

Fernando Távora: Churches and Modernity in Portugal

INVITED

Távora, Churches, Convent, Modern, Catholic.

/Abstract

Fernando Távora (1925-2005), a renowned architect from Oporto, left a profound legacy, which includes religious projects that played a significant role in shaping the human and architectural profile of a master whose centenary of birth was recently celebrated by the HPA magazine. A devout Catholic since his early age, as documented in the recently published records of his youth diaries, Távora would find in Catholic religious commissions an initial and privileged space to investigate and explore modernity in a broad sense. *Modern Churches at school, Modern Convent in the city, One lecture, Design exercises and real commissions, Working with the community* is our proposal to highlight his contribution for modern religious architecture discussion. Throughout the 1950's and 60's Fernando Távora, as teaching assistant and later professor at Porto School of Fine Arts (ESBAP, Escola Superior de Belas Artes do Porto/Oporto), he proposed to his students design projects of religious nature that, in parallel, he was developing in his atelier. Távora was a member of the Movement for the Renewal of Religious Art (MRAR, Movimento de Renovação da Arte Religiosa) with continued participation since the 1950s. Having strong cultural and social concerns, he actively participated in both the continued renovation of the School and the responsibilities he assumed in the diocese of Oporto. We find him associated with social promotion work in the second half of the 1960s in Oporto's Diocese, a commitment that he would continue through civic and political roles assumed after the 25th of April revolution, namely in the Local Ambulatory Support Service (SAAL, 1974-1975) operations.

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João Luís Marques, graduated from FAUP – Faculty of Architecture at the University of Porto (2006), earned a PhD in Architecture from the same institution in 2017 with the thesis *"The Church in the City: Service and Hospitality, Portuguese Architecture 1950-1975,"* funded by FCT.

Erasmus student at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia, he completed an internship in Barcelona with Carlos Ferrater. He began his professional career in Porto, collaborating with Camilo Cortesão, Serôdio Furtado, and Correia Ragazzi, alongside pursuing independent architectural practice, which he continues today.

Since 2013, he has been a researcher at the Center for Studies in Architecture and Urbanism CEAU and has been collaborating with the Center for Religious History Studies CEHR at the Portuguese Catholic University since 2015. His research focuses on the History of Architecture and Portuguese Architecture, through which he has organized events, exhibitions, and editorial projects, many extending beyond academic circles.

He is a member of international platforms like OARC (Observatory of Contemporary Religious Architecture) and ICOMOS, as well as the ATRIO group – Liturgy, Art, and Architecture.

Since 2018, he has been an Invited Assistant Professor at FAUP, teaching courses such as Portuguese Architectural History and, currently, the History of the City of Porto and Ancient and Medieval History.

Modern Churches at School

The pedagogical activity of Fernando Távora started in the beginning of the 1950s, upon invitation by Carlos Ramos (1897-1969), who then became the director of ESBAP. After completing his studies in 1950, Fernando Távora began his teaching career alongside Carlos Ramos, as his assistant in Architectural Composition (4th year) from 1951 to 1957.

Master Carlos Ramos was a unique figure and led the restructuring of ESBAP, along the 1950's and 1960's, "gathering for the Mother-House many of the dividends from the personal (or group) strengths of those involved in the multiple activities, which he himself often shared." Indeed, throughout his tenure as head of the school, he transformed the

(...) concept of School/Workshop: he went beyond the vision of the bourgeois patronage super-studio and embraced the idea of a School-oriented-towards-community-service, the true Workshop-School for the 'non-genius', the anti-'style school', capable of training professional citizens well-equipped to face the challenges of a very poor country like ours, grappling with an exhausting war and an uncertain political succession process in the making.¹

In 1952, Fernando Távora wrote in the magazine *Panorama* that Oporto had favorable signs and conditions suggesting "the possibility of a modern Architecture." This was not only supported by the School responsible for training future professionals, but also the understanding of public and private entities whose cooperation materialized in various ways, whether through "an urbanistic solution that allows or imposes a satisfactory architectural solution" or "the need for a construction of public interest that the Municipality does not hesitate to carry out in accordance with the life of the City, without prejudices of any kind."

Contemporary architecture is all what is created in our time; modern architecture is all that, being contemporary, is created in accordance with our time. (...) Those who attempt to define modern architecture as something expressed by a form, a technical process, or a program are mistaken. Such a definition makes no sense. Humans are different in space and time, under different physical conditions. Modern architecture is not a style, but the result of an attitude.²

At the end of the 1952-1953 academic year, Távora participated in two initiatives at ESBAP that would shape the school's renewal and its engagement with religious commissions: the hosting of the *Exhibition of Contemporary Religious Architecture* and the pioneering academic exercise for the fourth year of the Special Architecture Course, which involved converting a warehouse into a chapel in the fishing village of Afurada (Gaia). This exercise would later lead to a real commission building site (1954-1955) [Fig. 1, 2, 3].

1 Octávio Lixa Filgueiras, "A escola do Porto 1940/69," in *Carlos Ramos, exposição retrospectiva da sua obra* (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1986), n.p. (translation by the author).

2 Fernando Távora, "O Porto e a Arquitectura moderna," *Panorama – revista portuguesa de arte e turismo*, no. 4, II série (1952): n.p. (translation by the author).

In turn, the traveling exhibition, organized by an informal group of Catholic artists and students, was first presented in the Church of St. Nicholas (Lisbon)³ before moving to ESBAP – a hub for the training of modern architects, painters, and sculptors.

This exhibition does not merely present works. It goes further: it criticizes. (...) Not with the pretension of solving the problem of religious architecture in our time, but of framing it, taking clear awareness of its elements and of the urgency with which it arises among us. And this is done through structured observation and analysis of living tradition – so often evoked, yet neither followed nor respected.⁴

These words, taken from the exhibition catalog and published in the ESBAP bulletin, clearly reflect the interest generated by the exhibition. The critique inherent to the exhibition was embraced within the school, which fostered it in defense of the autonomy of education. Obviously, the school was by no means detached from the debate on religious architecture.

The proposals for the new chapel to serve the fishing community was naturally aligned with the values of purity, truth, poverty, and peace advocated by the young organizers of the *Exhibition of Contemporary Religious Architecture*. The academic exercise became a laboratory for exploring these values. Modernity lays more in this exploration than in the design of forms, which were often constrained. Reflecting on architectural works in Portugal up to the mid-20th century reveals the radical nature of the challenge posed to the students.

In Oporto, a local group of the *MRAR* emerged, associated with ESBAP. It was lead by Luiz Cunha, and involved figures such as Fernando Távora, Álvaro Siza, Carlos Alberto Carvalho Dias, Maria Luísa Marinho Leite, and José Grade, among others. Távora participated in several meetings and even hosted some in his office.

Parallel to the students' work, Fernando Távora developed the remodeling project for the *Instituto Nun'Álvares* (Santo Tirso, 1952) – a Jesuit boarding school housed in a former thermal hotel north of Oporto. The project included various facilities, such as a new library and the adaptation of a rectangular room into a chapel. The proposed solution stood out for its simplicity and axial organization: at the far end, a marble altar was complemented by a large wooden cross with a gilded baldachin suspended from the ceiling and lighting [Fig. 4].

This appears to have been the first religious commission Távora undertook as an independent professional. A decade later he would return to design an extension that included a classroom pavilion and a new chapel (Santo Tirso, 1963-1965), with the congregation organized around the altar, fully embracing the spirit of Vatican II.

3 See João Alves da Cunha and João Luís Marques, "Catholic parishes in Lisbon master plano of 1959. The legacy of the SNIP and the MRAR," in *Territories of faith. Religion, Urban planning and demographic change in post-war architecture*, ed. Sven Sterken and Eva Weyns (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2022), 191-220.

4 "Arquitetura Religiosa Contemporânea," *Arte Portuguesa. Boletim da Escola Superior de Belas Artes do Porto*, no. 2-3 [1951-1952 and 1952-1953] (1954): 11 (translation by the author).

