



INSTITUTO SUPERIOR TÉCNICO
Universidade Técnica de Lisboa

SAAL OPERATIONS, A VANGUARD URBAN POLICY

CASAL DAS FIGUEIRAS NEIGHBORHOOD, IN SETÚBAL

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Maria Eugénia Corte Real Ferreira de Lima

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HOUSING

The **housing** issue is and always will be a recurring theme, both in society, as in architecture. Housing is the main object of study architecture, it is the core of family life and the primary condition for a balanced social development. Therefore, the residential quality is considered an extremely important factor for the state of society, since it directly influences People and their behavior.

Thus, the issue of **social housing** is a very delicate issue, since it is the main support provided to families with few resources to become self-sufficient. It is also a main topic of different theories and practices to provide housing that are affordable, and at the same time is an effective and dignified manner to any person who lives on it. Among the various policies of social housing adopted in Portugal, SAAL presents itself as one of the most interesting experiences. Being fairly unique, SAAL implies the involvement and commitment of the inhabitants in its development, which relies on the cooperation and willingness of several technicians around the country.

IN PORTUGAL

The main reasons that led to the housing crisis in Portugal are essentially two: the accelerated process of urban concentration in a few privileged points of the national territory and the production conditions of the existing housing construction, leading to a permanent mismatch between supply and needs of the people.

The growing activity in Lisboa and Porto, areas developed at expense of continued drain of resources from peripheral interior regions, led, as known, to the rapid urban expansion in those areas, largely exceeding the carrying capacity of its infrastructure, as opposed to the depopulation of villages, towns and small rural towns and the abandonment of thousands of homes. Housing is one of the essential elements of reproduction of labor power in large cities. Starting 1950, a period that has seen the acceleration of the industrialization process in Portugal, the housing problem will be exacerbated. Given the enormous needs lived at the time, prices rise sharply, and conditions for big business are more than generous. Growing land speculation, large real estate developers, the massive speculative operations, the euphoria in the stock market... this is the picture immediately prior April 25th 1974.

All political issues and the environment experienced in the Portuguese society at this time leads this period to be considered one of the most shocking periods underlining the poor conditions of housing in Portugal and greater state intervention. This happened due to the process of migration from rural to urban and returnees from the former colonies, which occurred in a disorderly and concentrated fashion colliding with lack of policies, evidencing particularly, the high-impact, in terms of needs in housing, social facilities and urban infrastructure. Thus, in a context of massive influx of people of low economic resources and lack of housing responses, accentuated practices of cohabitation led to the spawning and development of an illegal market for the production of housing,

whose negative effects are felt even today. These practices were conducted in three distinct types of solutions:

- 1) The construction of slums and degraded – in Lisboa and Porto, together, it is known that there were about 150 000 people living in 50 000 tents
- 2) The illegal construction has become a "normal" way of urban growth of metropolitan areas - it is estimated that in the 70's, about 40% of construction in Portugal was not licensed;
- 3) Overcrowding, which reaches over 300 000 households.

SAAL PROCESS

It is in this context that the process SAAL was born, to give a quick solution to the housing crisis. This operation was launched in urban areas of Lisbon, Porto, Setúbal and the Algarve by the State and involved architects, engineers, lawyers and students, but especially the very poor neighborhoods. These residents came to organize themselves into local committees and fight for new rights and good life conditions, centered on the need for decent housing and “location ownership”; together, they worked and fought to build a more equal society. For a clearer view of the process, here are the main ideas:

The different roles of the Government in social housing:

The Government promoted, as a first stage of the revolutionary period, manners of urgent urban intervention, which involved the participation of citizens, and created at that time, certain basic conditions for sustained action (value table, legislation, military support). Subsequently, the various social dynamics - such as bureaucracy, procedural misunderstandings, unequal local involvement, complex and unstable political process at national level - have been the portrait of a Government divided between support and the abandonment of a remarkable social movement.

Technical Groupworks:

Holders of the technical skills of housing and urban development - architects, engineers, sociologists, lawyers, geographers, among others - were instrumental in defining strategies necessary to accomplish the objectives of the movement, as well as in established alliances with neighborhood committees. In a process that would not always be easy, the aesthetic views and preferences of residents had to be discussed, seeking low-cost technical solutions in order to configure and customize the habitat according to the experience.

Power to the people:

Associated with the SAAL, there were various collective phenomena of popular participation, highlighting the importance of housing cooperatives that grouped the residents of the slums, the "islands" and the residents of buildings subleased, sometimes cases that passed through the occupation of abandoned houses. That time saw a change in the social role of women, who began having a different importance in the public domain.

