

## TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY

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## EPILOGUE

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### 1. TRADITION AND SUSTAINABILITY

There has been a growing interest in the search for identity in the emerging phenomenon of globalisation in recent years. The latest trends in philosophy have stressed the importance of identity, speaking out in favour of the right to be different, respect for others and the eradication of any kind of discrimination at all levels. This attitude has also reached architectural and urban production.

Together with this entitlement to claim a series of rights, environmentalists have shown how deeply we are involved in a kind of development that is not authentic, as it is leading us to an unsustainable world. Environmental studies have demonstrated the importance of urban and architectural designs that will remain valid for a long time, i.e. ones whose existence exceeds the shelf life of most current consumer products.

Traditional architecture is now being considered once again, although, surprisingly, not by architects but by other sectors of society. And, as was the case with the avant-garde movements in the 1920s and 1930s, vernacular architecture is being recognised as the true bastion of rationality. There is nothing superfluous in vernacular architecture. The solutions proposed are the result of centuries of empiricism. At the same time, its relationship with its setting is more appropriate, as it is the source of life for all those living in it. The setting is carefully preserved and transformed with extreme sensitivity, never forgetting that it will have to be passed on to future generations.

This attitude explains, for example, why agricultural land has had the same use for centuries, without being invaded or taken over for purposes other than farming, as agriculture is the guarantee of people's survival.

The search for sustainable architectural and urban models is the environmentalists' latest concern, as they consider that the impact of urban and metropolitan areas on the environment and regions is the main factor for a sustainable environment.

In other words, an unsustainable city model will inevitably result in an unsustainable environment, not only in the city, but also in its surroundings and in the region, regardless of the distance between the city and the region's boundaries.

Therefore, talking about a sustainable model has nothing to do with a specific action in a specific place. It has to do with the approach to a wide range of human activities, with a different attitude towards the present and the future from that which we find today.

In addition to this emerging search for sustainable development, it is also important to mention what we call the level of formal obsolescence of architecture, i.e. the lifespan of the forms produced by a mere desire for novelty for novelty's sake, for consumption.

As Charles Siegel said: "Because this technological optimism has faded, - referring to the faith that architects of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had in technology - today's post-modernists do not have the social idealism of the early modernists to give their work meaning. They strain to create novel forms, as if novelty were an end in itself. If we look at why avant-garde architects have lost their idealism, it can help us understand what sort of architecture is needed in our time".

In his work *Architecture for Our Time*, Charles Siegel refers to the failure of these principles of the Modern Movement when applied to cities – a criticism that has been made for the last four decades. On the subject, Siegel says, "Through the 1960s, the modernist vision was being put into practice, and it was failing. Modernist housing projects built by idealistic governments became vertical slums that were worse than the old slums they replaced. Freeways blighted neighbourhoods, and revolts by local citizens made it virtually impossible to build new freeways in central cities. By the 1970s, modernism was the status quo, and it was oppressive".

How often have we heard this criticism? Surely quite a lot. Today, however, when novelty is still the central theme, as if it were an end in itself, the architecture being produced seems to have lost its way; it seems to care nothing for the central themes threatening society now and in the near future.

In a way, Siegel continues, designs based simply on novelty “symbolise the huge corporations that dominate our economy, just as the last generation of boxy high-rises did. In the past, the economy was smaller scale, and so the city was built on a smaller, more human scale. But now high-rises tower over the city, representing the wealth and power of the corporations that finance them. Second, they symbolise a society devoted to sensationalism and novelty, where the media rush to cover anything that is new and different. Journalists always marvel at how 'innovative' and 'cutting edge' these buildings are, but they never bother to ask whether they will make the city more liveable or more humane”.

The terrible thing is that this type of built “mistake” lasts for decades and affects people’s lives for many years, sometimes for generations. It is from the point of view of a building’s longevity that the formal obsolescence factor becomes an essential issue. As a result of experimentation and novelty, thousands of families are doomed to live for years in horrible buildings and neighbourhoods. As residents in these experimental buildings, they will resign themselves to their irrevocable dissatisfaction. Is this a progressive attitude on the part of the architects, the designers of these buildings and neighbourhoods?

It would be very enlightening to see where the designers of these experiments live. The public would be horrified by the huge gap between what they choose for themselves and what they build for others.

At the beginning, we mentioned the growing interest in traditional architecture and urbanism. It is an interest that ranges from the affirmation of identity, of the self, as a right claimed by contemporary thought, as a need felt by many at a time of standardising globalisation, which wipes out any trace of individuality.

This interest increases with the need for rationality and balance with the (rural and urban) setting and, as a result, with the concern for sustainable development. On top of all this is the need for expressive concordance with the widely established principles of formal stability instead of the instability that the new forms cause to consumption, with a high level of obsolescence.

In the essay quoted above, Siegel says that, in the 1970s, modern ideas on architecture and society were widely accepted by the powers that be and lost their critical weight. They were reduced to an “official” way of acting and were therefore not progressive. They became “regressive” or, to use his words, “oppressive”.

At the same time, a new way of regarding historical precedents appeared. Urban designs of the past were revisited in an attempt to seek out and rescue everything positive and find an alternative.

The same happened with architecture. History was revisited and the value of precedent, of memory, was cherished. Names like Aldo Rossi, Colin Rowe, Leon Krier and Robert Venturi, among others, played a very important role here. Precedent was a fundamental value in human existence and also in architecture and the way cities were built.

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## 2. THE IMPORTANCE OF PRECEDENT

Colin Rowe has written some revealing words about the importance of precedent. Commenting on an exercise that Walter Gropius set out for his architecture students, entitled *The use of precedent and the role of invention in architecture today*, Rowe was highly critical of the form of Gropius's exercise, saying that the students should avoid copying and, instead, should invent.