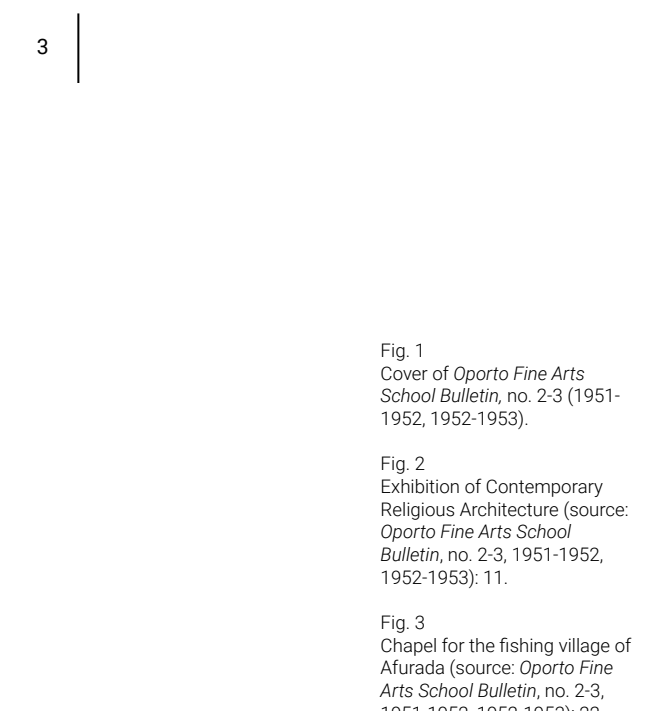
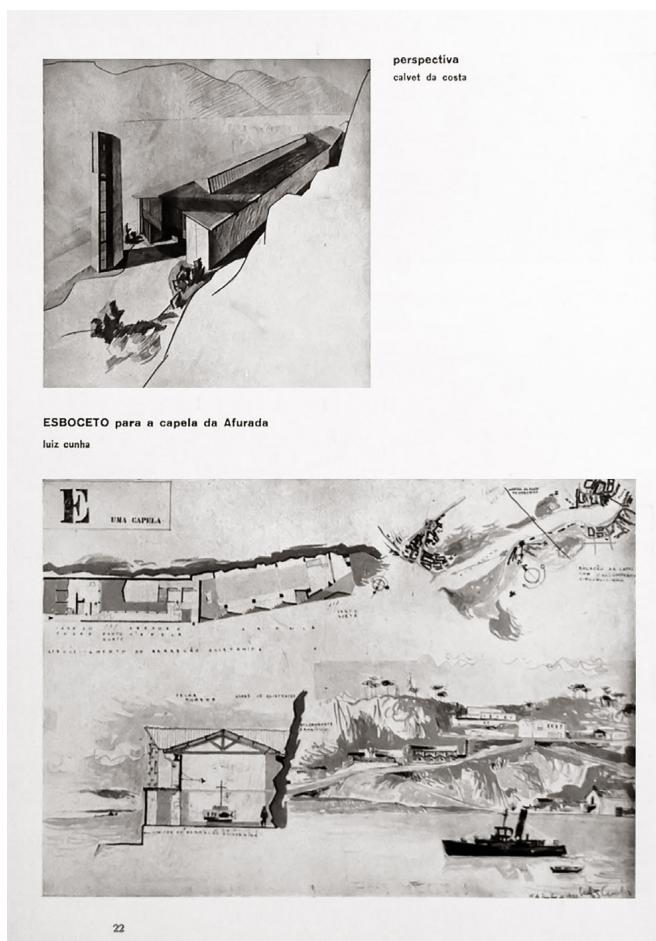
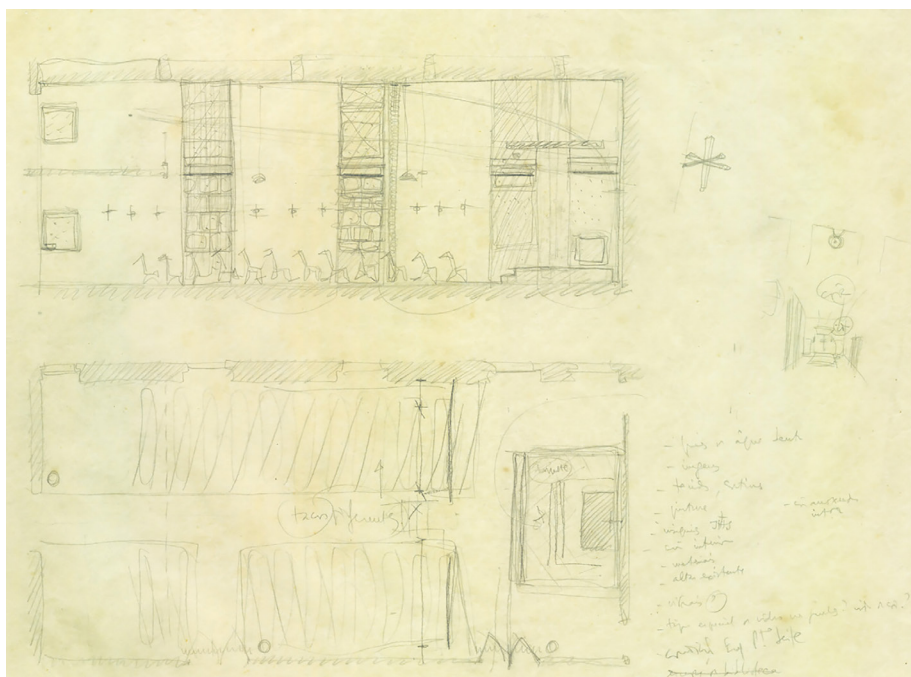


Fig. 1
Cover of *Oporto Fine Arts School Bulletin*, no. 2-3 (1951-1952, 1952-1953).

Fig. 2
Exhibition of Contemporary Religious Architecture (source: *Oporto Fine Arts School Bulletin*, no. 2-3, 1951-1952, 1952-1953): 11.

Fig. 3
Chapel for the fishing village of Afurada (source: *Oporto Fine Arts School Bulletin*, no. 2-3, 1951-1952, 1952-1953): 22.



Modern Convent in the City

As the city destroyed it, it was just right that the city rebuilds it. Hence, perhaps, the reason or historical justification for the fair and large alms that Oporto gave to the Order of St. Dominic in the form of this piece of uncultivated land that we are seeing and trampling on at this very moment.⁵

This was said at the blessing ceremony of the first stone of the Dominican convent, in 1951, by Luís de Pina, who had been the mayor of Oporto (1945-1949), the period in which steps were taken to the transfer of the land aside of Avenida Marechal Gomes da Costa. Such negotiations started in 1948, the very year in which Fernando Távora had joined the city council services.

This area, five kilometers west from the city center, met special conditions for urbanization, as identified by the team that studied the urbanization of the city in the 1940s and 1950s [Fig. 5]. In the particular case of Avenida Marechal Gomes da Costa, several possibilities for implementing religious equipment would be considered in the following years.

In 1947, a study plan for a new residencial neighborhood of the state 'Economic Houses Program' to be built to the east of that avenue, next to Quinta de Serralves, suggested an isolated church, bordering the garden square in the center of the neighborhood, Largo D. João III. Ten years later, in the 1957-1958 academic year, Fernando Távora would challenge his students, proposing "a chapel" for the same square.

At the same time, in 1947, an Urbanization Plan for the west side of the avenue was being developed in the Oporto's General Urbanization Plan Office. For

Fig. 4
Fernando Távora, Nun' Alvares
Institute Renewal, Chapel
Sketch, [1952]
(Fundação Marques da Silva,
Fernando Távora Archive,
FIMS/FT/0019-pd0055).

⁵ Luís de Pina, "O Porto e S. Domingos (22nd March.1952)," *Cristo Rei, Boletim Religioso da Igreja de Cristo-Rei Dominicanos*, ano I, no. 1 (1952): 1 (translation by the author).

this area, the plan considered single-family detached townhouses, providing for the construction of a set of schools, with a 'special building' (not identified in the study) topping the neighborhood's interior street axes, in accordance with the current urban trend of the time. The residential neighborhood project would have a small center for local commerce, close to a recreation and sports area, with a square crossed by the connection between Marechal Gomes da Costa and Boavista avenues. This square would be made up, on all its sides, of blocks with commerce, and would not be dominated by any singular urban equipment.

