

Construction of Social Housing Complexes in Portugal During the Estado Novo (1933-1974)

Daniel Navas-Carrillo ¹, Ana Costa Rosado ², Maria Teresa Perez Cano ¹

¹ Heritage and Urban Territorial Development in Andalusia (HUM700). Department of Urbanism and Regional Planning. University of Seville (Spain).

² CEAACP/Mértola's Archaeological Field (CAM). Research Center in Archaeology, Arts and Heritage Sciences (Portugal).

dnavas@us.es

Abstract. This paper focuses on the urban growth experienced in the third quarter of the 20th century due to the generalized deficit of housing in Portugal —by the transfer of population from rural to urban areas— and which characterized European cities mainly during the last century. This period was marked by great growth of cities and, therefore, one of the most considerable architectural and urban production in recent urban history. Following modern city's precepts of the Charter of Athens (1933), Housing in Portugal shares many of the morphological and typological characteristics with the rest of Europe. However, housing policies developed in Portugal during the dictatorship of Salazar (1933-1968) and Caetano (1968-1974) —within a socio-political context marked by a strong control of the State— caused Portuguese cities to introduce certain peculiarities in their development. In this sense, the research has sought to address the general context —social, economic and political— that conditioned the construction of these urban complexes during the so-called Estado Novo (1933-1974) in Portugal. This contextualization framework on construction of social housing has been mainly built through an analysis of housing legislation approved in those years. The research has also required an important bibliography search for references to articulate the knowledge generated by other researchers. Likewise, statistical data of construction and housing elaborated by the National Institute of Statistics of Portugal have been consulted. Based on this information, the research has detected two political facts of clear influence in terms of social housing. On one hand, the end of the Second World War brought along industrial growth for some regions of the country, which became important centres of population attraction at the beginning of the 50s. The pace of industrialization accelerated in the big cities and with it the migratory dynamics from the countryside to the city. In this context, Estado Novo had to rethink the policy on housing, planning large-scale housing construction through development plans. On the other hand, Marcello Caetano's Government, who was appointed the new head of government in 1968, tried to solve the problems of overcrowding that resulted from previous housing policy. This translates into an attempt to institutionalize and rationalize housing policy through the creation, in 1969, of the Fundo de Fomento da Habitação. It was sought to centralize the different public initiatives related to housing in a unique structure. It can be said that this period corresponds, in the sphere of housing and urban planning, to a transition for the policies that would develop after the Carnation Revolution in 1974.

1. Introduction

Several authors have presented the object of study from various disciplines and approaches. Gonçalves [1] is one of the first authors that deal with the study of social housing from a global conception during the *Estado Novo* in Portugal. From his work, other authors such as Gros [2] [3], Neves [4], Teixeira [5] Silva [6] [7] or Serra [8] [9] have studied in depth the housing and urban planning policies that took place in the years covered by the time frame of the investigation.

There are frequent studies that, from a typological and/or morphological analysis, approach social housing references within the summary of theoretical studies on twentieth century architecture in Portugal [10] [11] [12] [13] [14]. Other works that relate housing models to the ideological opinions of the Estado



Novo [15] [16] are also relevant. More recently, the work coordinated by Portas, Fernandes y Costa [17] and Carvalho's publication [18] has been disseminated. The first is a collective work that includes a broad retrospective of housing construction in Portugal after the Second World War. The second approaches collective housing as a way of producing and conceiving the city. This publication dedicates a chapter to analyze the construction of social housing neighborhoods between 1930 and 1970 in Portugal.

The large number of houses that were built in Lisbon and Porto justify that most part of the detailed studies that have been carried out focus on these two cities. The publications of Silva [19] and Baptista [20] reflect the characteristics of the urban growth of Lisbon in those years. Noteworthy are the doctoral theses of Filipa Serpa [21] and Israel Guarda [22]. The first includes an exhaustive analysis of the totality of the ensembles built in the city of Lisbon, at the same time as it introduces the social housing programs on the basis of which they were built. The second tackles from the disciplinary keys of art history, the construction of the great social housing complexes of Lisbon between 1945 and 1974. Similarly, in the case of Porto, we can highlight the publications of Loureiro de Matos [23], Cardoso [24] or Almeida [25].

