urbanistica

INFORMAZIONI

X Giornata Studio INU
"Crisi e rinascita delle città"

10° INU STUDY DAY
"Crisis and rebirth of Cities"

Special issue di Urbanistica Informazioni

a cura di/edited by
Francesco Domenico Moccia e Marichela Sepe

272 s.i.

Rivista bimestrale
Anno XXXXI
Gennaio - Febbraio 2017
ISSN n. 0392-5005

€ 10,00

INU Edizioni

INU
Edizioni

Rivista bimestrale urbanistica e ambientale
dell'Istituto Nazionale Urbanistica
Fondata da Edoardo Salzano
Anno XXXXIV
Marzo - Aprile 2017
Euro 10,00

Editore: INU Edizioni
Iscr. Tribunale di Roma n. 3563/1995;
Roc n. 3915/2001;
Iscr. Cciaa di Roma n. 814190.
Direttore responsabile: Francesco Sbetti

Urbanistica Informazioni è una rivista in fascia A2
nel ranking ANVUR, Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione
del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca

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Progetto grafico: Hstudio

Impaginazione: Ilaria Giatti

Fotocomposizione: Gaetana Del Giudice

Associato all'unione stampa periodica italiana

Registrazione presso il Tribunale della stampa di
Roma, n.122/1997

Abbonamento annuale Euro 30,00
Versamento sul c/c postale .16286007, intestato a
INU Edizioni srl: Via Ravenna 9/b, 00161 Roma,
o con carte di credito: CartaSi - Visa - MasterCard.

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The rebirth of cities inside the territorial system of public spaces in the Portuguese northwest

Ivo Oliveira

The territory of the Portuguese northwest encompasses a wide and complex urban area within which there is an important set of cities that, in their vast majority, correspond to the centres of the municipalities. Each one of those cities includes a public space in a central area whose quality differs greatly from the existing public spaces in the rest of the territory, where 2/3 of the population live and work. There is no public entity at regional level or an association of municipalities that has a strategy capable of overpowering an autonomous and fragmented way of operating each municipality and able to attribute some coherence to a territorial system of public spaces1. The development of a joint strategy for public spaces becomes relevant when recognising the fact that populations, in their everyday life, go across and articulate municipalities, establishing connections between spaces and buildings highly distinguished from the ones of a consolidated city. It is believed that the logic behind those movements entails a few of the criteria necessary to create a territorial system of public spaces and to prevent us from stating that there is nothing but unruly territory between cities2. The characterisation of those movements shall be associated with the characterisation of a set of architectural interventions performed in the last few decades in the Portuguese northwest. We shall present five topics that may contribute somehow to make public spaces work as a system and to a positive transformation of the territory and cities within, by using iconographic material produced through academic exercises

