

A Landscape of Multiplicities

The Production of Subjectivity in Álvaro Siza's Malagueira Neighbourhood

Povzetek

Pokrajina mnoštva. Produkcija subjektivitete v soseski Malagueira Álvaro Siza

Avtor v prispevku skozi empiričen pristop, temelječ na etnografskem raziskovanju, obravnava procese sprejemanja oblikovalskih odločitev in dogajanje po vselitvi v sosesko Malagueira, ki jo je za portugalsko mesto Évora leta 1977 zasnoval Álvaro Siza. Skozi te procese so se po avtorjevem mnenju oblikovale tudi specifične subjektivitete. Tako v prvem delu prouči vlogo, ki jo je pri oblikovanju soseske kot celote, sestavljene iz singularitet, igralo lastništvo. V nadaljevanju analizira tri družbeno-prostorske elemente (terase, zidove in ulice), pri katerih je sprejemanje oblikovalskih odločitev v zvezi z obravnavano sosesko sprožilo mediacijo med ontološkim enim in množtvom. Refleksija recepcije projekta pokaže na napetosti, ki so imanentne odnosu med avtoriteto in subjektiviteto; avtor zato v sklepnem delu za osvetlitev soodvisnosti med sprejemanjem odločitev in procesi subjektivacije v oblikovanju pokrajine mnoštva uporabi Negrijevo ontološko definicijo multitudine.

Ključne besede: sprejemanje oblikovalskih odločitev, dogajanje po vselitvi, soseska Malagueira, Álvaro Siza, singularnost, subjektiviteta

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Abstract

This article discusses the design decision-making and the post-occupancy processes of the Malagueira neighbourhood, a housing estate designed by Álvaro Siza in 1977 in the Portuguese city of Évora. In this article, I use an empirical approach supported by an ethnographic research to discuss the production of subjectivity in the Malagueira neighbourhood. In the first section of the article, I examine the extent to which ownership played an important role in the formation of the neighbourhood as a whole of singularities. Then I analyse three social-spatial conditions (patios, walls and streets) in which the design decision-making process of the Malagueira plan triggered a mediation between the ontological figures of the "one" and the "multiple". In the following section, I discuss the immanent tension between authority and subjectivity reviewing the project's reception. In the conclusion, I explore Antonio Negri's ontological definition of the "multitude" to highlight how the Malagueira neighbourhood illustrates the interdependence between design decisions and processes of subjectivation in the formation of a landscape of "multiplicities".

Keywords: design decision-making, post-occupancy processes, Malagueira neighbourhood, Álvaro Siza, singularity, subjectivity

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Introduction

Throughout the 1960s, the established power relations in the production of space were being challenged. Structuralism, Techno-fetishism and “architecture without architects” emerged as alternatives to combat the hegemony of the architectural discipline in design decision-making. In these alternative approaches, the role of the architect was re-framed to become part and parcel of the *process*. The concept of architecture as a *product*, as a commodity, was thoroughly contested. One of the most vocal protagonists of this stance was John Turner and his plea to promote “housing” as a *verb*, as opposed to “housing” as a *noun*, blatantly endorsing people’s autonomy in shaping their built environment (Turner, 1972). In the following decades, from the 1970s through the 1990s, the question of disciplinary autonomy was constantly reassessed and became a central topic in the politics of architectural design and theory.

Throughout these three decades, “temporality” (how buildings learn) and “spatial agency” (how people build) gained momentum as key concepts for architectural design and theory. The focus on these aspects as key operators in design decision-making processes stimulated a deeper concern with the social role of the architect. In this context, the idea of “open architecture” or “open form” appeared as a redemptory solution, a step towards a democratization of spatial agency. Designers’ expertise was negotiated with the users of the buildings in order to accommodate growth and change over time (e.g., stimulating DIY practices) and return the power to the people.

A great deal of the projects that entertained the concept of “open architecture” in the 1970s and 1980s made an attempt at exploring a trade-off between individual agency and spaces for collective action. Álvaro Siza’s project for the Malagueira housing neighbourhood, developed in the late 1970s for a site on the outskirts of the historic city of Évora (Portugal), is a case in point. This project can be discussed as a situation in which architectural design performed as a mediator for the exchanges between subjects and the multitude, to use Antonio Negri’s terminology.

