

Formas e desígnios do espaço público na cidade contemporânea

O projecto do espaço público na construção da cidade: casos portugueses

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Introduction

Thesis framework

The dissertation presented under the title "Shapes and purposes of public space in the contemporary city. The project of public space in the city building: the Portuguese case" is, fundamentally, a reflection on the plausibility of the project of public space to constitute itself as an instrument and factor of structuring and designing of the city. In this sense, it is a reflection on contemporary public space, and on how the disciplines of architecture, urban design and urban planning operate in the current urban context.

In the international context, the theoretical debate around the issue of public space is not new, having become an unavoidable issue, and subject to more thorough and systematic analysis, mainly from the second half of the 80s, following the first urban requalification operations in Barcelona. In the Portuguese case, it was only in the last decade, after the completion of the 1998 World Exhibition in Lisbon, and the experience of the Polis Programme in 1999¹ (both anchored in public space requalification programs) that were progressively created the conditions for the discussion of the theme of public space in a more specific and systematic manner.

However, this discussion about urban issues and public space is attached to the arising of new social and economic dynamics, and urban transformation processes observed in European cities in the past five decades, which introduced new critical questions, generating new urban design issues and problems.

Moreover, the pertinence of this study stems from the fact that either in theory, either in terms of the disciplinary practice of architecture and urban planning (whether in Portugal, whether in other European countries) are observed, however, some questions, uncertainties or even paradoxes, with respect to the major purposes that public space should play within the "new" urban reality.

In relation to this issue we can see different approaches. On the one hand, we identify a trend that faces the project of public space as "medicine for all ills that the city suffers" (which we can see reflected in a theoretical discourse and in a professional practice (the last one mainly surrendered to the seductiveness of fashions and architectural icons).

On the other hand, it is possible to recognize an other approach based on a critical understanding of the role of the project of public space which drifts from the recognition of the subjectivity and arbitrariness that many recent interventions in the city and public space translate (and which claim for the need of a disciplinary refocusing on problem of public space design).

A third understanding of this topic can be recognized on the devaluation of the role of the project and of the urban importance of public space in the current city model, assuming the city as generic and diffuse entity. This understanding converges with extra-disciplinary approaches (especially those arising from humanities and social sciences, but also from the visual and performing arts) that explicitly or implicitly, "invoke" the loss of urban and architectural vocation of public space, understanding consequently the project of public space as an "impossibility".

In terms of theoretical discussion, we can find the origin of these cleavages, whether in a certain emptying or loss of disciplinary identity that affects the architecture from the second post-war (which it is not indifferent to the cultural crisis which are clearly mirrored in the urban strategies and policy management of our cities), whether in the loss of influence of the dominant paradigm in the design and project of public space - embodied in the Barcelona model - which lasted until the mid-90s.

At the same time we observe the "strength loss" of the importance of this *Barcelona paradigm* (which corresponded to the confidence in design and planning of the city and its public spaces, sustained in integrated visions and strategic actions), we can identify, at the turn of twentieth century to the twenty-first century, the appearance of a new approach to the reflection on the city and the public space, which corresponds with the shift of the debate on urban issues to the north and central Europe.

In this new alternative perspective, it emerges a more hedonistic, indeterminate or abstract approach to urban and landscape issues, with strong repercussions with regard to the problem and project / design of public space and with regard to purposes that should guide that public space design.

Simultaneously we witnessed the assimilation and integration of extra-disciplinary contributions in the public space discourse, mainly in an abstract and reductive manner, submerging the criticism, the "theory" and

¹ Launched in 1999 and endowed with its own management (tutored at the time by the Ministry of Cities, Urban Planning and Environment), the Polis Program (National Program for Urban Renewal and Environmental Improvement of Cities), was established as an intensive urban requalification program (focused on urban regeneration and environmental improvement as a key objective) which intervenes in strategic urban sectors.

practice around the public space and the city in a kind of Babel, prevailing a speculative "abstract" discourse. In our view, these speculative and "abstract" discourses do not seem to construct a solid theoretical basis, capable of serving a consistent practical knowledge, and capable of solving the key issues and challenges that the city currently faces.

In a time of extension and blurring of disciplinary boundaries, and in a time of mediatization of architecture, especially through the overvaluation of the image and power of the icons, we can also observe that the construction of the city and the materialization of public space, adopt, paradoxically, in many cases, generic and functionalist responses, with visible consequences in the structuring and perception of the city.

In the current European cities - discontinuous, heterogeneous and fragmented in its most recent sectors - a very significant part of the designed/planned public spaces is characterized by the lack of character, meaning, shape and hierarchy, only assuming the role of functional joint between the different parts of a city, that grew and developed independently and without a global and integrated vision.

It seems certain, in many built examples, an inversion or subversion of the principles and purposes which are the source of the disciplines of urban design, architecture and urban planning. This reality apparently led to the weakening of an objective and consistent disciplinary knowledge and, at the same, time it seems undeniable the need to tackle new problems that the city and its public spaces pose.