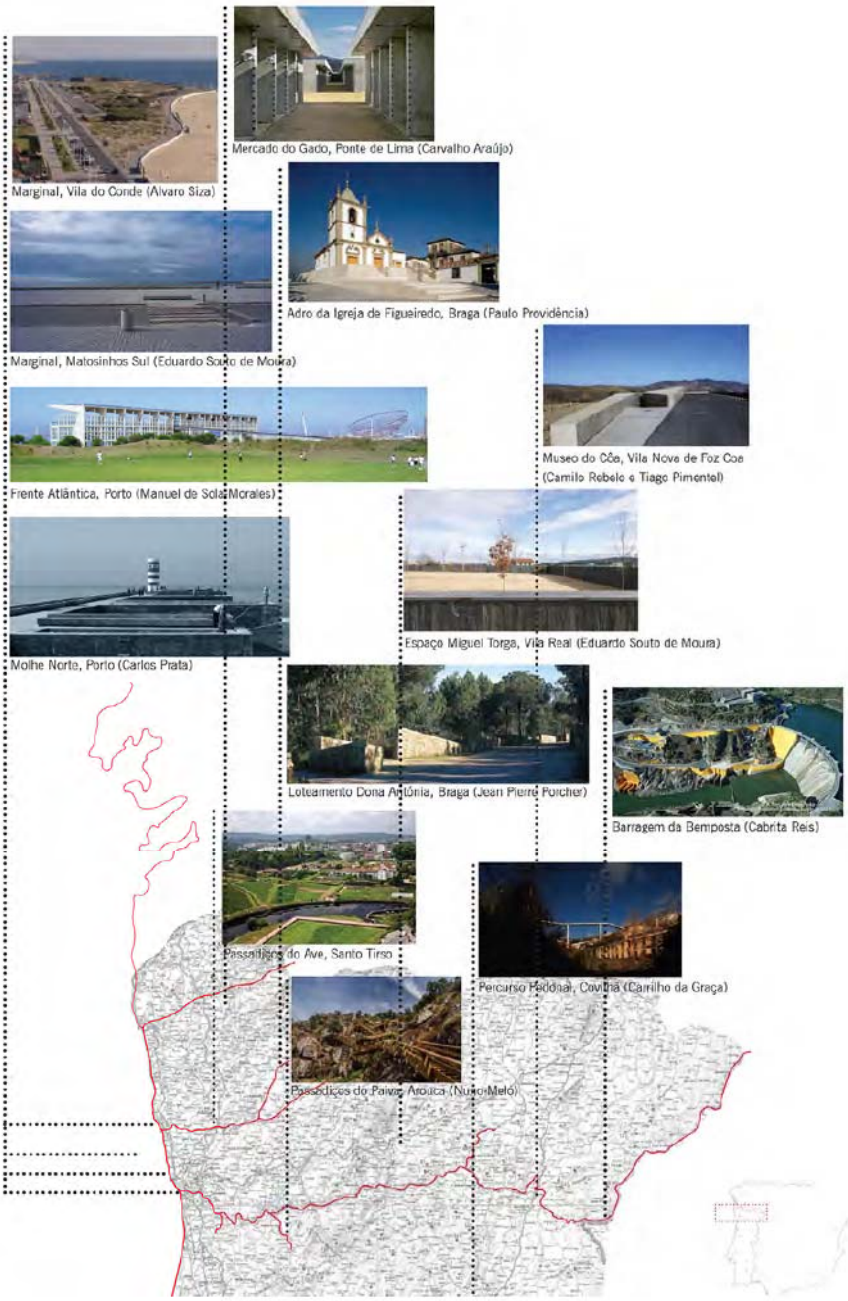

Figure 1 – architectural interventions performed in the last few decades in the Portuguese northwest

Figure 2– Iconographic material produced through academic exercises in Public Space EAUM course.

1.Complicities between public and private

In the peninsular northwest, the complicity between public and private actors connected to the production and commercialisation of energy, to both railway and roadway sectors, to the textile industry, footwear or furniture industry, as well as to vineyards and the wine business, has long been inscribed in the space. These and other actors have been feeding urbanisation and increasing complicities which have frequently shaken the common interest. In what concerns territory and architecture, the economical maximisation included the production of residential, industrial and commercial spaces, both generic and fractured; spaces which hardly articulate with other spaces that keep deep ties with morphological, typological, constructive, productive and social specificities of the territory, and that make long term processes visible. The predominance of private actors in ownership and land transformation seems to keep these places apart from the concept of *campagne publique*3 and, consequently, from a territorial system of public spaces.