In 1948, in the review of this urbanization project, instead of a parish church, the Dominican convent appeared next to a local shopping center, as documented in the transfer plan of approximately 7500 m² of municipal land – a block limited by streets in its entire perimeter. Although this drawing of December 1948 just presents the plot for construction, in April the "new study of the commercial and civic center" already included a 'church and ecclesiastical residence' for that same lot, a solution very close to the one Fernando Távora would sign in 1949 [Fig. 6].

This plan reduced the number of buildings foreseen in the initial studies. While in the mid-1940s six blocks were foreseen, limiting the center crossed longitudinally by the street, and in 1948 the center was the result of a combination of blocks and townhouses including the church, the final version by Fernando Távora, of 1949, proposes only two blocks, facing each other, intended to accommodate commerce, offices and housing.

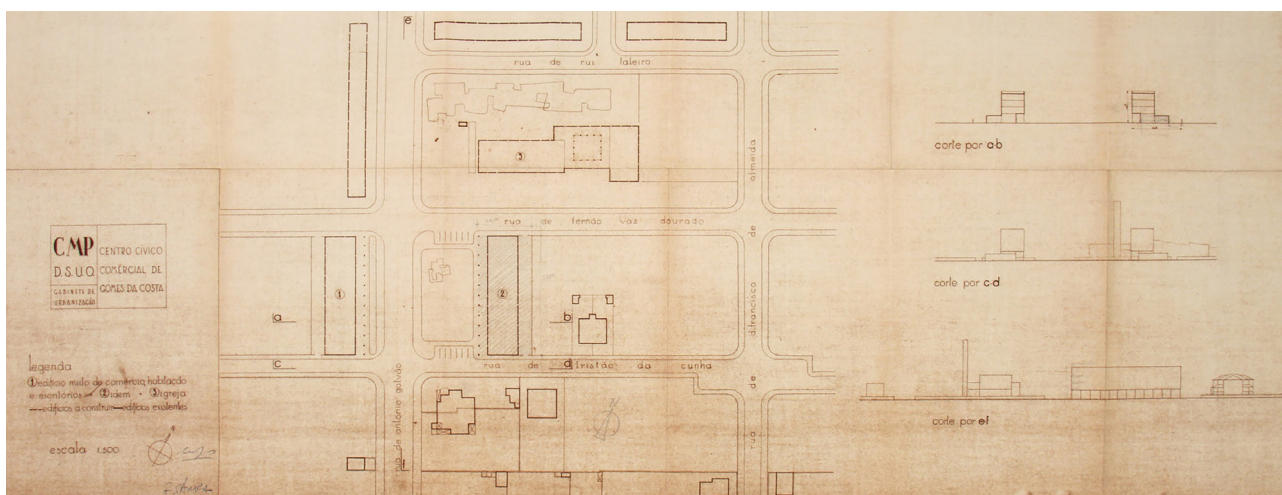
The blocks, east and west, would share the same volumetric and functional solution giving a certain unity to the entire complex: a commercial gallery on the ground floor and houses with terraces on the roof. These buildings would top off blocks of modern single-family homes, contributing to the increase in the scale of construction in that public space designed at the scale of the neighborhood. The "square" – a designation attributed by Távora in the study of the civic and commercial centre – appeared not as an island, but as a part of the residential block itself, a public space whose use would be enhanced by the proposed commerce. The street no longer runs through the square, it moved a little to the east. Without writing anything in the memory about the church and ecclesiastical residence, Távora defines it in the drawing, proposes a volume and implants it parallel to the square, in a recessed position, giving protagonism to the churchyard dominated by the isolated bell tower. The evolution of the project led to a redefinition of the location of the church that ended up being built over the square. The conservative taste and the power exercised were not indifferent to this process: by the client, represented by Br. Estevão da Fonseca Faria op. and by the fundraising committee, chaired by José Nosolini, future Portuguese ambassador to the Holy See.

With this statement we do not intend to detract from the important role that the Dominicans had at that time in the center of Europe, demanding modernity for sacred art, a feat which only later would be claimed by the order in Portugal.



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⁶ It should be noted that Távora was later called to carry out a project - not built - for the chapel of the Dominican Convent of Fátima. However, in the project for the convent of Cristo Rei drawn up in Oporto throughout the first half of the 1950s, the language and implementation adopted would betray the modern conception of the complex that Távora had proposed and that the Municipal Aesthetics Commission tried at all costs to defend.

In the appreciation of the project of the new religious building, design by the architects Manuel Passos Júnior and Eduardo Reis, we read:

The unity, harmony and scale of all the elements involved in the composition of any urban complex are expressions that today have a very different meaning. It is, quite simply, about designing a chapel/convent for a residential area of housing (...).

Fig. 5
Urbanisation plan area aside of Avenida Marechal Gomes da Costa, Porto 1950 (source: Cristo Rei Parish Archive).

Fig. 6
Fernando Távora, Civic and Commercial Centre Gomes da Costa, Porto 1949 (source: Câmara Municipal do Porto Archive).

⁶ About this subject: João Alves da Cunha and João Luís Marques, *Dominicanos. Arte e Arquitetura Portuguesa. Diálogos com a Modernidade* (Lisboa: Centro de Estudos de História Religiosa – Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Instituto São Tomás de Aquino – Província Portuguesa da Ordem dos Pregadores, 2019).

Let us, therefore, focus on the overall scale and move away from anything that, conventionally, tends to give a religious character to the building to be designed (...).

Do understand the goal of this Committee, whose attitude intends to dignify present day's architecture that finds its most determined bastion among professionals from the north [of the country].⁷

Távora's project was approved and the first phase of the convent would be inaugurated in May 1954. The remaining phases, which would close the cloister, were never built. Today, the different languages of the convent and of the surrounding blocks do not reveal Távora's modern proposal, which provided the neighborhood with small spaces for the population to meet and socialize [Fig. 7], including a place for religious practice – a program that met the concerns discussed at the International Congresses of Modern Architecture, CIAM 8 – The heart of the city (Hoddesdon, 1951), in which Távora had participated as an observer. Regarding the discussion that took place at that congress, he recalled in an interview:

"The theme was the core, interpreted as the heart, the center. Not only referred to the urban center but especially to the problem of the need for a center at any level of architectural and urban planning organization. (...) a very broad architectural, urbanistic and human vision of the need for the core as an element of spontaneous or organized life, either individual or collective."⁸

Years later, the area between the avenues Marechal Gomes da Costa, Boavista and Montevideo/Brazil would be launched as a competition test for the position of professor of Urbanology at ESBAP (1962), bringing into debate the organization of neighborhood units and their centers. The statement released to the candidates, based on the study of arch. Carvalho Dias, addressed once again the creation of a religious center for the new parish headquarters of Nevogilde, close to the convent. One of the candidates, Távora's colleague João Andresen, wrote:

(...) the presence of the Dominican Fathers, with their Church and Convent, makes this area known as the Dominican Zone (...) it is also a strictly residential area, made up of houses that reveal the fair good living standards of its population. It is worth noting the presence of a recent square, overlooking the Church of the Dominicans, a two-story building whose ground floor is occupied by commerce. This small set, outlines a principle of center of interest on a local scale".⁹

7 Carlos Teixeira da Costa Júnior e [Comissão Municipal de Arte e Arqueologia], "Parecer ao ante projecto do convento de Cristo-Rei," *Arquivo CMP*, (17th June 1950) (Translation by the author).

8 Fernando Távora, "Entrevista a Fernando Távora," *Arquitectura* (September-October 1971): 152 (translation by the author).

9 João Andresen, "Concurso de provas públicas para provimento dum lugar de professor do 2º grupo (Urbanologia)," in *Boletim especial da Escola Superior de Belas-Artes do Porto 1962-1963* (Porto: Escola Superior de Belas Artes, 1963) (translation by the author).



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In 1961, Távora would design his first convent built from scratch, on the outskirts of Porto. At the Convent of the Franciscan Sisters of Calais (Gondomar 1961-1971), echoes of the Dominican project can be observed, particularly in the use of the cloister and the volumetric importance of the church building [Fig. 8]. The design for the Chapel of the Dominican Convent in Fátima (1961), was never realized and was later carried out by Luíz Cunha, a former student of Fernando Távora [Fig. 9].