Our work arises, therefore, within a crossroad of concepts, contradictions and uncertainties (concerning the city and public space) that tend to weaken the disciplinary point of view, not only the theoretical and practical knowledge (regarding architecture and urban design), but also the role of the architect and architecture, in the materialization of the common collective habitat, particularly in those less consolidated urban areas in which the intervention of architects and urban planners is surely decisive in present city's structuring.

This dissertation does not deny or refuse the greater complexity and greater uncertainty with regard to city and public space construction processes and dynamics; but on the other hand this study takes into account, at its base, a set of disciplinary premises or assumptions that frame not only the objectives and our the observation point, but also allows us to rank the priority of the problems, and to prioritize the theoretical and methodological issues.

As an initial proposition, we assume that this work is firmly anchored in the idea of "built matter" - endowed with purposes and accurate and meaningful shapes - that we continue to link with the concept of public space.

To this extent, we can say that the title attach to the dissertation reflects the condition that affects every architectural design or public space: there is no significant shape without a purpose, nor is it possible to express a design without a significant shape. This perspective expresses the inter-switchable dimension and ambivalence that characterize the construction of the city, of architecture and its public spaces.

Secondly we believe that on the basis of "projects and programs of urban reconstruction" in the enlarged contemporary city, public space (understood either as a singular space in the city, either as a urban system) continues to have a central role to play in the "design of the city" and can provide structure, shape and identity to dispersed and disqualified urban sectors.

The third proposition that guided this work is reflected, thus, on the need to consider interventions that (starting from a global perspective) can develop and materialize a detailed scale, overcoming the abstract visions and working methods of planning.

Directly linked to the previous assumptions, the fourth premise that led our research, this one more methodological, is reflected in the importance we assign to the architectural examples and built projects².

Given the importance we confer to the transmission of knowledge through practice, we value the projects and built examples as the most stimulating ways, and perhaps the only ones, or the rarer ones, that serve us to study a complex and multifaceted field of research such as the contemporary city³.

In this context (paraphrasing Daniele Vitale) the *architect who makes research* must, above all, select and research on topics, problems and places from the extensive *array of material available*⁴.

While exploring this materials and research problems, the architect (as a researcher) distinguishes and selects,

² According to Joan Busquets, it is precisely the valuation capacity of the built examples and built projects that grant to urban design and urban planning the cultural content: as this author regards "*This is where the urban project intervenes and helps to shape the urban form, space public, and civic values (...) Therefore we ought to claim to the project as research in itself, capable of simulating and open alternative, achievable from the established models.*" Joan Busquets, "Presente y perspectivas del urbanismo", *Sociedade e Território*, n.º 37-38 (2004), p. 58.

³ "Undoubtedly, the projectual condition of urbanism claims to be verified in action. We would say that his own theoretical dimension leads to its practical verification." Joan Busquets, "Presente y perspectivas del urbanismo", *Sociedade e Território*, n.º 37-38 (2004), p. 58.

⁴ Daniele Vitale, "A Viagem da arquitectura", in prefácio de *Transformação e permanência na habitação portuense: as formas da casa na forma da cidade* (Francisco Barata Fernandes) Porto: FAUP publicações, 1999 (2ª edição).

organizes and observes the processes of formation and their results, aiming to reach a partial and hypothetical knowledge (likely to undergo continuous checks) of a city that he is not able to grasp any longer in a unified way.

Exploring and understanding the city through projects and built examples, as actions that define a *path or an orientation of what already exists* (but is waiting for a project, as stated by Bernardo Secchi), constitutes for us, paraphrasing Carlos Marti, a way of inquiring the *meaning of things, and a way which allows us to operate on a reality, and simultaneously understand it*. REF

From this point of view, the projects and the built examples interest us, therefore, as a result of a process and as the demarcation of the path that links the design to its purpose.

These hypotheses, or beliefs, put us on the trail of authors, architects and planners such as Carlos Marti, Vittorio Gregotti, Oriol Bohigas, Manuel de Solà-Morales or Joan Busquets, who claim, not only in theory, but also through the design practice, the importance of expressing purposes, “ideas of architecture” and “ideas of city”, according to our own discipline criteria and attributes.

Object of study and objectives

This study takes as a specific field of research the Portuguese reality, considering that the portuguese context - its scale and its idiosyncrasies - is not invulnerable to the change of paradigm and the contradictions and weaknesses pointed above, concerning the role of public space, and in particular the role of urban design in the context of recent changes.

However the Portuguese reality, due to its size and specificity, raises problems of different nature, forcing us to consider different assumptions of analysis and interpretation, as well as significantly different strategies and intervention methodologies.

The dissertation considers the contemporary Portuguese medium-sized city as subject of study, understood beyond its more established urban limits. We seek to analyze and deepen the topic under analysis, through the study of "cases" located in not consistently structured urban areas.

It means, therefore, that this work is characterized by its "extensive" or "transversal" nature, sweeping a relatively wide field of study that allows us to reflect on a variety of issues and problems (among which it's possible to establish relations of complementarity) that seem to be a possible approach to the “current city”, understood as a complex multi-entity, such as a body composed of distinct but interdependent parts.