Nonetheless, recently, the economic crisis revealed the crumbling of the housing market which until then had fed renovation and, above all, urban expansion. This new reality, added to the unbalance between financial resources available and the amount of areas to be cared, has precipitated the development of experiences which, without altering land ownership, gave way to new protocols between public and private sectors. This has resulted in the appearance of urban parks in private land, pedestrian courses which cross over farming fields, open air museums which exhibit and value the most varied artistic interventions in both public and private land. These interventions imply a closer complicity4 between the public and private sphere and, therefore, a bigger confrontation with the legal and normative mechanisms whose matrix remains bound to more consolidated urban spaces. This sort of interventions require the private actor to accept the fact that gains, namely financial ones, must be measured according to a wider temporal arch. The complicity revealed by these places renews bonds which have been long organising space. It sends us back to neighbourly and familial relationships and reminds us of the fact that these territories have always had several public practices happening in private space and private practices which extend to public space. We get to see the daily complex relationship between public and private which, surprisingly enough, does not include conflict. Those kinds of experiences taking place in more consolidated urban spaces, which are more intensely used and have plenty of conflict situations, come across innumerable obstacles and tend not to work because they are associated with conflict, either from a social point of view, or from an urban management perspective.

2. Leaving the line and considering the rhizome as structure

Whoever traverses the peninsular northwest public space develops a higher ability to read the landscape structures in their multiple scales and layers. Such an ability is not as high in more consolidated urban spaces since it is more likely to find landscape structures there, and its several layers, which have been destroyed or have become unreadable. When one goes through the public space, the contrasts between close and distant landscape remain visible and reinforce our bond to the territory. That happens because we still have to convert the roads into a channel kind of space whose margins are a built continuum. The process of densification enhanced by legal and normative aspects is still incomplete and, therefore, in order to characterise this public space you will need to include private spaces frequently gathered through observation. The expression of the relief and the slopes, often valued for their vegetation or long built plans, the old signs of the allotment system, the expressivity of uses of land and the dilution of the more elemental boundaries, are all features which have been progressively creating a new public space. Together they contribute to surpass the limits of built forms displayed along the street and to evoke topics that result from a broader look. These are the characteristics that may contribute to the stabilisation and consolidation of the urban areas (which does not mean they will decrease), to change the nature of interventions and infrastructural

projection, namely the ones regarding mobility, but also turn productive, social or environmental practices into the ingredients that may actually give some consistency to a territorial system of public spaces. It is in this context that one can imagine a public space free from a linear thought and spatiality, which restricts intervention to the inclusion of pavements along a road with an increasing functional specialisation in mind. It is in a context like this that an urban system often classified as labyrinthine and rhizomatic can reveal its opportunities.

3.The consistency of Strong Elements

In the extensively urbanised territory of the peninsular northwest, the identification of a territorial system of public spaces includes the valorisation of spaces and buildings which correspond to old factories, farms, museums, inns, agricultural parcels, forest areas. These are spaces and buildings which, due to their form and scale, show themselves as *strong elements*5. Although they come across as strongly disarticulated, they contain a space based on order and rationality easy to apprehend. It is inside them one can take a break in order to prepare the return to the 'disorder' of the territory they are placed in6. They are places that were put aside and seem to have taken the place left by the absence of remarkable buildings and monuments of the consolidated city. They act like a counterpoint to the monuments of the traditional city, but also to the succession of monuments which in the 1970's Robert Venturi identified along the road system of the American urban landscape7. They help fight the dilution of a sense of monumentality in the peninsular northwest and they help consolidate a system of spaces more easily recognisable by both inhabitants and visitors. In a system of public spaces, these strong elements reveal the closeness between different spaces and buildings. It is through them that one can develop spatial experiments supported by a wide set of narratives which contribute to the symbolic construction of a system that has nothing to do with the one regarding more consolidated places. Nowadays, there are several narratives articulating those spaces. Some are real, others virtual and, above all, they reveal today's complexity of spatial-temporal relationships. They gather themes that originate in gastronomy, architectural heritage, industrial or agricultural production, either current or past, under a wide spectrum8. In each one of them and their overlap, there are webs and connections which are present in all of the territory. Associated with strong elements which were always present in the territory in a diffuse way, they show a common cultural matrix and the levels through which we can read and find out about each place's specificities. Today, in the peninsular northwest, *strong elements* that pay tribute to the territory and architecture stand out from a long series of narratives. Each one of them is a lesson about the complex nature of the dialogues a given space can maintain with the territory. These are spaces designed by some of the most renowned Portuguese architects and together they produce narratives capable of enduring change that comes from a territorial system of public spaces. In the design of terraces and walls, profiles, constructive details or in a methodological specificity, it is possible to identify a link to an architectural practice which insists on reinventing the spatial expression of the link between what is global and local. We are talking about projects which feed from the different times that cross places and prove that spaces, constructive systems or materials cannot be held hostage of a specific period in time. To record the attributes of each one of these places is essential to produce knowledge capable of promoting change. This record is being made through academic exercises that, progressively, are also revealing the specificities of a system of public spaces.

