

Alfredo Viana de Lima, Fernando Távora

Between Sigtuna (1952) and Royaumont (1962)

*In 1951, Alfredo Viana de Lima (1913-91) and Fernando Távora (1923-2005) were in Hoddesdon for the first Portuguese participation in CIAM. Viana de Lima had been invited by Sigfried Giedion and Josep Lluís Sert as a delegate from Portugal. The invitation to participate in the activities of the Congresses caused the ODAM (A Organização dos Arquitectos Modernos), founded in 1947, to be rethought and aligned with the objectives of the CIAMs by also assuming – not without internal debate – the identity of CIAM Porto, a specification that was not necessary because no other CIAM groups existed in the country. In 1952 (25-30 June), the Portuguese delegation attended the CIAM Council Meeting in Sigtuna, Sweden, a preparatory activity for CIAM 9 to be held in Aix-en-Provence. The objective of the meeting is to write a Charte de l'Habitat, which will not have an immediate outcome. Two texts relating to the meeting are preserved at AFIMS, one by Viana de Lima – in French, undated –, and the second by Fernando Távora – in French, autographed and typed – dated 7 July 1952. This second text, although brief, already contains key elements of the critique of internationalism that is among the reasons for Távora's unease with CIAM events. Just over a decade later he published (Fernando Távora, "The Royaumont meeting", *Arquitectura*, no. 73, 1963) the text on the Royaumont meeting in which he justifies his distance from the revisions to CIAM themes proposed by TEAM X.*



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Dear Colleagues,

The Portuguese CIAM Group, “in the process of organisation”, is very honoured to bring the work we have started on the theme of the “Habitat Charter” to the Stockholm meeting and to finalise it at the CIAM Congress. It goes without saying that we claim no more here than to mention the issues that form the basis of our preparation for CIAM 9.

Although our work does not offer anything new, it is at least the result of considerable effort, given the short time available and the circumstance of being the first outcome of a GROUP still ‘in the process of being organised’.

Our work, carried out under my responsibility and personally directed by me, has seen not only the effective collaboration of the members present here, but also of our colleagues Fernando Távora, Andresen, Alves de Sousa and others who, with great regret, cannot be with us.

I would like to mention the great contribution made to our work by two of the main members of the youth component, Luís Praça, creator of the diagrams, diagrams, and their colours, and Tello Korrodi.

Our work has two aspects: the first is the work of analysis on the functions of the Habitat, an analysis based on Hegel’s method – negation of negation – which led us to the definition of an Objective that we called “Contribution to the HABITAT Chart”; the other aspect is the exemplification conducted through the analysis of one of the conditions: the condition of space. We define this aspect as a suggestion for a grid.

We cannot fail to recognise the countless difficulties encountered and the impossibility, for reasons of time, of dealing with the specific cases of Children and Extensions. We recognise our imperfections and possibilities for error, but our presence at this meeting expresses our desire to benefit from your experience and advice. Following this intention, we have kept blanks in the boxes of the “conditions of space” grid to consider your suggestions and criticisms.

I would not wish to end my brief remarks without presenting you with the warmest and friendliest greetings from the Portuguese CIAM Group.

Alfredo Viana de Lima

The Portuguese CIAM group (under organization) is presenting at the Stockholm meeting an essay analysing habitat problems, accompanied by a graphic rendering of one of its conditions.

The Habitat Charter to be defined by CIAM 9 must be drawn up considering the habitat problems of the different countries of the world and have a spirit so that its application does not go against the specific experience of each of the countries wishing to adopt it as a basis for their own achievements.

Since the Charter is a universal instrument, it must not block specific manifestations. But since the Charter must result from the analysis of habitat problems under the most varied conditions, it is indispensable, first, to establish a method of analysis. We believe that this last point must be the essential outcome of the present meeting, and we therefore present a hypothesis regarding the method in question.

The method of analysis to be defined at the Stockholm meeting must have the characteristics already indicated in relation to the Habitat Charter, so that all national groups, using it, can present CIAM 9 with its complete application in each specific case. After the evaluation of all these cases – specific application of a universal method of analysis – it will then be necessary to arrive, in conclusion, at common objectives defining the Habitat Charter.

To this end, the Portuguese CIAM group (under organization) proposes that the Stockholm meeting, with the objective of developing the Habitat Charter for CIAM 9:

(a) establish a method for analysing the current state of the Habitat, a method that, aspiring to the universal, may allow for specific applications;

b) invite all national groups to apply the same method to their specific cases, while defining the procedure or procedures to be followed for such application.

Fernando Távora, 7 July 1952

The fact that we didn't reach a conclusion at Royaumont, and that we didn't even try to do so, is deeply significant to me. There are times when it is possible for a group of men to come to clear, lucid, schematised conclusions; others, on the other hand, when it is only possible to conclude that... it is impossible to find a conclusion.

