

COLOCVIUL ORASUL LISABONA

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Recent Architecture in Lisbon - the last twenty five years

Vasco Pinheiro, Arch, PhD (ULHT, TERCUD)

(conference resume)

To talk about the last twenty five years of architecture in Lisbon implies the observation of an important period of urban and architectural development of the city as well as the observation of an important change of mentality and demands of its citizens and inhabitants. To talk about all that period we need to go back to the beginning of the 70s and focus on two important issues.

The first one concerns the failure of the modern movement and with the consequent need for the affirmation of a new architectural language.

The second one has to do with the fall of the ancient political regimen in Portugal in 1974 that lead the architecture and the arts in general into those new languages that we now call post-modernism.

Until that moment Lisbon's architecture was characterized by the rules of an International Style that was developed from the United States to the Orient as well as by a language marked by straight lines and the absence of colors. Like any other politically dominated culture, the architecture of Lisbon saw the marks of its regimen through some typical factors like scale, geometry or monumentality.

The 70s were therefore marked by these simultaneous events that brought to architecture a new spirit. A spirit motivated by a will of reaction against a recent past. A new breath that evoked the history of the past its values, symbols and connotations as an intent to give new life to architectural forms or, just like Venturi wrote, to give them *complexity*.

New aesthetic theories that tried to re-connect architecture with history as well as with the site became responsible for the introduction of the metaphor, the colour and the ornament.

A few office buildings like "Franjinhas" by Teotónio Pereira or "Castil" by Conceição Silva and some housing experiences like "Pantera Cor de Rosa" (the *Pink Panther building*) by Gonçalo Byrne in Chelas or "Alto do Restelo" by Teotónio Pereira can be used to demonstrate the reaction against funcionalism or against Le Corbusier's idea like the house as a machine for living.

Although those four examples are still a shy manifestation of the new principles of this new architecture the beginning of the eighties brought us the most impressive examples of Lisbon's post-modern architecture signed up by the portuguese architect Tomás Taveira – a housing complex in Olaias, a multifunctional complex in Amoreiras and the headquarters of Banco Nacional Ultramarino.

Still in those transitory years between 1975 and 1985 many other examples could be mentioned as they reflect the new tendencies that populated the urban scenario by that time. The Av. José Malhoa was an invention of that period. A large avenue dedicated to office buildings, short standing hotels and banks tried to become an innovative business district of the city. Although the plan failed because of the monofunctional occupancy of the site the buildings are still there, and growing, looking to the city and showing different types of languages.

A different type of architecture from the eighties is also represented by the building that hosts the historical archives of the Portuguese State – called Torre do Tombo – as an example that emphasize the connection between architecture and monumentality, the historicism and the academicist principles of composition and simbolization.

In the downtown, by the river, the intervention of José Santa Rita and Manuel Vicente in an early renaissance building called Casa dos Bicos inaugurated a new kind of possibilities in architecture that would culminate with the rehabilitation of another old building, from XIX century, near "Frajinhas" called "Heron Castilho" by Henrique Chicó. The project for "Heron Castilho" was very controversial at the time and gave birth to the discussion around the problem of the recuperation of old buildings and some old neighbourhoods of the city as well – the *Downtown*, Bairro Alto, Alfama, Mouraria, Lapa and the riverfront.

Until the end of this decade the portuguese architecture, and Lisbon's in general, tried to reach a kind of cultural identity driving away from the early experiences of Amoreiras or even Olaias. Recuperating the straight lines that characterized the architecture in the middle of the last century, the architecture in the end of the eighties became more "serious" and its forms became more purists. The Faculty of Psychology by Manuel Taínha on the oposite side of Torre do Tombo can be an example.

In general, the eighties became an important period of Lisbon's architectural development. This period was coincident with the integration of Portugal in the European Economic Community (now European Union) and the city was getting more and more cosmopolitan. The approach to the european standards and to some international architectural models was also a consequence of the economic development which permit several public and private companies

to build new headquarters as well as different investors to develop new luxury housing complexes.

In spite of the urban and architectural euphoria of the eighties, the end of this decade was marked by a catastrophe in the heart of Lisbon's downtown. In August of 1988 a fire in one of the most glamorous neighbourhoods of Lisbon – Chiado – destroyed several buildings from the XIX century and a distinguished and symbolic intellectual and cultural center of the city. Chiado became a ruin and the Town Hall asked Siza Vieira, one of the most wellknown portuguese architects, to get in charge of the reconstruction of the area. Siza's proposition was to change the least possible and as a result the project showed a rather different attitude from the spectacularity of some of the eighties interventions in town.

In the beginnig of the nineties Lisbon's population decreased significantly due to the increasing of new office buildings, hotels and shopping malls. Also the development of luxury housing complexes with different kinds of facilities like swimming pools, gymnasiums, etc, became responsible for the rising of the living standards and consequently people start to look for places for living in the outside. As a consequence the neighborhoods around Lisbon became bigger and, in the meanwhile, the frontiers between them and the old city almost disapeard. For that reason Lisbon's metropolitan area became one of the most populated of western Europe.

In the very heart of city, the begginig of the nineties brought a new controversial project. The Belém Cultural Center was one of the biggest buildings constructed in the last three decades. Facing the river, in the opposite side of one of the most brilliant jewels of Lisbon's renaissance – Jerónimos monastery – this building was built to house the first Portugal presidency of the European Comunity in 1992. The project by the italian architect Vittorio Gregotti and the portuguese architect Tomás Salgado was in the heart of extensive discussions due to the confrontation with the old monument of Jerónimos.

During the nineties the city's administration was also very concerned with the rehabilitation of the river front trying to bring back to life that industrial old part of the city. A few plans from the late eighties were brought to discussion and a big investment on the place was made in the years that followed. Plus, in the beginning of the nineties the city of Lisbon was chosen to host the 1998 World Exhibition. Evoking the theme of the Oceans, that was the perfect alibi to perform a complete transformation on the eastern part of the city trying its connection with the river itself.

The EXPO area was about 300 hectars of land just by the river. A place full of old industries completelly forgotten and very degradated. The idea was to reconvert the place into a new

district with housing, offices, public services and leisure. Today, almost 10 years has past since the exhibition and we can say that project was a success. We believe that the project for the EXPO 98 with all of its surrounding areas was for sure one of the most technologically advanced plans for Lisbon. The investment made brought big names of architecture into the city and, I believe, it put Lisbon in the map of the big capital cities of Europe. As a consequence Lisbon is today the scenario of different urban proposals by internationally wellknown architects as Frank Gehry, Norman Foster, Renzo Piano or Jean Nouvel.

The urban plan for EXPO 98 was a well done experience that gave hope to the necessary renewall of the city. Learning from there and from different examples around Europe, as the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, there are today a lage collection of new and innovative projects envolved in a new strategy for the city – Lisbon Twenty First Century.