Introduction

At the end of January 1954, six young members of the Dutch and English CIAM groups gathered at the Dutch city of Doorn. In this meeting, a famous document was formulated, the “Doorn Manifesto”, where they delivered criticism on CIAM’s “spiritual fathers”, Le Corbusier, Gropius and Giedion. They were particularly keen on highlighting the inadequacy of the Athens Charter’s principles, arguing that “Urbanism considered and developed in the terms of the Charte d’Athene [sic] tends to produce ‘towns’ in which vital human associations are inadequately expressed”\(^1\). They were explicitly against the idea of an assessment of the built environment through the lens of the four functions proposed in the Athens Charter, which didn’t considered other “ecological fields” apart from towns. Thus, they argued in favour of considering every community, despite its size, as a “particular total complex”, and the outcome of this novel methodological approach was the definition of the concept of “scales of association”, inspired on Patrick Geddes’ “Valley Section”\(^2\).

One of this proposal’s most striking consequences, was a deliberate shift from a universalist approach, the Athens Charter, into one more concerned with specific “atmospheres”, as Peter Smithson called them, which should be the basis for the creation of the Charte de l’Habitat. They were also critical on the separation of architecture and urban planning, which was embedded in CIAM’s interwar discourse. “In the past of CIAM”, Smithson argued, “[there was] too much dualism between house and city, without realising the interrelation” (Smithson, 1954a). Peter Smithson was, together with his future Team 10 fellow members, calling for a new understanding of the discipline, which should be supported by a new term: relationship. This position, we contend, resonates with Alberti’s famous dictum “a house is like a small city and the city is like a big house”, already suggested by Plato\(^3\), and it brings about an important contribution for a paradigm shift in the assessment of and approach to the built environment in the 1950s.

In the early 1950s, the influence of Alberti’s foundational text, De re aedificatoria, was fostered by the publication, in 1949, of Rudolf Wittkower’s Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism, which gained considerable attention by

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\(^1\) Quotation from the manuscript of this document, kept in the Bakema Archive held by NAI, Rotterdam. (Statement on habitat, 1954b NAI - BAKEg26).

\(^2\) For more information about the influence of Geddes on Team 10, see Welte, 2005.

\(^3\) Plato’s Leges, VI, 779b.
both professionals and dilettanti. The importance of Wittkower’s reassessment of both Alberti’s and Palladio’s seminal contributions for the definition of architectural principles would, in fact, catch the attention of the younger generation. On a letter to the editor of the RIBA Journal published in February 1952, Alison and Peter Smithson argued that

Dr. Wittkower is regarded by the younger architects as the only art-historian working in England capable of describing and analysing buildings in spatial and plastic terms, and not in terms of derivations and dates. (Smithson et al., 1952)

Alberti’s (Subsumed) Influence on CIAM and Team 10

Some years later, in December 1954, in the text with the instructions to the national groups for the presentation at the 10th CIAM congress, the Organising Committee asked the groups to present their projects for an ideal human habitat, “recognising and exploiting the reality of their various situations”. These projects should be presented according to the aforementioned scales of association, “City”, “Town”, “Village”, and “Homestead”, which were now also referred as “symbols for a much more complex series of relationships” (Team 10, 1954).

Both the idea of the scales of association, and the attention to the particular circumstance, cherished at this moment by the younger generation, resonate with a part of Alberti’s De re aedificatoria, where he presciently suggests that different scales are needed to understand the composition of a building: regio (the surroundings of the building), area (the building site), partitio (partition), paries (wall), tectum (roof), and apertio (opening)4.

This part of Alberti’s architectural principles was, however, conspicuously overlooked in Wittkower’s book. He was not the only one, though. Le Corbusier’s and Pierre Jeanneret’s 5 Points d’une Architecture Nouvelle, originally published in 1927, seemingly follows Alberti’s elements to systematize the disciplinary approach. In fact, with the exception of Alberti’s regio, Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret have strictly followed Alberti’s elements in their formulation of the 5 Points d’une Architecture Nouvelle5. Despite this extraordinary resonance, as far as we are aware of, neither Le Corbusier nor Pierre Jeanneret have ever credited Alberti as source or reference for their manifesto. Moreover, in its first publication, they even went on arguing that this “Architecture Nouvelle” was established against the architecture of the past, contending that “Il ne demeure ici

4 The latest translation of Alberti’s De re aedificatoria into English suggests the translation of regio as “locality” and partitio as “compartition”, Alberti, 1991: 8, which we do not follow and, thus, we prefer to keep the original terms in Latin.