In this article, I will use an empirical approach supported by an ethnographic research to discuss the design decision-making process and analyse the post-occupancy of the Malagueira neighbourhood. First, I will discuss how ownership played an important role in the formation of the neighbourhood as a whole of singularities. Then, I will analyse three social-spatial conditions (patios, walls and streets) in which the design decision-making process of the Malagueira plan triggered a mediation between the one and the multiple. I will move afterwards to a review of the Project’s reception in order to highlight the immanent tension between authority and subjectivity. I will conclude by highlighting the interdependence between design decisions and processes of subjectivation in the formation of a landscape of “multiplicities”, exploring Antonio Negri’s ontological definition of the multitude.

Ownership

The development of the plan for the Malagueira neighbourhood was part of a political strategy to eradicate the pervasive proliferation of illegal settlements on the outskirts of the walled historical city of Évora. Confronted with the lack of alternatives to find affordable housing in the city, the rural migrants that had been flocking to the city since the 1930s became easy prey to unscrupulous landowners who sold them plots of agricultural land that was not assigned for urbanisation. The settlements thus created, called *clandestinos*, spread all around the periphery of Évora's historic centre. In the late 1960s, the governmental agency for urbanization services (DGSU, *Direcção Geral dos Serviços de Urbanização*) developed a plan to try and combat the housing shortage and the proliferation of *clandestinos* in the western part of the city. The development of a new social housing complex for a site called Cruz da Picada, located in the periphery of the historic city, was one of the concrete outcomes of this plan.

The Cruz da Picada project was based on a type of housing that was new to the region: the multifamily housing block with stacked apartments. The adaptation of the residents to the new housing type was problematic. It generated widespread protest, especially regarding the formation of social networks in the community. Living in rented apartments soon became a synonym of "alienation" for the new tenants. For families that had lived for several generations with a strong connection with the ground, living in a rented apartment on the seventh floor prompted a sense of de-territorialization and lack of ownership. Conversely, those who bought plots in the *clandestinos* were able to build their own houses (despite the lack of a building permit) that resonated with their traditional patterns of inhabitation. There was no security of tenure, but there was a great deal of sense of ownership.

After the major political event that toppled down, in 25 April 1974, the dictatorial regime that had ruled Portugal since 1933, there was a paradigm shift in the politics of the production and design of social housing. The famous case of the SAAL process is perhaps the most compelling example of this paradigm shift (Sardo, 2014). It was against this background that Álvaro Siza, an architect based in Porto, was invited in 1977 by the municipality of Évora to design a plan for a neighbourhood that should accommodate 1,200 households in the western part of the city. The site was located on a former agricultural estate called *Quinta da Malagueira*, surrounded by the Cruz da Picada housing complex and the *Bairro de Santa Maria*, one of the city's many *clandestinos* settlements.

When Siza surveyed the site from the air, his sketches revealed the problematic integration of the Cruz da Picada housing complex in the surrounding landscape. A first analytical model developed after the initial survey shows the organic integration of the Bairro de Santa Maria, with the backdrop of agricultural estates and rolling hills.



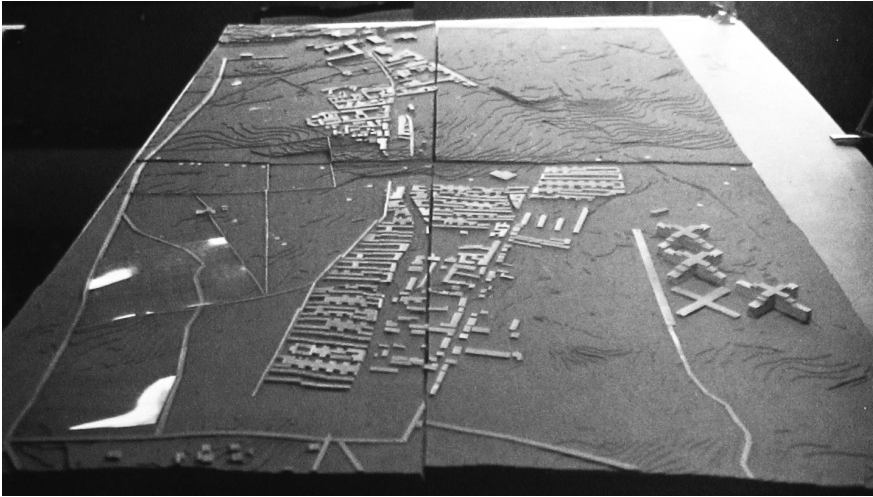
Site Plan of the Malagueira Neighbourhood. Green: Cruz da Picada Housing Complex; Yellow: Bairro de Santa Maria; Red: Malagueira Neighbourhood. Source: Author's Drawing.