As a monographic work that covers to a large extent the group of dwellings built within the timeframe of this research, we can cite the works of Abreu [26] and Navas-Carrillo [27] that delves into the case of Covilhã and Setúbal. For his part, Agarez [28] approaches the modern architecture built in the Algarve, which, although not focusing exclusively on social housing, incorporates the most representative cases of public housing in the cities of Faro and Portimão. The uniqueness of some of the programs approved in these 50 years makes their study has had a special development. This is the case of the economic houses built by the Federação de Caixas de Previdência. These institutions were intended for the provision of capital for social coverage and since 1946 they are authorized to participate in the resolution of the housing problem, thanks to the accumulated contributions of workers enrolled in them [29] [30] [31].

2. Social housing in Portugal between 1933 and 1974

Based on the aforementioned works, the research has identified two political moments of clear influence in terms of social housing, which allow us to divide the time frame of the research into three different stages.

On one hand, the end of the Second World War brought with it, among other consequences, the industrial take-off of some regions of the country, becoming focal points of population at the beginning of the 50s. The pace of industrialization accelerates in the big cities and with it the migratory dynamics of the countryside to the city. In this context, the *Estado Novo* had to rethink housing policy, planning large-scale housing construction through development plans. It was also forced to abandon the single-family housing model. Thus, the rural settlements located outside the cities were replaced by large neighbourhoods where the collective housing buildings predominated and which were located in the immediate expansion areas of the large urban centers. This new urban paradigm is based on large urban pieces built in a unified way. They can be recognised as areas that have grown without an overall view following the precepts of the modern city [32]. According to Ferrer i Aixalá [33] for its correct definition should be understood as operations in which the phases of subdivision, urbanization and building are managed in a unitary, morphologically characterized for being pieces with sufficient entity, minimal units with clearly defined urban boundaries that they allowed a city construction independently.

On the other hand, the arrival of Marcelo Caetano to power, in 1968, inaugurated the phase of greater state intervention in the housing sector, trying to solve the problems of overcrowding as a result of the previous policy. This translates into an attempt to institutionalize and rationalize housing policy through the creation, in 1969, of the Fundo de Fomento da Habitação (FFH). With this, it was sought to centralize and organize everything related to housing in a single structure. It can be said that this era corresponds, in the sphere of housing and urban planning, to a period of transition for the policies that took place after 1974. In fact, the change from the dictatorial regime to a democratic one after the 25th of April, does not initially imply a significant change in housing policy developed by the State. The FFH continues to bring together state control in a single agency and although it creates new housing programs, keeping most of the previous ones. Now, the Revolution does incorporate a new vector within a claiming climate that characterized those years: the demand for the right to decent housing.

2.1. First period (1933-1950): limited housing construction in a context of economic self-sufficiency

In the first decades of the regime (1933-1950), the performance of the *Estado Novo* can be divided into two lines of actions that follow each other and overlap according to political, economic and social conditions. In the first place, a clear line of paternalistic character through the construction of houses of reduced dimensions –the Program of Economic Houses–, focused in those cases of greater urgency or aimed at the control of certain sectors of the population –specifically those that disagreed with the ideas of

the regime—. As pointed out by Alves and Andersen [34], Salazar's housing policy focused initially on the promotions of single-family homes (figure1), which, having a garden, had a strongly rural character, in contrast to what Salazar himself called large phalansteries or colossal buildings for workers. This opens the way to the defence of the use of housing as a form of social legitimacy, both through the paternalism of the State, and the ideological question that the rural family house contains.