5 Le Corbusier’s pilotis are a replacement of Alberti’s area; The plan libre is a response to partitio; Façade Libre challenges Alberti’s concept of paries; Le Corbusier’s idea of toits-jardins has a parallel with Alberti’s tectum though with a different approach; and the fenêtre en longeur is related with apertio. For a more comprehensive development of this confrontation, see Krüger, 2011: 110-113.
plus rien des enseignements à la lettre des écoles”, and that “Il ne rest plus rien de l’architecture ancienne”.

Regarding the only building element defined by Alberti which was not considered in Le Corbusier’s and Jeanneret’s 5 Points, regio, it would appear later as the first clause of another important disciplinary manifesto written by Le Corbusier, the Athens Charter, with a different definition, though. In fact, for Alberti, regio was both the building’s surrounding atmosphere and the geographical aspects around the building site, whereas in the Athens Charter, La Région was an “ensemble économique, social et politique”.

Notwithstanding, in the early 1950s, directly or indirectly, Le Corbusier and Alberti would eventually become again leading actors in the disciplinary debate. In fact, in their letter to the editor of the RIBA Journal, the Smithsons testify to that, arguing the following:

Dr. Giedion at a lecture at the ICA earlier in the year stated that during 1950 at seminars both in Zurich and at the MIT the most discussed books of the year were Le Modulor and The Architectural Principles of the Age of Humanism, both concerned with proportion. Dr. Wittkower was furthermore the only representative from this country invited to the recent International Congress on Proportion at Milan when mathematicians, artists and architects met to discuss this vital subject. (Smithson et al., 1952: 140)

The Smithsons, thus, classified systems of proportion as a “vital subject”. We would then suggest that Team 10’s concept of Scales of Association, although inspired by Patrick Geddes’ valley section, is also tributary of a concatenation of ideas supported by and critically assessed from Alberti’s building elements and systems of proportion, together with Le Corbusier’s 5 Points and the Athens Charter. Furthermore, the stress on the idea of relationships, highlighted as one of the most important outcomes from the Doorn meeting, suggests a reconceptualization of the Athens Charter through the lens of Alberti’s aforementioned dictum “a house is like a small city and the city is like a big house”. This reconceptualization bears also a transition from a rational/intellectual humanism rooted in Classical antiquity, from Plato onwards, to a physical/perceptual one emerging in the aftermath of the World War II.

The tension between these two different instances of humanism would eventually become epitomized in the participation of a peripheral CIAM faction, the Portuguese group. Hence, to illustrate the outcome of such a debate, we will further analyse the participation of this group in post-war CIAM congresses, assessing it against a background of shifting methodologies in architectural education and the definition of the discipline itself.

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6 These sentences would be rephrased in the 1929 publication, into a “softer” tone. See (Oechslin, 1987: 93)

7 For more information about the process that led to the publication of the Athens Charter, see (Gold, 1998).
The post-war debate on the habitat

The Portuguese CIAM group was formed by a relatively small number of architects, who were gathered around the figure of Alfredo Viana de Lima, a confess admirer of Le Corbusier, whose Modulor he used as reference in his projects. Together with Viana de Lima, some young architects from Porto’s architecture school were also engaged with the group and, among them, two would eventually become important contributors for the work presented at the CIAM congresses: Fernando Távora and Octávio Lixa Filgueiras.

These young architects embodied the paradigm shift that the architectural education at Porto’s architecture school was experiencing in the early 1950s. The leader of this process was the then director of the school, Carlos Ramos, who had been, since 1940, encouraging the idea of “collective teaching” in the design studio chair (Ramos, 1935). Ramos, encouraged the conflation of a classic humanist pedagogical approach with modern pedagogical methods. Thus, in his class both Vitruvius’ treaty and Gropius’ ideas converged.

On the one hand, Ramos used the Vitruvian definition of the architect to stress the relation between theory and practice, as it was also highlighted in Alberti’s prologue to the De re aedificatoria. (Alberti, 1991: 3). On the other hand, he implemented the idea of teamwork and learning by doing together with the interrelation between architecture, technology and the city, thus following Gropius’ pedagogy.