Distribution of the different types of development in the Malagueira Neighbourhood. Top: 1980 Version; Bottom: Current situation. Red: Cooperatives; Green: Government and Municipality; Yellow: Private Initiative. Source: Author's Drawing.



The brief for the Malagueira plan stipulated that three types of ownership models should be accommodated, each one focused on a different income group and/or type of development: cooperatives, public housing and the private sector. In the initial version of Siza's plan for the Malagueira, the area for the cooperatives was clearly predominant over the other two types of development. Furthermore, the area allocated for the cooperatives was closely connected with the neighbouring *clandestinos* settlement, reinforcing the "natural" expansion of the social and physical fabric of the Bairro de Santa Maria into the new neighbourhood. Eventually, the public sector required more units and these were built in areas previously allocated to the cooperative and private sectors.



Álvaro Siza, Model of the Site for the Malagueira Neighbourhood, 1977. Source: *Arquitectura* (132), 1979.

Notwithstanding the adjustments to the plan, the differences based on the three types of tenure are relatively understated. Indeed, the plan avoids creating a clear spatial segregation or morphological distinctions that would lead to the stigmatization or ghettoization of the clusters defined for the different types of development and tenure.

Siza's approach testifies to his attempt to privilege the social organisation of the community based on the patterns of inhabitation surveyed in Bairro de Santa Maria. Conversely, his plan does not attempt to create any clear articulation with the Cruz da Picada housing complex. Instead, he used the existing fabric of the Bairro de Santa Maria as a matrix for the new plan. The street network of the *clandestinos* was extended, integrating the illegal settlement with the infrastructure of the new development. This design decision suggests an attempt to secure the consolidation of social relations in the new neighbourhood, structured along streets defined by rows of single-family houses.

The choice of the single-family house as the primary typological figure for the Malagueira neighbourhood was approved by the members of the S. Sebastião Residents Association, the first group of future dwellers that worked with Siza.¹ In 1978, when the construction of the first houses in Malagueira started, the residents' association was re-organized as the Giraldo Sem Pavor Cooperative (GSP Coop). The members of the GSP Coop, together with the representatives of the municipality, became key players in the initial discussions with Siza and his collaborators. They were soon joined by a new group of future dwellers, organised in the recently created Boa Vontade Cooperative (BV Coop).

Siza worked together with the future residents to define the project for the first 200 dwelling units, 100 units for each cooperative. The presence of the architect in the meetings became an event in itself, and a token of the redefinition of the power structures that prevailed in the past. One of the residents that participated in the meetings with Siza declared:

I had never seen anything like that... the houses where I lived before did not have either a project or an architect, let alone seeing the architect coming to the future users to discuss [the project] ... I think [Siza] designed a house that he wouldn't have done if he had designed it alone in his office. (Gomes, 2016: 121)²

While the testimony of this interviewee demonstrates a certain degree of identification with the project, the design decision-making process was not always consensual. In fact, it was continuously scrutinized by the client/developer and by the end-users. Over the next 40 years, the streets of Malagueira kept changing, reflecting a process of "progressive attachment", as I have called it elsewhere (Mota, 2014).

In what follows, I will examine in more detail three situations that illustrate how this progressive attachment became a vehicle for the production of subjectivity in the Malagueira neighbourhood: Patios, Walls and Streets.

¹ The S. Sebastião Residents Association was an established social network of people that came together in the post-revolutionary period (1974–76) to create a SAAL brigade. Eventually the SAAL operation in Évora failed and their hopes for a new house were frustrated. With the Malagueira plan, they were given another opportunity to restart the process.

