



Facing the contemporary urban challenges: rethinking the role and form of public space in the Porto Metropolitan Area

João Rodrigo Coelho

¹ CEAU-FAUP (Centre for Architecture and Urban Studies - Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto), Portugal, rodrigo.coelho@arq.up.pt

ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to analyse, through different examples, how the Porto Metropolitan Area (PMA) has been preparing itself to be able to respond robustly to the multiple challenges that the current urban context poses: particularly the need to decarbonize (namely from the promotion of smooth mobility), to combat extreme climatic phenomena, think and manage the water cycle efficiently, and think about public space in a systemic way (namely by recognizing the role of space public as urban green infrastructure).

But are metropolitan areas prepared to face these challenges? Namely those, as is the case of PMA, which grew in an accelerated and fragmented way and which globally disregarded inter-municipal coordination? and where an uncontrolled urbanization (supported by heavy road infrastructures) took place, occupying markedly rural territories? The hypothesis to be explored - as a fundamental premise to respond robustly to the urban challenges - is the need to consider, previously or simultaneously, the MPA territory as a set of articulated centralities, but without disregarding the diversity of logics, times, and urbanization patterns, that can still be recognized. Some questions arise:

- How can these systems of public spaces (with a potential metropolitan dimension) be articulated with each other, and to what extent can they be related to networks of public space on a more urban or even neighbourhood scale? What components or "urban materials" can shape these systems?

Beyond the Metro do Porto project, and waterscape public space systems, which already constitute anchors in responding to current challenges, the paper seeks to identify and analyse other systems and forms of public space, perhaps still barely recognizable, but capable, in the future, of establishing a network of public spaces of supra-municipal scope; and on which an integrated and robust response to the aforementioned challenges that contemporary times pose, can be based.

Keywords: Public Space, Porto Metropolitan Area, Climate Changes, Sustainability, Urban Design

Theme: 1. Disruption: climate change, global warming, heat island, rising sea levels, pandemic, healthy cities, migrations, conflicts, etc.