The affiliation of Ramos with Gropius is revealed by his engagement in the translation of the latter’s manifesto Training the Architect, a text written for his presentation in Harvard, which eventually was further disseminated in CIAM’s Educational Committee in the period 1949-1954 (Gropius, 1951). This text was envisioned as the base for a Charter of Education, whose guidelines were presented by Ernesto Rogers at the April 1950 Paris CIAM council meeting (Mumford, 2000: 202).

In his 1956 essay Modern architecture since the generation of the masters, Rogers himself associates Gropius with Alberti. He argues that

Gropius is the very conscience of the modern movement; he is our conscience; he is the creator of a method which overrides the a priori principles of traditional styles and enables us to understand things, to grasp problems and to give logic and harmony to their form and spirit. Gropius is the Leon Battista Alberti of our age. (Rogers, 1956: VII)

Rogers’ appraisal of Gropius pedagogical approach highlights the idea of continuity between Alberti’s humanism and modern movement’s integration of Science and Man, a continuity that was also cherished by Carlos Ramos.

Ramos pedagogical proposal would eventually expand to the entire school, first with his appointment as the school’s director in 1952, and then with the contribution of new teaching assistants such as Fernando Távora (invited to teach in 1950) and Octávio Lixa Filgueiras (hired in 1958), both Ramos’s former students.

8 Alfredo Viana de Lima (1913-1991); Fernando Távora (1923-2005); Octávio Lixa Filgueiras (1922-1996). The group CIAM-Portugal was officially created in 1951, in the aftermath of Viana de Lima’s and Távora’s participation in the CIAM VIII congress held in Hoddesdon, UK.
This would develop further the school as a collective space with a strong cultural activity nurtured by a new Research Centre for Architecture and Urbanism, which organized conferences, exhibitions and publications. This dynamic would foster both the school’s teachers and students to participate in international events such as the CIAM congresses, UIA or S. Paulo’s architecture biennale.

At this point, the education at the School of Porto was not only concerned with artistic or technical skills, but also with the development of a critical social conscience, supported on a solid theoretical formation. This conflation would, thus, influence the performance of the Portuguese group in the CIAM meetings and congresses, which would be epitomized in their contribution for the 10th CIAM congress.

Translating the Vernacular into Modern

According to CIAM’s president, Josep Lluis Sert, the Dubrovnik congress should deliver an approach to the future structure of human habitat (CIAM Porto 1956: 14). To pursue that goal, from 3 to 14 August 1956, thirty-five “grids” were presented and discussed in Dubrovnik. The Portuguese contribution was a project for an agricultural community, developed by Viana de Lima, Fernando Távora and Octávio Lixa Filgueiras, with the collaboration of Arnaldo Araújo and Carlos Carvalho Dias. (Fig. 1) The project, titled Habitat Rural. Nouvelle Communauté Agricole was located on a rural area in the northeast of Portugal, which was being studied for the Survey on Portuguese Regional Architecture, by the team coordinated by Filgueiras9.

The project, presented in Dubrovnik by Viana de Lima and Távora, was developed for a community of forty families, which was the average size of the region’s neighbouring communities. These communities were also the reference for the project’s urban layout, stretched along the two banks of a small river. According to the text sent to the congress, the Portuguese team argues that their project has “a very simple layout and structure, very natural, which allows easily to further extend the community, if necessary” (CIAM 1956: 132).

The Portuguese group option to exhibit an agricultural community in CIAM 10, highlights their concern in presenting the scale of a rural village as another possibility of using modern movement’s urban design principles. In fact, in the project’s description, the group contends that their scheme can contribute for the “Charte de l’Habitat”, reaffirming “the importance of the Rural Habitat, which should not be overlooked by CIAM if they want their proposals to be really universal”. At any rate, the group seems eager to demonstrate that CIAM principles cannot be only related with big cities and with metropolis, but also with those small communities forgotten by the heroic approach of CIAM’s interwar generation.

