

## The Difficult Affirmation of Modern Architecture in the Portugal of the Salazarist Regime

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### Abstract

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To fully understand the phases that determined the birth and evolution of the Modern Portuguese movement, with its contradictions and its constraints, it is essential to mention its intrinsic and conflictual relationship with the *Estado Novo* of António de Oliveira Salazar. In Portugal, the first references to the modern movement date from the last years of the Republic (1923-1926). This is a period characterized by the presence of a number of public and private buildings, designed by young architects, in which the new “modernist grammar” directly derived from the European functionalist rationalism begins to be used. In 1926 the political context of Portugal changes. A military coup puts an end to a republican regime, giving rise to a fascist dictatorial policy. The repercussions on modern architecture began to be visible, even though they were still disguised with a democratic appearance. In this first phase, the Salazar government appropriated the idea of modern, promoted by the new architecture, and in line with the concepts of *futurism* and of modernization present in the other European countries such as Italy and Germany, transferring it in the famous *Lição de Salazar*. The regime will initially support the new architectural movement, advocating the construction of some of the most important Portuguese modernist buildings, until its dramatic shift toward a nationalist architecture. The first *Congress Nacional of Architecture* of 1948 will be an important event for the Modern Portuguese movement and for its definitive national recognition.

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**Keywords:** Modern movement; Portuguese architecture; XX century; Salazar

### Introduction

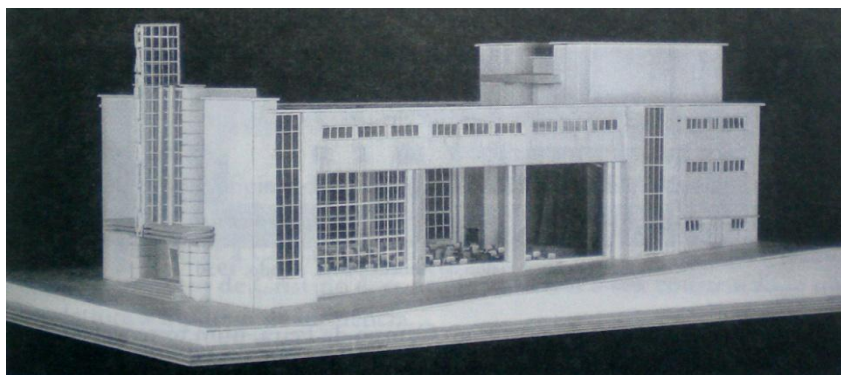
In the Portuguese architectural context of the 20th century, the first signs of a stylistic and formal change associated with a modern way of designing architecture date back to the early 1920s, when a small number of young architects trained at the *Beaux-arts* suggest the emergence of a new aesthetic directly derived from the use of modern construction techniques, including reinforced concrete. Against all odds, due to their eclectic and historicist formation, and contrary to the picturesque taste still in use, these courageous architects are inspired by the theories of the great European pioneers of modern architecture in the search for “new” forms of design and in the experimentation of an aesthetic far from the decorative ornaments of eclectic culture at the turn of the century. We mention a few special cases, such as the Casa dos Açores (1921), of Miguel Nogueira, the first demonstration in Portugal of modernist aesthetics devoid of decoration; the Agência Havas (1922), of Carlos Ramos, one of the first office buildings in Lisbon, the main façade of which has large functional windows, although the academic dimension is still present; or Sanatório Heliantia, built in Oporto between 1926 and 1930 by Francisco Oliveira Ferreira, a fine example of an architectural transition between academism and modernism, where the building becomes an opportunity to experiment with the possibilities offered by reinforced concrete, both from a structural and an expressive point of view. Equally important and worthy of mention is the Estação do Cais de Sodré of Porfirio Pardal Monteiro whose project, begun in 1923 and completed in 1928, announces, in a large-scale work, the desire to move away from an eclectic decoration instead looking for a “geometricized vocabulary” that, while still nourishing a taste for the *Art déco*, is already oriented towards a purification of decorative ornament.