² Except where otherwise noted, the interviews of residents of the Malagueira neighbourhood reproduced in this article were collected by Mário José Afonso Gomes during field work developed in 2010 for his doctoral dissertation in the field of anthropology. This and further quotations from this source were translated from Portuguese by the author.

Patios

In his first proposal, presented in August 1977, Siza designed a house built on a plot of 8x12 meters, organized around a patio of approximately 4x6 meters. The typological approach of Siza's Malagueira house-type resonated with vernacular dwelling types, especially the patio-house, which owed its lineage to the Islamic presence from the 8th century to the 13th century in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula. The houses were designed to be associated in rows along the street and clustered back-to-back. The dwelling units could be expanded through time, from a one-bedroom house to a five-bedroom house. There were two variations, one with the patio facing the street side (version A), and the other variation, by special request of a few residents, with the patio located on the back side (version B).³



First version of the dwelling types for the Malagueira Neighbourhood, November 1977. Source: Author's Drawing.

³ Version A is by far the predominant variation; only a few units of version B were actually built.

The patio was one of the key features in the house-types designed by Siza for the Malagueira neighbourhood. It was devised not only as an extension of the private realm, but also as a buffer zone between the domain of the family and the public space. The layout of the ground floor was designed to concentrate around the patio the partitioned areas where the social activities of the household take place: the living room and the kitchen. Alongside its social purpose, the patio performed as well a vital role in securing the ventilation of these spaces.⁴

The patio also became a major asset for the everyday practices of the inhabitants. One interviewee declared that the patio was one of the reasons for her decision to buy a house in Malagueira. "I loved the patio very much," she stated, "I can see the whole house from there. For me the house is like an egg. It's an egg. My egg..." (Gomes, 2016: 220) Another resident declared how the patio became a safe haven in Évora's hot summer nights.



Survey of layout and occupation of the ground floor of Type A dwelling units. Source: Leger and Matos, 2004.

In the patio, I had trees and I paved the floor with bricks, ceramic bricks, because it's a rustic and natural finishing... I planted some trees, I have here a cypress, a lemon tree and a pomegranate tree. [...] that patio is the best room of the house. (Gomes, 2016: 172)

In many cases, the dwellers changed the circulation structure of the house, connecting the patio directly with the roof terrace on the first floor, a possibility that Siza did not consider in the first versions of the project. By doing this, the residents enlarged their open-to-the-sky spaces, expanding also the functional

⁴ As the houses could be connected on three of the four sides of the plot (along the 12m-long sides and the back side), there was no other possible source for getting natural ventilation inside the house.

possibilities of the house. The roof terraces could now be used to dry laundry or just to grant direct access from the patio to the bedrooms on the first floor.⁵

The patio became a privileged territory for the production of subjectivity. It was perceived as a space of freedom, a place where the residents could claim ownership. An interviewee that moved to Malagueira from one of the apartments in the Cruz da Picada housing estate confirms this. When asked about the reasons for moving, she declared: “[Malagueira] has a patio, has balconies... it’s totally different... [here] we are free to do the BBQs we want. [...] In the summer we have lunch there. And dinner sometimes.” (Gomes, 2016: 343) The patio became a hybrid domain: both a social space and a secluded territory. The wall dividing the patio and the street would play a crucial role in this trade-off between publicity and privacy.

Walls

In Siza’s first version of the Malagueira house-type, the border between the public space and the domestic space was clearly defined through a 3.5m-high wall and an almost blind street façade, pierced only with the gate to the patio and a protruding chimney. This architectural characterization celebrated the street as the main social space and the patio as the extension of the domestic realm to a protected open-to-the-sky space.

After the presentation of Siza’s preliminary proposal for the dwelling type, the members of the residents’ association criticised the excessive introversion of the house. Most of the members of the first group of residents came from the *clandestinos* and still had a strong connection with the patterns of inhabitation of the villages from where they came. While they were interested in protecting the privacy of the family, they also desired some sort of control over the street. In other words, they wanted to see but not be seen. To cater to this aspiration, in the revised version of the project, Siza introduced a window in the kitchen, facing the street.

