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A Casa Portuguesa: Between Tradition and Avant-Garde. The First Social Housing Neighbourhoods in Setúbal (Portugal)

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Abstract. In Portugal, the first public housing policies were developed in a high state-control context: the Salazar dictatorship (1933-1968). Until the 1950s, the Estado Novo (the dictatorial regime) actions had an evident paternalistic character by constructing small-scale housing focused on the most urgent cases or aimed at controlling specific sectors of the population. The public effort focused on promoting housing in the country's central districts and cities, given that the population was abandoning rural areas to seek better living conditions in the large cities with a higher level of industrialisation. In this context, the official architectural discourse defended the ideal of the *Casa Portuguesa* [Portuguese House] as an affirmation of the ideological discourse of the regime. This model advocated a ruralising architecture style by integrating architectural and decorative elements of the region's traditional architecture, including an outdoor garden to grow vegetables, store agricultural, farming or fishing tackle. The single-family dwelling was presented as the only residential type capable of assuming the Nation's principles as seen by the regime, with low-rise and low-density urban designs typical of the garden city. It would become an excellent instrument to enforce the traditional family model and preserving the existing social order. In this regard, the paper proposes to study the first social housing neighbourhoods built in the medium-sized city of Setúbal: Afonso Costa, Nossa Senhora da Conceição, Pescadores and Famílias Pobres. Setúbal has historically played a significant role in the region due to its strategic location within its territorial structure around the Sado Estuary. Linked to the fishing tradition, the city overgrew in the first decades of the 20th century thanks to the canning industry, making it a recipient of the migratory processes that gave rise to social housing construction. The research has identified that these four neighbourhoods respond to a simple-line architecture close to the Modern Movement, especially in their spatial organisation. However, their external image and their urban planning link them to the “Portuguese House” ideals. Most of them consist of one- or two-storey houses, detached or semi-detached with gardens, and their façades incorporate elements typical of the popular architecture.

INTRODUCTION: 20TH-CENTURY SOCIAL HOUSING IN PORTUGAL

The beginning of the Portuguese 20th century sees an increasing migration flux from rural interior areas to the industrialised cities on the shore. That flux would grow, by the mid-20th century, to a entire process of rural exodus. Although rural exodus is a demographic movement shared by most European countries during industrialisation processes, it was often accompanied by social or public housing policies to lodge the waves of new migrant workers. In Portugal, until 1918, workers' housing was mostly informal and occupied empty areas of cities, as could be blocks' inner courtyards, called *pátios* [courtyards] or *ilhas* [islands]. Informal housing repeated organisation schemes akin to traditional housing, with two compartments in a row [1]. Some small-scale attempts of social

housing were promoted by privates or industrialists through estates called *vilas*, consisting of one or two blocks of adjacent houses [2]. Nevertheless, these solutions were only patches in a more significant issue. In 1918, the first attempt of a structural operation was carried by the government to tackle the low living conditions of the working class in Lisbon through the construction of the social neighbourhoods of Ajuda and Arco do Cego [1]. The delays in construction and the assignment of houses to higher social strata deemed these projects as failures. It was not until the Estado Novo that public housing was built systematically, although following ideologically stained models.

Among the Portuguese research on social and public housing, Gonçalves [3] stands as one of the first to study social housing from a global conception during the Estado Novo in Portugal. From his work, other authors such as Gros [4], Neves [5], Teixeira [6] Silva [7] or Serra [8] have studied in depth the housing and urban planning policies implemented inside the time frame of this research. As in other countries under authoritarian regimes, there are relevant works on the correlation between housing, architecture and ideology. It is crucial to mention works as “Habitação para o Maior Número: Portugal os anos de 1950-1980” [9], which approaches collective housing as a way of producing and conceiving the city, and “A Cidade Social. Impasse. Desenvolvimento. Fragmento” [10], a collaborative work that includes a broad retrospective of housing construction in Portugal between 1930 and 1970. Finally, the publications “From House to Home: Social Control and Emancipation in Portuguese Public Housing, 1926–76” [11] and “Urbanism under Salazar: Program, Practice and Reception” [12] analyse Estado Novo’s legislation on housing, highlighting housing commercialisation, and showing similarities between the Portuguese case with its closer counterparts, as Spain.

