Rui Aristides Lebre

Portuguese Moderns: the Ramalde Neighborhood by Fernando Távora 1950

Social Housing, Modernist Planning, Political Identity, Postwar, Porto

/Abstract

In the postwar, Portugal, entering its second decade under dictatorship and although not being directly involved in the war, witnessed the promotion of mass "social" housing. Portuguese architects were allowed a creative platform for the reinvention of housing typologies, urban forms and ideas in dialogue with central Europe. Fernando Távora was one of the architects engaged in this process early in his career as council architect at Porto, and designing one of very few examples of modernist housing in Ramalde. This article examines this early work by Távora as a grounding moment in Portuguese modern architecture after the war, situating Ramalde in the geography of Porto's postwar urban changes. Using the method of *derive* as a form of critical geographical analysis, the article combines archival research with formal and environmental analysis of the built environment of Ramalde. Although Távora's eminent career is more commonly referred to later works, this article argues that Ramalde's housing plan, entangled in the dictatorship's working of welfare with control, opens the discussion to alternative readings of postwar modern architecture in Portugal, while contributing to debates about the parallel development of modernism and European political identity in the postwar.

/Authors

Rui Aristides Lebre
Lecturer, Birmingham City University, UK (Rui.lebre@bcu.ac.uk)
Visiting Researcher, African Studies Centre, University of Oxford
rui.lebre@bcu.ac.uk
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4506-373X

Architect and academic devoted to the study of the social, cultural and political implications of space production. He graduated from a 6-year Architecture degree at the University of Coimbra in 2007, then following a career in practice in between work as a collaborator in several research projects. In 2017 he finished a PhD in Architecture examining the political history of the 'Porto School' of Architecture during the Portuguese dictatorship. Rui has taught BA and MA in Architecture at the University of Coimbra, Portugal, as an Invited Assistant Professor (2017-2022), and currently teaches Foundation and BA Architecture at Birmingham City University as a full-time Lecturer. In parallel, he has been working as an architect in Til collective (https://www.otil.pt/?lang=en) exploring the boundaries of architecture through participatory and environmentally attentive design practices. Recent research interests range from the making of colonial and post-colonial African landscapes, to examining human-environment dialectics and the urban-rural divide. Conducting research in collaboration with Porto's Architecture Faculty and the University of Oxford's African Studies Centre.

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I descend at Ramalde metro station. To the east there is a group of four storied buildings with a 'social housing' look, walls complemented with graffiti tags, abused sidewalks and greenery, old cars enduring solemnly, and other attributes of post-war suburbs built around Europe, although this one was built much later. To the west there is an old narrow road, bound to the north by what seems to be an old farmhouse or maybe an old industrial unit from the beginning of the past century. To the south, the road is bound by a couple of small houses, modest looking, for the exception of a two-storied façade, no house behind it, looking like the home of a once wealthy family.

This road is still made of stone, my feet feel the 18th century, my eyes are conflicted but a young citizen informs me that the shopping mall – *Norte Shopping* – is just one metro stop away. I did not ask where the shopping mall was, but which way was north. I have to go west, past the industrial zone and into another postwar suburb.

Going around this industrial area is not as uncomfortable as I imagined; the sidewalks are wider and better cared for than those in many central areas of Porto. Also, there are plenty of people walking around, another surprise. One look at the satellite view of this area and gets the image of running scared amidst big trucks. It is not the case at all, although I will have to find a path around the freeway leading north to the port and the airport and dividing the industrial area in two.

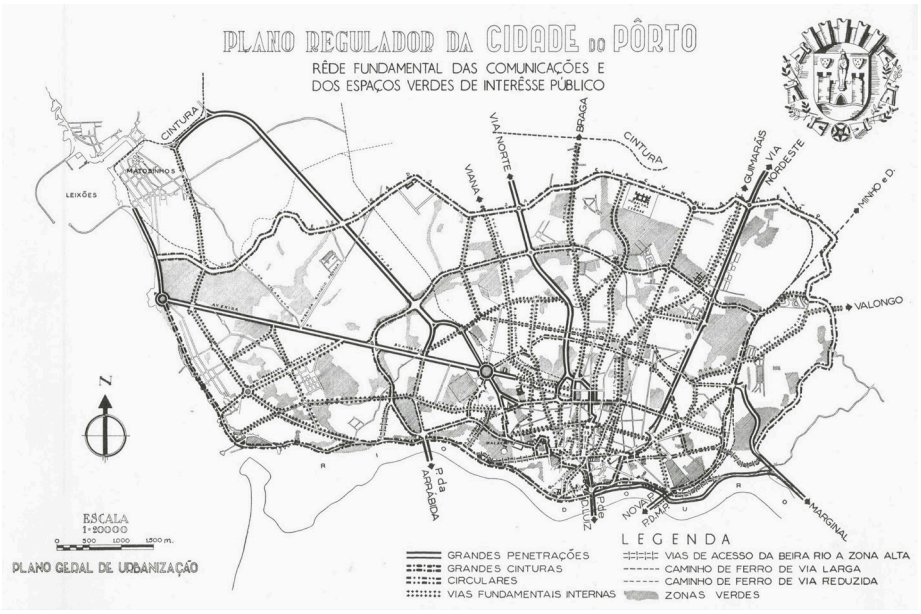
I have driven this freeway many times, always assuming that I was beyond the city, not even in a suburb but just passing through an industrial area. All you can see from the freeway are old modern looking warehouses. I never suspected these warehouses also served as a buffer, even if unwittingly, to housing neighbourhoods around them. The old and tall plan-trees siding the freeway are a clue that this was probably not a freeway to start with, at least not in the contemporary sense, but instead a 19th century styled avenue, a walk able boulevard, wanting to serve more than the mere flux of merchandise.