One Lecture

In January 1958, Fernando Távora delivered a lecture titled *Characteristics of Southern Religious Architecture* as part of the Sacred Architecture Course, organized to support preparations for the architectural competition for the new Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Lisbon). The discovery of a magnetic tape containing a partial audio recording of the course, has shed light on the themes explored by the senior Swiss architect Hermann Baur and the young Portuguese architect Fernando Távora. This event marked MRAR's most widely attended activity, drawing approximately 200 participants to Lisbon and receiving extensive coverage in the national press.

The lecture by Fernando Távora was prepared and discussed in collaboration with professors Mário Chicó, Artur Nobre Gusmão, and architect António Freitas Leal. The conference was divided into three parts and concluded with a presentation of slides.

In the first part, Távora acknowledged the impossibility of providing a precise response to the organization's request. From his perspective, rather than focusing on the "characteristics of architecture," it was necessary to understand the "characteristics of a particular type of spatial organization" – a theme that would later lead to his dissertation *Da organização do espaço* (1962). This required a cross-disciplinary reading that did not disregard humanity, integrated within

Fig. 7
Civic and Commercial Centre
Gomes da Costa, design by
Fernando Távora for CMP with
the dominican convent (Manuel
Passos Júnior and Eduardo
Reis arch.) and the housing
block (Pereira da Costa arch.),
Porto c.1954 (source: Casa
da Imagem – Fundação
Manuel Leão FML PT-FML-TR-
COM-833-2).

a specific environment and inhabiting it in various ways. However, the desired synthesis of urbanism and architecture had yet to be achieved, as knowledge at the time remained overly compartmentalized and rigid.

“There is research by archaeologists, there is research by sociologists, there is research by economists, but in truth the synthesis, which will naturally come one day, is yet to be achieved. We are still groping around this matter, still a little linked to a sensitivity, to a knowledge through sensitivity, but not really to a scientific understanding of the underlying phenomena.”¹⁰

Távora revealed the expectation and confidence he had in the ongoing work of the Inquérito à Arquitectura Regional Portuguesa, which sought to deepen the study “of a certain organized space”, proposing a more global reading.

In the second part, Távora explored the importance of understanding the characteristics of southern architecture, particularly the Portuguese one, and how this knowledge could have a “tangible, useful, and practical application.” He outlined the path that had led to the concept of international architecture and questioned the understanding of the “human scale.”

An architecture that knows neither men, nor climates, nor materials. A pure architecture, for a pure man, living in a pure land. The reality, however, which we recognize day by day, is that neither all men are equal, nor the conditions of the Earth are all similar. It's a bit like ‘the emperor is naked’. The problem then arises: if men are different from each other, if the land they walk on is full and so rich in diversities, why should one force reality and move towards an architecture and urbanism of essences?¹¹

In this context, Távora recognized the timeliness and importance of MRAR's action, as a movement that, conversely to the ‘idea of international architecture’, defended the need for knowledge of reality, in order to “integrate each architecture into a specific physical, human and historical environment”, stating:

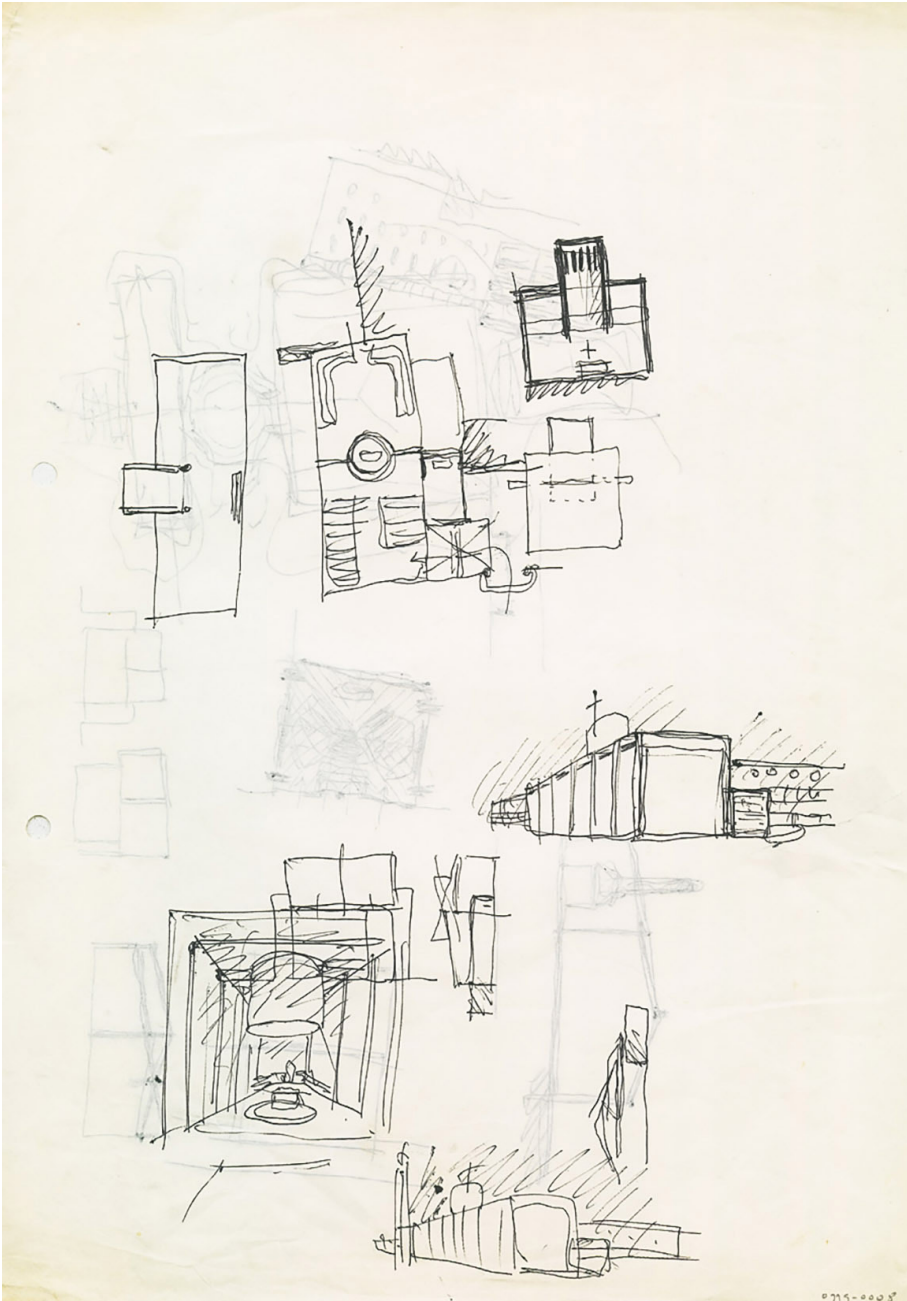
(...) we have to become aware of our reality. In a very broad sense. And really, when talking about human scale in architecture and urbanism for the Man [mankind], we do not really consider the geometric man, but a human Man, with his sense of the [surrounding] realities – cultural, social, economic, geographic, historical, etc. – and [one has to] analyze everything and know everything with a creative sense; not looking for a history lesson that is pure dilettantism, pure knowledge; [but] as far as possible, apply, carry out, that is, analyze with a synthetic and creative sense.¹²

In the third part of his presentation, Távora highlighted themes he associated

10 Fernando Távora, “Características da arquitectura religiosa meridional,” in João Luís Marques, “A Igreja na cidade. Serviço e Acolhimento. Arquitectura Portuguesa 1950-1975,” (PhD Diss., FAUP, Porto, 2017), 658 (translation by the author).

11 Marques, “Igreja,” 659 (translation by the author).

12 Marques, “Igreja,” 659 (translation by the author).



with the hypothetical characteristics of southern architecture. He discussed the differences between northern and southern Portugal, such as the distribution of vegetation masses in each region, and the sobriety of design, which could not simply be attributed to economic austerity. He spoke of the square proportions connected to the earth, the concentration of strong decoration, the integration of buildings into the landscape (in contrast to Nordic architectural practices), and the “certain family resemblance” he referred to as a “domestic scale.”

