complex, culminates in the front that faces a small square on the top south (Figure 4).

The street, the block and the square are employed as the basic elements for composing urban fabric, and the buildings are implanted along, in order to format public space, instead of isolated and freely oriented, as modernism advocated. It's the morphology of urban space that prevails, and no longer the hygienist's concern for the sun, the air and the greenery.

30. Varela Gomes, Op. Cit.: In an international meeting in Barcelona, Álvaro Siza contacted with the ideas of Robert Venturi (and his recently published "Complexity and Contraction in Architecture". R. Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1966)), which influenced his following architecture work, according to: D. Tavares, *Da Rua Formosa à Firmeza* (Porto: FAUP Publicações, 1985).



Figure 4. View from the Top South of the Caxinas Quarter

Source: Rui Seco, 2010.

Inspired by many characteristics and qualities of the ancient, pre-modernist city, this shift was not a mere and simple reutilization of old concepts, but a reassessment informed by the contemporary standards and the knowledge about the advances of the modernist period and of its architectonic and social achievements. Each of the elements inherited from the traditional city was reconsidered and redesigned from its foundation.

Siza goes even beyond that and, in Caxinas - as in his following projects like Bouça or São Vítor, in Porto, and Malagueira, in Évora - has major attention to the specific characteristics of the location, the contact with the surrounding urban fabric, orography, landmarks and significant elements, from his own understanding and interpretation of the territory.³¹

The scale of the urban public space and of the buildings conceived in the intervention is one of the major qualities of Siza's urban design. The Caxinas plan

31. The plans for Bouça (Porto, 1973-77, with António Madureira, Francisco Guedes de Carvalho, Adalberto Dias, Miguel Guedes de Carvalho, Eduardo Souto de Moura, Maria Manuela Sambade, Nuno Ribeiro Lopes and José Paulo dos Santos) and S. Vítor (Porto, 1974-77, with Domingos Tavares and Francisco Guedes de Carvalho, Adalberto Dias, Eduardo Souto de Moura, Maria Manuela Sambade, Edgar Castro, Graça Nieto, Teresa Fonseca) were developed within the existing city and only partially built. Malagueira (Évora, 1977-95, with Nuno Ribeiro Lopes, Adalberto Dias, Miguel Guedes de Carvalho, Eduardo Souto de Moura, Maria Manuela Sambade, Bruno Marchand, José Paulo dos Santos, Jean Gèrard Giorla, Chantal Meysman, Luiza Brandão, Luiza Penha and José Luís Carvalho Gomes) was a new urban expansion, creating a much more extensive area of urban fabric, planned and completed. Projects presented by: Trigueiros, *Álvaro Siza: 1954-1976* (Lisbon: Editorial Blau, 1997). See also: E. Molteni, *Álvaro Siza: Barrio de la Malagueira, Évora* (Barcelona: Edicions UPC, 1997). And: J. Rodrigues, *Álvaro Siza: Obra e Método* (Porto: Livraria Civilização Editora, 1992).

adapts to the site, does not impose itself in it, it creates an urban space that suits the semi-rural nature of a fishermen's village in the context of the early 1970's northern Portugal. It is in fact based in this perception, formed with a deep knowledge of reality, and in the intention to establish continuity, in space and in time.

In that sense, it is in its essence anti-modernist, as it does not intend to create a new reality, but to produce permanence and connection. It does not reject, however, the modernist legacy, from which inspires its architectural grammar. It absorbs and assimilates all cultural elements, ancient and contemporary as also local and global, to produce a complex and integrated design.

This approach that Álvaro Siza develops in Caxinas and pursues in his following plans can be correlated to the manner Fernando Távora developed his practice in the years that followed his presence at Royaumont: a strong attention to the context and the specific characteristics of each location and circumstance, backed by a solid cultural awareness, that assists the creation of architectonic solutions conscious of its transience, as transformations of the territory that superimpose each other continuously over time. Siza transposes this methodology to the urban scale, accepting its complexity and lack of universality, of general synthesis.

From each site, he creates a design that matches the circumstances, in accordance to its environment, but simultaneously produces order and regulation, not only in the buildings but also in urban space. Balance and adequacy of scale in the composition of urban fabric are major achievements of Siza's urban design.