Planning the "great estate"

In March 1948, Porto's council approved the design of a road extension connecting the "5 de outubro" road, which leads directly to one of the city's central areas – the boavista roundabout – to the port of Leixões or what we might call "the Douro-Leixões economic complex".[1] At the time Leixões was one of the country's main interfaces. By the early 1950s, Porto became one of country's main industrial centres, surpassing Lisbon in terms of active population

1 Expression used by the architecture then student José Borrego, related to the fact that the port of *leixões* was originally built for boats that could not sail the river Douro, where the city's commercial activity was historically concentrated, see José Borrego, *Anteplano Duma Zona Portuária – Urbanologia* (MA diss., FAUP, Porto 1954), 3.

involved in the industrial sector.[2] The 1948 new avenue design emerged from the political will to modernize the economy in the wake of a wartime urban plan foregrounding the city's industrial development, part of the postwar economic restructuring enabled by the Marshall Plan. The new avenue in effect involved creating a more efficient corridor between the nodes of distribution (Leixões) and the various productive and storage units spread throughout the city and its outskirts. In other words, it involved making fast tracks for the drainage of the city's productivity [Fig. 1].



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This new avenue also implied a rationalization of the city's economic activities, namely where and how to concentrated headquarters, technical offices, storage and distribution centres, while removing these programs from the city centre, freeing it for an emerging service sector. Indeed, businesses appropriated key sections of the city centre and, to accomplish this effectively, urban policy gravitated around business priorities. From the outset, the road extension approved in 1948 drew its logic not from the territory that it would occupy, but from the desired reorganization of central Porto and its welcoming of a modern business oriented urban effectiveness. It is, thus, curious to observe how the council's urbanization office proposed an urbanization plan for the lands adjacent to the new avenue with several housing quarters. Indeed, it appears Porto's council took the opportunity offered by the new planning priorities to provide some amelioration to the city's housing situation. For this reason, the council's urbanization office moved ahead with the idea that this new avenue needed to be more than a corridor of merchandise, but also an extension of the city, outgrowing into one of its semi-rural outskirts.

The problem of the freeway we experience today was then the problem of rearranging the city's population and, thus, tending to those that would be without

Fig. 1

The new road system proposed in the 1952 master urban plan (Antão de Almeida Garrett, *Plano Regulador da Cidade do Porto*).

2 Fernando Rosas (ed.), *História de Portugal: O Estado Novo (1926-1974)*, vol. 7 (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1993), 65.

a place after the transformation of central Porto into a third-sector hub. In this respect, the reformist economic avenues engaged with more than one aspect of the city's industrial and commercial productivity – its historically consolidated concentration of human labour [Fig. 2].

I go beneath the freeway, through the east side tunnel, the sidewalks are still generous and ample. As I reach the other side of the freeway, coming out of the tunnel, the landscape is entirely different from the one I just came from. On my right side, to the north-west, there is a large estate with old and tall trees, encircled by a stone wall that looks aristocratic in appeal. I say aristocratic because it encloses *Casa de Ramalde* (House of Ramalde), the past residence of an old local noble family. Behind this estate, further westwards, there is a group of collective housing blocks, state-promoted in its apparent cheap materials and pre-made appeal. Facing these is the other side of the industrial zone I have departed from.

To my left there is a group of small two-storied houses with a meek complexion. Behind them a multi-storied condominium rises, probably not built twenty years ago, and deeply contrasting with the pauper, smallish, houses. I go past the first couple of small houses, symbolically taking me back to a village setting, as if suddenly walking through rural Portugal. Now I am somewhere in the past, an unrecognisable, yet familiar, past that lingers. As I go by these houses I reach an open space, at the corner where this road intersects another coming from the south. An old communal laundry occupies the corner, done in cement and stone, with large back-to-back cement tanks, where the water to rinse clothes still lays. This old public space, where mostly women used to gather, is just beneath the intersecting roads almost a full story. The latter were probably laid after the communal laundry and menacingly insinuated themselves over it. The open space created by the public laundry enables one to look within the innards of the old houses' plots. A combination of metal and wood sheds and shacks outgrowing slightly more permanent brick walls shows itself. In between these sheds and shacks some trees and chimneys pop up. There is probably some garden space in between the shacks, walls and old houses. But besides these packed gardens, the inner space of the quarter, constituted by the old houses on the intersecting roads, seems almost completely packed with the attributes of a self-functioning village. In other words, it is a collective housing complex, not by design but by gradual use and appropriation. The inner parts of the plots accommodate unforeseen tenements, residents and more. It is that unrecognisable familiar past that persists to exist and which came to be called *ilha* in Porto in some situations.[3]

3 The *ilha*, literally translatable as island, deriving its meaning from the latin *insulae* is the name associated with an architectural typology for workers' quarters specific to Porto's modern urban history, equivalent to the Birmingham back-to-back. It is also an old Portuguese slang word to signify that which belongs to the outcast city, the imaginary ghetto of Porto. For a history of the *ilha* see: Maria Ferreira, *As "Ilhas" do Porto: Estudo Socioeconómico*, (Porto: Câmara Municipal do Porto – Pelouro de Habitação e Acção Social, 2001); Gaspar Martins Pereira, "As Ilhas No Percurso Das Famílias Trabalhadoras Do Porto Em Finais Do Século XIX," in *Família, Espaço E Património*, edited by Carlota Santos Porto: CITCEM – Centro de Investigação Transdisciplinar Cultura, Espaço e Memória, 2011), 477-493; Paulo Castro Seixas, "Ilhas E Novos Condomínios No Porto Do Século XX, Reflexos Do Passado, Interrogações Do Presente," in Família, Espaço E Património, edited by Carlota Santos (Porto: CITCEM – Centro de Investigação Transdisciplinar Cultura, Espaço e Memória, 2011), 495–502.