Eventually, another contested aspect of the house’s street façade came to the fore in the discussions between Siza and the first group of residents: the height of the wall between the patio and the street. Many of the members of the cooperatives that built the first groups of houses requested authorization to reduce the height of the wall, in order to increase the contact with the street. Most of them had a shared history of social cooperation, which could explain the willingness to have a more permeable border between the house and the street. Along with the desire to participate more in the street life, there was also an aspirational reason

⁵ The request articulated by many residents for an external access from the patio to the first floor was eventually considered by Siza and his team, who gave some guidelines for the construction of this additional element.



Front walls in dwelling units developed for the members of the Giraldo Sem Pavor Cooperative (top) and Boa Vontade Cooperative (bottom). Situation in 2014. Source: Google Street view.

Front walls in dwelling units developed for the governmental housing agency (top) and the private initiative (bottom). Situation in 2014. Source: Google Street view.

for the request. For the first residents in Malagueira, the new house was tangible evidence of their ascent up the social ladder, but its qualities remained hidden behind those high walls (Leger and Matos, 2004: 51).

For others, however, the height of the wall was perceived as a class issue. Indeed, some declared that the high walls provided the privacy that the well-off liked to preserve. As one interviewee put it, “the houses of the rich people have patios, gardens; [...] but the walls are high and the people do not discern what’s happening inside.” He then concluded that “this must have been Siza’s inspiration to design the walls like this” (Gomes, 2016: 129).

Siza was not keen in enforcing the high wall though. After the discussions with the residents, and considering their feedback on the project, Siza relaxed the rules for the height of the walls, and introduced two more possibilities: 2.25m and 1.50m. These two alternatives would change radically the role played by the wall in the definition of the limit between the private and the public realm. The wall suddenly becomes less of a boundary and more of a border, to use Richard Sennett’s definition of two kinds of edges (Sennett, 2018: 218–227). Navigating through the streets of Malagueira today, one can perceive the implications of the height of the patio wall in the expansion of the dwelling towards the street.

While the group of “pioneers” preferred low walls, the high walls became the default configuration for the houses developed by the governmental

social housing agency (FFH) and by the cooperatives for the second stream of residents. In both cases, the beneficiaries were either selected through lottery, or otherwise by allocating houses to families without a relationship established previously. The atmosphere of the streets in the so-called “social housing” sector contrasts with the one in the first phase of the cooperatives. While the first is characterized by repetition and anonymity, in the latter, one can find clear evidences of subjectivization. A diversity of colours, materials and decorative artefacts proliferates in the low walls of the “pioneers”, while the high walls of the tenants of the social housing agency lack visible signs of personal expression. The streets of Malagueira, either defined by the continuous lines of high walls or animated by a rhythmic sequence of low walls, are thus an important field for the formation of subjectivity.

Streets

The open spaces in Malagueira contrast dramatically. The expansive park at the core of the neighbourhood, alongside the creek and the small lake, offers a generous area for leisure and recreation. The main street connecting the neighbourhood with the city centre of Évora is wide, with a layout that features two traffic lanes, parking spaces and trees. The streets between the housing clusters are, however, narrow. As mentioned above, this was Siza’s deliberate strategy to integrate in the new plan the street pattern of the Bairro de Santa Maria, the neighbouring “clandestine” settlement. Siza designed cobblestone streets with a layout of six meters, without sidewalks or parking spaces. Siza’s goal was to stimulate the use of the street as a place for conviviality, to invite the dwellers to come out of their houses and meet on the street, a common practice in the villages of Alentejo’s rural countryside.