Colin Rowe's comments are so lucid that I will transcribe the article published in *The Harvard Architecture Review*, in 1986 almost in its entirety.

“Let me first stipulate that I don't really perceive how your topic, *the use of precedent and the role of invention in architecture today*, can very well lead to profitable dispute. I can never begin to understand how it is possible to attack or to question the use of precedent. Indeed, I am not able to comprehend how anyone can begin to *act* (let alone to *think*) without resorting to precedent. For, at the most banal level, a kiss may be instinctual, and a handshake remains the product of convention, of habit, or of tradition; and in my reading, all of these words and whatever they may signify are related—loosely no doubt—to the notions of paradigm, of model, and hence, of precedent.

“So much is my initiatory bias which I will now expand upon via the ancient strategy of a series of rhetorical questions: Just how is it possible to conceive of any society, any civilization, or any culture without the provision of precedent?

“Are not language and mathematical signs the evidence of convenient fables and hence the advertisement of prevailing precedent? Further, in the romantic predicament of interminable novelty, surely one must be at a loss to discover how any discourse (other than a grunt) is to be conducted? Is not precedent, and are not its connotations, the primary cement of society? Is not their

recognition the ultimate guarantee of legitimate government, legal freedom, decent prosperity, and polite intercourse?

“As painfully obvious and horribly banal as these implicit propositions are, I assume that they belong to the platitudes that any one operating in a *reasonably* structure society (neither savage nor subjected to overheated revolutionary excitement) will be compelled to observe.

“I do not assume—I *cannot*—that these platitudes are available to the average architecture student. For he or she has been educated in a much more expansive milieu, with boundaries and limitations fragile to say the least.

“In the days when it was understood that all art is a matter of imitation, whether of external reality or of some more metaphysical abstraction, the role of precedent was scarcely to be disputed; and, needless to say, Aristotle produces the argument very succinctly. ‘The instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated’”.

Colin Rowe goes on, referring to a Wordsworth poem on the importance of imitation in a child’s learning.

“But if Wordsworth expands upon Aristotle and begins to relate mimesis to infant worship (the child is the father to the man) one must turn to Walter Gropius to receive the full, the kindergarten drift of this diversion. Inadvertently, Wordsworth describes the architecture student as one knows this creature to be: but the impulsive Walter goes on to specify a *beau ideal* for the species. ‘Creativeness in the growing child must be awakened through actual working with all kinds of materials in conjunction with training in free design...But this is important: no copying, no elimination of the urge to play, i.e., no artistic tutelage’.

“Such is to provide pointers to a condensed history of the doctrine of mimesis and its decline; and such is also to bring into prominence your business about the use of precedent. For with the best will in the world, it is not extremely easy to understand the Gropius distinction between ‘copying’ and the ‘urge to play’: Yer gotta play but yer not gotta copy and that’s what you guys have gotta do. But could there be any dictate more perverse and inhibiting?

“Is it not evident that any form of play is inherently ‘copying’—and is related to fantasies of war or fantasies of domesticity?”

“And, without these models either of battle or building, surely it is extremely hard to imagine how any game from chess to architecture could very well survive. No, all play is essentially the celebration of precedent.

“Now, what about the second part of your topic: *the role of invention in architecture today?* Well, one thinks about the lawyer with a whole library bound in blue morocco behind him. This is the inventory of cases bearing upon the specific case that he is required to judge. So simply to pronounce a legal innovation, to discriminate the new, our jurist is obliged to consult the old And, without these models either of battle or building, surely it is extremely hard to imagine how any game from chess to architecture could very well survive. No, all play is essentially the celebration of precedent and the existing; and it is only by reference to these that genuine innovation can be proclaimed. For are not precedent and invention the opposite sides of the same coin? *I think a better topic might have been: How does the new invade the old and how does the old invade the new?*”

Sincerely,  
Colin Rowe.”

It was this interest in the value of precedent that paved the way for a reaction in favour of revisiting history. Several articles by the architects mentioned above have helped to clarify the scenario in the 1970s: *La Arquitectura de la Ciudad*, by Aldo Rossi; *Collage City*, by Colin Rowe and *Complejidad y Contradicción en la Arquitectura*, by Robert Ventura, among others. They have become reference books and are still up-to-date. Today they are even more pertinent.

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### 3. THE IMPORTANCE OF URBANITY

As we watch the disintegration of the cities in the western world, we can clearly see the importance of precedent, not only in the history of architecture, but also in the history of humanity. We realise the impossibility or huge difficulty of changing the rules when what we are looking for is a modicum of harmony and balance in a particular context.

We remember something that we learned in school when we were children some forty years ago.

Every week we would take a book home with our marks in the different subjects: geography, grammar, mathematics, etc. This meant that parents always knew how their children were getting on. The father or mother would sign the book and the child would take it back to the teacher. The same would happen the next week. The list of subjects was in the left-hand column, while the right-hand column was for the marks. There were two subjects (or rather, categories) – “Department” and “Good Manners” – that were separate, at the top of the page before the others. For parents, the marks in these two were the most important. If the child did not get top marks, the alarm sounded as if there was something wrong. And off the parents would go to talk to the teachers.

They were therefore extremely important to both parents and teachers. Their children might not be much good at maths, history or other subjects, but under no circumstances could they fail in these two, which meant that they had to behave. “Department” and “Good Manners” were considered basic rules in education for a healthy life. Children were taught to behave in accordance with principles and manners considered conducive to harmony and mutual respect. We will never forget these two categories: Department and Good Manners.