Other neighbourhoods designed from the 1970s on were also significant in the transition of the Portuguese city breaking away from modernism. The SAAL process, a housing programme conducted by the Portuguese new government after the 1974 revolution was a laboratory for the construction of dwelling, experimenting innovative solutions of urban organization, throughout the country.³²

Organized in a decentralised and unbureaucratic basis, it put architects, students and other technicians directly in contact with local residents, organized in neighbourhood committees, listening to their expectations and requirements and presenting them directly their projects for housing. This type of organization, implemented with the guidance of architect Nuno Portas, Secretary of State for Housing, is similar to the one that Fernando Távora created in Barredo a few years before.

Many of the neighbourhoods created in the SAAL programme were interesting experiences in the creation of urban tissue, though being very different from each other in their design, scale and urban principles. Architects like Raul

32. During the post-revolutionary period (PREC) the SAAL (acronym for 'Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local' - Local Mobile Support Service) was a housing programme that, from 1974 to 1976, implemented all over the Portuguese country dozens of housing settlements. It had an abrupt ending, due to the sudden political and governmental changes, leaving the construction of most of the housing complexes incomplete. About this program, see: Bandeirinha, Op. Cit (2002); Portas, "O Processo SAAL, entre o Estado e o Poder Local," in *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 18/19/20 (1986): 636-644; M. Coelho, "Uma Experiência de Transformação no Sector Habitacional do Estado: SAAL 1974-76," in *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 18/19/20 (1986): 619-634.

Hestnes, Manuel Vicente, Gonçalo Byrne, Manuel Taíña, Artur Rosa, Pedro Ramalho, Sérgio Fernandez or Fernando Távora himself designed some of these neighbourhoods.

Other programmes like the Fundo de Fomento da Habitação (FFH) also developed noteworthy solutions for housing settlements following the SAAL example, adopting more direct and practical methods than the centralised and heavy planning processes they used in the period before the Revolution. Vítor Figueiredo, José Charters Monteiro, Bartolomeu Costa Cabral, Maurício Vasconcelos or Justino Morais were some of the architects involved in several housing projects for different parts of the country, notably in the most industrialized cities.³³

These urban housing complexes constituted, in many different ways, a turnaround in the Portuguese city. A more direct and inclusive approach to the planning process, involving inhabitants and local planning units, a new strategy in the relation with the existing city and the testing of innovative design solutions for the urban fabric were significant advances from the sluggish previous response in dwelling construction and urban planning processes.

Multiple Synthesis: A Conclusion

Returning from Royaumont, Fernando Távora called for a future synthesis, as he realized the fundamental shifts that affected the context of architectural and city production.

In the following years, no such response would be presented, and the idea of a consensus about the future of city and architecture faded away. CIAM ended, the Team 10 would focus on specific issues and research ideas, distant from common practice, and distinct generations of architects and urban planners would remain orphans of references and common ground in which to develop their practice. A new wave of writings would analyse the city, demonstrating its diversity and complexity, by the hand of authors like Aldo Rossi, Jane Jacobs, Christopher Alexander or Kevin Lynch, among others, widening the theoretical field about architecture and the city, and connecting it with other fields of knowledge and with the society, for whom they are destined.³⁴

33. The Portuguese government programme (Fundo de Fomento da Habitação – FFH) was before the democratic Revolution a cumbersome process with few tangible results; the example of the SAAL programme led the FFH to change its methodology and swiftly develop new housing settlements in several urban áreas, such as Lisbon, Almada, Setúbal and Aveiro. See: Seco, “Requiring City: FFH and SAAL in Portuguese Revolutionary Period,” in *74-14 SAAL and Architecture* (ed.) Bandeirinha, Sardo and Moniz (Coimbra: Edarq CES Fundação de Serralves, 2015).

34. A. Rossi, *L'Architettura della Città* (Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 1966); J. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961); C. Alexander, “A City is Not a Tree,” *Architectural Forum* 122, no. 1 (April/May 1965); K. Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960).

These evolutions did not set a context favourable to the attainment of the synthesis that Távora called for, but to the individual maturation of ideas that supported the work of each professional.