Finally, visual materials were presented. The first series featured examples from the history of international religious architecture, followed by Portuguese churches: small Romanesque churches (used to discuss “decoration,” “mystery,” “material,” and the “assertion of volumes”) and “anonymous architectures” along the coastline (intended to spark interest in the use of lime and to observe the presence of different layouts—“more rectangular in the north” and “more irregu-

Fig. 8
Fernando Távora, CNSR –
Convento Nossa Senhora do
Rosário de Fátima, unbuilt
chapel, Porto 1961 (Fundação
Marques da Silva, Fernando
Távora Archive, FIMS/FT/0119-
pd0008).



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lar in the south”). The sequence concluded with plans and photographs of Lisbon churches that the group would visit in the following days: the Cathedral (Sé), Jerónimos Monastery, São Vicente de Fora, Santa Engrácia, São Paulo, Nossa Senhora de Fátima, and Moscavide.

Távora emphasized two key themes in this sequence: the integration of churches into the urban fabric, as seen in the case of São Paulo Church, and the design of entry porticos, exemplified by the Lisbon Cathedral. Diplomatically, in the following slides, he shifted the discussion to contemporary religious architecture, focusing on the modern churches of Lisbon: Nossa Senhora de Fátima (1938) and Moscavide (1956). He compared the two, expressing admiration for the solution developed by João de Almeida and António Freitas Leal, which explored the “concept of the square church. He then revisited the theme of the integration of churches into their surroundings, as well as the Lisbon – Oporto dichotomy.

It gives me the impression that Moscavide was a church that, to a certain extent (if not sent from Lisbon to Oporto, which was also possible), is doing very well here (...). There is a certain proportion, an amenity that we think is good, although we might not do like that.¹³

If not for the slides of works from foreign and Portuguese churches, the conference would have seemed poorly focused on religious architecture. In fact, Távora did not mention any liturgical aspects – an expected topic in a conference dedicated to the “Characteristics of Southern Religious Architecture.” However, the topics discussed suggested a broad framework for addressing architectural issues, to which churches were no strangers.

13 Marques, “A Igreja na cidade,” 666 (translation by the author).

Fig. 9
Fernando Távora, Convento de Gondomar, 1961-1971 (source: Fundación DCOMOMO Ibérico).

Design Exercises and Real Commissions

In 1962, already in the framework of the ESBAP's reform, Távora launched for his students of 'Architectural Composition', project exercises like real commissioned projects, to be developed along with other academic activities.

Since a significant part of Távora's commissions in the 1960s were of a religious nature, he proposed several works in successive academic years: convents (1961-1962, 4th year), chapels (1963-1964, 6th year) and parish churches (1965-1966 and 1966-1967, 5th year). We just found references to these works in the catalogues of the ESBAP annual *Exposição Magna* [Great Exhibition] of those years.

Távora sought to make the classroom a space for debate and exchange of ideas, well beyond the basic problems of typological and liturgical organization that he was well aware of. We highlight the direct interventions of the prelates of Oporto in the processes commissioned to Fernando Távora: D. António Ferreira Gomes accompanied him in the study of a location for the new church of S. João de Ver (1959), and D. Florentino de Andrade e Silva recommended him to carry out the project for S. João de Ovar (1967). No less important was the role of Manuel Falcão, director of the Secretariat for New Churches in the Patriarchate (SNIP, Secretariado das Novas Igrejas do Patriarcado – Lisbon), and responsible for suggesting the commission of the church of Nazaré (1962) to Fernando Távora.¹⁴

On the school's drawing boards, the challenges posed by each project were also addressed, whether related to urban integration, the definition of criteria for site selection, the exploration of the interiority of a plot and its cross; or concepts of monumentality and volumetry, care in the distribution of the program, the creation of transition and gathering spaces. These are topics that we can identify in many Projects Descriptions written by Távora at that time:

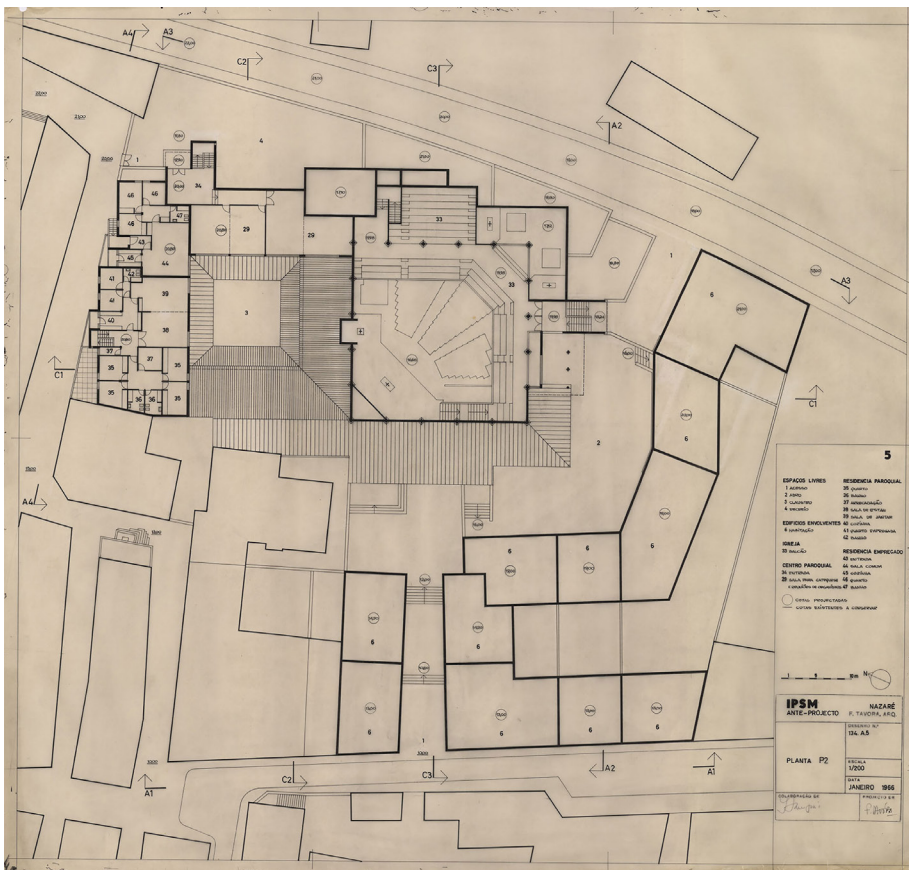
The solution as a whole [Senhor dos Mares, Nazaré], is extremely clear: the Church occupies a central position on the land, surrounded by access on the west and south sides and by the parish center and residences on the north side. (...) There is a clear intention to provoke a movement, which we consider to be of the greatest interest.¹⁵ [Fig. 10, 11]

(...) [São João de Ver] sought to combat a certain idea of monumentality, always tempting, of a House of God that well reflects the spirit of the men who built it and knows well the place in which it is located.¹⁶ [Fig. 12, 13]

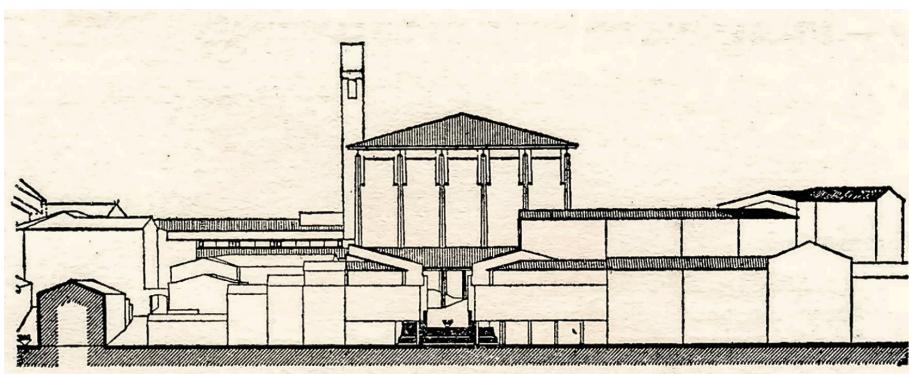
14 See João Luís Marques, "Igrejas para a comunidade" um projecto do arquivo de Fernando Távora – Igreja Paroquial Senhor dos Mares, Nazaré," in *Sobre o 'Projeto-de-Arquitetura de Fernando Távora'*, ed. Manuel Mendes (Porto: Fundação Marques da Silva, 2015), 72-95.