The plan included some parking spaces though. These were placed in dedicated buildings spread around the area of the plan, clustered in single-floor blocks surrounded by blind white walls. As the garages were offered at an extra cost, there was little interest for them at the beginning of the development. Eventually, when the first garages were finally built, the families had already acquired habits of parking their car next to the house. Soon, the narrow streets were transformed into an informal parking space, thwarting Siza’s idealized vision of a vibrant social space. As one interviewee puts it: “I think Siza made a mistake in that which concerns the streets and the lack of parking. Considering that this is a social housing neighbourhood, he assumed that people would walk forever.” (Gomes, 2016: 286)

Over time, the presence of vehicles on the streets of Malagueira became ubiquitous. The narrow streets with houses on both sides became too small to accommodate the growing number of cars parked in front of the houses. Next



Aspect of street in the area developed for the members of the Giraldo Sem Pavor Cooperative (top) and Boa Vontade Cooperative (bottom). Situation in 2011. Photos: Nelson Mota.

to other distinctive signs of individual expression, the car parked in front of the house became a token of social mobility for many of the residents in Malagueira. Furthermore, the negotiation of the territory for the car *vis-à-vis* the projection of the private domain into the street became a source of conflicts between neighbours. Parking in front of someone else's house is considered abusive.

The street was a social space for the first group of residents, the founding members of the two cooperatives. They negotiated with Siza a reconfiguration of the relation between the patio and the street, reducing the height of the wall to expand the realm of the domestic into the public space. The streetscape was

lively and the atmosphere was convivial. However, in the sectors developed by the governmental agency for social housing (FFH), the tenants were not authorized to produce changes to the physical configuration of the houses. The default house-type used in this sector included the 3.5m-high wall that Siza favoured in the initial version of the project. These streetscapes, characterized by a continuous wall with a few openings pierced in it, would become a matter of public debate and derogative perception.

Reception

The architectural solutions developed by Siza and his collaborators for the Malagueira neighbourhood generated a heated debate in public opinion. In 1983, just a few years after the completion of the first units, Malagueira was called "the Arab neighbourhood". "It is very monotonous," some residents argued. They

claimed, "it's always the same thing: the houses resemble animal pens and the streets look like intersections of telephone cables." (Robalo, 1983: 20-R)

The derogatory use of expressions such as "the Arab neighbourhood" or "animal pens" highlights the displacement between the popular reception of the project and the architect's design approach. In an interview given in 1998 to Guido Giangregorio, Siza declared that the architectural solutions devised for the Malagueira plan, especially the dwelling types, were polemical from the outset of the process. The choice of a single-housing type was, Siza contends, transformed into a political issue. "An idea had spread, coming from inside the [residents' general] assembly or from outside, that building only patio houses, on a sector of the city, was inhumane and unacceptable," he stated. However, Siza went on, "this fear of monotony is a challenge to pursue diversity, which cannot be solved as an aesthetic issue, because in doing so, the result would immediately appear artificial, caricaturized or invented" (Siza, 2009: 115-117).

The resistance to the project created a setback for the mayor of Évora, Abílio Fernandes, the politician responsible for commissioning Siza with the design of the Malagueira

plan. To counter popular criticism, the municipality strived to publicize the qualities of Siza's project, avoiding the idea of rupture and emphasizing the project's resonances with the morphological patterns of the houses in the city's historical centre (Fernandes, 1979).

The Malagueira neighbourhood gained some notoriety in the national media as well. The opinions about the project were anything but consensual. In 1985, a reporter stated on the pages of the newspaper *O Diário* that



Aspect of street in the area developed for the governmental housing agency (top) and the private initiative (bottom). Situation in 2011. Photos: Nelson Mota.

the external appearance of the houses [in the Malagueira neighbourhood] maybe isn't very appealing, but internally they are spacious, well-designed, prepared against climate hardships, and they transmit a pleasant sensation of well-being. Everybody living there is unanimously stating that the houses are "marvellous". (Rocha, 1985: 13)

While this account of the project was somewhat sympathetic, some years later, in 1998, a well-known sociologist reported in the pages of an important media outlet how Siza's "architectural plan was translated into a desolated neighbourhood, dominated by right angles, cubes and naked walls. The facades of the houses," the writer went on, "are all the same, only pierced by the slits of the doors and windows." (Mónica, 1998: 25) The author associates the atmosphere of the neighbourhood to that of a concentration camp, and concludes that Malagueira became an inhumane neighbourhood caused by Siza's "regulatory obsession and his modernist preferences" (Mónica, 1998: 29).