Therefore, the delineation of a possible "map of vital issues or problems " emerges as the central aim of the dissertation; a map capable of giving consistency to the project practice, considering the public space (new or reclassified) as a factor of rebalancing / restructuring of a city that grew fragmented and discontinuously during the second half of the twentieth century.

Besides these more general objectives, this study aims to:

- . Assess the relevance and capacity of the (designed) public space to solve concrete problems and its the ability to assign structure, identity, and a symbolic and formal order to the above mentioned urban sectors, fulfilling at the same time the desires and uses that the contemporary society claims to public spaces;
- . Assess whether current strategies and design methodologies and the new public space configurations of the recent city (in many cases linked to infrastructure, mobility systems, or community facilities), (yet) may or may not take into account architectural and urbanistic criteria (structure, scale, shape, use) that were the basis of the design of public spaces of the canonical city (where we can recognize an identity, intensity of use, which we do not found in the new parts of the city);
- . inquire about the political, social and economic circumstances in which the practice of the public space project is today inscribed, in order to understand how can we consider the project as an ordering tool (able to qualify the experience of perception, and readability of urban space) and, on the other hand, as a factor of consistency and integration of the different disciplines and interests (often conflicting) that converge in the public space.

Brief description of the dissertation

The dissertation is organized into two distinct parts. The first one (chapters 1, 2 and 3), assumes a more theoretical nature, and corresponds to the framing of the main concepts, issues and problems. The second one (Chapter 4) corresponds to the case studies.

The first chapter deals with more general questions related to the meaning and the polysemic and diachronic nature that characterizes the concept of public space along the history of the European city, assigning a special emphasis to the explanation, albeit briefly, of the main paradigms and ruptures that marked the historical evolution of systems, shapes and types of public space.

In this long process of transformation of the shape and meaning of public space we stress the specialization and “loss of status” that the public space suffered particularly in the second half of the twentieth century,

which culminates in the spreading and fragmentation of the city. This urban spreading partially explains the difficulty of fitting the notion of public space today (but also the difficulty of fitting the typologies and formal configurations).

In Chapter 2, is held a review of the literature on the subject of public space. This chapter aims to discuss the main authors, the references and the theoretical concepts regarding urban design and public space design, and aim to frame the key issues and problems that will be further addressed in the case studies chapters.

In Chapter 3, it is briefly drawn a diagnosis on the main changes affecting the recent "architecture of the public space"; delineating some hypotheses to *think the public space as a design problem* (which constitute the matrix on which we selected of the case studies).

Chapter 4, corresponds to the case studies part of the dissertation. After a brief introduction (which aims to characterize in a more detailed way the "Portuguese context" and aims to define the criteria and reasons for the selection of case studies) follows the analysis of four interventions in public space, held in Portugal in the past three and a half decades.

Each of these interventions is linked to a main design problem, or design purpose. The case study discourses are relatively autonomous from each other, but are intended to be integrated within a *problematic constellation*, which constitutes all the treated cases.

. In the project of Malagueira Neighborhood (designed by Alvaro Siza from 1977 to 1997), we discussed more specifically the problem of the project of public space in the expansion of the city. We intend to discuss in this case not only the importance of the "political will" in the development of a city expansion, but also the importance of considering the public space (design) and the urban form, as key elements of these urban expansions structure.

. In the proposed requalification of public space in Cacém Central Area (authored by Manuel Salgado / RISCO, between 1998 and 2008), it is essentially discussed the project of public space, taking into account the "city without a plan." In this case, it is intended to highlight the importance of physical characterization of public space in this type of urban renewal program; and also the need for a deep, systematic, global action (especially at the level of the road structure), linking a set of design themes and scales of intervention.

. In the "urban insertion" project of the Metro do Porto in Maia (designed by Eduardo Souto de Moura and João Álvaro Rocha, between 1999 and 2008), it is primarily discussed the project of public space in the (re) structuring of contemporary (metropolitan) city. It is intended in this case to highlight the need to rethink the role of infrastructure in the construction of the metropolitan city, considering (at various scales) the public space project as a restructuring and urban (re) design tool, able of conferring an "architectural dimension" to public space, and able of connecting the dispersed and fragmented (sub) urban fabric (while establishing some rules for the expansion of the city and its metropolitan area).

. In the project of the City Park Maritime Front, in Porto (designed by Manuel de Solà-Morales between 1999 and 2002), it is essentially discussed the problem of materialization of public space as a geographic and exceptional space in the current city.

In this perspective we intended not only to stress the relevance of waterfronts as major public places of the contemporary city, but above we aimed to highlight the need to integrate uses, functions, scales and different urban materials in the design process (and in the final urban shape); finally with this case study we aimed to stress the importance of a sensitive and careful "reading and interpretation" of the place in the design process and materialization of the *public space of exception* in the contemporary city (in particular the reading of its geography, topography and specific urban condition).

Methodology

The first part of this study follows, essentially, a theoretical and reflective record. The concepts, examples and issues are framed resorting to the primary sources of bibliography and iconography as the main elements to the reflection.