15 Fernando Távora, *Memória Descritiva e Justificativa do anteprojecto para a igreja paroquial Senhor dos Mares, Nazaré*, *Arquivo FIMS-FT*, January 1966 (translation by the author).

16 Fernando Távora, *Memória Descritiva e Justificativa da igreja paroquial São João de Ver*, *Arquivo FIMS-FT*, December 1966 (translation by the author).



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(...) the desire to unify three buildings as diverse as the church, the center and the residence, led us to a solution in [São João de Ovar] which the whole is structured around a large churchyard facing south, its point of access and confluence, center of gravity, of the parish family (...).¹⁷ [Fig. 14, 15]

The discussion of these themes did not take place only in his studio or in the school where he taught – preliminary projects for the convent of Gondomar and the church of Nazaré were presented and discussed in the MRAR events.

In the particular case of parish church complexes, we highlight the meetings that Távora held with the communities, not only presenting and explaining the project, but sharing an entire international culture with the populations. Taking

Fig. 10
Senhor dos Mares, Nazaré,
1966 [unbuilt], plan (Fundação
Marques da Silva, Fernando
Távora Archive PT/FIMS/
FT/0134-pd0006).

Fig. 11
Senhor dos Mares, Nazaré,
1966 [unbuilt], last elevation
(private collection)

17 Fernando Távora, *Memória Descritiva e Justificativa da igreja paroquial São João de Ovar*, *Arquivo FIMS-FT*, January 1969 (translation by the author).



One could already sense here, in the context of the religious commission, the dynamics that would shape the participated architecture. The pedagogy thus left the school space to meet the population to be served:

Fig. 13
Fernando Távora, São João de
Ver Parish Church, 1967 [built
2005-2008] maquette (source:
São João de Ver Parish
Archive).

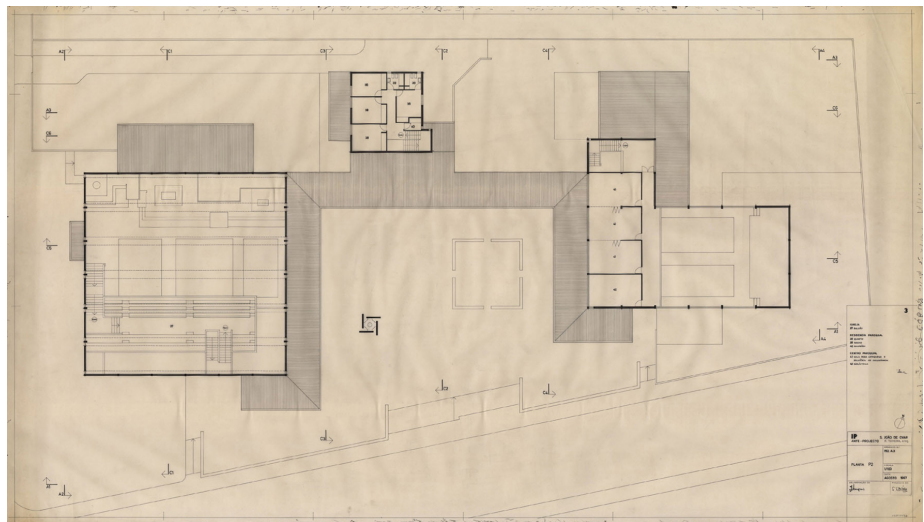
“Demonstrating that Távora is up to date with everything that the Council and the Liturgical Commissions determined regarding a type of model church, expressing his interest in the work and the way in which he conceived it, and giving an account of his knowledge, obtained both on trips and specialized publications, from modern temples in Germany and Switzerland, the architect held the audience for two hours.”¹⁸

Despite the specificities and constraints of each project, we found common research around themes covered at the time across Europe – for example, on

transitional spaces, churchyards, courtyards and cloisters, outdoor distribution and meeting spaces. We highlight the outdoor spaces of Nazaré and S. João de Ovar, where the parish complex was organized around a large open square, punctuated by a tower that would dominate the plain. As for the liturgical space, we find in the churches that he designed in the 1960s

the exploration of the same shape – the square, and the organization around the altar. In fact, we recognize this form in the chapel of the Santo Tirso Jesuit college [Fig. 16], in the church of Nazaré, and also in those of S. João de Ver and S. João de Ovar, regardless of the internal organization of the assembly, more or less surrounding the altar. He thus revisits the theme of ‘squareness’ already stated in the 1958 lecture when, at the MRAR Sacred Architecture Course, he was asked to speak about the characteristics of southern religious architecture. He then remembered the “Invariantes Castizos de la Arquitectura Española” by Chueca Goitia, sensing that also in the North of Portugal that attribute was felt in a particular way in the “anonymous (...) Romanesque architecture made by some guys we don’t know who they were – men of the land”. There, as in the named churches, Goitia’s writing echoes:

“(...) the square proportion, thanks to which this sensation of calm, of perfect rest, is achieved. The square proportion provides architectural compositions with that virile solidity that always holds the architecture of our country.”¹⁹

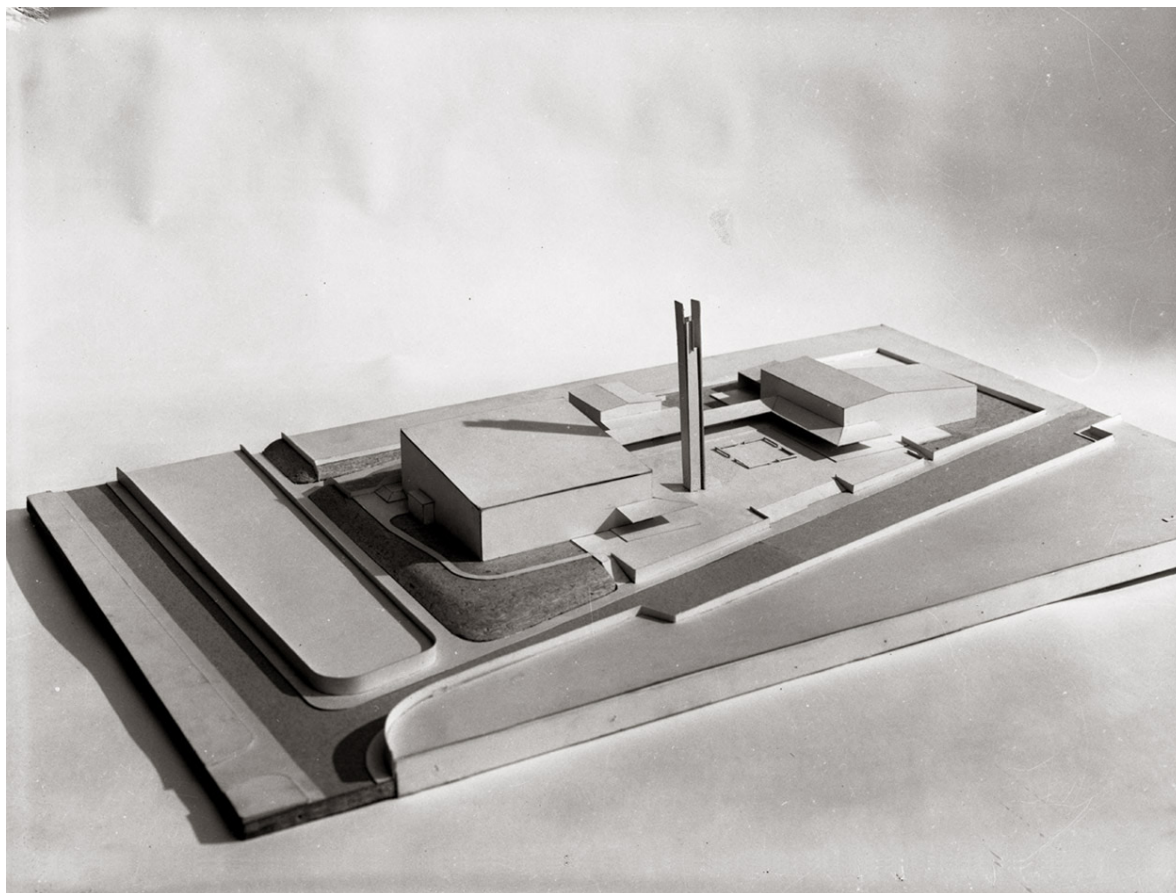


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18 Alfa, “A moderna igreja de S. João de Ovar,” *Notícias de Ovar – semanário nacionalista e regional*, September 21, 1967 (translation by the author).