I continue up the road leading from the communal laundry and its rural *ilha* to the townhall and the main street of Ramalde. On one side stands a new church, on the other the cemetery with its old chapel. I pass through an accumulation of what seems to be housing blocks erected sometime in the 1990s, with ground floor shops and adjacent parking. The road then becomes wider as four white story blocks, disposed in a strict geometrical pattern, emerge. Walking down a straight and generously spaced avenue, these blocks accommodate large open spaces in-between. The blocks are at times parallel and perpendicular to the avenue, so the in-between spaces oscillate between courtyard and green open space. The latter have grass that needs some caring, lumps of dirt appearing here and there. There are also cars parked everywhere, usually right next to small steel structures for drying clothes, recently built by the township to improve the neighbourhood's living conditions, namely by physically suggesting inhabitants not to dry their clothes in their balconies and windows – this apparently created the wrong impression for visitors.

Central stone paths in-between the blocks connect their different entrances. To enter each block, other smaller stone paths lead perpendicularly away from the main path onto common entrances. The base of the blocks is coated in granite, rising to waist level and then giving way to white towed façades. This creates the impression the blocks emerge from rock itself, that its foundations are stable and deep. The stone is but a filling, most blocks don't have basements and the ones that do, don't run very deep. It is more the symbolic gesture of gravity, both physical and social, as granite is a stone widely used in the north of Portugal, usually identified with nobility.

The white towed façades are blind on the block's shorter extremities and opened by groups of waist height windows and small balconies with regular rhythms, no deviation from an orthogonal metric. These rhythms are interrupted by the staircase that distributes to apartments on both sides of it. Residents that moved in in the late 1960s said the central staircase used to be open: each landing was an open balcony where people used to gather and talk during the day, in-between home shores – mainly women – and, when in summer, also during the night, making the stair landings small public living rooms from where they could talk with people walking in the stone paths, grass and on other staircases.[4] Nowadays, however, these stairways are semi-enclosed by frosted glass blades that reach well above medium Portuguese heights; the ground floor entrance was also closed.

The average number of apartments per block is between twelve and eighteen, each block built from six apartments per floor, three on each side of the central staircase. This neighbourhood was named *Campinas* and promoted by public housing policies from the early sixties that aimed to solve, in a more systematic way, the housing problem of the lower working-class of Porto. The *Campinas* neighbourhood came to house all kinds of lower-class families, including some

4 Collected from a group interview with old residents, on 11 of March of 2015.

from then recently demolished *ilhas*. Campinas, however, was just a portion of a greater urban plan publicly announced through the newspaper *O Primeiro de Janeiro*, in 1950, in the following terms: "A truly new city for six thousand inhabitants is going to be built in Ramalde – according to the most modern urban conceptions".[5]

The urban plan for Ramalde developed in the late 1940s and involved a large area between the *Boavista* avenue and the new avenue, filled with old farmlands and steads, aristocratic estates (House of Ramalde), several *ilhas* and some factories.[6] It was part of a more general master plan for the city and its metropolitan region, in development since the late 1930s.[7] The masterplan's main strategy was to establish Porto as the urban node tying northern Portugal. The new road network proposed a strict zoning policy, operating the functional distinction between housing, commerce, service, industry and leisure. The plan involved a campaign of urban renewal and new housing construction, following the vision of Porto as an organic "great estate," structured along a hierarchy of socio-environmental typologies, whose grounding example was the village.[8]

2

5 "Uma Verdadeira Cidade Nova Para 6 Mil Habitantes, Vai Ser Construída Em Ramalde, Segundo as Mais Modernas Concepções Urbanísticas," *O Primeiro de Janeiro*, February 26, 1950 (translation by author).

6 Maria Tavares, "Casas a Norte: As HE (Habitações Económicas – Federação de Caixas de Previdência) Num Processo de Continuidade," *Revista Arquitectura Lusíada*, no. 2 (2011): 80.

7 The master plan started in 1939, stemming from a government program for the creation and of urban master plans throughout Portugal and developed under the auspices of the Ministry of Public Works. Its first planning coordinator was the Italian architect-planner Marcello Piacentini and two of his collaborators, the architect Giorgio Calza Bini and engineer Vicenzo Civico. They were replaced in the early 1940s by the architect-planner Giovanni Muzio and, in 1943, the latter was replaced by the engineer Antão de Almeida Garrett, a former collaborator of Muzio. Távora worked under Garrett during the late 1940s and early 1950s, as he joined the city's urbanization office in 1948. In the early 1960s, Garrett was replaced, as lead planner, by the French architect-planner Robert Auzelle. See: Margarida Lôbo, "Planos de Urbanização: A Época de Duarte Pacheco" (PhD dissertation, Porto: FAUP, 1995); Maria Adriana Pacheco Rodrigues Gravato, "Trajecto Do Risco Urbano: A Arquitectura Na Cidade Do Porto, Nas Décadas de 30 a 50 Do Século XX, Através Do Estudo Do Conjunto Da Avenida Dos Aliados À Rua de Ceuta", (Master's Dissertation, Faculty of Literature of the University of Porto, 2004).

8 Garrett, in the public presentation of Porto's master plan in 1952, explained it thus: "In a village, the lords are like the natural protectors of the most in need that know to have in them a support – and the first feel themselves morally obliged to do so. Everybody knows each other and everybody counts on one another. If a poor dies, the neighbours support does not faulter, whatever their economic situation. (…) It becomes indispensable to return to the natural local organization and complete it with the greatest sum of gains that today's life affords in Antão de Almeida Garrett, *Plano Regulador Da Cidade Do Porto* (Porto: Câmara Municipal do Porto, 1952): 16, translation by author.

Fig. 2

Urban design for a neighborhood of economical housing in *Ramalde*, 1948 (Porto's municipal archive D-CMP-03-526-013).