Respect for certain rules was the basic principle of education for sociability and life in society. This has also been the case with life and urban architecture throughout history. If we say it happened, rather than it happens, it is because that is the way it is.

In the three or four decades since consumption increased, the need to get the consumers’ attention, competing for novelty at any price, inventing and reinventing the wheel every five minutes, things have changed considerably. And not necessarily for the better. Why not just accept it?

The decline in good manners, or civility, on this scale has done nothing to improve people’s lives or that of the community. On the contrary, the formal homogeneity of many areas has been eroded and in some cases has disappeared completely, practically losing its identity to a characterless amorphousness.

Many of the solutions proposed have been insufficiently tested (tried and proved) over time and the results have been highly diminishing. In so many cases, the city has become a veritable visual cacophony of objects; it has lost harmony and a minimum degree of respect for public areas, streets, squares, etc.

How is this related to architecture and the city or to sustainable development? In fact, this relationship is visible in several ways, because sustainability and the creation of a

harmonious or sustainable environment require consensus, joint acceptance of the communal, identification with place and, even more important, with the setting, in its broadest sense. Only with this consensus is it possible to establish certain commitments and projects.

Nevertheless, the scenario that we have today is exactly the opposite of that proclaimed by civility. We have already mentioned the reasonable degree of adaptation to the setting that vernacular architecture has achieved, and how this is the result of centuries of empiricism. We could also say the same of the city. Inventing (if novelty is, in fact, really an invention) and reinventing forms just for the sake of novelty is nothing but a contribution to the consumption associated with fashion, including the finite quality of the product, which increases day by day. And this is happening on a scale that poses a serious threat to the whole human universe.

This situation has nothing to do with stability or with permanent solutions and, worse still, it has absolutely nothing to do with the real problems that our planet's urban population has to face. It is (why not say it?) pure banality. If civility is a value, the acceptance of certain rules is inevitable. And this is where we come up against the question of harmony, balance, the creation of a certain homogeneity. For example, the recurrence of certain types as the most appropriate to a certain situation or the use of arrangements that certain public areas guarantee, respect for predefined alienations in specific periods, etc. In certain cases, we could even go further with regard to the nature of the openings, recesses, materials, colours, etc. of buildings.

We would be acting with civility, i.e. in the common interest of and with respect for our neighbours. In other words, for architecture, civility is like the formal expression of respect, just as it is respect for the individual in social life. This attitude does not affect the individual's personality nor does it reduce his freedom; on the contrary, it helps him to relate, it paves his way and shows the milestones along his way.

This means that civility does not involve any kind of *diktat*. On the contrary, an individual is reasonably able to predict what is going to happen in his street or neighbourhood. All the rest, his supposed freedom of action, is mere *laissez faire* for the benefit of a few independents, who waive sustainability or whatever and who, under the guise of "individual freedom", seek only their own benefit. And in all this, the role of the media, just like that of education, is very important in instilling all these values that have been moulding social life over the years and seem to have been gradually lost in the last three or four decades.

We are witnessing enormous damage caused by those who call themselves critics and who are only interested in defending novelty rather than passing appropriate judgement on



the relevance or transcendence of the object that they worship. Many have already asked whether these “critics” do in fact criticise and whether they are guided by rigour or are merely accomplices of the system, renouncing even a minimum of dignity and integrity and seeking only profit.

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#### 4. THE VALUE ATTRIBUTED TO VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE IN EUROPE

Interest in vernacular architecture was awakened in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, in reaction to baroque, accompanied by an interest in reason, as part of an attraction to nature and all that was natural.

Laugier, Rousseau and then Newton’s ideas played an important role here. Contact with nature was considered purifying. The aristocracy, nobility and even monarchs, influenced by the wonders that Rousseau attributed to nature and all that was natural, had rural cottages and villages built in the gardens of their palaces and castles. Look at the village that Marie Antoinette commissioned in the gardens of Versailles in 1783. It was a real village inhabited by peasants. It had a farm, a dairy, a chicken run, a dovecote, a mill, etc. This was where Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette spent their leisure time, doing peasants’ work.

The nobility’s taste for all things rural had already resulted in excellent examples of picturesque architecture in Britain since the times of Lord Burlington and William Kent, in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. After that, the picturesque became so important that, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, from his elevated position, John Nash increased interest in traditional cottage architecture. There is an excellent example from 1810 in Blaise Hamlet, near Bristol.

We cannot forget the importance of trips to Italy, where renowned architects discovered the beauty of rural houses, which they then tried to copy in their countries of origin, seeing in them a clear, rational expression of picturesque architecture. We can quote the example of Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841), who built the famous Roman baths in Potsdam for the princes (1833).

But it was certainly in Britain that the interest in traditional, single-family dwellings went furthest, to the point to constituting a reference for other European countries. It was A.W. Pugin (1812-1852), trained by his father, one of John Nash’s disciples, who showed a particular interest in recapturing the harmony that the medieval village guilds had supposedly achieved. His idea of “reviving” this harmony of medieval Christian Europe

was very close to the return to the values of traditional architecture. His ideas were taken up again by such important theorists as John Ruskin and William Morris.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, architects who were followers of Pugin and Ruskin took an interest in the characteristics of local architecture. It was no longer only a question of focussing on crafts, of integrating the design of all the elements – exteriors, interiors and decoration –, of raising the craftsman to the category of artist. What was important was to find the inheritance of each place's architecture.