4.An expanded program

The set of architectural interventions which potentiate a territorial system of public spaces stands out by the way they are synthesised into constructed forms, precise programmatic, technical and economical requirements, and, simultaneously, strategically aspire to other goals that may have different consequences. This aspiration is the reason why many of these buildings consider equally the built and the void space they delimit or control. Spaces may be void because of something physically close to them, but also due to something that, due to the fact it goes through spaces and scales, carries plenty of signs that come from a collective imaginary and its permanent subversion. Inside a factory, in a building that can be confused with a wall, in the multipurpose space of a market, there are voids conceptually created through the dramatization of possible connections with the territory. They can all be associated with something that, from the design point of view, can be frugal but translates programmatic and formal experiments which feed from an ambitious spatial and territorial experience. In the peninsular northwest there is an increasing interest from private actors in associating their commercial plans to these spatial and territorial experiences. The placement of new commercial units does no longer justify itself through the number of potential customers in the surrounding areas, accessibility or parking spots. The new commercial buildings try to become important pieces in this new system of public spaces and, thus, take part in the positive change of the territory. They appear more and more associated with new programs and this way stop being seen as fragments that bear a generic spatiality frequently serviced by a poor road system. In the context of this change it could be said that going from a model of big commercial spaces to a model based on the scattering of medium-sized ones, allows us to restore proximity levels and re-establish a system of urban micro-polarities.

5.Sustainability and durability of the system and not the fragment

The close relationship this system of public spaces establishes with the territory contributes to a new look over landscape infrastructures and over a "technological landscape"9. There are imprints of economical actors and their technological artefacts in the landscape, but also of a small and complex land structure. Fertile lands structured by water lines, which even today promote a diffuse occupation of the territory, reveal processes of artificiality of the landscape strongly linked to the main hydrographical basins. When considering such a complex process of artificiality and control over the landscape it is reductive to associate the system of public spaces with visions that limit the theme of sustainability and of durability to low-tech lookalike interventions. The distance

between this territorial system and a low-tech vision of the sustainable and the durable serves as a warning to the need to clear any misunderstandings, namely those that result from the notion that both concepts, per se, correspond to a project of society or, simply, to a project. Each space should be seen as a part of a system which, for instance, manipulates water lines in a positive way. By producing energy, keeping and redistributing water within fertile lands, and supplying it to distant places, we can assure ways of populating and possibilities of sustainable permanence which may help us rethink some of the rehabilitation strategies. This rehabilitation will, most likely, protect the processes, artefacts, and environments that can be rediscovered by going through its system of public spaces. To think about the sustainable and the durable as something implicit to this territorial system is essential to prevent a course of action that, due to its extreme artificiality, usually keeps under a low-tech façade highly restricted places which, paradoxically, survive thanks to sophisticated and quite expensive technological environmental control systems.

Conclusion

Considering that a big part of the diffuse territory of the peninsular northwest keeps a tight link with the concept of 'urban field' described by Pierre Donadieu10, it is, then, only natural to think about the public space as a system which highlights its multiple qualities and specificities. This is the only way to overcome the readings that just report the losses from the last decades by establishing a correlation between them and ferocious processes of urbanisation, and to begin to highlight the territorial 'palimpsest' instead. A system of public spaces is increasingly taking the leading role in the Portuguese northwest Atlantic shore and in a clear advance towards the interior of the country through the hydrographical basins of Ave and Douro. It allows us to experiment with the territory beyond its programmatic areas. This system gives us a chance to read some of the most expressive territorial extracts, but also their main geographical elements and heritage. It values the current state of the territory, its landscape structures and its social complexity. It includes a sensitive grasp of the territory and, whenever it is necessary to imagine its future, it re-establishes the link between old urban centres and whatever is beyond them.