19 Fernando Chueca Goitia, *Invariantes Castizos de la Arquitectura Española* (Madrid: Dossat, 1947).

Fig. 14
Fernando Távora, São João de Ovar Parish Church, 1967 [unbuilt], plan (Fundação Marques da Silva, Fernando Távora Archive FIMS/FT/0134-pd0006).



Working with the Community

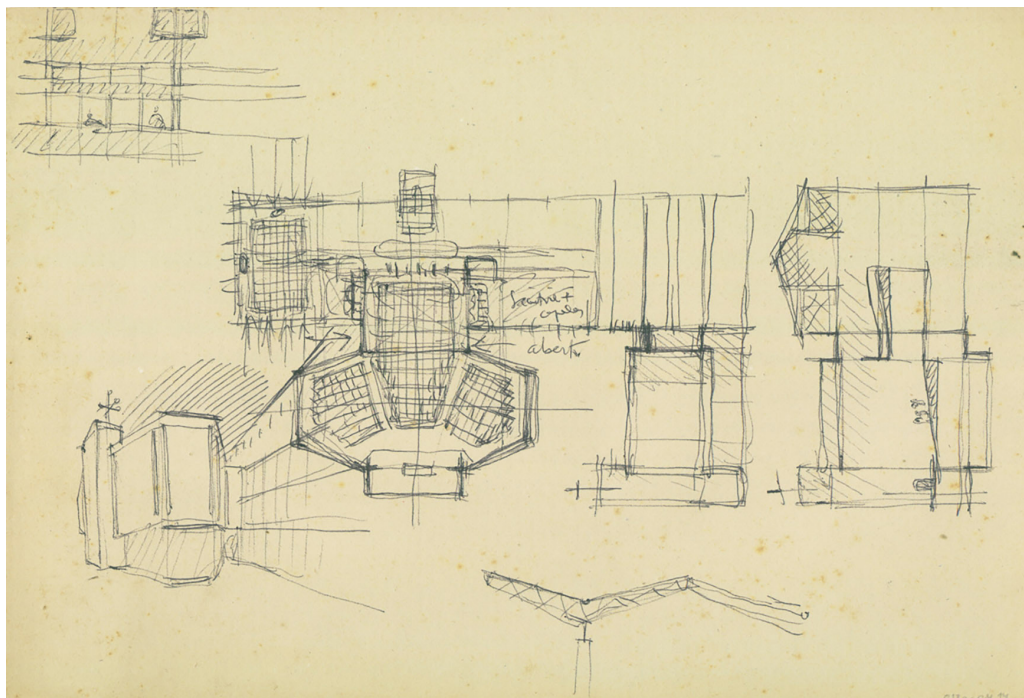
The name of Fernando Távora would once again be associated with the history of the Church in the city of Oporto after the return of D. António Ferreira Gomes, the bishop of Oporto who was in exile between 1959 and 1969.

D. António felt the need to reinforce the presence of the Diocesan Work for Social Promotion (ODPS, *Obra Diocesana de Promoção Social*) created in 1964 by the apostolic administrator D. Florentino Andrade e Silva, following the work carried out in the neighborhoods by the Diocesan Secretariat for Social Action. D. António Ferreira Gomes identified two names from Oporto's cultural circles whom he invited to join the direction of the diocesan institute: the professor and architect Fernando Távora and the lawyer Francisco Sá Carneiro, then deputy of the National Assembly. In this way, the Church sought to open up to the world through greater participation of lay people in its structures.

If the invitation to Francisco Sá Carneiro was the result of recognition of his political intervention with Marcelo Caetano for the return of D. António, the invitation to the architect Fernando Távora, a Catholic militant since his youth²⁰ with recognized academic merit, culminated a decade of his collaboration in some causes in the diocese of Oporto. Beyond the works already identified,

²⁰ About this subject: Manuel Mendes, ed., *Fernando Távora: as raízes e os frutos: palavra, desenho, obra 1937-2001* (Porto: Fundação Instituto Arquitecto José Marques da Silva Universidade do Porto. Faculdade de Arquitectura U.Porto Press, 2020).

Fig. 15
Fernando Távora, São João
de Ovar Parish Church, 1967
[unbuilt], maquette (Casa
da Imagem – Fundação
Manuel Leão FML PT-FML-TR-
COM-460-7).



Távora had assisted Luiz Cunha, his former student and an active member of the MRAR, in the exhibition proposal for the Museum of Art and Archaeology of the Major Seminary of Oporto (former Jesuit College of Oporto near Barredo), inaugurated in 1958.

But more significant in the context of D. António's invitation, was the collaboration that Távora had been developing, where

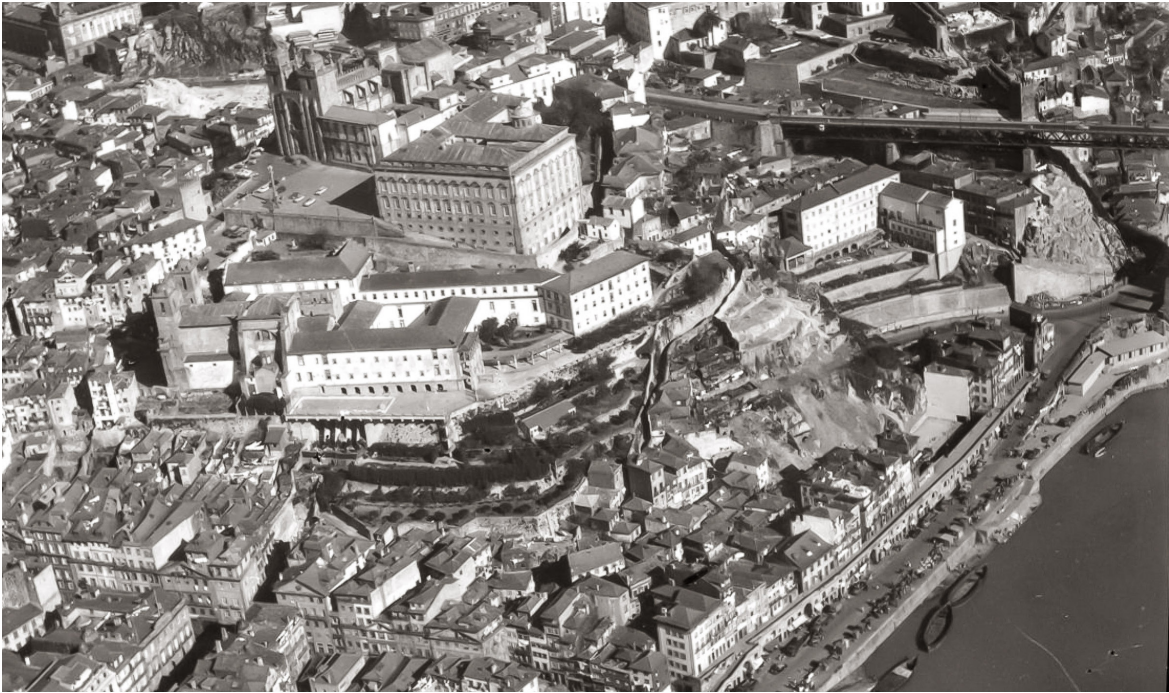
he had confirmed his role as a 'man of the people and with the people' in the Barredo Social Center, which was built in the square under the lower deck of the D. Luís Bridge. The Work's assistants, having the best impressions of Távora, had shown they wished to see him in the directorate.²¹

Despite Fernando Távora beginning his teaching career at ESBAP earlier than Octávio Lixa Filgueiras, the theme "Zona do Barredo – Estudo de Recuperação Parcial" (Zone of Barredo – Partial Recovery Study) in Távora's *Composição de Arquitectura* 3rd part course (1967-1968) emerged after the "operations" initiated by Filgueiras in the *Arquitectura Analítica* 1 and 2 courses (1964-1965), who in that year began studies in that poor and central area of the city.