A genuine interest in what we can call vernacular architecture really took hold from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, regardless of the contaminations and interpretations that we may find. In other words, the romantic passion for affirmation of self and individuality gave birth to a true interest in an architecture that was characteristic of each place. Architects like P. Webb (1831-1916), W.R. Lethaby (1857-1931), C.F.A. Voysey (1857-1941), E.S. Prior (1852-1932) and even E. Luytens (1869-1944) left us splendid examples of the interpretation of vernacular architecture, tinged with ideas inherited from the picturesque movement of Pugin or Ruskin.

Then, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the architecture of the architects began a long period that would last for more than a century, characterised by the quest for regional architecture. Anonymous architecture without architects was the constant reference of this quest. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, the richness and variety of designs have been of an extraordinary brilliance that has never been completely understood.

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## 5. TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE IN SPAIN

Spain was not untouched by the influence that the “English house” had on every European country from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, which was felt particularly in Cantabria. The royal family's choice of San Sebastian to spend their summers was very important, because, when their summer palace was built in 1888, they chose the British architect, Selden Wornum (1847-1910). This building was followed years later (1907-1912) by the Madalena Palace in Santander, also in “English style”, designed by the famous architects Javier Gonzalez Riancho and Gonzalo Bringas. It is no wonder that, like the royal family, the nobles and aristocrats focussed their attention on English houses. This was the case especially in Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia and Santander.

On the other hand, interest in seeking out past Spanish architectural traditions began to grow, albeit somewhat sporadically, in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps the pioneers who took an interest in learning about traditional architecture included the

Catalan Luis Domenech i Muntaner, thanks to his reputation as an architect and writer. His article “In search of traditional architecture”, published in *La Renaixença* in 1878 is very well-known.

The journal reflected the concerns of a movement that was led by intellectuals and bourgeois and sought its own characteristic expression of culture and also, logically, of Catalan architecture. This movement gave rise to *Noucentismo* and *Modernismo* in Catalonia. The latter was internationally renowned thanks to the singular figure of Antoni Gaudí.

Although *Modernismo* considered regional architecture from the past interesting, it was eventually converted into its own style, with the idea of placing the Catalan debate on a level worthy of the European debate of the time. This coveted equivalence with Europe explained the decorative excesses, the eclectic attitudes and the taste for handicraft to be found in other movements in other countries, in varying degrees of intensity of some factors over others –construction, decoration, colours, etc. –, depending on the architects.

It is interesting to note that, from figures like Luis Domenech i Muntaner, there appeared a clear interest in traditional architecture, resulting in the appearance of regional styles designed by well-known figures. Leonardo Rucabado created the so-called mountain style. He designed magnificent homes in Cantabria, and his influence was felt in the neighbouring provinces of Asturias and Bizkaia.

On the other hand, the neo-Basque style was very important. The influence of the English house, the interest aroused in Europe by the Swiss chalet and the existence of vernacular Basque architecture created a magnificent synthesis in this regional style – the neo-Basque style. Other local versions of regional architecture appeared in other regions of Spain.

The loss of Spain’s last American colonies in 1898 triggered an attraction for everything that was genuinely Spanish, as a reaction to foreign currents. This year is an important reference in the search for a national architecture.

However, the nostalgia for traditional architecture came later in Spain than in other countries. Until the second and third decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this interest was relatively limited. The architect Aníbal Alvarez, in his admission speech at the Real Academia de Belas Artes in San Fernando, upheld that the styles that seemed most typical of Spain, like *plateresco*<sup>1</sup> or baroque, should be studied and, therefore, architects should consider the architecture of each region’s past. Vicente Lamperez y Romea and

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<sup>1</sup> N.T.: 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish ornamental style.

Leonardo Rucabado were also decisive when it came to bringing more typically Spanish styles from the past to be adapted to the needs of the present. Leopoldo Torres Balbás, however, leant not so much towards the reinterpretation of significant works and styles from the past, but rather towards a direct look at popular architecture. Like him, Teodoro de Anasagasti and Fernando Garcia Mercadal favoured vernacular architecture until the start of the Civil War (1936-1939).

After the war, there was a huge reconstruction plan. In the new towns, the choice was traditional architecture typical of each region. Given the great shortage of resources in the post-war economy, simplicity was inevitable in construction and ornamentation, which made it compatible with the choice of vernacular architecture, with the aspirations of the incipient Spanish Modern Movement, in a republican age, in favour of national architecture.

The vernacular was considered a model to be taken into account by those belonging to the modern architecture groups. It was an authentic bastion of rationality.

The most distinguished architects in Spain participated in this urbanist experience. There was an important coincidence in the preference for vernacular architecture on the part of the regime's architects and of others more interested in modern language, even of more open, versatile figures like Fernando Garcia Mercadal, who published *La casa popular en España* in 1930. Others, who have already been mentioned, like Leopoldo Torres Balbás, author of *La vivienda popular en España*, committed wholeheartedly to vernacular architecture.

From the end of the Civil War until the late 1950s, Spain remained relatively isolated and focussed on the reconstruction of the country, based on very traditional, historicist architecture and urbanism.

In the early 1960s, Spain began to fall under the influence of international architecture. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, there was great economic development with truly devastating effects on the environment. Architecture and urbanism abandoned any speck of tradition.

It was in the late 1970s that an attraction for traditional architecture reappeared as a result of a growing interest in the history of architecture. In 1973, Carlos Flores published *Arquitectura Popular en España* and a group of anthropologists, historians and people of culture stressed the importance of maintaining and preserving the legacy of traditional architecture. Among them was Júlio Caro Baroja.