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This aesthetic simplification of the building, in the architectural forms and the wall decoration, represents the true stylistic innovation of Portuguese architecture in the first decades of the twentieth century; even if, in some way, it is still alleviated by the adoption of monumental façades used to define the hierarchical position of the building in the adjacent urban context, as in the case of the Cine-Teatro Eden of Cassiano Branco, which succeeded in combining the concepts of the purist rationalism of the European avant-garde with the decorative Art déco of the beginning of the century. It is possible to situate chronologically the beginnings of the Modern Movement in the Portuguese architecture in 1927, the year in which was formed the *geração do compromisso* (so named by Carlos Ramos, one of its principal architects) involved in the adoption in Portugal of a modern and international architectural syntax. 1927 is also the year of the creation of the magazine *Arquitetura*, co-founded by the architect Jorge Segurado, as well as that of the magazine *Presença*, both committed to promoting the birth of a “modern consciousness” in Portuguese society. The latter became an important reference for the architectural environment of those years, in parallel with the magazine *Orfeu*, within a more literary context (ALMEIDA, FERNANDES 1986, pp. 23, 112).

To these literary aspects of indisputable importance must be associated other essential architectural references which, for their modern aesthetics, lead to a notable change in the Portuguese architecture of the first decades of the twentieth century. The Cine-Teatro Capitólio, of Luis Cristino da Silva, marks a clear break with the Portuguese architecture of the preceding period, announcing the great aesthetic changes imposed by the Modern Movement. The preliminary draft, which dates back to 1925, is clearly of European inspiration and a remembrance of the purist rationalism in vogue at that time. Pure and geometric volumes without decorations of an eclectic revival, large interior spaces without vertical supports, large movable windows and a roof terrace make this work the first example of modern Portuguese architecture (RODOLFO, 2002).



**Figure 1: Luis Cristino da Silva, *Cinema Capitólio*. Model of the project. (RODOLFO 2002, p. 75).**

As with other European countries, modern architecture in Portugal is taking its first steps in specific building typologies, such as industrial and commercial buildings, pavilions for exhibitions or markets, hangars, stations that, with a view to their usability, adapting to the aesthetic and formal experimentation of modern architecture. We mention here, in particular, the project of Cottinelli Telmo for the Estação Fluvial de Sul e Sueste in Lisbon (1928-1930), one of the first modern attempts of the Portuguese architecture, despite some Art déco compromises still present; the *Garagem do Jornal «O Comércio de Porto»* (1930), first work of Rogério de Azevedo, whose construction is conceived according to a modern plan obtained by the adoption of pure geometric volumes, including also a cylindrical turret in corner position; or the *Lota de Peixe de Massarelos*, also in Porto, equally considered one of the most representative buildings of modern Portuguese architecture of the first decades of the twentieth century. Designed in 1932 by Januario Godinho, this building is part of an essentially functionalist concept. Its interior is wide and spacious. Without decorations and academic constraints, its prospects have a horizontal setting determined by the large curved windows on the first floor, as well as by the balconies and cornices of the windows. At the top, the clear and decisive closure of the main perspective emphasizes the plastic value of the building, which has various influences: from the German expressionism to the Dutch neoclassicism and the French purism.



Figure 2 : Lota de Peixe de Massarelos. Porto, 2016.

The utilitarian character of the buildings has probably defended the authors of the projects from the critics coming from an academic environment still much too conservative. It is not the case of other architectural works built at the same time, such as the Liceu de Beja (1930-1935) of Luis Cristino da Silva, whose architecture, resolutely functionalist and rationalist, led to the beginning of the contestation of the Modern Movement in Portugal. Let us also mention the long conception of the Casa da Moeda (1933-1941), of Jorge Segurado, whose variants had to be submitted several times to the competent authorities because they were too aligned with the international aesthetic. The search of the modern aesthetic was strongly encouraged by certain portuguese magazines, particularly attentive to the dissemination of new futurist theories, among them the magazine *Arquitectura*, whose editorial choices were of great importance in the affirmation of a modern conception of architecture. In this regard, in 1930, in an article entitled *Por uma Arquitectura própria. A Arquitectura Moderna*, the editor of the magazine, Francisco Costa, writes:

*[...] Conquanto sejamos fervorosos admiradores da arquitectura manuelina, entendemos que fazê-la reviver nas nossas construções de hoje, era um erro gravíssimo. Nem mesmo simplificada a aceitávamos. [...] Queremos com isto dizer que o que ultimamente se tem feito em manuelino esteja mal? Não. Nem a Estação do Rossio no manuelino simplificado nem uma vivenda de Sintra no florido, e outras casas, que tenham sido bem estudadas, estejam mal? Não. Com o que não concordamos e isso ninguém nos pode levar a mal é que [...] o manuelino fez a sua época e marcou-a bem, ja o dissemos, portanto, agora ja que estamos no século XX, façamos arquitectura do século XX [...]* (COSTA 1931, p. 80).