1. According to McLoughlin (1972, p.79) "(...) a system is not the real world but a way of looking into it. Definitions of systems therefore depend in part on the purposes and objectives for which they are to be used".
2. It means adding to the territory what Nuno Portas (2001, p.119) believes to be a strategy to reinforce centralities, "it is about making the image of unity of the whole recognisable within a system of complementary parts regardless of how diversified they are. Rather than through 'big' design it is through 'meta' design that one can match this objective – which, by the way, will never be either credible or viable unless it includes fairer processes of social cohesion".
3. Concept/expression used by landscape architect Pascal Hannetel that reinforces the need to ponder upon the qualities and attractiveness of territories beyond the city limits
4. In El paisaje próximo: fragmentos del Vale do Ave (PhD thesis presented at University of Minho, 2013), Marta Labastida uses the concept of promiscuity when referring to 'processes of transformation of the territory in which boundaries and time play an important role both regarding its construction and understanding".
5. In Revisões da Infraestrutura Viária do Território Desruralizado e Extensamente Urbanizado (PhD thesis presented at University of Minho, 2015), Ivo Oliveira associates the concept of 'Strong Elements' with spaces that stand out in the territory due to their scale, formal coherence and autonomy of the processes that produced them.
6. Places informed with a more apparent order and rationality, through which one can 'prepare' the return to the 'disorder' of the territory they are placed in. In La sfera e il labirinto (1980), Tafuri refers that architecture seems to have always moved between the sphere and the labyrinth, between permanence and change, structure and chaos.
7. In the Portuguese northwest these strong elements act not only as a counterpoint to Robert Venturi's reading, who in 1978 identified a series of monuments along the road, but also as a counterpoint to the current reading which restricts the concept of monumentality to big and open unbuilt spaces.
8. Nowadays it is possible to gather unbuilt and built spaces, with different characteristics and scattered over a significant part of the territory, through a large set of routes (Roman Route, Vinho Verde (Green Wine) Route, Douro's Route, Industrial Heritage Route, Lamprey Route, Convent Pastry Route, Hats and Footwear Industry Route, etc.)
9. Concept which, according to Marta Macedo's research Projectar e Construir a Nação: Engenheiros, ciência e território em Portugal no século XIX (2012), is developed under the scope of the changes which took place in the 1800's regarding farming and territory in Alto Douro.
10. Pierre Donadieu uses the concept of 'campagnes urbaines' (1998) to reconcile and rethink the link between two kinds of spaces. The concept attributes a positive dimension to spaces with very distinct characteristics and of great complexity, and helps reconsidering the 'dichotomies city-countryside, urban culture-rural 'world'.

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La metropoli come insieme complesso di città Osservazioni preliminari per la governance delle aree metropolitane

Marco Pietrolucci

Premessa

Città e *metropoli* non sono termini sovrapponibili, hanno piuttosto significati tendenzialmente conflittuali che non riguardano solo la loro diversa estensione territoriale piuttosto hanno a che fare con i principi della loro organizzazione.