A Social Centre was established in the Barredo area in 1961 [Fig. 17], described as a "point of support and an element of contact with the population," as detailed in the Urban Renewal Study of Barredo (May 1969), coordinated by Fernando Távora for the Oporto City Council. At that Social Centre, students from the Social Service Institute (created in 1956 within the Diocese of Oporto) conducted surveys that provided an in-depth understanding of the socio-economic and housing realities. This work was complemented by ESBAP students,

Fig. 16
Fernando Távora, Chapel
and pavilion of NuniÁlvares
Institute, Porto 1963-1965
(Fundação Marques da Silva,
Fernando Távora Archive
FIMS/FT/0019-pd0055).

21 João Alves Dias, *Nos Alvares da Obra Diocesana* (Porto: Obra Diocesana de Promoção Social, 2013), 53 (translation by the author).



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who made building surveys in the area. These collaborative efforts allowed the Barredo to be perceived as a “theoretical space for the articulation between architectural education and social practice; and as a stage for constructing a new humanist paradigm for urban policies.”

Similar to the various religious architectural projects Távora proposed to students at ESBAP, the urban renewal study he developed for the City Council also became an academic project. Beyond its focus on housing, the study identified the “essential construction of a new Social Centre in Barredo – one that works with the population, not for the population.” As was noted when the institution was created in 1961, “responsibility will rest with the people themselves.”

The new programme, devised in the late 1960s under the direction of the Social Centre, was in many ways like a parish complex, except for the liturgical space. It included facilities such as a reception office, cafeteria, library, auditorium (with stage and dressing rooms), meeting and social rooms (for youth groups and study purposes), as well as rooms for childcare, nursing, a kitchen, etc. Despite the specificities of Barredo’s social and heritage surroundings, similarities can be established with the debate on the construction of new churches that go beyond their specific program. On the one hand, the desire to integrate the equipment in the community, implementing it at crossing points and offering a diverse program to the population that enhanced its use; but, above all, the call for the community participation, from the conception of the project to the exploitation of the spaces.

The invitations to join the management of the ODPS between 1971 and 1974 115, accepted by Távora and Sá Carneiro, were made by the ‘communist priest’ João Alves Dias, responsible for monitoring the population of the Cerco neighborhood, and there resident, who, since 1964, pursued the process of establishing that new community – a social amalgam.

Fig. 17
Cathedral and the seminar
and Barredo, Porto (Private
Collection).

It should be noted that the work of the diocesan community in the neighborhoods was fundamental to the social cohesion and human development of the population, particularly those rehoused in neighborhoods under the city improvement plan, as Távora recognized in 1969 in the proposal for urban renewal of Barredo. The municipal response to social problems was not enough and, on several occasions, the municipal reports identified the contribution of religious institutions in the area of assistance. Thus, in 1964, following the proposal of the Mayor Nuno Pinheiro Torres' Office, assistance was delegated to the Diocesan Secretariat for Social Action which, as reported in the municipal minutes, highlighted the technical capacity and spirit of that institution. In fact, the spirit of the association – “an ecclesiastical work but not (...) clerical” – and its practices were pioneering in the 1960s, as highlighted in the 1966 municipal report:

“(...) the Diocesan Secretariat for Social Action was introduced, mainly in the neighborhoods of Cerco do Oporto, Pasteleira and Fonte da Moura, where it developed very intense action, organizing committees and creating groups with local residents for purposes of great educational and welfare interest, including: library, nursing station, cultural and recreational center, sports, etc. And the most remarkable thing is that the organizers awakened the residents, instigated and galvanized their enthusiasm and put it into action, but always convincing them that everything was their work.

It is believed that this is the way to create lasting work.”²²

The Church of Oporto, alongside parish work, developed programs to integrate and promote the social development of local communities, moving away from welfare models, as recalled by António Teixeira Fernandes – priest, private secretary to D. Florentino de Andrade e Silva and pioneer of the study of Sociology in the diocese of Oporto. These initiatives stimulated the autonomy that was fundamental for the social transformations that took place after the 25th of April.

SAAL (Local Outpatient Support Service) or Barredo were raising an issue that would later be widely discussed in municipal planning experiments in other municipalities: should a plan be made from the bottom up to the top, or from the top down to bottom? Making a plan from the bottom up, that is, starting from the neighborhoods to the entire city or, conversely, starting from a general view of the entire city to say what is of interest to each neighborhood, which was how it was done before and how it is still done in most places, even abroad.²³

More than social action in the neighborhoods, the work of Oporto's diocese

22 Câmara municipal do Porto, *Relatório e Contas da Gerência referentes a 1964* (Porto: Câmara Municipal do Porto, 1964), 228 (translation by the author).

23 Nuno Portas, “O processo SAAL: Entre o Estado e o Poder Local,” *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, no. 18-20 (February 1986): 641 (translation by the author).

sought the participation and social promotion of the city's inhabitants, meeting with residents, encouraging them to identify needs and motivating them to form committees to solve problems. The Church placed itself at the service of the City and this intention was expressed in the name of the institution.

I still wonder today: how was it possible for the Salazar Government to give legal status to a Work whose objective was to promote the social development of human groups... raising the awareness of their potential? The Diocesan Work was unique in the country. It was not about assistance, but about social development. It developed a community activity in which the citizens themselves were the authors of their development.

They were inconvenient for the established powers: they were aware of their needs and demanded their rights. The "poor" were agents of their own transformation, of their growth as a community.²⁴

By accepting the invitation of the Bishop of Oporto, and being a regular presence at the weekly board meetings, Fernando Távora joined the group of people who advocated listening to the communities and seeking solutions with them. In the 1970s, working for the Church implied political participation in the construction of the City. This was the spirit that guided the work that, together with Sá Carneiro and the Board team, they carried out with the bodies of the Oporto City Council and the Ministry of Health and Welfare, at a time of some hostility towards the Church following the death of Mayor Nuno Pinheiro Torres.

If in the 1960s we witnessed, in the ESBAP school space, the development of projects that anticipated the importance of community participation, the testimony of the beginning of the following decade takes us to another magnitude of problem – an architecture of and for the community, as Távora wrote in 1952, in the 'Lição das Constantes' (Lesson on Constants) regarding the climate of close collaboration necessary between the inhabitants in the construction of the city endowed with works of architecture and urban planning:

(...) in fact, it will not be enough to build houses or cities or temples, it is necessary to have the guarantee of their interest for those for whom such works are intended; by living them, they collaborate not in the creation but in the very existence of these manifestations. As works of collaboration, the works of Architecture and Urban Planning will be syntheses, plastic translations in the organized space of those by whom and for whom they are carried out; translations that are unique, characteristic, diverse, varied and changeable. Previous and common to all of them is the fact that, without a spirit of collaboration and collective effort, these works could not be carried out.²⁵

24 João Alves Dias, "Grande Entrevista a João Alves Dias," *Espaço Solidário*, no. 7 (May-June 2007): 18 (translation by the author).

25 Fernando Távora, "A lição das constantes," *Lusíada – revista ilustrada de cultura* 1, no. 2 (November 1952) (translation by the author).

With the selection of cases presented, an effort was made to highlight the importance of religious commissions in Fernando Távora's professional career, which has been rarely acknowledged in the history of Modern Religious Architecture. However, the diversity of topics he addressed is evident. These works included reflections on the role of the church in the urban context, the renewal of liturgical forms, and the development of pioneering and participatory social processes. It is therefore deserved and fair to celebrate and remember Fernando Távora, a man of remarkable sensitivity, vast experience, profound vision, exceptional ability for dialogue (listening, making himself heard, and captivating others), and immense tenacity in action over decades, who significantly contributed to the prestige of his school of architects.

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