3

A neighbourhood for a Modern Capital

The urbanization of Ramalde emerged from this urban ideal of a new organic urban unit, specifically as a modern service and housing area delimiting the city's growth westwards. In practice the urban plan was supposed to house present and future displaced residents, created from the clearing of "dangerous" housing situations from central Porto [Fig. 3]. So, simultaneously keeping with Porto's master plan and adapting Marshall Plan priorities, the urbanization of Ramalde aimed to solve the city's "housing crisis." As the newspaper clarified:

> his initiative – owed to the *Federação das Caixas de Previdência* (FCP)[9] – is of the greatest import to Porto, where the housing problem is far from finding a solution. (…) The construction of the new residential neighbourhoods, if it doesn't completely solve the problem – we must not forget that in Porto more than 50.000 people live in *ilha* houses –is a positive contribution, worthy of the biggest praises.[10] [Fig. 4]

This tone of reformist enthusiasm was betrayed by reality, in effect solutions were late and partial. The plan was acted with a mixed financial and organizational structure. The council advanced the urban plan and the technical expertise that would further develop the housing design and its construction. The central state, through the body of the FCP, funded the enterprise, stipulated the housing models and supervised the design and construction process. This was made possible by the dictatorship's adaptation to the postwar reconstruction environment, namely felt in the influence of Marshall Plan housing policies and the integration of experts with a reforming mindset in the ranks of civil and state corporations. Departing from a new legal framing for housing,[11] the FCP, a branch of the "almighty" INTP that, in the words of Fernando Rosas, was

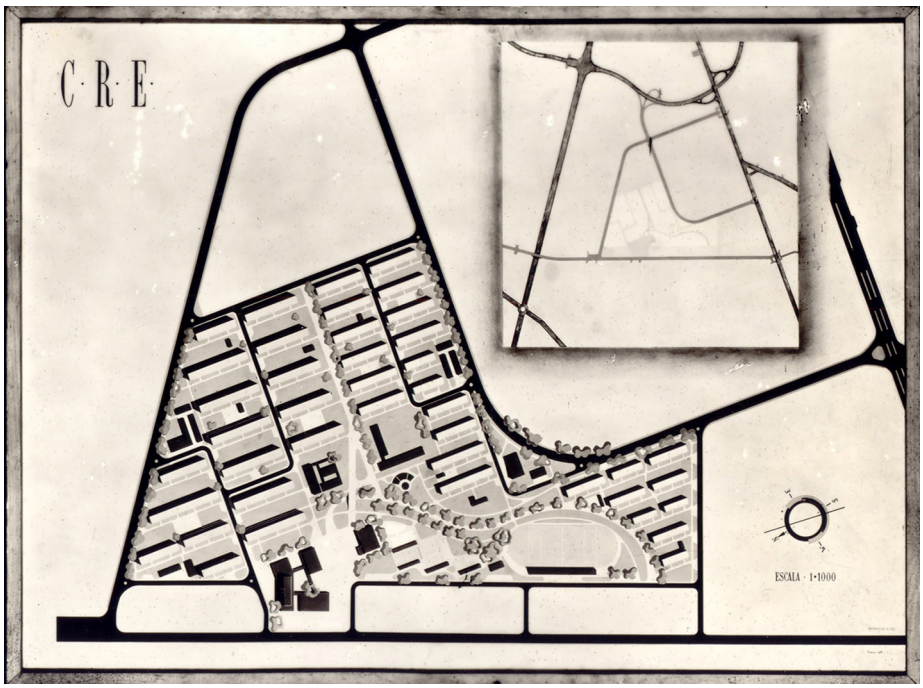
9 The Welfare Funds Federation was a welfare organization legislated in the immediate postwar, influenced by *Marshal Plan* directives, namely its housing program, and implementing the dictatorship's worker welfare and control apparatus, the *Instituto Nacional do Trabalho e Previdência* – INTP, translatable as National Institute of Work and Welfare. For INTP's work until 1943 see Instituto Nacional do Trabalho e Previdência, edited by, *Dez Anos de Política Social 1933-1943* (Lisboa, 1943); For an overview of FDP's housing program see Maria Tavares, "Leituras de Um Percurso Na Habitação Em Portugal. As Habitações Económicas – Federação de Caixas de Previdência," in *Habitação Para O Maior Número. Portugal, Os Anos de 1950-1980*, edited by Nuno Portas (Lisbon: IRHU – Lisbon Municipality, 2013), 21-45; On the relation of these government institutions with the dictatorship's administrative and executive structure see: José Luís Cardoso, "Corporativismo, Instituições Políticas E Desempenho Económico," in *Corporativismo, Fascismos, Estado Novo*, edited by Fernando Rosas e Álvaro Garrido, (Coimbra: Almedina, 2012), 101-120.

10 "Uma Verdadeira Cidade Nova Para 6 Mil Habitantes, Vai Ser Construída Em Ramalde, Segundo as Mais Modernas Concepções Urbanísticas". Translation by author.

11 May 7 of 1945 the dictatorship approved the decree-law no. 2007 that reformulated the norms by which public housing was to be promoted, built and made available. See Tavares, "Casas a Norte: As HE (Habitações Económicas – Federação de Caixas de Previdência) Num Processo de Continuidade": 78.

Fig. 3

Sporting event at Ramalde's sport's complex, unknown date (Porto's municipal archive F-NP-CMP-01-07-721,722,723).



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the "supreme guarantor of social discipline" through which an "embryonic and paternalistic social assistance" was developed,[12] created the housing program HE – *Habitações Económicas* (Economical Housing), which would take on the tutelage of several urban and housing plans, namely the one through which we are walking.

The Campinas blocks seem to result from the "modern conceptions" praised at the time and today: "The new residential zone will not be a group of houses with their gardens, but a great garden with their houses".[13] Even though the grass needs tending, its suggestion is easily conveyed: the blocks do seem to stand on a garden, bringing forth a garden city scenography, if only just that.[14] Yet Campinas is a later phase of the whole plan. In fact, it is one of its derivations.