The first case occurred, for example, when the men of the Charter of Athens came together; they certainly made a great effort to reach a conclusion, but in any case, they produced a document in which paths are indicated, where there is no uncertainty and where a grammar and a few key words made it possible to establish a common language. These were men with certainties, with the ability to prioritise and analyse the problems they were aware of, hence the creation of a letter arriving at supposedly universal conclusions.

This was not, I suppose, the case at the Royaumont meeting. I can't exactly consider myself a participant in the meeting since, having not presented any work, a certain natural shyness prevented me from speaking in public. I was therefore more of an assistant, and perhaps this allowed me to observe a little from the outside the significance of the discussions and the work that was presented.

Little time still separates us from the Charter of Athens, but circumstances have evolved in such a way that, in my opinion and now, a formal conclusion similar to that remarkable document is absolutely impossible, almost childish.

Times and dimensions have changed... Reality is more diverse, richer, and more varied. It is not possible, for the time being, to give recipes, to classify with sovereignty, to hierarchise with precision. The world appears to our eyes and our minds as complex, disturbing. Unusual. We know man better; we begin to unravel the phenomena of society and, at the same time, everything becomes more complicated. Contacts are increasing, new cultures are coming into play, concepts are relativising, the field of science and technology is broadening, in short, man and the world are flourishing in unexpected ways. One senses that this is a time of research and doubt, of re-encounter, drama, and mystery. So how can we conclude clearly?

But what we've just said, comparing the men of Athens with ourselves, is not intended to diminish their endeavour and its significance in any way, as well as all their thinking and the achievements that resulted from it. All the Royaumont participants signed a letter sent to Le Corbusier, which simply said "nous continuons", which succinctly and clearly expresses the meaning of our relationship with the heroic generation that preceded us. But to continue, to endeavour to achieve the same heroism in the face of any given reality, does not mean copying solutions or falling asleep in their shadow.

The statement that the time is not ripe for a conclusion cannot be considered pessimistic or sceptical. As far as I'm concerned, you shouldn't try to categorise such a statement, but just check whether it's true. I don't think it's

shameful that a group of well-intentioned men, animated by frankness and sincerity, could come to such a conclusion. Wouldn't it be less honest to do the opposite?

During the dense days and nights in Royaumont, many facts – big and small – led me to this conclusion. The spirit of the meeting was perhaps summed up in Coderch's little comment when Candilis presented his plan for 25,000 homes for Toulouse, a plan that was realised in five months, while Coderch himself said he needed six months to study the design of a small house. This striking contrast clearly shows us the scale of the problems that are beginning to worry us and that we absolutely need to resolve, problems that were the stuff of visionaries only a few years ago but are now a strong and vivid reality. I believe that the truth was on both sides, simply that awareness of the phenomenon, no longer as a utopia but as a palpable reality, is now emerging in its fullness.

It is the need for a new synthesis between the number 1 and the number 25.000 that is beginning to present itself to our minds as indispensable. Whatever sense, meaning or extension you want to give to this contrast, you will realise that it exists a little and everywhere in our world; It doesn't exist in the game between individual freedom and the "rebellion of the masses" that we've been witnessing, in the distance that separates the raw object from the product of the machine, in the gap that must be filled between intelligence and the love of order and the need for the spontaneous, the chaotic, the subjective, in the world that exists between old cultures that cannot be rejected and the most advanced forms of civilisation, in the extreme differences in living standards that separate men, in the speeds that can reach the pedestrian and the astronaut, between the human love of peace and the imminent danger of a war that will devastate everything and everyone, between the scale of a small rural village and a city with millions and millions of inhabitants, a region, a continent or the entire globe?

How can we achieve the essential synthesis between such real and apparently opposing elements of the same, continuous reality?

And, as a result, one theme came up frequently at the Royaumont meeting: that of the architect's responsibility. This is understandable; when there are no concrete, clear, exact truths, the problem arises more strongly because responsibility is always linked to the possibility of choosing and choosing between 1 and 25.000, in its real meaning or in its symbolic meaning, is no easy task...

Don't take these words and this interpretation as some form of scepticism or pessimism. This is simply an awareness of reality. To ignore it and come to comfortable conclusions would be nothing more than a betrayal. To be aware of a problem is to have already partly solved it. We should therefore feel very satisfied if we have come to know a little about the drama that surrounds us, because this is the first and indispensable step towards a victorious synthesis.

So, let's turn this awareness into a cry of hope for a future synthesis.

And let this impossibility of concluding for now, this desire to continue and to survive, be the most significant conclusion of our meeting and encourage us to hold future meetings.

Life is continually reborn of itself.

Fernando Távora, December 1962