In the 1980s in Spain, buildings favouring traditional architecture appeared, although there were not very many. They were isolated cases, like that of Philippe Rothier, in Ibiza, and a few others. It was in the 1990s that a growing demand for traditional architecture began. However, the market, and even the architects, were not properly prepared to satisfy this demand, which is why, since then, there has been a boom of sub-products which are supposed to remind us of traditional architecture, but in fact have very little to do with it.

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## 6. TRADITIONAL URBANISM IN SPAIN

Where traditional urbanism is concerned, we have the example of the new settlements built in Spain in the years following the Civil War (1936-1939). It was in these towns that the types and morphologies most strongly rooted in urban tradition proliferated.

In 1939, there were plans to rebuild almost 300 cities and towns destroyed by the war. The Department of Destroyed Regions was set up for the purpose. In addition to this department, there was another, the National Colonisation Institute, to create new communities.

Where the outlines of these small villages were concerned, there was the vast Spanish tradition of colonisation from previous centuries, based essentially on a grid layout. The modern experiences of the Republic only strengthened this trend, adapting it to the new premises of functionality and rational use. Although the creative base was the grid, some designs showed an organicist, i.e. clearly hierarchical, tendency, i.e. a main street ran from the centre and other side streets led out from the centre like branches of a tree. As we have said before, traditional architecture typical of each region was used. Given the shortage of resources in the post-war economy, an inevitable simplicity was imposed.

The layouts of these new settlements were based on the definition of the streets. The streets were clearly laid out in blocks, but the blocks were not only occupied by homes. The one or two-storey homes had a wide, open space surrounded by a wall. The result was that the street was defined by the buildings and by the walls surrounding these open spaces. The idea was to provide the farm workers and craftsmen with space for vegetable gardens, stables, storerooms and so on. and also so that they could build an extension to the house if necessary.

The buildings were of great simplicity, mostly due to the shortage of resources. They created a neutral, uniform visual background that made the public buildings stand out: the town hall, the church, the schools, the health centre, etc. In these layouts there was

always a *Plaza Mayor*, with strong Castilian, ergo Spanish, tradition. This is a rectangular area with galleries where the town hall and shopping areas are located.

A historicist style was reserved for the public buildings. It was left to private initiative to add ornamental details the neutral backgrounds of the houses, providing a little touch of variety.

The work of the journal *Reconstrucción* was important. Starting in 1940, it published articles not only about the reconstruction of the major monuments, but also the designs of these new settlements and countless details on building and ornamentation taken from traditional architecture.

The most significant difference between these new settlements and other designs from modern, avant-garde movements was not the return to popular architecture, but rather the desire to create a town with all the different uses of such a community. Although they were small settlements, with exact, closed dimensions, and therefore with clearly defined limits, there was an attempt to recreate the whole intensity of the different uses typical of any traditional city or town. So they created a genuine urban landscape and not just a merely residential unit, i.e. sectors for different uses, as proposed by the Modern Movement.

In the cities, the new neighbourhoods created by the Phalangists for the *Obra Sindical del Hogar* also followed the idea of creating an urban environment including clearly defined squares, pavements and streets. Different uses were also included, such as shops, sports facilities, a church, a health centre, etc. The architecture was extremely rational and simple.

This way of building cities was interrupted in the late 1950s, when the regime opened to liberalism. The urbanism of developmentism and *laissez faire* had arrived. The new city plans had to have open blocks. They renounced the definition of streets and almost exclusively established residential use. And so dormitory neighbourhoods were created. The difference between the outskirts and the city centre became clearly visible. As the centre had to have the services that the suburbs did not have, it began to deteriorate.

This situation continued for 20 years until the revision of history, in the late 1970s. This was when there was an attempt to recover an urban sense for the new city plans, though they still lacked numerous services and continued to be areas reserved only for housing. City planning in recent years seems to focus on giving character to the new neighbourhoods by including architectural objects designed to be new and surprising. The idea seems to be that the more of these surprising objects there are, the greater the interest there will be in the neighbourhood. Examples of this phenomenon are theme parks

or architectural zoos. The city is regarded as a mere field of action for the large real estate groups. Speculation on an increasingly larger scale is disguised by the inclusion of these surprises.

Nevertheless, new concerns for eradicating this proliferation of zoos are beginning to arise in Spain, Portugal and Europe, albeit very slowly. We will touch on this in the epilogue.

## **7. Traditional Architecture in Portugal**

In Portugal from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1920s, there was also a proliferation of different styles resulting not only from the influence of architects who brought them from abroad in general and France in particular, like Ventura Terra and Possidónio da Silva, but also from the production of foreign architects working in Portugal, like the Italian, Luigi Manini, among others.

Names like those mentioned above together with Norte Júnior, José Luis Monteiro and Marques da Silva were part of the period that was called “Eclecticism” or the “Romantic Period”.

While most of the buildings constructed according to these aesthetic models clearly showed where their designers had taken their influences (France, Italy, Britain, etc.) or had exotic or oriental references (the palace in Príncipe Real in Lisbon, or the Stock Exchange Palace in Oporto), there were others that showed clear references to local tradition.

There were attempts to recover unique national elements, an architectural image “style” that could be considered “Portuguese”, using neo-Manueline symbols and language. Rossio Station by José Luis Monteiro; the O’Neil house, now the Condes de Castro Guimarães Museum in Cascais, by Luigi Manini and Francisco Vilaça; and Bussaco Palace (originally intended to be the royal hunting lodge), also by Manini, are important examples of this architectural period in Portugal, still strongly imbued with the typical aesthetics of Romanticism. There were no other flights of fancy or, at most, they were very timid (like art nouveau and “modern style”), mostly due to the economic crisis in Portugal, which lasted from the end of *Fontismo* in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the first years of the Republic.