The largest number of houses were built in Lisbon and Porto. This fact explains why the majority of studies on social housing focus on these two cities. In the capital, the works “Política Urbana em Lisboa 1926-1974” [13] and “Cidade e habitação social: o estado novo e o programa das casas económicas em Lisboa” [14] attend the city’s growth during the 20th century. Following that line, Filipa Serpa’s dissertation [15] draws an exhaustive analysis of the ensembles built in Lisbon, while enlisting the social housing programs upon which the ensembles were based. Israel Guarda [16] approaches public housing complexes from the perspective of the History of Art. In Oporto, the works “Os Barrios Sociais no Espaço Urbano do Porto” [17], “Do Desenvolvimento do Planeamento ao Planeamento do Desenvolvimento” [18] o “Favor, Recompensa e Controlo Social: Os Bairros de Casas Económicas do Porto” [19] draw the exhaustive picture of public housing in the city.

Outside the two main cities, there can be highlighted the works of Abreu [20] for Covilhã and Agarez [21] for Algarve (Faro and Portimão), albeit the last one is a compendium of modern architecture works and not just social housing. Nevertheless, the study on housing programs has been exhaustive regardless of their location, mainly due to the singularity of the programs themselves. An example can be the *Federação de Caixas de Previdência* (FCP) building program. The FCP was a private social security entity, which financed the construction of economic houses from 1946 onwards [22] [23]. Last but not the least, the project “Habitação: Cem anos de Políticas Públicas em Portugal, 1918-2018” [24] is crucial to inform any research on social housing. It has unified sparse material, and it shows the relations of 20th-century public housing in different geographies of the Portuguese context through morphological and socio-economic analysis.

PUBLIC HOUSING POLICIES IN PORTUGAL BETWEEN 1933 AND 1970

During Estado Novo, housing policies were carried under strict state control, especially during Salazar’s first years in power [25]. Therefore, there is an evident state influence on the architectonic types used in public housing in Portugal. The so-called *Casa Portuguesa* [Portuguese House] should attend to the regime’s ideals as a tool to promote the traditional family and maintain the existing social order. Hence, public housing was built in single-family houses, either isolated or semi-detached, with private gardens. The development of said architectonic and urban models stem from the British Garden City or other models akin to it, although, taking a much more rural character in Portugal.

After the IIWW, there are changes in the regime’s internal conception that lead to, among others, an increase in international relations (e.g. entering OEEC, NATO...) and less governmental control in direct city’s management, which would necessarily impact public housing. The rural image, key in the conception of first phase public housing, was abandoned as the industrial take-off of some regions of the country accelerated the migratory dynamics from the countryside to urban areas. Lisbon and Oporto, the two largest cities, would concentrate most state efforts to palliate housing deficiency. The mechanisms of housing promotion were reformed after IIWW, mainly regarding financing systems. Those would encompass, from then on, co-financing methods as the participation of entities as the above-mentioned FCP and financing self-construction with public funds.

Rural migration towards the cities had also shown the need for new housing forms. Public housing converts from single-family houses in small neighbourhoods to multi-storey buildings in large ones in the periphery of cities. The number and overall quality of the interventions rise, mainly due to new legislation. One of those legislative tools is the creation of subsidised housing programs. It did not mean the discontinuation of former public housing programs that were still taking place, meaning that for some time, different types of housing programs were implemented simultaneously, with different criteria.

Nevertheless, the bulk of different programs and legislation did not necessarily translate into enough construction to cover the country's housing shortage, a goal that would not be met until the first years of the democratic regime (from 1974 onwards). During the sixties, housing policy was fragmented and focused on solutions to local problems. Moreover, it adapted housing availability to each family's needs and economic means. The year 1969 would be a turning point in housing policies due to the creation of the *Fundo de Fomento da Habitação* [Housing Promotion Fund], the milestone that points to the end of the period studied in this research.