In the second part of the study different methods of analysis are adopted, in accordance with the intended objectives, which mainly include the deepening and recognition, "on the ground" (from the case studies) of the major problems, purposes, strategies and qualities that should be considered in the project public space of the contemporary city.

The elaboration of cartography, the development of research "on the ground", and the research through bibliographic and iconographic resources and, when it was possible, interviews with authors and technicians involved in the analyzed projects, constituted in this case the major developed research practices.

The interviews with the authors involved in the case studies were fundamental, as they allowed not only a deeper understanding of the options and strategies followed, but also the recognition of the processes and circumstances on which these were developed (which in some cases are poorly documented), providing us

both valuable information and clues towards validation of our initial hypothesis.

Regarding the drawn material, specifically made for the dissertation, this is based on maps provided by the authors of the projects and / or by official entities involved in the analyzed projects.

The cartography obtained, and drawings made were a fundamental research tool, not only for the analysis of recent urban development but, above all, for understanding the relationships between the interventions and the surrounding urban context, but also for elaborating syntheses able to illustrate the strategies and methodologies adopted in the analyzed projects.

Regarding the bibliographical sources used (preferentially primary sources, and whenever possible consulting editions in the original language), it is distinguishable in the bibliography a broader disciplinary scope - which range from theory and history of the city, to public space and urban design.

Carlos Marti, Bernardo Secchi, Manuel de Solà-Morales, Ignasi de Solà-Morales, Joan Busquets, Oriol Bohigas and Vittorio Gregotti (on the international scene) and Alvaro Domingues Luis Bruno Soares, Manuel Salgado, Manuel Fernandes de Sá and Nuno Portas (in the national scene) are referential authors in our research. From the very beginning, the reading and reflection on this authors writings, were the foundations on which we supported our intuitions, and allowed us to stimulate a critical analysis of the main issues and problems that structure the dissertation.

Annex 2 - "A few notes to (re)think the design of public space in the contemporary city" - synthesis paper with the main thesis arguments (originally published in ZARCH magazine No 02 -2014)

1. The "loss" of architectural and urban insight in the construction of public space

During this time of uncertainty, when we hear tell of the imminent *death of public space*, of the *retreat towards the private*, of rising *fear and insecurity instilled by the city*, it comes as altogether surprising – even paradoxical – the sheer number of studies and interventions that focus exactly on *public space* as their specific field of action. Perhaps it could then be argued that never before has as much been *required* and *expected* from public space; never have so many *interventions* and *requalifications* been effected as public space; and certainly never has as much *thinking* and *theorizing* addressed public space.

Conversely, this paradoxical reality hints at a set of contradictions which, we believe, can become significant to the discernment of prevailing key issues, intersectant within a broader reflection on public space design, urban design, and architecture practice.

Remains paradoxical, for instance, the *lack of consensus* bred amongst the different disciplines that effectively *build* public space (architecture, landscape architecture, engineering), as to what *meaning* should this space have, what *shape* it must be, and what *role* might public space play in city-building, today.

Enforcing adulterated values and concepts, whilst namedropping *politically correct* slogans – "ecology", "environmental", "sustainability" –, most of the latest public space proposals (and particularly those through the last two decades) seem to follow *design recipes* – *generic* strategies that present, largely, a blatant spatial and figurative *standardization*. Moreover, these guidelines entail a simplification or outright dismissal of urbanistic and architectural methodologies and criteria, which were historically held as fundamental to the conception of public space.

Likewise, the enforcement of dissonant programs, ill-fitting in their surrounding urban realities (be that by their *artificial complexity*, *strictly-functional* design guidelines, or *marketing-oriented* intents, prompted by the ever-increasing demand of entertainment and comfort by the user), characterizes an overall generic method of building public space today.

In this sense we'll agree with Manuel de Solà-Morales, when he criticizes this approach as "(...) a new form of autonomous professional practice which sees the precinct where the work is to be done as a free range in which zero-elevation architecture might be invented, an unconstrained exercise in which – relatively – low-cost forms and images can be explored in freedom that could not exist in construction that is constantly submitted to the much stricter requirements of the programme, costs, functions, structure and client"⁵.

With its conception seemingly void of strategic insight, this *designed public space* often ends up an unarticulated arrangement of isolated parts – usually self-referential, structurally fragile, undefined in use and scale – leading to the diffusion of meaning and legibility of public space and urban form, detaching it from the tectonic and urban condition that we traditionally recognize to it.

This *febleness*, diagnosed as inherent to this public space, attunes to the nonsustainability of long-term urban design decisions, given the complex interplay of power relations and stepped decision-making processes that make up the management of the city of today. Following Nuno Portas, our time is one of amplification in technical solutions and cultural patterns, which in turn compromise technical, cultural, and disciplinary consensus in the establishment of architectural and urbanistic models to city-(re)building; this is particularly relevant to the rapport between public space outline and urban fabric, decisive to a coherent urban layout.⁶

These mounting inconsistencies, induced by a loss of architectural and urbanistic insight into planning public space, turns the most part of the recently built *public space architecture*, into a multi-referenced and diffuse *entity*, devoided of a discernible typological or spatial matrix, and ultimately unable to express civic, aesthetic, functional and social meanings.

