ALVALADE AND AREEIRO NEIGHBOURHOODS FROM SPATIALITY TO SIGNIFICANCE

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ABSTRACT: This essay proposes to approach the urban form of Alvalade and Areeiro not only from a formal perspective, but also on the view point of the user. Both have different spatial features and each of them pursuits their own identity, constructed through the details perceived by the inhabitants more than by the general perception that the common visitor can have at first sight. It gives an insight of the relation between its layout as conceived and as it is perceived, the hybrid status that outcomes of its original urban form, giving insights on how to apply this condition for future reality needs.
KEYWORDS: rapid growth, urbanization, local identity, urban design, public life, significance.

1 SPATIALITY

1.1 Historical context

Alvalade and Areeiro neighbourhoods emerged as a consequence of Lisbon's expansion towards the plateau on the North side of the city. With the "Estado Novo" (New State) dictatorship politics, appeared in 1938 the General Plan for the city's expansion. It was commonly called the De Gröer plan and it was ordered by Duarte Pacheco, the Public Works Minister. In 1945, the plan for the "*Sítio de Alvalade e Areeiro*" was concluded, being the first according to the aims of the De Gröer Plan for the city.
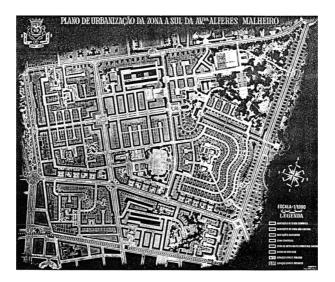

Figure 1 Alvalade presentation plan, 1945

Despite the input given by Duarte Pacheco's "development politics", with the compulsory realization of plans for villages and cities and the work of demanded urban planners like Agache, De Gröer, Piacentini or Dodi (Rossi, 1967), urbanism was at that time a quite recent matter in Portugal and it did not seem to call upon great interest as far as most of the Portuguese architects were concerned. For this large scale

intervention the architect Faria da Costa, graduated in the Paris *Institut d'Urbanisme*, was called. He took charge of the realization of most of the plans made in the 30's to the 50's, among which the plans for the "*Sítio de Alvalade and Areeiro*" were included (Costa, 1998).

1.2 Alvalade and Areeiro

Both neighbourhoods, Alvalade and Areeiro are the result of the above mentioned Duarte Pacheco's "development politics". They are part of the planned expansions in order to respond to habitation problems within the city and to enable the de-centralization of services and population to the periphery. The project was realized in expropriated terrains with a strong public and municipal control, taking advantage of an area in between main traffic axis and railway. Each of the two neighbourhoods was designed in different moments. Areeiro was planned in 1938, for 9000 inhabitants, with 2680 dwelling in 32 hectares. The first stage of construction started in 1940 and the second stage started in 1948. Alvalade was planned in 1945. This larger plan was designed for 45 000 inhabitants, in 12 000 dwellings located in an area of 230 hectares. In 1948 Alvalade was already partially built. Both neighbourhoods were meant to relocate the incoming inhabitants from precarious areas of the city center, like the area of "Martim Moniz". The latter was demolished in the beginning of the 40's but the Faria da Costa plan destined for this neighbourhood was never implemented.

To manage the articulation of the new urbanized areas with the pre-existing urban tissue was a well achieved goal. The space continuity - of which the most refined example is the connection between Alvalade, Areeiro and Avenidas (adjacent neighbourhood from the beginning of the 20th century) – synthesized in one single extension between the axis of two previously existing main avenues (Avenida da República and Avenida Almirante de Reis), that before were defined as two different city sectors with opposed socio-cultural standards. This synthesis could be framed in the "corporative spirit" to conciliate different social status, dominant in the contemporary political ideology. (Lamas, 1993) The introduction of innovative modern urban forms is evident and only in a very general way, is the neighbourhood similar to other reticulated neighbourhoods of Lisbon. The main difference resides in the application of the adapted neighbourhood unit concept. The acceptance of a new multifunctional urbanized area through this project helped to reverse the "zoning" tendency that kept on being accentuated in the expansions of the city since the end of the 19th century.

1.3 Typologies and modern influences

Alvalade shows in its typological diversity and a variety of social programs. The whole neighbourhood is organized with precise urban typologies. The street hierarchy is organized by avenues, streets, alleys and pedestrian paths, with squares placed on the main crossroads. The blocks are open inside, allowing space for gardens, parking and equipments. Also the hierarchies of the sidewalks reinterpret and adapt the image of the Corbusier's *redent*. The repetitive buildings in unity and architectonic order, with their controlled façades, are only emphasised in the crossroads, marking the intersection with squares and more visible spaces.