Their project, in fact, reveals an attempt at reconciling both the interwar CIAM principles, and the new approach championed by Team 10. On the one

PART TWO. CITIES BETWEEN HISTORY AND FUTURE

1. Group CIAM Porto, Portugal, “Habitat Rural”, panel 2 of the project presented in the CIAM 10th Congress, 1956 (Source: Archive CDUA-FAUP)

hand, concerning the urban structure, their project was influenced by the idea of zoning, with housing, work, and leisure areas well defined, served by a circulation network, which articulates those sectors. On the other hand, they delivered a critical account on the modern idea of disciplinary autonomy, of the heroic role of the architect as author of a Gesamtkunstwerk. They argued that

the architect is no longer the dictator who imposes his own form, but the natural man, simple and humble, who is devoted to solve the problems of their fellow men no to be served, but to serve them, thus building a work, perhaps anonymous, but despite that, intensely lived in. (CIAM, 1956: 132)

They tried to illustrate this through the use of vernacular references in the project. In the layout of the housing unit, in the techniques they suggested and in the design of the volumes, the project showed a deliberate ambition to translate vernacular references into a modern language. Furthermore, they highlighted also the incremental character of the project. According to the description of the “grid”, the floor plan of the dwellings “allows a great variety of types, adaptable to the growing size of the family, which could have themselves the initiative to develop the necessary works to adapt the house to their current needs”.

The group suggested, moreover, that the future users should participate in the design process, claiming themselves to be supporters of “an honest and permanent collaboration of all men in architecture and urban design projects, a collaboration which would entitle them to say my house, my village” (CIAM Porto, 1956).

The Portuguese group reveals their engagement with the adoption of a more humanist approach to housing and urban design, where variety is praised instead of uniformity, and the spontaneous is cherished instead of the ideal.

Towards a Welfare Humanism

We would suggest, thus, that Carlos Ramos combination of classic humanism and modern education gave Távora and Filgueiras the methodological apparatus to participate in CIAM’s debate on a more humanist approach to the habitat, which resulted in the project discussed above. Moreover, Távora and Filgueiras would be also responsible to renovate architectural education towards a “new humanism”. Távora would further claim for an organization of the space at the scale of man (Távora, 2004: 14), whereas Filgueiras would eventually highlight the architect’s social responsibility, arguing that “the architect to be accomplished, must know how to do and, at the same time, know about things, man, the world and life” (Filgueiras, 1985: 16).

This approach can be illustrated by the course taught by Filgueiras, Analytical Architecture, where he has developed throughout the 1960s an assignment called “Urban Surveys”. Supported by an analytical method that used drawings and pictures, the students researched on urban vernacular housing in the city’s historic centre, mainly inhabited by poor people. (Fig. 2) The goal of the assignment was to better understand the living standards of these communities in order to deliver a more comprehensive and critical intervention.
Filgueiras’ interest in this humanist approach would be rendered in his 1962 text *Da Função Social do Arquitecto* (On the Architect’s Social Function). In this text, Filgueiras frames his viewpoint on the architect’s social responsibility with references from Alberti, Lúcio Costa, or Wittkower. He calls his approach the “marvellous anti-pencil” and, quoting Ernesto Rogers, claims that “the true architect is not an elegant elaborator of forms of varying taste, but rather a moralist whose task is to deepen the content of life and to draw from it the symbols needed to give it form”.

Fernando Távora’s and Octávio Lixa Filgueiras’ humanism echoed the international debate that was held throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. In his 1962 book, Filgueiras discusses thoroughly Wittkower’s *Architectural Principles*, highlighting the contribution of this book to understand a new scientific interpretation of Nature, brought about by the Renaissance artists. However, Filgueiras deems the Renaissance architectural principles as being eclectic and regressive, bearing the “acculturation mark resultant of the incompatible connubial between two antagonist worlds, and especially the adoption of a vocabulary full of compromises with an already distant world” (Filgueiras, 1985: 49-50).

This statement brings about Filgueiras’ critique of the Renaissance humanism, “that abstract cosmogony that does not penetrate into the people’s understanding, which, by now, can only apprehend the mundane grandiosity of forms”. He recognizes the importance of Alberti and his Renaissance counterparts in systematizing knowledge, but he argues that, now, the architect has to step down from an autonomous position to one more engaged with the real.

Hence, both the project presented by the Portuguese CIAM group in Dubrovnik, and their later pedagogic experiences illustrate an attempt to critically review Alberti’s work and the Renaissance humanism with a new, emergent “welfare” humanism, which acknowledges the importance of a platonic approach but is driven to foster a more socially engaged one.

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