The different imported styles made themselves felt here and there without actually constituting a “renewal” of the architecture of the time, more so in the coastal areas and in the city, while in the inland areas design and construction systems remained faithful to architectural traditions.

The new habit of taking seaside holidays brought equally “new” architectures to Estoril and Cascais, where the royal family spent its holidays, and later to the beaches in the Oporto area, Figueira da Foz and others. “Chalets” appeared all over in these places, bringing not only an unprecedented exoticism to the landscape, but also a more informal, more convivial or more domestic lifestyle, among the wealthier classes.

The clearest sign of change came from a group of architects from the so-called “traditional naturalist” trend, the most important of whom was Raul Lino. For the first time, with this architect there was real authenticity and not just a romantic or nostalgic reflex in the quest for the nationalistic roots of architecture. They went back to styles like “Moorish”, “*Pombalino*” or “baroque” to create new models, “axiologically defining persistent forms (...) in architecture”, according to Irene Ribeiro in her thesis “Raul Lino, a Nationalist Thinker in Architecture”. This was an “attempt to ‘re-Portuguesify’ the art of construction”, as José Augusto França called it, “in the continuity of collective memory and with respect for ecology, (...) in a desirable adaptation between architecture, landscape and life”, as Ribeiro said in her thesis.

Raul Lino left us works of extraordinary beauty. In an extremely effective but beautiful way, he managed to combine the practical aspects of domestic life with local tradition in a synthesis that was extremely up to date compared to the current massification and, on the other hand, to the unfortunate, chaotic, environmentally inappropriate designs produced today in a show with a succession of “stars”, following fashion, going with the concept that is closely linked to uninformed, unbridled consumption controlled by the large business groups that dominate the planet and manipulate tastes and whose sole objective is profit at any price, even if the price is a reduction in our quality of life.

Raul Lino taught us a lesson, not only because of the above but also because of the quality of the construction of his works, full of modernity yet, at the same time, continuing history and tradition, in a remarkable synthesis. His works are therefore a good example of



the true concept of tradition that, contrary to certain more dogmatic theories in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, does not exclude innovation or creativity.

The regime called the *Estado Novo* that ruled Portugal from the 1930s to April 1974, more markedly in the 1940s and 1950s under Salazar and his Minister of Public Works, Duarte Pacheco, and António Ferro the regime's propagandist, encouraged architectures that sought to synthesis local tradition with the idea of Empire and a taste for all that was "modest" and rural. It absorbed a lot from architects like Pardal Monteiro, Carlos Ramos, Cristino da Silva, Cotinelli Telmo and others who, since the 1920s, had begun to produce works to suit the modernist tastes of the times. Most of them gave in to official tastes, which could only be confused with Raul Lino's work out of ignorance.

It was only after the death of Duarte Pacheco, under the influence of the Athens Charter and after the first National Architecture Congress (1948) that a reaction to this dominant taste in architecture began. Designs by personalities like Keil do Amaral, for example, sought, on one hand, to interpret the internationalist currents of the modern movement and, on the other hand, a little later, tried out new paths inspired by more regionalist currents that were beginning to appear in Northern Europe and of which the Oporto School, with Fernando Távora, Siza Vieira and others, was an international reference.

The survey of popular Portuguese architecture, which began in 1956 (F. Keil do Amaral, Fernando Távora and others), completed later with the works *Arquitectura Popular nos Açores* and *Arquitectura Popular na Madeira* by Vítor Mestre, was another important milestone in the history of traditional architecture in Portugal. The work was remarkable, though it is unfortunate that it served very little purpose in subsequent years.

In fact, what has been produced in Portugal in the field of architecture, from the 1970s to the present day, with a few honourable, mostly very recent exceptions, has been of very poor quality. There has been prolific speculative construction that, in addition to resulting in a devastating panorama and serious environmental consequences on the outskirts of the main cities, has even attacked balanced works in the actual city centres.

The repulsion with which, even today, Portugal regards the architecture inspired by traditional models is basically due to two factors:

- The first and most significant is the fact that the *Estado Novo* architecture, which can only be labelled traditional out of ignorance, is indissolubly linked to the regime that dominated Portuguese society until April 1974. Portuguese architects, most of whom were opposed to the previous regime, developed a more or less understandable reaction to everything associated with tradition, although 30 years later this may seem over-emotional and incomprehensible to the new generations (who regard the problems of loss of cultural identity and environmental deterioration as much more urgent than abstract, meaningless problems in the age of globalisation). They have chosen the “modernist style” or the neo-modernist currents that they feel are the only acceptable ones, confusing tradition with a recent past that was closed to the outside and the new ideas that were coming from elsewhere. Paradoxically, these architects have taken a similar attitude which is contrary but equally dogmatic;

- The second factor is the poor quality of the so-called architecture that began to appear rather spontaneously and empirically in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a reaction to the exhaustion of neo-modernist and post-modernist models, with no knowledge of the rules, without justification, without quality, with profoundly kitsch models. This was a result of the persistent refusal on the part of existing schools to keep traditional architecture in their syllabuses, thus turning their backs on this inevitable phenomenon that, from “emigrants’ houses” to villas in gated communities to supposedly regional tourist complexes, have taken over the Portuguese landscape in the last two decades. This phenomenon continues to manifest itself alongside official, academic architecture, which may include some quality works but continues to refuse to rethink its sociological bases, isolating itself more and more in its hermetic circles, progressively moving farther away from the people’s wishes, creating mythologies fuelled by the propaganda machine of an “establishment” that has no interest in change, totally ignoring the signs of the times.