Figure 2 Economic rent apartments, Igreja Avenue, 1949   **Figure 3** Typologies contrast

The old city, in which the inner block courtyards where underutilized, was rejected. The traditional continuous street is applied, but the inner courtyards privatization ends. These spaces are now meant to be

leisure, green or equipments areas. The buildings have two façades – one towards the street and the other one towards the inner block's public space, more intimate and quiet. This feature can be an analogy to Barcelona Cerdá's plan, where this proposal was less successful and the inhabitants end up occupying the blocks' inner courtyards (Lamas, 1993).

Planning and constructing some diversified areas within the original plan changed the way of "producing the city" that the classic block patterns and avenues have installed in Lisbon. The conception for the aerated city, filled by the construction in height translated in isolated buildings surrounded by large extensions of open spaces was then introduced in the Portuguese context.

Figure 4 Bairro das Estacas modernist incursion, facing Areeiro area, behond the railway, 1949

It is within the Alvalade urban tissue itself, despite the changes to the original plan, that at that time these more radical modern urbanism proposals were tested in the final realization stages, namely the Estados Unidos da America avenue (by the architects Cid, Laginha and Esteves, 1957), Brazil avenue (by Segurado, 1958) and in the above mentioned Estacas Neighbourhood (by Sanchez and Authoguia, 1954) (Tricard, 1963). Alvalade and Areeiro adapted easily to this kind of introduced changes (with great design quality) and other changes that were and still are determined in the following years by the municipal bureaucracy and private development driving forces.

Figure 5 Areeiro aerial view, 2005   **Figure 6** Alvalade aerial view, 200

2 SIGNIFICANCE

2.1 Specificities of places

Place is perceived as having a single, uniform and essential identity… different people not only give different meanings to the same place, but they all use it differently too (Uguris, 2004). Alvalade and Areeiro have different spatial features and each of the neighbourhoods pursuits its own identity, constructed through the details perceived by the inhabitants more than by the general perception that the common visitor can have at first sight. The spatial qualities are more appreciated by the visitors that quickly realise the easy access to commerce, services, schools, public spaces, while the subtle aesthetic experience is only experienced by its inhabitants in a longer time frame.

Not trying to enumerate Alvalade and Areeiro specificities, the following section refers to the very personal experience of growing up in such a space… or should I say in such place? It is the trajectory of a person, in a real life time frame, noticing the specificities that the previously made descriptive analysis of the site did not grasp. It is an insight to some of the everyday places inside all the other everyday spaces that serve as framing background for the action to occur. A simple photographic reportage with very personal comments tries to attribute meaning to Alvalade and Areeiro.

2.2 Places of significance

My older sister left me at the door and pointed one direction… "Your classroom is over there". I was too nervous on the first day of primary school. The echoes of the other children playing, the cold walls in an oversized corridor made my stomach shrink and my legs tremble. As I moved forward along the corridor, over and over, day after day, the fear of the unknown became a new world where all my friends and all the surprises were placed. Every night I was looking forward for the next day to happen.

Sometimes I would go to the market with the doorkeeper of my building. Minding the steps, jumping between the water stains on the asphalt, pretending to buy my own vegetables and talking to the arranged fish were common activities while the energetic lady talked with her neighbour friends.

Figure 7 Bairro das Estacas daily market in the 50's   **Figure 8** the market in 2009

Her parents didn't have phone at home and there were no cell phones at that time. I would look from my bedroom window and see if my best friend was playing in the garden. If so, I would open the window and have a loud dialogue with her across the railway: "- Can I come and play with you?" to what she would usually answer screaming "-Yes! I'm going to ask my mum if you can have lunch with us!"…

Every weekend I would go with my parents, brothers and sisters to visit my grandmother at her house in the "pink blocks". Someone used to hold my hand and drag me over the sidewalk. I have always walked slowly. In the first years that I remember those visits, my interest went to the Portuguese "*calçada*" pavement drawings. As I grew up, the "looking down" image of my feet jumping over the black and white floor, to try to catch up with the wider adult steps changed to the "looking up" image. Guessing where was the perfect house for me to live in when I would become independent… "The ones on the corner are the best."

Figure 9 Estados Unidos da America avenue in the 50's   **Figure 10** my grandmother's building in 2009

Six years doing the same fourteen minute walk, sometimes twice a day. The high school siren was ringing. Again, late… crossing the round balcony corner: 10 minutes to go… Hurry! Passing the church: 4 minutes to go!...

Going back home triggers the nostalgia feeling in my mind. Approaching the corner of Roma Avenue the anxiety grows. The next is the slightly taller green corner building, my home. The wide sidewalk and almost no traffic give the peaceful sense that I, once more, was able to go home and feel that everything is still the same. Here the time stops, the sounds are familiar, the people recognize me and I feel the warm and relaxing feeling of protection… My place is still the same even if my space has become wider.