La *città* rappresenta sempre di più la necessità delle relazioni di prossimità: è l'insieme dei luoghi sicuri perché quotidianamente presidiati dai propri abitanti, è l' espressione del bisogno di identità e di radicamento collettivo, è espressione complessa e stratificata delle comunità che l'hanno abitata nel tempo; la *metropoli* viceversa rappresenta lo spazio dello *slabbramento* dei rapporti di comunità, *la rottura* delle interazioni su base locale, in un certo senso rappresenta la *destrutturazione* dei luoghi del vivere condiviso. Le moderne metropoli nascono con il capitalismo, con la rivoluzione industriale e con la conseguente organizzazione degli insediamenti umani in maniera funzionale alle necessità capitalistiche: il modello della metropoli è la specializzazione e la divisone del lavoro, la sua rappresentazione nello spazio e nel tempo segue il modello economico che l' ha generata e che ha la propria forza nella specializzazione funzionale. Alla base della costruzione delle metropoli c'è la zonizzazione funzionale, o meglio la divisione della città in quartieri tipologicamente omogenei, che a partire dalla fine dell'ottocento ha definito la struttura della maggior parte delle metropoli europee. *Questa costruzione ha mostrato però nella contemporaneità un insufficiente grado di adattabilità ai bisogni umani e una generale incapacità di costruire complessità urbana. La divisione in aree omogenee, che nasceva da esigenze di carattere igienico, è del tutto venuta a cadere come esigenza pratica di divisione tra aree residenziali ed aree produttive nelle attuali metropoli postindustriali.* L'integrazione sociale e le stratificazioni funzionali proprie della *città storica* possono ricominciare a costituire uno dei punti di riferimento del progetto di riorganizzazione delle *città metropolitane* contemporanee ed è a partire da questo punto di vista che cercheremo di sviluppare il nostro ragionamento sulla *governance* delle aree metropolitane.

Il riassetto della geografia amministrativa delle grandi metropoli: definizione e sviluppo di nuove città municipali -microcittà- in luogo di territori-città composti da generiche periferie urbane

Le trasformazioni novecentesche e le dinamiche di urbanizzazione del dopoguerra segnate da una forte attrattività dei maggiori centri urbani hanno reso largamente obsoleto il disegno amministrativo dei principali Comuni italiani, che non hanno saputo registrare e opportunamente gestire la nascita e lo sviluppo delle grandi conurbazioni periferiche. I confini e le interdipendenze tra *centro* e *periferia* sono largamente mutati rispetto al passato: al rapporto tradizionale tra un unico *centro* e l' insieme indistinto di *periferie* si è sostituita nella maggior parte dei centri urbani maturi, la figura dell'*arcipelago*, caratterizzata da una molteplicità di centralità e da una forte diffusione urbana. Il territorio delle metropoli è un tutto urbanizzato, è un *territorio-città*.

Quello che fino agli anni sessanta poteva essere rappresentato come un organismo unitario, pur in presenza di salti e differenze qualitative e spaziali significative, tuttavia ancora schematizzabile come un *aggregato costruttivo complesso* sviluppato radialmente attorno a un *centro*, contrapposto a un territorio agricolo circostante marcatamente differente in termini di densità e di usi, è oggi un ben più complesso sistema di *interdipendenze* che agiscono *su* aree spesso molto vaste, rispetto alla quale i grandi problemi dell'organizzazione della vita collettiva (trasporti, servizi di cittadinanza, insediamenti produttivi, produzione e condivisione della conoscenza) si pongono e richiedono soluzione su scale territoriali differenti: alcuni a livello della stretta conurbazione centrale, altri a livello di una più ampia interdipendenza tra conurbazione centrale e centri esterni, altri lungo *corridoi* territoriali disegnati dall'infrastruttura viaria, ferroviaria e dalla logistica, altri ancora, infine, riguardano l'organizzazione di un ristretto numero di attività molto specializzate, comunque rilevanti, che richiedono un coordinamento e sviluppano interdipendenze in aree molto vaste.

La geografia amministrativa della maggior parte dei Comuni italiani, nella maggior parte dei casi disegnata sotto il fascismo, non ha ancora registrato questo passaggio ed è quindi del tutto superata, in quanto espressione di un *modello lineare* di organizzazione urbana, fondato sull'idea che l'espansione e il funzionamento dei centri urbani avvenga per crescita ed attrazione del nucleo interno mentre nelle aree urbane più mature ovvero nelle *aree metropolitane* sono prevalenti i fenome-

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