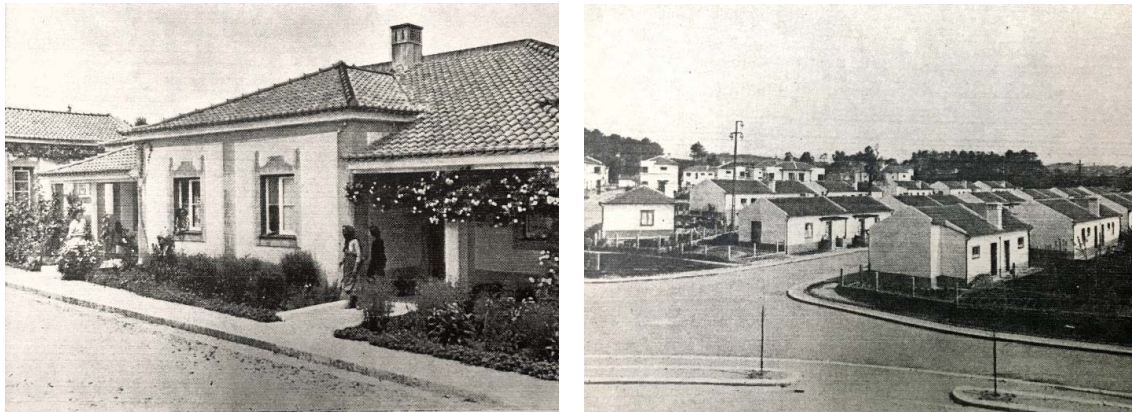


Figure 1. Social houses in Portimão and Porto. Source: *A habitação em Portugal* [Housing in Portugal]. Centro de Estudos de Urbanização e Habitação Engenheiro Duarte Pacheco, 1963.

Secondly, an intervention aimed at regulating the growth processes of large cities, which continued to maintain the single-family home as the ideal prototype. This constitutes a significant moment of the intervention of the *Estado Novo* in the matter of housing, given the scale of the promotions and the balance between housing and urbanization. These would be preferentially destined to the working class with secure income, since the financing was articulated through monthly rents for a period of 25 years, not passing the house to be owned by the family until that moment. This limitation would mean that both the families with fewer resources and the middle class would have been left out. Since 1945, this situation has been resolved through the approval of the program of houses for poor families and that of affordable houses, respectively.

In this first period, the *Estado Novo's* effort in housing promotion focused on the main districts of the country: Lisbon, Porto, Setúbal and Faro. On a second level are other coastal regions such as Aveiro and Braga. It corresponds to those with the highest level of industrialization, and therefore to the main population receiving centres, which led to a high housing deficit. According to Serra [35], this fact is also a consequence of the centralist Portuguese administrative system. In his opinion, the proximity to the main decision-making bodies meant that, in the promotion of social housing, there was also a mixed response on the part of the State. In less urbanized areas of the country, the public promotion of housing –apart from some local initiatives– was practically nil. Machado [36] contemporarily pointed out that this was one of the reasons why population was leaving rural areas in order to seek better living conditions in large cities.

The Political Constitution of 1933 marks the beginning of the *Estado Novo* and the end of the military dictatorship. The internal situation and the international economic circumstances led the regime to adopt an interventionist policy with high levels of public expenditure and strong state control [37]. It is in this context that the lack of housing, especially for insolvent classes, becomes a governmental priority, and Article 14 of the 1933 Constitution makes it compulsory to favour the establishment of independent homes and in health conditions. During the first decades, different regimes or complementary categories of social housing destined to different social profiles were approved as the first results were obtained [38].

The Program of Economic Houses was approved in 1933, a general scheme that is complemented with the programs of Detachable Houses and Houses for Poor Families in 1945. These are social housing initiatives that have arisen on the basis of those already tried since the beginning of the century and that had as reference the British model of the city-garden. In fact, as stated by Texeira [39], there would be one or two-storey houses isolated or paired, that had their own garden. An architectural type that, as in any dictatorship, should respond to the ideals of the regime itself and that was to become "excellent instrument of defence of the family institution and conservation of existing social order" (Decree-Law No. 28.912).

It is understandable that Portugal was an essentially rural country (around 50% of the workforce worked in the primary sector, while the secondary sector did not represent more than 20%) and culturally

backward (mid-century close to half the population was illiterate). The growth of the Portuguese population suffered oscillations in this period, associated with the change of political regime in the country and the instability of the 30s following the international economic crisis, continuing in the 40s and 50s as a result of the Second World War.

As a result, since 1945 new economic and political conditions arose, and the State must make an effort to adapt to the newly established order, which meant breaking with the ideals that had been defended by Salazar [40]. It resorts to other legislative measures, the program of houses of economic rent of 1945 and later those of free rent of 1947, which made possible for the private sector also to participate in the resolution of housing shortage, at the same time that it looked for fighting speculative promotion. These measures also opened the door to construction in height, although, still within a limited number of plants.

From 1945, other initiatives also emerged that, although they cannot properly be considered social housing regimes, had an important weight in solving the problem throughout the country. These are the so-called economic houses of the *Federação de Caixas de Previdência* and the *Junta Central das Casas dos Pescadores* (figure 2), public institutions that were authorized to build accommodation for their associates under the various state programs approved.