Five years before, Vítor Figueiredo, another Portuguese architect that actively worked on housing and urban complexes in the same period,³⁵ wrote that “*To serve reality is not to wholly reject the undeniable contribution of rationalism and the real asceticism it represents for architecture; it is to take a courageous searching position; disconcerting in the acceptance that each theme has its own character, its own specific problems, its own expression; it is to consider man within its human completeness.*”³⁶ This declaration corroborates and complements Távora’s perspective and methodology, anchored in the assimilation and incorporation of multiple inputs into architecture, accepting History and the superposition of periods in time, the modernist period as the ones before, part of the continuous transformation of reality.³⁷

“*For today’s architect only an ‘experience criterion’ is rightful; a criterion that does not refuse the inherent nature of the real – which, in fact exists but only as subject for essays, searches that more or less oriented but never towards aprioristic solutions and necessarily abstract – trying to serve and orient it, humbly but with the certainty of not having mistaken the course taken.*” further writes Vítor Figueiredo. As Távora, he focuses on reality and its conditions as the foundations to the work of the architect, informed by his own culture, sensibility and awareness. The ‘experience criterion’ can here be understood as the openness and attention to the multiple factors that inform the specific problem that the architect is called to cope with in the particular experience of a project. The physical aspects, like orography, sun exposure, positioning in the urban fabric, area and volumetry, as also history, from an eclectic perspective, tradition, popular know-how and erudition, and even the social and anthropological values of architecture, are part of this experience.

Far from an idea of a conclusion similar to the one of the *Charte d’Athènes* era, as Távora envisaged, these findings conducted to the development of different responses, through practice, specific to each case, without the aspiration to create universal solutions.

The difficulty of establishing a synthesis opens up the perspective that architecture is not aimed at creating a universal solution to common problems, but rather an individual response, the best possible response, to the specific conditions of the project and its particular situation.

The methodology that Távora adopted reflected all this insight, that he carried into his architecture with utmost coherency, accepting the doubt and search of the time in which he worked.

35. Vítor Figueiredo, six years younger than Fernando Távora, also completed his architecture studies in Porto; he worked in numerous housing projects in the 1960s and 1970s, mainly in the Lisbon metropolitan area.

36. Vítor Figueiredo in 1957 (V. Figueiredo, *Memória Descritiva do Concurso para Obtenção de Diploma de Arquitecto*, in RA 0 (Porto: FAUP publicações, 1987)), quoted by Costa (Op. Cit., 1993).

37. Vítor Figueiredo, Id.

Álvaro Siza transposed to the city this approach, embedding his plans with his own interpretation about urban setting, landscape, legacy, community and architecture, and the complexity and contradictions inherent to the practice in a period of uncertainty. Focusing in the site and its characteristics, integrating with acute sensitivity the fundamental morphological elements of the ancient city, the ‘asceticism’ inherited from rationalism, a ‘radical architectural grammar’ and the emphasis in the public space shape, with a notable sense of balance.

From Távora, Siza retained the value of continuity in the process of improvement and renovation of the environment and the importance of involving users and residents, but he furthermore inherited the sense of need for the maximum coherence in each new action towards the renewal of reality.

As Álvaro Siza, other Portuguese architects also developed relevant contributions for the city and the revision of modernist urban models and ideas, such as Nuno Teotónio, Pedro Vieira de Almeida, Raul Hestnes, Vítor Figueiredo, José Charters Monteiro, among others, coping with the absence of major references and the immense task of creating dwelling for hundreds of thousands of families. Their different design solutions, created according to their influences, culture and experience, and to site-specific conditions that they were sensitive to, are consistent with Távora’s realization that a single conclusion was unachievable for architecture in face of a deeply complex world.

As Távora did in his own work, each architect created specific syntheses, using their knowledge and principles to inform the projects, new layers in the transformation of reality. Modernity trailed different paths, allowing itself to be contaminated by reality, and no longer aspired to produce an egalitarian and idealized world.

Returning to the request for a synthesis, it can therefore be understood that the answer to Távora, in terms of city, emerged through practice, not by the elaboration of a new synthesis but the development of multiple syntheses, each one informed by the specific conditions of its context.

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