Soon enough I find it, but not easily as expected, as there aren't many elements to distinguish the spatiality of the later phases from the first, original, modern neighbourhood of Ramalde. A paint stamp, printed on the blank white walls gives it away, it reads 'HE'. These marked blocks were not the first to be built; they were built in-between the Campinas' and the first phase. Their roofs give it away: they are sloped and not very "modern" looking, meaning flat, just like the ones in Campinas. I walk past the HE blocks made vivacious by richly cultivated front gardens, with many different flowers and vegetables. They seem personal appropriations of the wide grassed open spaces between the blocks.

12 Fernando Rosas, *Salazar E O Poder: A Arte de Saber Durar* (Lisbon: Tinta-da-china, 2012): 294-295. Translation by author.

13 "Uma Verdadeira Cidade Nova Para 6 Mil Habitantes, Vai Ser Construída Em Ramalde, Segundo as Mais Modernas Concepções Urbanísticas." Translation by author.

14 For a comparison of Ramalde's urban plan in the 1950s with garden-city models see Eduardo Fernandes, *A Escolha Do Porto: Contributos Para a Actualização de Uma Ideia de Escola* (PhD Diss., Guimarães: Escola de Arquitectura da Universidade do Minho, 2010), 125-132.

Fig. 4

The new urbanization plan for Ramalde of 1952 (Porto's municipal archive D-CMP-05-66-3-037).

In fact, many of these richly treated gardens are communal, organized by the tenants. Moving past the gardens and reaching a wide road a recent housing project seems to have been caught in the real-estate crash of 2008. Apparent concrete, unfinished windows, plastics of all sorts springing from a dark empty space inside, the whole complex boarded up with aluminium sheets. The road curves along this incomplete project and, on its other side, leads us to the first phase of Ramalde's urbanization.

The blocks seem smaller because of the flat roof. The walls and rhythms of openings are similar, if not the same, to all the other blocks before. The entrance and the staircase are, however, quite different. Its gardens are also richly cultivated and personalized. In-between the blocks the original trees, planted in the late 1950s, have grown higher than the blocks. Tenants closed the open balconies with conservatories – the habitual Portuguese marquise. An old tenant, moving in in1964, tells me the place is famous. Many architects come here to see the neighbourhood he says, "sometimes even in buses full of them".[15] Let us try to understand why this is so.

Portuguese Modern Architects Being Portuguese

In 1948 Távora was hired as an architect for Porto's urbanization office. His first known work, the urban plan of *Campo Alegre*, emerged from ongoing work on the new urban corridor and its various possible implications for the surrounding area. The plan was inserted within Garret's master plan described above. Contrary to original designs proposed by Milanese Giovanni Muzio, Távora's Campo Alegre tried a direct translation of CIAM's urban norms into Porto's urban landscape, advancing the modernist package of spatial solutions: segregation between pedestrian and vehicle traffic, as well as between different programs; housing blocks standing "freely" amidst open green spaces; the concentration of public activities in a common "precinct" that allowed "intense social life within the area." The whole thing would be, at least partially, self-sufficient and conceived to have its own traffic, public equipment and so forth.[16]

Like the late urban plan of Ramalde, it aimed to house "about 6000 inhabitants"[17] Campo Alegre was in many respects the unrealized prequel for the letter. Although the latter precedes the modernist exercise of Campo Alegre – the first known official document regarding Ramalde's urban plan dates to March 1948[18] – it was transformed by the inspiration of Campo Alegre when Távora assumed the lead for its design. Thus, the mystery of the bus loads of architects is partly solved: it is because of its famous author. The fact that Távora has become one

15 Interview in 3 of March of 2015.

16 For a contemporary reading of Campo Alegre's relation with CIAM norms see Nuno Portas, "Arquitecto Fernando Távora, 12 Anos de Actividade Profissional, Um Estudo Crítico," *Arquitectura*, no. 71 (July 1961): 11-12; for a more recent one, see Fernandes, "A Escolha Do Porto: Contributos Para a Actualização de Uma Ideia de Escola".

17 Távora cited in José António Bandeirinha, edited by, *Fernando Távora: Modernidade Permanente* (Porto: Associação Casa da Arquitectura, 2012), 198.

18 *Plano Parcial de Urbanização de uma Zona Destinada a Casas de Renda Económica em Ramalde*, Historical Archive of Porto Municipality, document D-CMP-03-526, see image 2.

of the most famous Portuguese architects is detrimental, but equally important Ramalde would become one of the first examples of CIAM's "heroic" period in Portugal, which has its particular charm, i.e., cultural capital in modernism nostalgic architecture circles.

The "heroic" modernism of Távora's design for Ramalde did not happen in a vacuum. Quite the contrary, it was part of a concerted effort within the fascist government headed by Oliveira Salazar, namely through the FCT, to experiment with dwelling languages and priorities following from the modernist impetus of the Marshall Plan. After the construction of the first FCT neighbourhood of Alvalade, in Lisbon, by the architect Miguel Jacobetty, the FCT started exploring housing typologies beyond this initial model. Jacobetty's first generation of FCT housing rearticulated a late 19th century liberal middle-class housing block, such as those we find in end of century Vienna developed by Otto Wagner.[19] Indeed, he designed Alvalade's blocks as the reproduction of a single rational model covered in a 19th century combination of *art-déco* decorated windows and panels, steel details, and monumental aspiring entrances with neoclassical symmetries. We might argue Jacobetty's Alvalade constitutes a nostalgic living archaeology of that late liberal spirit observable in central European countries: the desire to be one with the industry of the times while, simultaneously, not disguising its century old wish to civic nobility.[20]

Departure from this spatial language in the FCT occurred through the efforts of young architects that, cultured in the revisionist environment of the post-war, promoted a proximity to modernist codes and logics. A later phase of Alvalade, the "cell 8," planned by the architects Formozinho Sanches and Ruy d' Athouguia during the latter part of the 1940s and constructed in the early 1950s, showcased a Corbusian inspired spatial rationality: functionally dimensioned apartments, rejection of the road, elevation of the building from the ground and an urban articulation of Le Corbusier's specific take of the on garden-city ideal. This was the first building of its kind in Portugal, creating an immediate standard **[Fig. 5]**.

