

The double periphery in Metropolitan Area of Lisbon: Suburban cities without centre

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The suburban growth has almost always been an optimistic growth. Optimistic for land owners who gave a profitable use to land long off from agricultural practices; to speculators that use the tremendous pressure of a demand with no viable alternative in the housing market; for buyers who, in the ongoing (and seemingly endless) appreciation of property, saw its assets swell; to financial capital that found skyrocketing profitability levels and very low risk; finally for municipalities that obtained resources (toxic, for what they represent in the future) that were significant portion of their annual budgets.

It was this unrepeatability of optimism, a kind of collective alienation that allowed the emergence of a metropolitan area needing land use planning. This, incidentally, would be an acceptable requirement in this euphoric environment for all, including for the central government that felt some relief from social pressure in this area. It is recalled that already in the period of formation of illegal neighborhoods, in the 60s and 70s, the state allowed the construction by applying the “fine system”. That is, while it marked his commanding presence through a soft supervision never did in something in order to dissuade the owners of the construction of their own home, as it was to solve a problem that the state had.

These brief notes help to contextualize the two original aspects that this communication is intended to bring out linked to the big housing neighborhoods in the suburbs of Lisbon: i) its generation in spaces that had only to accommodate infrastructure and correspond to properties that were perpetuated in the toponymy of these housing developments and that have no linkage to each other concerning the road network, the public spaces system or in urban or architectural terms; ii) its organization and internal structure which includes the functional aridity and the

absence of formal centrality, ie public spaces that act as identity references to the communities.

The optimism generated by the short cycle of speculation now requires realism to counter the decline and ensure the long cycle of sustainability. It is intended, therefore, look closely at emblematic cases of the first and second metropolitan crown in order to demonstrate these two originality that shape the “simpliCity” and contribute to the design of mechanisms and instruments to reverse for greater "complexCity" through: i) The adjustment of urban management tools; ii) Municipal and Community funding; iii) Urban interventions aimed at creating spaces of reference; iv) Urban and community animation.

In the absence of urban management tools of detail, that is, that defines clearly the urban form, prevailed, in almost all the metropolitan area of Lisbon, formal and informal varieties for urban expansion, which resulted from the use the use of each promoter of its property.

In the case of clandestine operations, the rural property, without sanitation or water supply systems, sewerage, gas or electricity, was roughly slashed to leaving the sight of what would become the future lots to market. Although the orthogonal grid was the one that best fit a good real estate monetization, the terrain and other obstacles sometimes forced to take other options that brought irregularities to the resulting urban area.

Similarly, formal operations that were taken on pre-existing registered land include autonomous urban solutions within the allotment process either in type or in morphology.

Both in the case of formal urban operations as informal operations the government has never shown, willingly or unwillingly, ability to tame this dynamic. Therefore, one of the most striking images of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area is the succession of “enclave spaces”, ie spaces that function without relationship to each other.

However, there is another striking feature not always so obvious: the absence of a functional center, an identity reference that can exert a centripetal effect on social life in that space.

All this formal and informal suburban movements since the 60's until the early years of the 21st century occur in a very fast pace with the role of the government constrained to the construction of the great accessibility infrastructure or the provision of urban services.

It is understandable, therefore, the conviction that these territories were particularly deficient in social infrastructure, education, safety and leisure.

It is therefore important to bring these two sides - the absence of an organized urban structure with a well-defined center and wide layers of the population without adequate access to collective facilities - to understand that the process of convergence between the two could ultimately result minimizing this double problem by setting and convenient location of network equipment.

What reality came to demonstrate was that the investment was in fact carried out but devalued the need for an educational strategy for these spaces by removing, perhaps definitively, the possibility of constituting an aggregator urban center of local life.

Specific cases were studied on the outskirts of Lisbon, in particular legal urban operations involving large housing complexes and thousands of people, as the case of urbanization of Quinta da Piedade, in the municipality of Vila Franca de Xira (Lisbon Metropolitan Area), where the metropolitan exclusion due to their difficult insertion in the road system, the time and distance to the capital at rush hour joins to the spraying of investments made in collective equipment by the municipal authority or by the Central Administration.

They are, then, peripheries in two ways: in the capital's outskirts and peripheral of themselves.