Figure 2. Fishermen's neighbourhoods developed by *Junta Central das Casas dos Pescadores* in Portimão and Olhão. Source: SIPA's archives in Forte de Sacavem (Ref. CE-0285).

The predominance of a rural economic and territorial structure, and the containment of urbanization in the 30s and 40s, meant that the demand for housing was mainly addressed by the social housing programs of the *Estado Novo*, although it was clearly insufficient. Paradoxically, it would be a higher social stratum that would benefit most from public policies on social housing. Of the 15.513 social housing units built at this stage, only 3.642 dwellings were intended for families with fewer resources, to which the 1.370 houses for fishermen built should be added. It should be noted that this population could not meet the requirements set by the rest of the program, which is why many continued to be tuned in the so-called can neighbourhoods (slum) and illegal occupation zones lacking minimum living conditions. In this period the direct state and municipal promotion predominated, and an economic structure formed by small civil construction companies.

The comparative analysis between programs shows the predominance of economic houses. On the other hand, this is logical to be the general regulatory framework and the most effective time. A total of 6.083 lodgings characterized by being single-family and whose production is significant, in addition to the previously mentioned districts, would be built in Braga, Coimbra and Faro. The same considerations can be made for promotions for poor families and fishermen, which together exceeded 5.000 homes. On the contrary, the number of houses of economic and limited rent built is significant, in total 3.867 households that are concentrated mainly in Lisbon and with multi-family promotions of 6 to 8 units per building.

Despite these figures, Silva [41] states that the promotion of public housing during those years was less than 7% of those required and, therefore, increasing the scope of the problem. In 1950 about 10% of the population did not have decent housing. In terms of the number of housing units, the deficit in the country as a whole was calculated at 210.000 homes, of which 60.000 and 12.000 corresponded to Lisbon and Porto respectively.

For this reason, although it is recognized that these three districts were the ones that focused the construction of public housing, they were also the ones with the greatest scarcity, motivated by the arrival

of the rural population with very few or no economic resources. The construction of social housing in Lisbon, Porto and Setubal only reached 10.7%, 7% and 8.6% of the deficit that had been calculated in 1950, motivating the reorganization of housing policies to focus on large urban centres.

2.2. Second period (1951-1968): the international opening after the Second World War and the planning for a significant advance in the construction of affordable housing

In this stage, the state effort is redirected towards the cities with the highest level of industrialization as the main receptive centers of the rural population, seeking in this way to solve the situations of greatest housing deficit. On a first level are the districts of Lisbon, Porto and Setubal, followed by Santarem, Leiria, Faro and Portalegre. On the contrary, intervention in the northern districts, especially those in the interior, is virtually non-existent. In this statement, it can be understood that compared to the aforementioned, these are districts with a territorial structure mainly based on rural nuclei.

The defeat of the fascist countries in the Second World War also brings with it an internal crisis of Salazar's regime in Portugal. This process involves the abandonment of ideals such as nationalism or ruralism that had marked the policy in the early years of the *Estado Novo* [42]. In 1948 Portugal was one of the founding countries of the Organization for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) whose objective was to administer the aid of the Marshall Plan. This demanded the reformulation of economic policies, betting on a model based on industrial growth, to the detriment of the traditional support that had been made to the primary sector. These measures materialized from 1953 on the so-called Development Plans.

This change in economic policy brought with it the increase in precariousness of living conditions in the countryside and employment opportunities in the main cities, which resulted in a significant transfer of its population to the main urban centers of the interior, and especially those on the coast. As mentioned above, by 1950 the housing deficit had been estimated at 210.000 homes, an estimate that according to Pereira [43] increased to 466.000 homes at the beginning of the 1960s. An increase in the housing shortage that had been motivated for the consequent urban growth of these cities thanks to the economic dynamism experienced by Portugal in the 50s and especially after its inclusion in the European and world economy.

In January 1960, Portugal is among the founding countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), an alternative trade bloc to the European Economic Community (EEC), which sought to promote the economic expansion and financial stability of all its members. In the same year, two decree-laws approve the agreement to benefit from the aid of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and adhesion to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In 1962, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was signed in Geneva. The adhesion to these organizations supposes the definitive end to the autarkic policy of the *Estado Novo*, and the industrial takeoff of the country.