5

Fig. 5

Ruy de d'Athouguia and Sebastião Formosinho Sanchez, *Alvalade*'s "cell 8" housing blocks, built between 1952-1954.

From FCT's internal reconfiguration of architectural sensibilities, the field was open to encourage Ramalde's plan rethinking according to Távora's Campo Alegre proposal. The role of Nuno Teotónio Pereira, one of the younger

19 Carl Emil Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 24-115.

20 Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*.

architects in FCT, was instrumental to this change. He started his career as a consultant to Jacobetty's plan for Alvalade in 1947, assisting the detailing and construction process. Soon afterwards he was invited to integrate the technical staff of the housing branch of FCP and made responsible for the first competition for new architectural typologies for economical housing. This competition served as a recruiting platform for the younger, more modernist inclined, architects. The architects selected were in effect selected from Teotónio Pereira's social circle, having himself "fled" from Lisbon's Fine-Arts school in 1946, to study in Porto's, at the time considered more artistically free.[21] By 1948 Távora and Teotónio Pereira were more than acquaintances, having shared a common agenda since 1945 in the debate of what architecture for the modern Portuguese house. Yet Távora was not selected right away to design Ramalde.

Compelled by the FCP in 1949, the Porto's council opened a competition for the development of the urban plan's housing types, specially directed at two architects from the school of fine arts, one of them being João Andresen, who had developed a design for Ramalde in 1948-1949. The other competition entry was authored by the architect Manuel Magalhães and followed closely the example of Jacobetty's Alvalade.[22] AAndresen's proposal, developed in collaboration with architect Rogério Martins, while maintaining the spatial dispositions of the "petit-bourgeois" typology, namely the maid's quarter, the study and the total number of rooms, proposed a modernist language, specifically: the elimination of the corridor; the functional segregation between sleeping and working – rooms, living room, study and maid's quarters, adjoining the kitchen and laundry, are all segregated through a highly ordered spatial planning.

In February 1951, these two typological proposals were the target of the concerned opinion of the *Comissão Municipal de Arte e Arqueologia* (Municipal Commission of Art and Archaeology), a branch of the council's urban regulating apparatus.[23] This expert body openly rejected the modernist looking proposal by Andresen, claiming it completely missed the "spirit" of Ramalde's urban plan. These experts were referring to the guiding vision of Porto as a grand noble estate, with its well delimited and represented social layers and spatial partitions. There was on the council's side a clear identification of modernist forms as anti-cultural, which indirectly rejected, according to them, the ideological aesthetic of a well distributed society. FCT forced the decision and Andresen's solution moved forward, yet not with the same architects at the helm. Curiously,

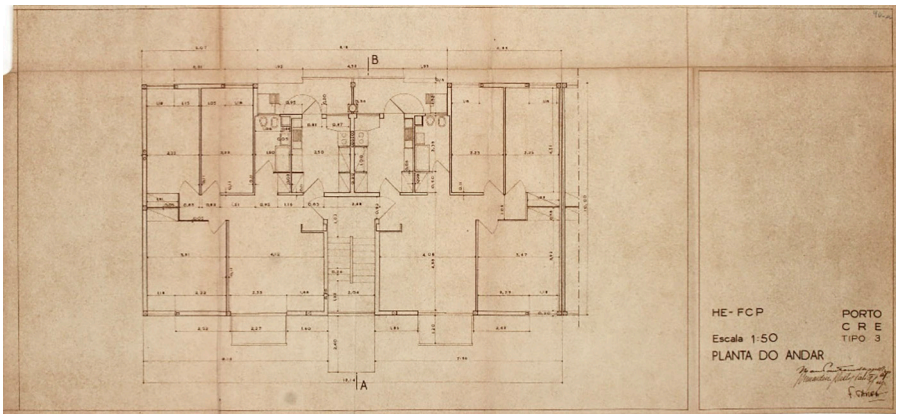
21 See Tavares, "Leituras de Um Percurso Na Habitação Em Portugal. As Habitações Económicas – Federação de Caixas de Previdência": 8.

22 Tavares, "Casas a Norte: As HE (Habitações Económicas – Federação de Caixas de Previdência) Num Processo de Continuidade", 84.

23 These commissions were formalized by national decree in 1936 and were responsible for passing judgment on local urbanization and building plans, specifically regarding their relationship towards the city's heritage. Their main area of purview was the city's historical centre but its remit also involving passing judgment more widely on the "defense of art, culture and popular education." For a brief historical description see Fátima Abraços, "História Da Conservação E Restauro Do Mosaico Romano, Subsídios Para O Conhecimento Do Estado de Conservação Dos Mosaicos No Sul de Portugal" (Master's Diss., Faculty of Literature of the University of Lisbon, 2000), 40-43.

as Távora picks up the design where Andresen and Magalhães left it, this issue returns with a twist.