The exception to this rule came from a group of architects, which includes the author of this article and which, since the mid-1980s, has been producing architectures in which history and tradition play an inspiring role. From the more vernacular designs of Tiago Bradel or Luis Bleck da Silva, to the more classicist or historicist works of José Cornélio da Silva, including models that combine the classical with the local tradition of Alberto Castro Nunes and António Braga, among others, they seek to reconcile high-quality architecture with the people’s real wishes, without complexes or dogmas, with tolerance and sensitivity, resuming the course of history, with no radical cuts and incorporating innovation and

modernity with ancestral know-how or with tradition, full of respect for the collective memory of a people with a right to cultural individuality.

As Miguel Torga, perhaps one of last century's greatest writers and poets in the Portuguese language, wrote, "What pains me in the Motherland is that there is no correspondence in the minds of the Portuguese between their past and their future. Every historical building that chance has preserved intact or mutilated – castle, pillory, church, mansion or simple fountain – is for all of us an extraordinary survival that insists on lasting and in which no-one recognises himself. We look at this testimony to our identity like old, useless furniture that only gets in the way of our daily lives. What individual or collective memory recalls this embattled chronicle?"

Torga, who loved his "hometown", experienced this divorce between past and future with pain and, like him, many of us share this sad reality with disappointment, aware that there is nothing nostalgic or retrograde about this love for our "hometown". On the contrary, it is the only possible response to the threat of massification, of reducing everything to fashion and consumption, with disastrous consequences for the environment. It is therefore the most up-to-date, educated, informed response to this anti-natural threat.

While Portuguese schools are still reluctant to accept this reality where architecture is concerned, ignoring everything that is being produced in theory or in practice in so many other countries, as described above, rejecting new teaching models like those introduced by José Cornélio da Silva and Lucien Steil in the Architecture Degree Course at the Beiras Regional Centre of Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Viseu, there have been some really positive changes in urbanism. The phenomenon of "conservation", the recognition of the importance of preserving "monuments and sites" and the advent of national and international classification have triggered acceptance of tradition urban types, in contrast to those being produced from nationalistic dogmas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The quality of the restored urban areas in Guimarães, Évora, Óbidos and so many other places is so evident that today it is no longer possible to ignore the lessons of tradition when dealing with land or urban planning. But let us leave that for the next chapter.

## **8. Traditional Urbanism in Portugal**

The matrix of Portuguese cities is very similar to that of other Southern European countries. It has markedly medieval roots and, in some cases, deep marks left by Romanisation. In Portugal, with insignificant intervention during the Renaissance of which Bairro Alto in Lisbon is an example, it is an exception.

Most of our cities grew organically, developing in networks of streets and squares forming a highly uniform fabric, marked by the more notable secular and religious buildings – the castle, the cathedral, churches and palaces – true, singular “urban ecosystems” that developed over the centuries, full of vitality.

The earthquake in 1755 severely damaged many of these structures and helped make Portugal different or special, at least in the cities affected most, like Lisbon.

Immediately after the earthquake, Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, the Marquis of Pombal, Minister of the Realm under King José I, took over the reins of the reconstruction. From the designs of architects and engineers like Eugénio dos Santos, Manuel da Maia and Carlos Mardel came the rebirth of streets, squares, blocks and neighbourhoods of illuminist inspiration. They respected administrative divisions and the memory of the most important urban spaces and introduced “modernity” and “light”, disciplining the organic with more Cartesian geometries and, whenever possible, integrating buildings that were recoverable or that absolutely had to be restored.

These cities were reborn in a more airy, luminous environment and, until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, slowly regained their populations and activities, deeply affected by the natural catastrophe.

It was only with the advent of *Fontismo* and industrialisation that there were the first glimpses of major change in Portuguese cities. The first public transportation, street lighting, the opening of wide boulevards like Avenida da Liberdade in Lisbon, the construction of public funiculars and so on showed a growing concern for public areas. The city was being used by an emerging industrial working class and, as its numbers and importance grew, it required new neighbourhoods. *Avenidas Novas* and Campo de Ourique, by Ressano Garcia, are examples of this phenomenon in Lisbon. In these new,

orthogonal neighbourhoods, the essential matrix of the European city was preserved, involving mixed uses in the healthy cohabitation of “Res Publica” with “Res Privata”.

Meanwhile, mostly as a result of the political and economic crisis that followed *Fontismo* and was felt until the advent of the *Estado Novo* in the 1930s, nothing of any significance was produced in Portugal in terms of urbanism, with the exception of one or two “new neighbourhoods” here and there.

In fact, it was only in the late 1930s and early 1940s that there were any changes to this panorama. One of them was the restoration of countless historical buildings all over the country, like the Cathedral and São Jorge Castle in Lisbon, *Paço dos Duques* and the castle in Guimarães, *Palácio Nacional de Sintra*, Queluz, Mafra, Alcobaça, Batalha Monastery, Tomar and innumerable castles and monuments.

“This look back at the motherland’s past was appropriate to the achievements of the present, but they needed an ideographic reference” – José Augusto França.

At the same time, new neighbourhoods, streets, avenues and squares were being built, clearly based on classic models – channels and boulevards – dotted with monuments, fountains and other landmarks, squares that were clearly delimited or framed by buildings with strict geometric layouts. There was a feeling of regulation, order and sense. There were galleries, public gardens, streets, blocks, neighbourhoods. Everything had its own, human scale that, however, was too dominated by the ruler and T-square of the planners.

In the more “domestic” settings, either in the city or in towns and villages, the intention was to incorporate the most characteristic features of urban traditions and local architecture, from region to region, not only in terms of design but also of materials. However, due to excessive “rationality”, the results were “unnatural” and too “severe”, with no joy, sensitivity or lightness. There was no tolerance or charm, but the base was good.