In view of this situation, the State adopted various measures that redressed the housing policy. Firstly, the single-family typology is abandoned definitively by large neighborhoods located on the periphery of the main urban centers. The single-family type had proved to be unsuitable if the objective was quantitative, that is, to provide accommodation in a massive way. Secondly, the effort focuses on large cities, promulgating the approval of specific programs for Lisbon and Porto: *Plano de Melhoramentos para a Cidade do Porto* and *Plano de Construção de Novas Habitações na Cidade de Lisboa* (figure 3). Investment mechanisms are also reformulated through co-financing policies such as social welfare funds and the promotion of self-construction with public support.

In the second stage, housing policy was not characterized by the approval of new programs of general nature, except for those mentioned for self-construction and houses for civil servants. The effort is directed towards the two main capitals of the country, Lisbon and Porto, and legislative amendments are introduced on the programs approved during the first stage, in order to adapt to the new economic policies promulgated by the State Novo after the Second World War.

In this sense, the evaluation of the territorial distribution of the homes built between 1950 and 1968 coincides, in general terms, with the considerations made in the previous stage. Not only are the differences between regions maintained according to levels of urbanization, but the weight of Porto, and especially of Lisbon, increases with 6.594 and 25.646 public housing units built, respectively. Also important are the figures that are reached in other districts relatively close to Lisbon such as Setubal (2.068), Santarem (1.225) or Leiria (1.003), where new industrial centers were located and, consequently, had experienced an important population growth.

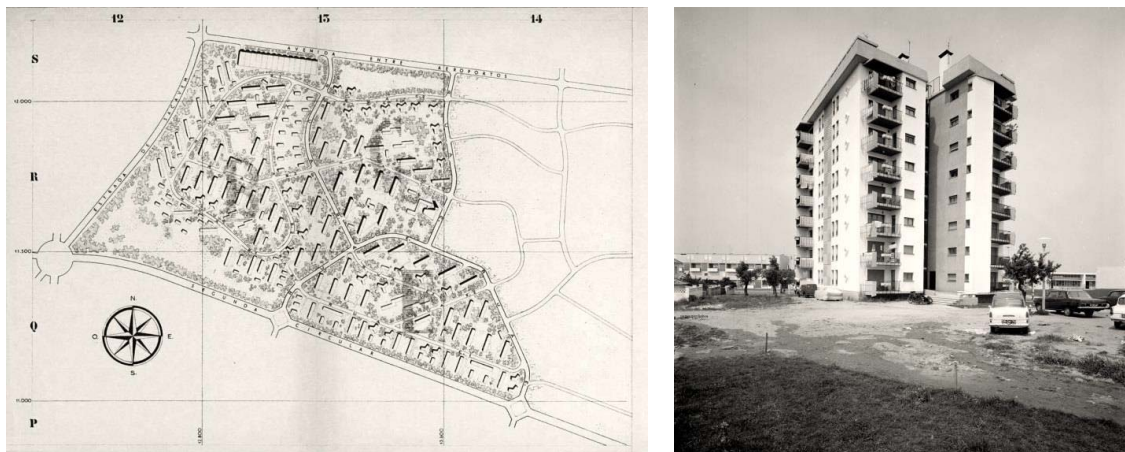


Figure 3. Urban development plan for the neighborhood of *Olivais-Sul*. Source: Lisbon Municipal Archive

These regional differences can also be extracted for the predominant typology based on the relationship between houses and buildings built. As can be seen in the attached table, while Lisbon and Porto are above the average (3,5 homes per building), the rest of the districts are below, with the exception of Castelo Branco. It can be observed that for these two districts the horizontal property regime is consolidated, surpassing the four houses per building on average. On the other hand, in the rest, lower-density developments characterized by the use of detached or detached single-family homes continue to prevail.

The comparative analysis between programs evidences the important production of houses of economic (8.874) and limited (7.910) rent, in a total of 16.784 homes that are concentrated mainly in Lisbon and that are characterized as multi-family promotions that house more than six families each building. The irrelevance of programs aimed at the population with fewer resources is again significant. Only 9.122 houses for poor families and 710 for fishermen are built, although it is true that 8.115 homes built within the framework of the Lisbon and Porto plans must also be considered in this case. About 18.000 homes in total, a figure that exceeds 40% of all built.

However, the increase in homes built compared to the first years is significant. If up to 1950 15.513 had been built, between 1951 and 1968 the figure almost tripled, reaching 43.690 new accommodations. Nonetheless, it is again insufficient according to the estimates made. In 1960 it had been estimated that some 600.000 new houses were needed [44], and the 71.672 homes that the Government had planned to build under the Development Plans (21.672 in the Intermediate Plan and 50.000 in the Third Development Plan) were not reached either.