SETÚBAL, A MEDIUM-SIZED CITY AS A CASE STUDY

The location of the city of Setúbal has determined its historical development. It is placed in the namesake Peninsula, within the Sado River's Estuary and surrounded by the Serra da Arrabida Natural Park. Despite being located on a low-rise plain, traditionally flooded and insalubrious, it emerges as a meeting place between the ocean and the navigable river, between a limestone mountain system and the plains of Alentejo. This strategic position has given the city a significant role within its region since its first territorial occupations, dating back to the Neolithic period and flourishing in pre-roman and roman times. Setúbal constitutes a notable example of the Portuguese medium-sized coastal cities, and as seen, some of the most representative public housing construction during the 20th century. Its importance falls in the total number of houses and the number and scale of the promotions. It is also relevant that this growth has been exclusively linked to its industrial development, based on its fishing port and the fishing canning industry associated with it [26].

Due to its strategic location, the city has historically had a considerable weight in the region. While other coastal cities have attracted more extensive private sector investments, Setúbal owns the highest percentage of public housing promotion out of the cases analysed. However, the interest in public housing is not just a matter of quantity but of complexity since Setúbal's population acknowledges those buildings as part of its historical legacy (Fig. 1).



FIGURE 1. View of Setúbal bay from Palmela. Source: Photograph by authors

HOUSING AND CITY. THE BUILDING PROCESS OF SETÚBAL BETWEEN 1933 AND 1970

The canning industry experienced a tremendous expansion during the first decades of the 20th century, thanks to the opening of new markets after the Great War. These industries were located by the city limits, which stretched along the river, reaching a total number of 130 factories [27]. According to Charters Monteiro [28], the first heavy

industries were settled at the beginning of the 20th century (Secil in 1904 and SAPEC in 1926). In addition, the port was enlarged around the 1930s. The railway was extended to the riverbank, completing Setúbal connection with Funcheira in 1907 and Alcácer do Sal in 1925, which connected Setúbal with the Algarve rail line.

Between 1890 and 1911, the population of Setúbal almost doubled (from 29,320 to 47,783 inhabitants). At that time, the first working-class housing planned districts (Santos Nicolao and Rosalino) and the informal ones (Dias y Melo) began developing. Their purpose was to shelter numerous workers who came to the city from all over the country, even from Lisbon and Porto, seeking job opportunities [29].

The fast growth of the Setúbal's Canning Industry during the first decades of the 20th century would slow down due to the country's economic situation and the sardine fisheries sector crisis during the years before WWII. The reduction in the number of canning factories led to a significant increase in unemployment rates, which forced many people to leave the city. As a significant fact, the population in 1940 had diminished to 45,345 inhabitants [30]. Paradoxically, compared to other sectors, the canning industry would boost during the international conflict. In 1944, in a context characterised by the increase of the building sector, Setúbal approved its first urban planning document, called the *Plano Geral de Urbanização de Setúbal* [Setúbal's general urban plan]. It envisaged a radial growth of the city, taking into account its geographical conditions. It proposed the edification of three areas: the Viso Hill, close to the Forte Velho in the West; the urbanisation of the large orange orchards that spread on the Northern access of the city; and the occupation of the plain that enters the Estuary marshes, today the industrial centre of Mitrena.

The canning industry declined by the end of the War. As Vieira da Silva [31] acknowledges, this circumstance would have significant consequences on the city's urban structure, which would freeze until the 1960s. In 1955, the General Plan was revised to adapt to the new forecasts. Despite broadly maintaining the previous urban model, it incorporated an excellent detailed study. Some of the social housing neighbourhoods built in the years after the first plan can be recognised: the Alfonso Costa neighbourhood, the Nossa Senhora da Conceição neighbourhood and the housing complexes of Pescadores and Famílias Pobres.

Housing for low incomes. The Afonso Costa neighbourhood

The first social housing complex built in Setúbal after World War II and named António Óscar de Fragoso Carmona in honour of Estado Novo's first president, was inaugurated in 1948. Following the architect Raúl Rodrigues Lima's plans, they were a unitary group of 320 semi-detached houses, orthogonal in shape, single or double-storeyed, where two or four families could be housed, respectively. It was a simple and functional architecture, close to the Modern Movement principles. However, the exterior appearance respected the idea of *Casa Portuguesa* as an affirmation of the regime ideological discourse.