As Raul Lino said about the Exhibition of the Portuguese World in 1940, “one thing was, at least, made clear: heraldic or ethnographic motifs are not enough to imprint a work of art with the national stamp; national character lies in the ineffable architectural feeling, in the mystery of proportions, in the nature of the plastic forms that the artist naturally prefers – taking this adverb in its primary, full meaning”. And this applies equally well to the city.

The image sought was one of a rural Portugal, with traditional values, but it was done forcibly, with no authenticity or urbanity. It was staged to a certain extent. The result was not the product of concrete factors stemming from the setting or the formal expression of a particular culture.

Today, however, with help that time has given in erasing or smoothing over the excessive rigidity of these places, many of the neighbourhoods, streets and avenues of the time are now quite pleasant places to live, exposing their basic, traditional quality.

Since the death of Duarte Pacheco, and even more since the 1970s, new constructions have been designed, planned on the basis of the Athens Charter, separating the streets from the buildings, creating single-purpose zones and isolating buildings in empty spaces, eradicating the function of the street, introducing overdependence on cars and road networks, ignoring the square as the “forum” or “agora”, abstractly systematising the arrangement of the buildings, all with no human sense, rejecting mankind’s natural social organisation, producing an anti-city and destroying the city.

City centres are being emptied of housing, which is being replaced by services. As a result, the streets are unsafe and the cities are losing quality of life.

Meanwhile, the suburbs are growing, either along these planning models or in a disorganised fashion, in clandestine cement-block neighbourhoods or shantytowns, accompanying the depopulation of the farmland, of the rural world, who are seeking to improve their living conditions in the big city.

With the new regime in 1974, and more markedly from the 1980s onwards, two new urbanistic phenomena emerged in Portuguese society – the large-scale construction of controlled-cost housing and the restoration of old parts of cities.

The policies that have guided these phenomena, just like those behind most urbanistic production in Portugal until now, are still based on outdated presuppositions. Only now, and very timidly, do we hear talk of the importance of the street, mixed uses and social strata, though we continue to build condominiums for the rich and for the poor, fuelling social segregation and turning our backs on the city.

Unlike everywhere else in Europe and the United States (and now in other places, too), we are not yet making cities at all in Portugal and the theories of Jane Jacobs, Léon Krier and others have not yet had the opportunity to demonstrate their importance and topicality around here.

We recognise the quality of life in traditional neighbourhoods that have been restored. We accept urban renewal as something essential for our cities. We renovate zones and build remarkable buildings, but we are not yet prepared to make new things on the basis of models inspired by tradition.

The restoration of the Chiado district in Lisbon, headed by Siza Vieira, was a bit of a surprise for all, as they were expecting something more radical, which seems to be the fashion now and which the city councillors are aching to develop. They have already commissioned designs from the more fashionable studios, forking out astronomical sums from public funds, while we continue to reduce the budget for urban renewal or for preserving our heritage.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Eça de Queiroz spoke out against the “provincial idea of progress”. In the meantime, people “grab” as much as they can of the achievements that are closest to their vision of a city with European style – organic, with life – rejecting, whenever they can, the abstract models that the authorities insist on imposing. Any construction that fills the vacuums of city centres, restoring images and life, is guaranteed success right from the start, which is symptomatic.

Times will change. It is inevitable.

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## EPILOGUE

In a history that chooses to attract attention by using more and more surprising forms and that has seemed to typify the way to build cities in recent years, cities have finally renounced the transcendental issues that concern their citizens.

Throughout this article, we have mentioned some of these concerns and they all apply to the whole planet. In other words, they affect and have to do with all citizens all over the

world. Today, we are facing some challenges of unheard-of proportions. Achieving sustainable development is not a principle that we talk about just because it sounds good. To achieve this kind of development – the only kind that can really be called development – poetry contests are mere distractive manoeuvres.

This architectural zoo-type urbanism for which so many cities all over the world compete intensely almost pathologically shows how out of place we are. Built by and for the powers that be, this is the urbanism of the establishment. Defending it is not a commitment to progress, because the attitudes of progress are clearly marked by the defence of models that are capable of standing up to the colossal challenges that humanity has to face and not by the late, decadent enjoyment of the “architectural zoos”, artifices and circuses for the stupefied masses.

As we have said, new sensitivities and new ways of facing up to these challenges are slowly entering the European scene. Experiences of movements like New Urbanism or Smart Growth, which involve the inhabitants in all conditions, have already arrived in Europe and will soon reach the Iberian Peninsula. Their arrival will (initially) cause a reaction from the political, economic and academic establishment, entrenched in a way of making cities that only produces benefits for a small minority. But the seed of another way of regarding the future has already taken root on the Old Continent, just as it did a decade ago in the United States.

Civic movements like those mentioned above, which include all kinds of sensitivities, are interested rescuing the models from history than incorporate the premises of sustainability, and in recovering everything positive about traditional architecture and urbanism. They are openly opposed to the façade of “stardom” and stand up to serious problems that the human habitat will have to face in a few years.

Progressive attitudes are not longer flashy, no longer the creation of novelty for novelty’s sake, for consumption and in detriment to the planet’s resources.

The issue is of transcendental importance. The reverse of the trend – radical, positive, fresh, inclusive, civil, anti-elitist and hopeful – is making itself felt all over Europe. It has the unconditional support of all the environmental movements and is determined to follow the path leading to a sustainable model.

There can be no doubt that is room for hope in the midst of the banal, consumerist circus of the established culture.

Javier Cenicacelaya & José Baganha



Bilbao, Lisbon, November 2004