Right to housing is right to quality of life:

With the dynamic operations undertaken by the SAAL, people had the opportunity to discuss the importance of quality residential space and critical infrastructure, urban infrastructure and to claim social on-premise, so that it take root to develop forms of sociability anchored in the appropriation of public space. Adequate public transport, leisure facilities for children, schools, daycare centers, parks, day centers for the elderly, health centers, sporting venues and leisure were the concerns integrated into an idea of "right to the location".

Architectural design:

What makes this whole process so specific is that the culture of the Portuguese architectural April 25 is the SAAL, it represents everything that architectural production process and reflections on it in the post-revolution. There was no standard type, or equal in any of the operation solutions. Each was performed according to their geographical location, to the technicians involved, household characteristics, etc., Resulting in a collection of diversified architectural solutions for social housing.

TERMINATION OF SAAL

On 27 October 1976, were about two years since the official start of the program, a joint order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Housing, Urbanism and Construction suggested the extinction of the SAAL process methodology and its structure of organic intervention. "(...) *It was concluded that some of the SAAL brigades have strayed so evident that the essence of the order sent to organize, acting outside the FFH and the very local municipalities,*" considering how badly housed people had not come to be "*accompanied as it was imperative that they were.*" (National Council of SAAL). The factors leading to the extinction of SAAL, however, are more complex and differentiated. Shortly after the resolving of that decision, it would be observed a containment of public investment in the housing sector, thus changing the trend observed in previous years.

On the other hand, the technical and administrative machinery of the state proved to be less and less able and less willing to respond to the dynamics of administrative compliance program and the growing number of requests for action, either due to financial constraints, or by blocks generated often at the municipal level, for reasons of nature and urban planning site. The add-on to these

factors, there was a growing demand from residents, concomitant with the progressive institutionalization of SAAL.

Raising some doubts and setbacks, they are probably the main causes that explain the end of the SAAL and the failure of maturation, consolidation and continuity of one of the most important experiences of popular participation in the revolutionary period.

THE SAAL IN SETÚBAL AND IN CASAL DAS FIGUEIRAS

In August 1974 started the process SAAL to the resettlement of poor households in social housing. It was in Setubal that was quickly established itself, since some of the slums were already mobilizing several months ago. People organized themselves and created associations and commissions quickly and regularly met with each other to exchange ideas and find out about the best method for conducting the process. *"The first step was to contact some people in the neighborhood who had some leadership skills as to constitute a committee of residents. It aimed to encourage residents to, after an election process, write the statutes and legalize the commission. The process was slow and commissions only began to be legalized in 1975."*

Operations in Casal das Figueiras, case study chosen for this work, began later than in other neighborhoods of Setúbal, despite having been, along with Bairro Dias, one of the first districts to come into contact with SAAL. In early June 1975 approved the accession of the Union of Committees neighborhood of Setubal, which was an organization of committees to resolve the problems of the residents at the district level, they started working for the construction of this neighborhood.

It was about to relocate about 600 families in a land with wonderful exposure to the South, offering a wide panoramic view of Setúbal and Sado river. Initially, it was decided to split the operation into two phases, the first covering the field open to the marginal neighborhood, planned for 310 homes and community facilities. Then the work would be performed reordering of the existing old neighborhood, with occasional and small interventions, totaling about 150 new or recovered houses. However, only the first phase was completed and only built 312 lots divided, into eight zones. After 12 years of work, impasses and difficulties, successes and claims, the neighborhood was fully ready and delivered to its residents.

One of the most important objectives of this work is to be able to watch it and review it today. If in fact the process has changed these people's lives, if they are still live there, or the families themselves, if people estimate their neighborhood and what is its current status, among others.

After several visits, surveys and study of the neighborhood in the "old days" came to the conclusion that the neighborhood is presented as one of the successes of SAAL process, since it was the main driver for a substantial improvement in the quality of life of that population. People

estimate their neighborhood, very few changes were made to the original project; even when necessary to intervene, they make the most to not interfere with the whole – to stay similar with the surroundings. There are, nowadays, inhabitants with university degree, working and with much better lives. The families living there are practically the same and, if there is some kind of house sale, the Association of Casal das Figueiras, still working as administrative, is in charge of directing the sale of housing for family members or acquaintances in the neighborhood.

This paper lead to the understanding of the process SAAL, to understand the complexity in drawing social housing and all the details to be considered for effective implementation of solutions. To understand that, in each case also the social and economic factors influencing these same solutions, and also very important that a participatory intervention of stakeholders for each project, later to feel it as yours.