During the first period, rural architecture was advocated, as seen above. These self-sufficient models used to integrate traditional architectural elements from the region, and there was a vegetable garden annexed to the house. These low-density, single or double-storeyed and detached houses, akin to the garden city models, were established as the Nation's principles ideal housing. Contrarily, in the first years of Estado Novo, collective buildings were understood as other ideologies' (as communism) mistaken solutions.

These housing promotions aimed at low-income families are heavily mentioned in the project's report [32]. The result were small-room designs, economical materials and debatable constructive solutions. These low-quality standards would also be reflected in their urban space, with minimal paved roadway and dusty sidewalks. The vast majority of dwellings had three bedrooms, although some had only two, and a small proportion had four. Bedrooms were sized to accommodate one bed and had a minimal area for movement. The kitchen was also tiny, designed for the work of a single person, and was separate from the living room and children's play area. Access to the dwelling was directly through the living room, with at least a dining table, cupboards for storing household goods and a small pantry/dressing room. They were also equipped with a bathroom, although it did not have a bathtub due to its small size.

It must be noted that the neighbourhood was demolished in the 1990s. Today, six-storey collective buildings create closed blocks, a transformation that followed 1977's City Plan guidelines. According to Afonso de Faria Nunes [29], this planning document proposed the urban regeneration of critical areas, characterised by poor constructions and lack of infrastructures, social facilities, and open communal areas. Despite receiving the same name, the current Barrio de Afonso Costa replaces the former Barrio Carmona. Its original urban configuration has been completely erased, but its population identity values are still preserved.

Affordable housing or “Económica”. The Nossa Senhora da Conceição neighbourhood

This affordable housing neighbourhood was built in 1949, and it is located near the historic centre, on the East side of the city. Following Jaime Cortesão Avenue's axis, this area can be considered the first urban expansion of Setúbal. It remained the city boundary until the construction of Infante D. Henrique and D. Manuel I Avenues, which extended the city further eastward.

This neighbourhood was under the *Casas Económicas* program, but, in this case, it responded to the housing demands of another social stratum, civil servants. These houses were intended for workers linked to the system, preferably. The 200 dwellings built were between 75 and 10 square metres in size and arranged following an orthogonal blocks grid, created by four to six buildings. These blocks were also segregated into plots from 300 to 500 square metres in size. Each parcel contained a central double-storeyed building occupied by two houses, with independent access from outside. These buildings were surrounded by green areas, creating a garden city appearance. (Fig. 2)



FIGURE 2. *Alfonso Costa* after neighbourhood renovation (right) and *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* (left). Source: Photograph by authors.

Housing for Fishermen or “Pescadores”

The first phase of the Fishermen’s neighbourhood was built between 1945 and 1952 and housed 138 families. They were also under the Low Rent’s program and were promoted by the Junta Central das Casas dos Pescadores (JCCP). Setúbal was one of the first cities to have a Fishermen’s Syndicate; thus, Casa dos Pescadores was established in 1938 (Fig. 3). At that time, it was one of the 18 existing throughout the country. Furthermore, the Elementary School of Fisheries of Setúbal was inaugurated in 1941 [33].

Two architects designed this neighbourhood, Francisco Keil do Amaral and José Lima Franco. It is located in the Northwest of the city, closed to the Fort of São Luis Gonzaga. With a panoramic view of the city’s foundational core and the Sado’s estuary, that is a prominent location. The single or double-storeyed buildings contained two houses and were settled down following the hillside’s contours, enjoying the views and adapted to the topography. The houses were 75 square metres in size approximately; they were bigger than many other ones built so far [34]. These simple-geometry buildings also contained traditional architectural features, such as the entrance arch or the sloping roof. Their courtyard must be noticed, a crucial outdoor area for families linked to fishing activities, such as fish drying, net repairing, etc.