While it is true that this *dismal diagnosis* can – and *should* – be nuanced according to each situation in its singular context, we must also recognize that, considering its repercussions to the city, these different approaches to public space design, in our disciplinary area, fail to take into account the structural *support matrix* that, in the past, guided the construction of public space, ensuring its stability, permanence, and continuity.

Considering the enduring *urban deficit*, even in the city sectors we have seen growing in the last decades, and faced with the inconsistencies and unseemliness of these (new) public spaces, it becomes as necessary as it is urgent to question their outset purposes, design practices and methodologies, thus allowing us to implement *a positive reaction to the problem of (re)building public space in the contemporary city*.

⁵ DE SOLÀ-MORALES, Manuel (2010) "The Impossible Project of Public Space" in *In favour of public space: ten years of the european prize* (Magda Anglès ed.), Barcelona: Actar, p. 27.

⁶ PORTAS, Nuno "Planeamento Urbano: Morte e Transfiguração" in *Arquitetura(s): teoria e desenho, investigação e projecto*. Porto: Faup publicações, 2005, p. 64, 65.

Faced with the present urban reality (as staged in most European cities), we believe it becomes significant to wonder: how feasible is to shape the city nowadays? Can we, and if so should we, endeavour to do so, considering how challenging it is to control its overall shape and structure? What instruments must we wield to do so? What role does *public space* play, in a more desirable prospective process of city redesigning?

2. Thinking public space in the contemporary city

The need to think public space as the main pillar of city-building

Given the penchant for expansion, diversification, and fragmentation of urban open space in the city of today, a critical issue seems to arise for us, architects and urban planners, as to how best to mediate coexistence amid the immense diversity of our urban places; and thence, from our public spaces, materialize renewed social interactions, and new ways of living and commuting.

Moreover, if the *designed public space* has indeed lost much of its historical formal and functional attributes, as previously stated, how then can we (re)build (new) public places that render the collective existence of a city, while simultaneously embodying attributes that may convert them into suitable, memorable, permanent spaces? Or, as Carlos Martí notes, how can we (re)build (new) public places as "landmarks of the city to come"?

Following Carlos Martí, these two issues relate to the incurring difficulty to describe the "public places of our time"; furthermore, they seemingly converge into one nuclear concern regarding the uncertainty of what is – or should be – the contemporary city. Believing these to be two facets of one singular problem, Martí notes that "(...) the presence of public places is what characterizes the city itself and what makes it distinct from mere settlement (...)".⁷

The need to consider the *idea of 'City'* as a means to think public space becomes, in this way, quite decisive. From our point of view, and following Martí's argument, it is only possible to meaningfully discuss public space by having it take on a role and value that are interdependent of architectural and urbanistic attributes of the physical and cultural aspects pertaining to the urban context in which it operates.

With this in mind seem the arguments of Jordi Borja and Oriol Bohigas even more relevant, as both authors underline the necessary challenge of "making city over the city" (by perceiving the present city as a set of potentially rebalancing social and territorial centralities), recognizing *recovery of the city, urban mobility, urban fabric*, and, aptly enough, *public space*, as main subjects to address in that challenge⁸. We are therefore interested in a *city model* that allows public space an *intermutual value*, so this might be a product of interdisciplinary action, and where *public space design, urban design, and urban planning* can be instrumental in its development.

The need to think and design the city and its public spaces from accurate scale referents

The lack of correlation between *scale referents* and assigned *fields of study* seems one of the most evident *methodological shortcomings* displayed in current theoretical approaches to *public space*, what can only produce studies and reasonings that borderline on the abstract, generic, and inconclusive.

If we can agree that today's cities seem to share the same widespread symptoms, then, we believe, a more in-depth study of public space in the contemporary city must be specifically framed within a preset reality and order of magnitude. This seemingly *simple premise*, becomes decisive, given that most of the speculation and conjecture surrounding the debate of "public space in the contemporary city" tend to be based on assumptions pertinent only in very specific contexts (such as in large cities or metropolises) – as these conjectures turn to guidelines, they become the prevailing discourse, take on official value, and ultimately impede more consistent research on public space.

In a time when it seems that the concept of city *swells*, ever larger, to *dissolve* into the city-region, it is perhaps significant to note that the European territory is composed not of large cities or conurbations, but of medium to small size cities. For this reason, the preset of an *order of magnitude* (and, thus, of a concrete field of study) constitutes in itself a powerful statement of principles, regarding the value (the premise, the objective, the intent) afforded to what we perceive as *city* or *public space* today. We believe this assertion to be crucial if we intend *public space* to partake in the debate of urban issues – a debate in which remains pertinent to think *city* and *public space* on criteria of form, structure and meaning.

The need to think and design the city beyond its consolidated limits

Yet, predictably, the contemporary city – even the medium-sized one – breeds such an array of issues, that their very complexity and diversity provoke equally complex and diverse opinions on its *public space*. We believe the main concern should relate to the ascertainment of the *sector* or *sectors* of the city where the intervention on public space becomes urgent or problematic.