Figure 11 Roma Avenue intersection in the 50's   **Figure 12** one block away from home, 2009

2.3 The "hibrid" status of Alvalade and Areeiro

At this point, the concept of hybridity, which at its most basic level, it has meant the interbreeding or mixing of different people, cultures and societies, is introduced. In the last few years many good books have been authored and edited on hybridity and the concept of a "third space". However, few of these have attempted to ground themselves in the concrete realities of the physical environment: in neighbourhoods, housing projects, urban squares and city streets (AlSayyad, 2001). The physical environment of the neighbourhoods of Alvalade and Areeiro can be seen as these kinds of realities. Its hybridity is accentuated by the mix of different cultural backgrounds that were able to coexist within the same area, due to the different housing typologies planned for it – from the economic rent housing projects to the high quality modernist housing blocks, for example. Also the smooth porosity of spaces allows a hybridity of the spatial features of the neighbourhoods. The organization of private and common parts of the houses, the soft but steady transition between public and private spaces and further on, the permeability between these areas with the surroundings (previously existing and posteriors) confer a particular *dégradé* of perception that we can call as hybrid. Hybrid within Foucault's "given" oppositions – between the public and private, familiar and social or leisure and work.

The understanding of how the notion of hybridity has contributed to the shaping of a unique urbanism that can be called the "third place" can be seen in this case. The intentional mix of uses, social classes and the above mentioned gradients between public and private areas and spaces assume dualities that introduce the logic of hybridity. The process does not simply involve the combination or merger of incompatible

elements, but instead the insertion of a third possibility connection (AlSayyad, 2001). It is possible that the inherent characteristic of these neighbourhoods that make this third space happen is the scale. In Alvalade and Areeiro the balanced coexistence of scales - in relation to the surrounding urban fabric and within the neighbourhood, with the relation of different typologies - allows that the human scale is set up in evidence by the several architectural scales in itself.

The notion of emplacement that one can attribute to the neighbourhood is personal and unique. Still, when confronted with other individual perceptions of the same space a converging complicity of perceptions arises in this specific case… The elderly perception goes back to the times of an area still in construction when a somewhat sterile urban landscape was formed. The displacement feeling was not questionable due to the political and social context of that time. The occupation of the "virgin" territory is what constructed its character from scratch, in a context that was not repeated again in the city's history. The authoritarian regime and its sometimes monumental and always controlled architecture can be compared to Rossi's vocabulary of potent type-forms that could be adapted to many purposes discovering a new kind of monumental power (Jones, 1986). It reflects the political frame in the spatiality and social behaviours of that time.

The phasing of the plan and the introduction of changes created an articulation of spaces, a variety in rhythms and porosity gradients that allow the real life to occur, as well as changes within the space in a spontaneous way. The compilation of the characteristics of the so called "New Urbanism", as the nostalgia of the old city with its rich mixture of undifferentiated functions, a nostalgia for a lively public realm of streets and squares with fronts and backs (Jones, 1986), along with the modernist first incursions made of Alvalade and Areeiro a lucky experimentation in the city. The good city is the one that manages to give public value to the private. Considering the urban collective space as a space of experience (Solà-Morales, 1992), Alvalade and Areeiro are a vast territory to test the significance of these as the third spaces. They are more emphasized when the experience can be scaled up to the Lisbon scale or when in other perception, the private space is introduced.

Figure 13 Londres square, 2009

2.2 Future meanings

In times where the growth of cities is beyond our individual perception, an important lesson should be learned from Alvalade and Areeiro. Is the gathering of important urban and architectonic elements in an economic rent housing project happening nowadays in Lisbon (and other metropolitan areas around the globe)? Are the new fabrics coherent with the surroundings? Is the human scale being taken in account? Are, at last, the new fabrics allowing a third space to occur? We need to face growing cities with the disadvantage of not having time to define the human layer within the new urban fabrics. Cities are urgent! As such, time should be taken for a careful planning of what these are becoming in the perspective of the human scale and condition. Will the significance of places make of the "urgent cities" ones that work?

The way life took possession of the neighbourhoods was a process that started from scratch. But the availability of functions and services needed in the city, concentrated in the same physical area, made of it an inviting area for a good urban environment that made people stay. As the time passes, the increasing cohesion of the space becomes more and more intrinsically related with the human reality within. The spatial reality of Alvalade and Areeiro is a symbiotic relation between the emplacement feelings of its inhabitants and the characteristics of its architecture. More than one generation has passed and the human life cycle has also an immediate reflection in the experiences of the place. Again, the coherence of scales and the

significance of the details make these neighbourhoods a place - and for others, a space - of exception.

Figure 14   Heading to Roma avenue in traffic hour, 2009

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