Later, another 50 houses were built between 1958 and 1959, and opened in 1961. After that, in 1967, the project for a second phase for 224 new families began. This new phase was designed by employing collective housing. Housing was distributed in longitudinal four-storeyed buildings with two houses per floor. These buildings were arranged along the curvilinear streets that access Forte Velho, by the coplanar union of several buildings or staggering. The central building serves both phases and has shops on the ground floor.

The result is a neighbourhood with 412 dwellings completed in the 70s, which, together with Espinho and Matosinhos' neighbourhoods, defines the most extensive neighbourhoods of Fishermen's Houses in Portugal. According to information from the Architectural Heritage Information Service (SIPA), a total of 1,512 fishermen's houses were built, spread over 27 neighbourhoods, with an average of 57 homes each. Its importance at the national level was noted in the Exhibition "Quinze Anos de Obras Públicas, 1932-1947".



FIGURE 3. *Pescadores* (right) and *Famílias Pobres* (left). Source: Photograph by authors.

Housing for Poor Families or “Famílias Pobres”

By 1960, a new group of 18 homes was built in Setúbal next to the Carmona neighbourhood. These homes were intended for financial support beneficiaries of the building accommodation's program promoted by *Património dos Pobres [Patrimony of the Poor]*. These were extremely low-income families living in one of the informal housing areas of the city.

Afonso Costa (Carmona)



Nossa Senhora da Conceição



FIGURE 4a. Site plans. Source: Army Geospatial Information Centre of Portugal (CIGeoE)

Pescadores



Famílias Pobres



FIGURE 4b. Site plans. Source: Army Geospatial Information Centre of Portugal (CIGeoE)

The houses, which did not surpass 55 square metres of total area, were arranged into a longitudinal building placed parallel to Afonso de Albuquerque Avenue. On the rear side, each house had a small land plot, around 100 square metres, for farming and self-sufficiency activities. Today, these outdoor areas have been partially occupied by enlargements and new rooms, with only small courtyards remaining from the previous vegetable gardens.

Famílias Pobres housing is another example of the adaptation of rational architecture to the *Casa Portuguesa* principles. In line with the architecture of the Carmona neighbourhood, the exteriors are the last of this style remaining in Setúbal. For that reason, it closes the first of the two phases that structured the ideas and plans for public housing in Estado Novo (Fig. 4a, b).

CONCLUSIONS

During the period analysed (1933-1970), housing policy focused on public workers, the most impoverished families and, to a lesser extent, to the middle-class fringes. In Setúbal, there is a significant delay in transferring these policies due to the fisheries sector's crisis the years before World War II. This sector was Setúbal's main economic activity, and it declined at the end of the War.

For instance, the first social housing group, the old named Carmona neighbourhood, was not completed until 1948, fifteen years after the affordable housing program's approval in 1933. By 1960, only four promotions had been built, each one corresponding to a different program. All of them had a clear rural imprint, based on the idea of *Casa Portuguesa*. Except for the fishermen's quarter, these promotions were placed in continuity with the existing urban fabric and still have an intermediate position between the historic city and the new peripheral developments.

This architecture reconciles modernity's rationality, especially concerning its spatial organisation of strong functionalistic characteristics, with the "Portuguese House". It emerges from types already tested since the beginning of the century, having the British model of the city-garden as a reference despite being harshly criticised by contemporaries such as Fernando Távora [35]. *Casa portuguesa* was defended as a Portuguese architecture prototype by Raúl Lino [36] before Estado Novo, but it became an excellent tool to sustain the Salazar regime's purposes as the traditional family and social order preservation.

However, some cases of public housing, such as the fishermen's neighbourhood designed by Keil do Amaral, do not simply follow aesthetic approaches to traditional architecture but seeks to respond to the local conditions, needs and particularities, being characterised by deep respect to the life factors in a given region [37]. The fishermen's neighbourhood in Setúbal constitutes a reference in the debate between local or international features, as they propose a third way using a balanced and straightforward language inspired simultaneously by the traditional housing schemes and modern architecture. That approach to modern architecture would be the main characters in Portuguese architecture of the second half of the 20th century, and public and social housing experiences were a crucial part of the establishment of said architectonic language.

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