As recognized by the Intermediate Development Plan in 1964, the situation of the construction industry was not comparable to that of the rest of the sectors, which had experienced a great advance and modernization in order to be competitive with their European counterparts. This fact would have special repercussions on the capacity of housing production and the quality of them. For Gonçalves [45], the difficulties of a sector especially polarized by the inability of the Government to control land speculation, as well as the illegal settlements that arise due to the economic incapacity of a wide range of population, must also be taken into account. These issues will mark the housing policies of the following years, especially after the 25th of April Revolution.

2.3. *Third period (1969-1974): the bases for the massive production of housing*

In 1969 the *Fundo de Fomento da Habitação (FFH)* was created through the enactment of Decree-Law no. 49.033 of May 28. This organization came to satisfy the demand of many professionals, included in the Interim Development Plan, to centralize in a single institution all the functions and attributes of the Ministry of Public Works in housing matters, assuming responsibility for all measures of housing policy approved so far, as well as future initiatives that will be adopted.

As Serra [46] recognizes, it was a complicated political moment, at the end of the dictatorship, which limited the scope of housing policy until after *Revolução dos Cravos*. Its activity extends until 1982, and therefore it covers the last stage of the *Estado Novo*, with Marcelo Caetano in power, and the first years in democracy after the 25th of April. The policies initiated in the early 70's will have special development after the Revolution. In fact, until 1974, the FFH had only begun construction by direct promotion of some

2.000 homes, so it is not possible to carry out a disaggregated analysis of the data by programs and/or regions.

It should be remembered that a highly polarized construction sector is inherited from the previous stage, in which the vast majority of families do not have the economic capacity to acquire a home in the free market. The economic situation of late 1960's is strongly pressed by escalating inflation - mainly due to the effects of ongoing colonial war - to which should be added the speculative nature of housing prices, kept in the hands of a few large real estate companies. According to Serra [46], the economic and logistical incapacity of the town halls is notorious in the final stage of the dictatorship, to which the subordinate role should be added to the State. Unlike what can be thought, the approved measures fail to solve the main housing problem: the proliferation of areas of illegal occupation, the so-called *barrios de lata*, lacking basic services.

However, the high housing needs detected in municipalities across the country led the FFH to initiate various direct promotion actions. This organization would be responsible for drafting projects, awarding construction work and managing the entire process. Promotions were combined in rent and property regime, which would be awarded to families that met the requirements established in each case through a contest. The management of these activities would fall on the city councils, through the Municipal Housing Committees.

The activity started distinguishing between the integrated plans -operations of large dimensions over 1000 homes- and the rest of the smaller-scale developments (figura 4). The objective of the Integrated Plans was to organize the construction of housing in those cities with greatest demand for housing. They are mainly located in industrial areas with great development in the 1970s, which had attracted a large population, mainly from rural areas. They were conceived as a coordination and articulation mechanism of all the phases of the process. The process was excessively complex due to the size and scope of the proposals, and therefore, required exhaustive control by the FFH. Ordered by the number of dwellings initially proposed, the integrated plans developed were: Almada-Monte da Caparica (6.000 dwellings), Setubal (3.000 dwellings), Porto-Viso (3.000 dwellings), Oeiras-Zambujal (2.000 dwellings), Matosinhos (1.500 dwellings), Guimarães (1.000 dwellings), Aveiro-Santiago (1.000 dwellings) and Coimbra-Ingote (1.000 dwellings). In some of these cases the initial figures were revised, finally approving much more ambitious plans.