When confronted with the criticisms voiced against the Malagueira process, Siza argued, "I have no knowledge of a project more discussed, step-by-step, more patiently revised and re-revised. At least 450 families, in several meetings, have seen it, listened to its explanation by words, models, sketches, drawings, photomontages." He went on to stress the active participation of stakeholders working in very different capacities on the project. He contended,

they delivered criticism, proposed changes, approved. The technicians of the municipality and the representatives of the population gave their opinion; staff from my office, from the engineers' office, from several services, have developed and reviewed it; when necessary, they have suggested changes, analysed the economic and technical viability, and coordinated efforts. (Siza, 1979: 38)

The polarised public opinion about the project testifies to the challenging development process that the Malagueira plan went through. In reality, it became a field for political struggle that went beyond the project's specific qualities or weaknesses. Furthermore, it became a testing ground for the articulation of local and national bureaucratic apparatuses and political agendas in a period when Portugal was going through times of unceasing political instability. Despite the problematic conditions in which the development of the project was managed, the Malagueira plan was arguably the most important case of a participatory design decision-making process developed in Portugal after the post-revolutionary experience with citizens' participation during the SAAL process. For Siza, however, participation does not entail solely a conciliatory approach. It's also about exploring the creative potential of conflicts.

In effect, referring to Siza's experience with citizens' participation in the design process, architectural historian Kenneth Frampton argued, "it was this intense and difficult experience which has led him, in retrospect, to caution against the simplistic populism of 'giving the people what they want.'" (Frampton, 1986: 12) To be sure, the conflicts between the architect and the other stakeholders in the process became part and parcel of the design process and played an important role in the processes of subjectivation. Siza claimed, "participation procedures are above all critical processes for the transformation of thought, not only of the inhabitants' idea of themselves, but also of the concepts of the architect" (Siza and Vanlaethem, 1983: 18).

Subjectivation

Siza's agonistic approach to citizens' participation in design decision-making resonates, I would argue, with a critical approach to what Jonathan Hughes and Simon Sadler called "an optimistic belief in the ability of people to gain from the devolution of power" (Hughes and Sadler, 2000: ix). During the development of the Malagueira plan, Siza privileged processes of negotiation instead of simply accommodating the will of the people (Mota, 2011: 50–53). In the Malagueira process, there is a delicate balance of freedom and control in the devolution of power to the people. The position of the architect in this negotiation was deliberately ambivalent.

In 1991, commenting on the pervasive appropriations and changes produced by the residents to the houses, Siza claimed, "it's true that all this goes far beyond the control of the design. Yet," he went on, "none of it is chaotic or irrational since our aim was to build a structure open to transformations, but that's able to maintain its identity nonetheless." (Siza, 1991: 64–65) In 1996, during an interview given to a program aired on the Portuguese public TV network (RTP), Siza explained the nature of his ambivalent approach. Referring to the Malagueira plan, Siza argued, "my goal was to create very precise limits to spontaneous intervention". This was nonetheless a conscious strategy, he contended. In effect, he went on, these limits were imposed

knowing right from the start that this strictness does not have translation into practice, because there is an anxiety to be different, which conquers all, but if it does not have a solid framework, it leads to the chaos that we experience in so many parts of the country. (Siza in Feldman, 1996)

In the same interview, Siza concedes that the Malagueira plan's "regulations are tyrannical, with the belief that the limits to tyranny, fortunately existing, will foster subversion."

Forty years after the first houses were built, what Siza calls “subversion” could be better defined, I would suggest, as the production of subjectivity. Using Antonio Negri’s ontological definition of multitude as a subject and product of collective praxis, I would contend, following Negri, that in Malagueira’s patios, walls and streets, a “multitude of bodies become blended, mongrel, hybrid, transformed; they are like sea waves, in perennial movement and reciprocal transformation” (Negri, 2002: 42).

In Malagueira, the dynamic and reciprocal transformation of bodies and places operated by the multitude is one of the most striking achievements of the project. It shows how a social body of singularities works together to produce the common. While the architectural project operated as an instrument of control, regulation and constraint, it became also a vehicle to enhance participation, appropriation and consumption. Over time, the interaction between bodies and buildings in the Malagueira neighbourhood has created a landscape of multiplicities, where the constitution of difference and identity is constantly mediated by the commons.

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