As Nuno Portas makes note, in the numerous requalificative and regenerative interventions of the 80s and 90s (targeting central and preeminent areas of the city), public space is given a key-role, perceptibly holding a

⁷ MARTÍ ARIS, Carlos (2012) "Lugares Públicos en la Naturaleza", Conference held at Faculdade de Arquitectura do Porto em 18-11-02, policopied author's edition, p. 1.

⁸ BORJA, Jordi; MUXI, Zaida, *El espacio público: ciudad y ciudadanía*, Barcelona: Electa, 2003, p. 57.

certain *status*. On the other hand, this same *status* is not apparent in those interventions developed in the limits, in the outskirts of the emerging city, i.e., in the open and discontinuous city, where we sorely lack, in number and quality, urban concepts and strategies, that may help define consistent paradigms by which to act.

We believe this to be a consequence not only of the lack of a more comprehensive and integral city-wide proposal, but of the likely resistance, in architectural and urbanistic disciplines, in complying with any necessary and inevitable losses and paradigm shifts, that come with the transition to a more heterogeneous and open urban reality.

Thus do we stand, in need of models and strategies by which to think and act upon the outmost, less consolidated urban areas, which is where the 'future of the city' takes place nowadays, and reflections on the conceptualization and materialization of the public space become increasingly demanding.

We do recognise, additionally, that the current theoretical debate on the city and public space (within our discipline) has often been swayed by the bipolarization between *good* and *bad* city, between *good* and *bad* public space, which usually leads to strict and dogmatic assertions regarding the interpretation and ability to intervene in the city, and design its public spaces.

Therefore, it is not uncommon to find polarized viewpoints, between those who call for a mimetic (albeit uncritical and reducing) return to the more *legible* and *reassuring* types of the traditional city – the public space characterized by a *nostalgic* and *outdated* architecture, preached and enforced in the *new urbanism à la Krier* (as remarks Nuno Portas) – and the proponents of a *city without form*, *generic* and *indomitable*, that denies public spaces their *ordering vocation*, their ability to commit standards of clarity, order, and hierarchy to urban space.

3. Public space as a design problem

The need for purposes, while intervening in the city from public space

As Bernardo Secchi rightly points out, "(...) the image of the contemporary city is a city that already exists, but is waiting for a project."⁹ In developing this idea, Carlos Martí suggests that this *project* is not only an inquiry into the meaning of things, but also an intellectual procedure, allowing us to operate on the world whilst understanding it¹⁰.

Following these arguments (and recalling those aforesaid, urging *strategic significance* and *concrete city size* as premises in interpreting and planning public space), we believe a more rich and operational research of urban reality to be possible, granted we can, discerningly, select those spaces, places, and projects adept in condensing the urban design issues that affect the city as a whole.

For an increasingly thorough, accurate analysis and intervention in the public space of the contemporary European city, we would propose as *starting point hypothesis* the pressing need to further investigate, selectively, those areas of the city (perchance of different scale, form, and use) that allow us to perceive them as prospective ordering elements of urban form, and potentially significant spaces in a collective experience of the city.

This hypothesis must therefore be understood as a comprehensive *analysis matrix* that is also selective or multi-targeted, allowing for the identification of 'vectors' and 'topics of analysis' that we deem relevant to a *re-valuation* of urban insight in the projects of public space¹¹.

From this set matrix, we simultaneously recognize both the recurrence of the same invariable themes, and the contemporary city with its different parts, as projects in themselves, apt to be tackled as specific and concrete problems within a different reality (like Bernardo Secchi and Carlos Martí suggest); therefore, we believe fundamental a clear distinction of four main purposes or problems for public space:

- The public space as an *ordering* element of urban expansion;
- The public space as a *reconstruction* element of the unplanned city;

⁹ Bernardo Secchi quoted by Carlos Martí in "Public Places", Conference held at the Colegio de Arquitectos de Madrid on 26-04-2001, policopied author's edition, p. 1.

Joan Busquets supports this understanding of Bernardo Secchi, when he stresses the need to think the [master] plan as the "(...) container project capable of providing an overview, but also of decanting consensus regarding basic criteria, that may be developed by interventions or projects of times very distinct, but able to open new procedures on unpredictable topics" Joan Busquets, "Presente y perspectivas del urbanismo", *Sociedade e Território*, n.º 37-38 (2004), p. 55.

¹⁰ Carlos Martí in "Public Places", Conference held at the Colegio de Arquitectos de Madrid on 26-04-2001, policopied author's edition, p. 1.

¹¹ Mindful of this, Joan Busquets stresses the need to rescue the idea of "project, or medium-term vision plan" from the intervention on "some spaces, in certain systems, or on certain strategies," which, as he states, implies the necessity to study "almost everything" and extensively. This vision is, according to Busquets, directly related to the requisite of recovering the "(...) conceptual and abstract [determination] of the master plan, as a way to address the issue of urban form, without having to fall into the fallacy of designing all its parts (...)" "Entrevistas: 20 visiones" in *Papers. Regió Metropolitana de Barcelona*, n.º 43, Junho 2005, p. 26, 27.

