

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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Centro de Estudos Sociais
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HOUSING ARCHITECTURE

Tiago Castela

The debate on housing during the pandemic rightly focuses on emergencies, such as housing for homeless people or the prospect of mass evictions after exceptional protections expire. However, in addition to the crucial issue of the political economy of housing, it is also urgent to rethink the architecture of housing. Preliminary research suggests that urban density is not a relevant factor in the pandemic; in contrast, the lack of adequate housing size is definitely a factor. Furthermore, the materiality and shape of housing are central elements in the climate crisis: from emissions associated with the use of the building materials that are more suitable for industrialised construction, to the increase in built volumes and the dispersion of privileged housing. In this framework, the conundrum of the housing architecture that results from spatial commodification encompasses three central problems: the lack of access, on the part of most citizens, to specialists capable of designing the necessary transformations to face pandemics and the climate crisis; the lack of adequate housing unit size and pedestrian outdoor spaces in many residential areas; and the emissions associated with construction and urbanism.

It is therefore necessary to think about the architecture of housing starting from Portugal's central State, avoiding policy fragmentation but also the return to technocratic planning. This would include a democratic, multiscale project for housing, as well as the provision of technical services for direct intervention –

notably for people without access to private architectural services. This process could be called the National Architecture Service.

The NAS could immediately coordinate the implementation of the following situated measures in Portugal: to reclassify, in every city, roads with a majority of residential buildings and sidewalks less than 2 metres wide, for a speed limit of 30 km/h on a shared road; to create a programme for balcony construction in buildings with small units, as has been done in France; and to amend the country's national building code so as to introduce maximum areas for rooms, instead of minimum areas only. In the medium term, the NAS could also develop the following policies: to discourage, in urban areas, dispersed new construction that is impossible to reach easily by public transport; to encourage rehabilitation based on low-emission materials and increasing energy efficiency; to foster local energy generation on non-accessible flat roofs; to foster a mix of activities in residential areas while prohibiting the construction of new peripheral shopping centres. These are just a few examples; only with a transformation programme defined through democratic deliberation and informed by expert knowledge will we be able to transform the architecture of housing in a way that mirrors the gargantuan ambitions of the 20th century. This time, however, without the belief in permanent development, which turned out to be both destructive for the planet and a source of inequality.