Somewhere between early 1951 and 1952, Távora, who had been working as a technician for the city for four years, was charged with 'solving' Ramalde. Távora used Andresen's typological proposal – the exclusion of corridors and other obsolete functional schemes and took it a step further. While Andresen's proposal was in some ways just a modernist formal translation of Jacobetty's Alvalade, Távora's excluded some of its aspects of 'middle-class luxury.' The study, as well as the maid's room, were removed from the design. The living room, which in Andresen's proposal was generous, was reduced in size almost to the limit of usable space but not quite reaching Le Corbusier's minimal standards, likewise with the bedrooms. Within this logic, cabinets were placed above room entrances and the reduced halls that resulted from the intersection of various rooms, such as the bathroom/main-room access space in the two-bedroom flat, or the small corridor distributing to rooms in the three-bedroom typology. The kitchen was also made smaller both in width and length. Width wise, the reduction served to place the bathroom in-between the kitchen and the first bedroom, creating a small hall in front of the bathroom to segregate the latter from the living room. Lengthwise, it created a semi-exterior balcony serving various functions, namely as a laundry hidden by concrete blades, behind which there is the bathroom window. The dirty, wet, cooking section of the flat was thus accommodated in a neatly tied square area, adjoining the flat's entrance and enclosing the stairwell. [Fig. 6].



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This permitted the concentration of all piping in the central wall dividing each flat, where different kitchens touched. To this rationalization of Ramalde's typology, Távora made correspond a frugal aesthetic. Between the late liberal civility of the first Alvalade neighbourhoods and the collective authoritarian civility of Sanches' and Athouguia's Alvalade, Távora proposed yet another aesthetic rendition of being modern: that of the Weimar social-democrats. It did not face the same resistance in Porto's council that Andresen's plan did a couple of years before.

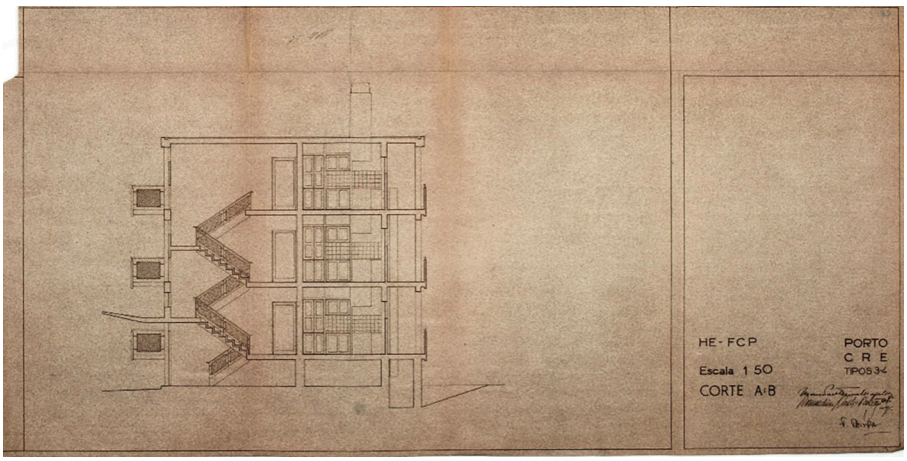
Ramalde was, thus, a choice for Ernst May's Römerstadt garden-cityor Hans Scharoun's *Siemensstadt* or still Bruno Taut's and Hugo Häring's *Onkel-Toms-Hütte*. Like in all these city extensions, which "just as much in any English garden city" produced an environment of "peacefulness"[24], the "new city" of Ramalde did

Fig. 6

Plan of Távora's rendition of Ramalde (Porto's municipal archive D-CMP-05-66-4-089).

24 Abraços, "História Da Conservação E Restauro Do Mosaico Romano, Subsídios Para O Conhecimento Do Estado de Conservação Dos Mosaicos No Sul de Portugal".

just that. Between the grown trees and the plan's segregating disposition between block and street, one has the feeling of urban tranquillity, felt even more dramatically when arriving from busy adjacent avenues, built during the city's later expansion. This feeling of tranquillity is corroborated by some of its dwellers, young and old alike, who rejoice the marvel of living in such a peaceful place in the midst of a bustling urbanity, "so close to everything and so peaceful," many saidy [Fig. 7].[25]



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When the Távora's first phase of Ramalde was finished in the late 1950s, only nine blocks out of the forty-three originally advertised were built, 138 apartments in total built. There was no bus or tram to promote the commuting that had justified the German housing experiences cited above. The blocks were surrounded by agricultural land, vacant fields, some dirt roads, industry here and there, the old noble estate of Ramalde and a public housing development from two decades earlier, made of semi-detached single-family houses done in 'national style', with their private gardens and central square.

People commuted by foot and car, either their own car, which were not many at the time, or sharing rides into town. Groceries were either bought by the men, when returning home from work, or bought by women from local farmers and other small providers. There were also some services that came to the doorstep through the diligence of fishwives, bakers and milkmen. Of course, the postman came to the neighbourhood, as well as inspectors from the electrical and garbage companies. All of which were overseen by the urbanization's inspector, centrally appointed to manage all sorts of aspects of the neighbourhood's livelihood, ranging from repairs and maintenance to social supervision of guests and tenants.

Apparently, the garbage men had the hardest task, because Távora designed a centralized waste disposal system for each group of six apartments that would make rubbish converge on a basement depot. Garbage men would have to go down into the basement of each group of six apartments, pick up the depot, then come up the stairs and dump it into the wagon, so they had to do it twenty-three times in total per couple of days. It was not long until they realized they were underpaid for the smelly basement trips and until tenants started cementing their shoots because of bad odours.

Maintenance also had setbacks as council authorities progressively rolled

Fig. 7

Section of Távora's Ramalde (Porto's municipal archive D-CMP-05-66-4-090a).