- The public space as a *restructuring* element of the metropolitan city;
- The public space as an *exception* component of geographical scale.

These four purposes (attuned to more operative topics of analysis, and specific project-related issues) are not established just as statement of principle, in recognizing the importance of public space in the current city; they also allows us, from the outlook of design and analysis, to individualize and clarify the assorted roles that, in our view, public space can or should fulfil.

Furthermore, in terms of methodology, we believe important to distinguish the intermediate urban design scale as the more consistent and appropriate approach, while intervening in the city through public space¹². As stressed by Manuel de Solà-Morales (highlighting the long tradition of urban design), this approach consists on operating "(...) *from the geography of a given city, on its requests and suggestions, and, with architecture, introduce language elements that shape the site (...) it is also working inductively, generalizing the particular, the strategic, the local, the generative, and the model*"¹³.

The need to design public space as significant built form. Two general principles

Assuming, as above-stated, that we hold the outlining of purposes (or, specific problems) as indispensable to the thinking (and design) of public space today, it is as decisive to correlate public space design to a set of attributes, values, and requirements, that are relatively ageless (and often forgotten) and, under every circumstance, allow for the recognition of public space as *legible spatial system*, able to take part and support the diversity and instability that characterizes the contemporary city.

The somewhat elementary nature and generic character that, at first glance, we may perceive in these attributes, should not diminish their importance as key-criteria in the design of public space. The upholding of these principles, which ensures a substantial part of the consistency and significance of public space interventions, intersects with many of the aforementioned arguments, calling for a consideration of a complex network of potential relationships between elements of different nature.

Acknowledging the ongoing expansion and fragmentation of urban space (and indeed the difficulty in recognizing a hierarchy or in setting shape and limits in the present city), the consideration of a shape constitutes, perhaps, one of the most difficult challenges to public space design in the contemporary city. Undoubtedly, the issue of plausibility in proposing a shape for public space is a controversial one – not only does it partition the different disciplines that research on public space, it also begets an inconclusive debate within our own. This primarily addresses the relevance, pertinence, and terms by which (as we experience urban dispersion – with no form or limits) architecture and urbanism may or may not shape and organize the urban space, so as to make it legible, liveable and lasting – particularly considering its scale and formal qualities. Bearing in mind the countless AND? complex issues that may constrain the project and design of public space today, us architects will hold that public space is and will continue being a *matter of building form*, able to structure the urban space and the city's own collective life. To that extent, we will state that there are *no significant shapes without purpose*, as it is impossible to express *purpose without a significant shape*.

This *principle of interdependency* with *context* unfolds as equally crucial, in the identification of a strong and consistent intervention in public space, as it seemingly is to the achievement of a richer and more meaningful spatial synthesis. Likewise does the consideration of *memory* and *History* remain as decisive in today's public space design. Paraphrasing Alexandre Alves Costa, we always *build with and upon the built* – and reality – and we *cannot build without memory*.

This claim does not intend to restrict the much needed *sense of transformation*, or *invention*, which we believe must guide any project or intervention in public space. On the contrary, it means to uphold the importance of accepting reality as starting point, in a cultural and design practice that may (be able to) control or restrain the craving for a permanent expression of novelty (and presumed originality), evinced in many of the most recent public space interventions. It additionally means to adopt an "ethically responsible" (and critical) approach to the valuation and interpretation of the particular specificities of a given urban reality; which is, incidentally,

¹² Joan Busquets is one of the authors who have more consistently upheld the "high degree of operability" of the intermediate scale urban project, as privileged instrument of intervention in the city. In his view, this instrument corresponds to a "(...) type of urban project that accepts working from the urban fragment, understanding that, from it, it becomes possible to tackle general questions of the city "facing"(...) varied programs where the idea of integration (between infrastructure and city, between public and collective spaces) becomes the fundamental concept". On the other hand, Busquets stresses the importance of the intermediate scale as the most apt in thinking on "inbetween relationships", as it ensures the recognition and enhancement of "propositional ideas in an abstract layer, making them adaptable to different programs and changes in the course of the project. Joan Busquets, "Presente y perspectivas del urbanismo", *Sociedade e Território*, n.º 37-38 (2004), p. 51, 52.

¹³ DE SOLÀ-MORALES, Manuel, "La segunda historia del proyecto urbano" *UR* n°5 (1987), p. 22.

what warrants Álvaro Siza and Manuel de Solà-Morales's admonitions that there are no ugly cities, only realities that the architect must cherish, and to which should retribute some of its hidden qualities.

4. Final considerations: on the need to strengthen the consistency and objectivity of public space design

Mindful of the aforementioned arguments, we believe it crucial to perceive public space as fundamental *urban matter*, insofar as it represents open spaces that can yet be planned, and those that have been subject to intervention lacking a *global vision*, but are still capable of undergoing change.

Lastly, we credit such worth to public space (design) because it can *reattach* (yet again) the practice and disciplinary knowledge of architecture to "city building and planning processes" (that, as already stated, have become increasingly more fragmented and uncertain, from a technical, economical, and political standpoint).