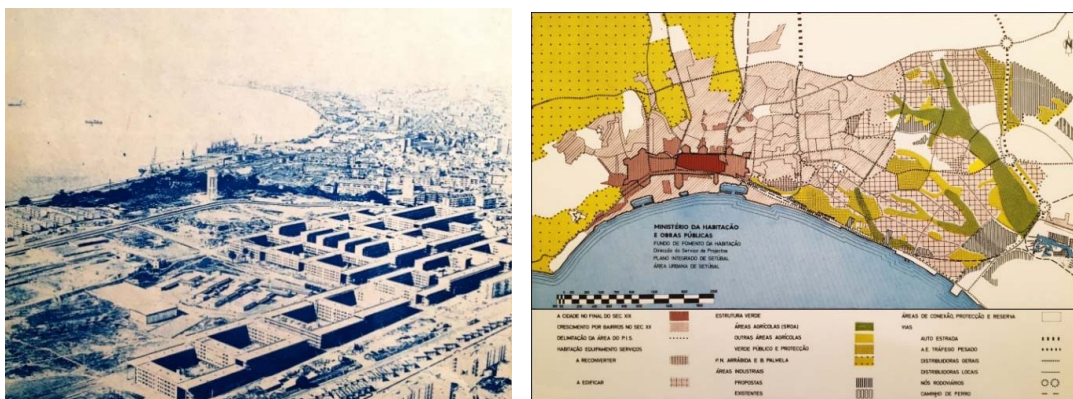


Figure 4. Integrated Plan of Setubal. Source: SIPA's library in Forte de Sacavem. Ref. IGAPHE-URB-12126 / FFH-HAB-7562

3. Conclusions

The housing policies developed during the *Estado Novo* in Portugal -within a socio-political context marked by a strong control of the State- make Portuguese cities present certain peculiarities in their development in their European homonyms. Throughout the time frame that this work addresses, specific legislation on housing is repeatedly approved, but with the same objective: to respond to the persistent problem of housing due to the overcrowding of the main urban centers. In fact, from the analysis of the successive state protection housing programs created, it is extracted that, despite the repeated effort made by the State to alleviate the huge housing deficit, it is not until the first years of democracy, after the 25th of April, when it is possible to achieve housing construction data close to the estimated needs.

In fact, not only is it significant in quantitative terms, but the years that precede the Revolution will be characterized by the development of a fragmented housing policy in order to seek a solution to each of the

problems detected, as well as to adapt the housing offer to economic capacity and the particular needs of families. Here, it should be noted that it has been established that the housing policy in these years is not alien to the economic guidelines that follow one another. In the opinion of this investigation, the economic policy has been the main actor for the success or failure of these plans. In the first years with Salazar in power, and especially during the Second World War, there is a significant decline in the quality of life of citizens as a result of the serious economic recession that the country would experience, especially caused by the autarchic policy adopted and the blockade that Portugal suffers at international level. One cannot expect that on those days' construction of public housing would have been alien to this reality. And, moreover, it is not only that the situation will limit the number of promotions carried out and the quality of its construction, but that it would have special relevance on architectural types. The Portuguese House had to respond to the ideals of its own regime and it was going to become an *excellent instrument of defense of the family institution and of conservation of the existing social order*. Taking as a reference the types already tested since the beginning of the century next to the British model of the garden city and distinguished by a rural character, the public promotions will be characterized by having one or two-stories, isolated or semi-detached houses, which should have its own garden.

Otherwise, it has been verified that relaxation on strong state control and the process of opening up the country, begun after the Second World War, are important keys in changing the way of understanding and valuing the protected housing starting of the 50s. It is the definitive end to the autarchic policy of the *Estado Novo* and the industrial take-off of the country. Ideals are abandoned, such as nationalism or ruralism, which had marked politics in the early years of the *Estado Novo*. Therefore, the single-family typology is replaced by the horizontal property regime, and small developments by large neighbourhoods located on the periphery of the main urban centres. Housing shortage was the main consequence of exponential urban growth cause by the 1950's Portuguese economic dynamism after the country's inclusion in European and world economic trades. As a result, the State's effort is directed to the main capitals of the country, Lisbon and Porto, and the investment mechanisms are reformulated through co-financing policies through social security funds and the promotion of self-construction with public support.

The investigation has found in the creation of the *Fundo de Fomento da Habitação (FFH)* in 1969 a turning point in the way of tackling the housing problem in Portugal. This organization came to meet the demand to centralize in a single institution all the functions and powers of the Ministry of Public Works in housing. The so-called integrated plans for the massive construction of housing are promulgated, measures are adopted to encourage the private promotion of affordable housing for the middle class, attention is also being paid to the coordination between housing and urban development policy, and state intervention in the urban planning. To the thread, it has been detected that the last stage of the *Estado Novo*, with Marcelo Caetano in power, sets the legislative bases that, implemented with specific actions to respond to the circumstances that have arisen, will make the first years after the Revolution the period of greatest social housing production of the entire time frame analyzed.

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