25 From interviews with old residentes of Ramalde, 2015. See also interviews conducted in João Paixão, in "Um Bairro Intemporal No Porto – Unidade Residencial de Ramalde" (Masters Diss., Porto: FAUP, 2011).

back on the upkeep of the area's public spaces, namely its gardens, but also regarding buildings facades. Only very recently, when tenants organized in private condominium associations, did some restoration works get underway and, even then, there is a big disparity between those with greater organizational skills, free time and money, from those with less of each of these aspects or all of them combined. The result is apparent: in the same block of three units, one group may be glittering the original splendour, while the other two are in-between some state of decay.[26] In terms of services, the neighbourhood also faced some issues. Bus service only came much later and the tram only in the 2000s. For the longest of times, the residents of Ramalde, namely women who were mostly confined to the home, dwelled in a sort of island of modernity. They shared more in terms of everyday with the agricultural-industrial landscape of the city's outskirts, than they did with the cosmopolitan habits of central Porto.

In their time, however, Ramalde's modernist blocks represented a celebrated modernization of the city through the upgrading of its urban territory. It also spoke to how the county was joining, at least in part, the rest of Europe in reconstructing the continent anew, sharing its Marshall Plan welfare prerogatives. Likewise, it also spoke to how a group of willing politicians and technicians were making Porto modern, stringing its territories with new avenues of economy and living. For some Portuguese architects, the Ramalde blocks came to stand for one of the few works in the country opening routes for a radical spatial language, together with Alvalade's "cell8". Its flat roof, rigid fenestration grid, austere language, made to bear the phantasmagoria of socialism, welfare and democracy were also appealing for a coming young and progressive generation of postwar Portuguesearchitects. Celebrated as such, it stood for a sign that Portuguese architects, despite the dictatorship, were not falling back with the ideological and technical advancements of the rest of Europe.[27]

In the mid-1980s, Távora recalled:

> Alvalade [Jacobetty's solution] had a configuration that at that moment to us architects seemed terrible. It was a plan with streets disposed in blocks, with main and secondary streets (…) Well, the guidance we received was to do a similar plan and I, yet again, thought that it should be a modern plan and modern implied the continuity of spaces and open blocks (…).[28]

He argued that the first urban plan for Ramalde of 1948 and the later variations of Andresen and Magalhães, based as they were in Jacobetty's Alvalade,

26 However, it must be said that recent pressures to resell apartments and the desirability of the place have been increasing, which has promoted restoration efforts.

27 For two of the most influent readings, at the time, of Ramalde's innovation and power, see Portas, "Arquitecto Fernando Távora, 12 Anos de Actividade Profissional, Um Estudo Crítico"; Nuno Teotonio Pereira, *Escritos*: 1947-1996 (Porto: FAUP, 1996).

28 Javier Frechilla, "Fernando Távora, Conversaciones en Oporto," *Arquitectura,* no. 261 (July-August 1986): 23. Translation by author.

"were not adapted to the *desenho* and characteristics of Porto".[29] It is essential to bear in mind that for Távora's and later generations of Portuguese architects, modernist architecture was idealized, in his words, as "(…) an architecture of war, was a declaration of war"[30] from the postwar onwards. This historicizing of the 'heroic' period of Portuguese modernist architecture was essentially written after the fact and within the political environment of a democratic Portugal repudiating all things dictatorial as much as possible. It is only understandable if it is tinged with the stakes of the day. In contrast, what we find at the time of Ramalde's conception, as illustrated by Távora's critique of Jacobetty's Alvalade is that modernist architecture was made to relate to an imagined social identity of the city. The modernist design of Ramalde was answering the "characteristics of Porto", these being a proud entrepreneurial provincial capital that was being re-conceived as a great modern estate with very clear values and urban hierarchies. Modernism meet an unsuspecting identity politics, not of the nationalist kind espoused by the dictatorship, but homegrown and regional in nature. Távora's Ramalde articulated a reinvention of tradition, reproducing an existing observed culture with a new language. Above all, modernism was a language for and of Porto, that was the point. Thus started a story that until this day makes the city, its famous architecture school and its eminent architects the bearers of a 'heroic' style **[Fig. 8, 9]**.

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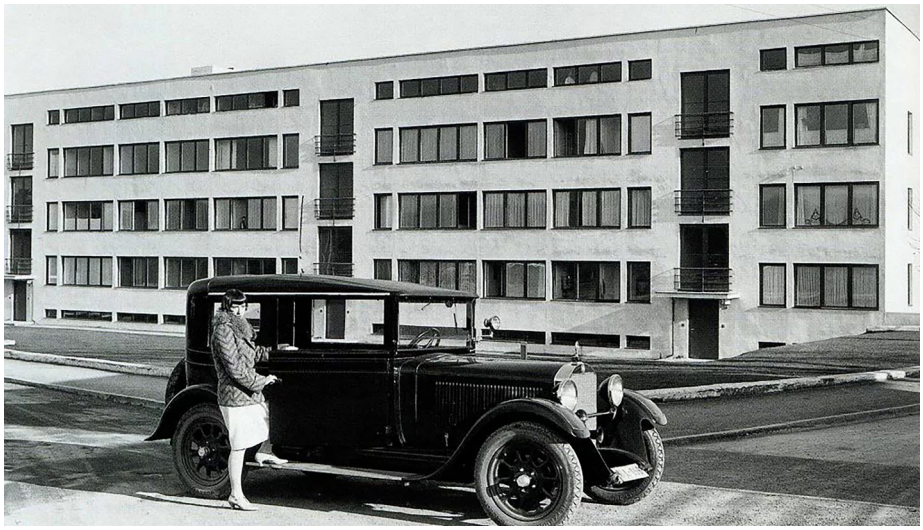

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Fig. 8

Távora's Ramalde neighborhood in the 1980s (FIMS/AFT, ref. 0017-Foto0003).

Fig. 9

Mies van der Rohe's housing block in the Weissenhof siedlung, 1927, unknown author.

29 Távora, interview, in Nuno Lacerda, "Projecto E Modos de Habitar" (PhD Diss., FAUP, 2008).

30 Fernando Távora and Jorge Figueira, "Fernando Távora, Coisa Mental: Entrevista," *Unidade*, no. 3 (June 1992): 102. Translation by author.

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