We believe this claim directly related to the significance that urban design and architecture should wield in moments of design synthesis. This certainly does not dispute the need to consider design and construction of public space as an outcome of several insights and experiences, or as result of assorted interpretations. Our reflection means only to stress, ultimately, the appeal for greater exaction and commitment of architecture to those *moments of synthesis*, decisive, as we well know, in the planning and design of public space.

Our argument is not a claim for the autonomy of Architecture in city building and urban intervention processes; on the contrary, it intends to claim, for the project of public space, a further consistency able to centralize decisions, so that coherent synthesis can be achieved, which is, in most cases, what we believe Architecture is most well suited to perform (overwriting the purely functional, opportunistic urban design approach, understood, in many cases, as a sum of several technical projects).

Only with this *demand of control* over public space design and project, devised from the scale "1:1000 to 1:1", we believe it possible to ensure an accurate materialization, that is capable of rendering the precision of its outset purposes, and integrating the tangibility, measurability, and usefulness that have always made and will continue to make the city and the urban.

In this sense, we are claiming for the disciplinary assertion of architecture in the construction of public space, so as to recover an urban design culture and methodology based on a more unitary, articulated vision of urban space, practiced until the mid-twentieth century.

We are therefore interested in those urban proposals and interventions in which public space takes on objectives that exceed the reasoning behind many of the recent urban proposals, where public space is primarily understood as 'equipped urban fragment' (which tends to distort its urban, civic and collective dimension, and undermines its ability to give meaning and coherence to the city).

To undertake our intent, we must recognize an urban and architectural value to public space design, as one that looks at the city as a whole, ascribing it structure(s), order(s), and shape(s). A design that rates and ranks the complexity that comes with a variety of interests, and is forced to take sides, seeing as not everything holds the same value. Ergo, a design that can not dissociate itself from the complexity of the real, or from the desire to (re)build cities and public spaces where urban experience encapsulates the multiplicity of its actors, users, and architectural and urban references.

Acting on the headroom that each project allows, *city and public space makers* are thereby asked to build a coherent, dense, and meaningful design or *urban materiality*. A design made possible through the control of measures, distances, scales and textures of objects and urban voids, making public spaces significant and referenceable in relation to the context(s) in which they operate.

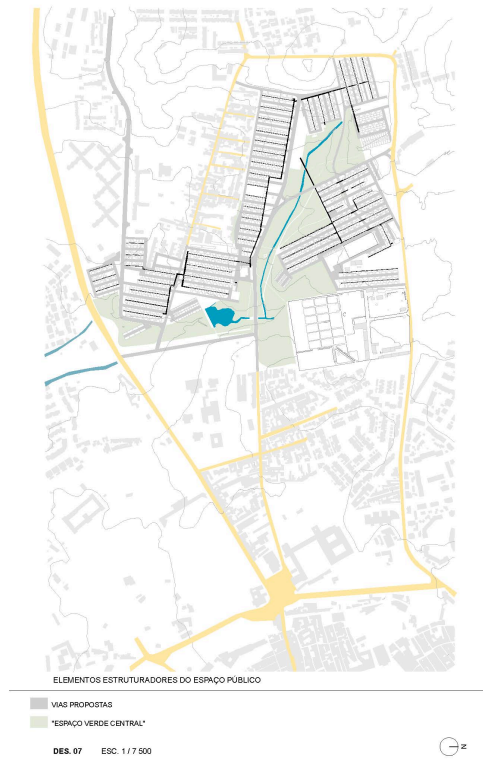
In summary, architects, urbanists and landscape architects are urged to materialize a public space design prone to generate a candid but powerful transformation of the city, allowing it to take root and *produce future*, and ensuring its liveability and sustainability – its primary key purposes.

In "The Great City History" Charles Delfante states:

"There is no law that allows one to be sure of achieving an urban composition. There is also no law ensuring that one writes a good book, even if it is perfect in terms of style, syntax and grammar. As a starting point we have to talk about Art. We are well aware that art is the set of means and regulated procedures that tend to a particular purpose. It implies knowledge and rules of action in its particular domain, but also a certain skill. Urban composition [or, *the architecture of public space*] can be perceived, to some extent, as the combination of an abstract knowledge (Science) with an applied knowledge (Art). (...) The applied knowledge requires an enlightened intervention, then, a certain talent, i.e., a gift, a skill, hopefully remarkable. Above all, requires a clear, both global and detailed vision" ¹⁴.

Perhaps this can be, now more than ever, the eventual pathway for the design of public space.

¹⁴ DELFANTE, Charles. *A Grande História da Cidade: da Mesopotâmia aos Estados Unidos*. Lisboa: Instituto Piaget, 2000, p. 402, 403.



Bairro da Malagueira (Évora, Portugal) . The public space as *ordering* element of urban expansion



Requalificação da Área Central do Cacém, The public space as *reconstruction* element of the *unplanned city*;



Metro do Porto (City of Maia). The public space as *restructuring* element of the metropolitan city



Porto City Park Waterfront (Porto) . The public space as an *exception* component of geographical scale

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