Portuguese architecture at the beginning of the 20th century, before the contamination and the intrusion of the Estado Novo, shows all the courage of conception that can be found later in the 1950s and 1960s, when, after the I Congresso Nacional da Arquitectura de 1948, a new generation of professionals reclaims an architectural independence hitherto hindered.

### **The rise of the power of Salazar and the first interferences in the Portuguese architecture**

In 1926, the Portuguese political context suffers a radical change. A military coup put an end to a period of seventeen years of republican rule and led the country into a dictatorial policy with fascist contours (CALDAS 1997, p. 23-32). The event prompted a rapid reorganization of the main political structures of the State, the repercussions of which soon became evident in various areas of Portuguese collective life. Beginning in 1933, the government of António de Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970) more centralized its authoritarian powers by promulgating a new Constitution and the establishment of an *Estado Novo*, a regime of illusory democracy. The founding of a single political party in 1935, the banning of opposition parties, the creation of the Nazi and Fascist militias in 1936 and the establishment of a concentration camp in Tarrafal, to imprison opponents of the government, as well as the Política do Espírito promoted by the Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional (SPN) are all examples showing the rapid rise of the power of Salazar in Portugal and the hegemony that will quickly assume in all fields of Portuguese life, including architecture.

Among the highlights of the Estado Novo policy, which entail a further exaltation of the dictatorial regime, we mention the preparatory programs for the great Exposição do Mundo Português of 1940, which definitively marks the presence (intrusion) of the government in the definition of the national architecture <sup>1</sup>. However, the signs of a radical change in Portuguese architecture begin to appear in 1938, during the great campaign of public works promoted for the city of Lisbon, which led, among other things, to the design of Praça de Areeiro : project in which the architect Luis Cristino da Silva, who a few years before had designed the avant-garde Cine-Teatro Capitólio, proposes a nationalist style strongly advocated by Duarte José Pacheco (1900-1943), Minister of Public Works and Communications of the Salazar government. The Praça de Areeiro is perhaps the most emblematic example of the nationalist architecture proposed at that time by the regime. The use of pillars and stone frames, inspired by the aristocratic architecture of the 17th century, the development on the main façade of the building of the noble floor with its wrought iron balconies (although in the internal division of space it has a distribution equal to that of the other floors) as well as the choice of turret elements in the roof of the building will become important architectural references for the design, in a nationalistic key, of the public and private buildings of the country.

From 1938, and during the decade of 1940, part of the Portuguese architecture, distorted in modern values, will align itself with the new conception of the regime. Later, the architectural taste imposed on the pavilions of the 1940 Exposition is another indication of the formal change imposed by the government and an official confirmation of the new style to be followed. We mention the Pavilhão de Honra e da Cidade, still produced by Cristino da Silva, which will officially determine the birth of an aesthetic quite opposite to the international style of the 1930s, and undoubtedly aligned with a state architecture.

If in 1938 the architects of the first generation of the Modern Portuguese Movement, not without some criticism, still work in an architectural style as modern and international as historicalist and regionalist - we think in particular of the concomitance of projects that are very divergent between them, as the Praça de Areeiro and the Igreja de Nossa Senhora de Fátima, construction of Pórfirio Pardal Monteiro much more modern - following the Exposition of 1940, the presence in the country of a modern architecture becomes essentially a political question that is often resolved by the affirmation of a “portuguese” architecture whose classification remains uncertain. Let us take the symbolic example of some religious buildings built in Portugal in the mid-1940s, such as Santo Condestável, São João de Deus and São João de Brito in Lisbon, and the Imaculada Conceição Church in Porto, emblematic examples of a growing nationalistic taste in which the adopted architectural solutions betray bad design agreements between tradition and modernity (FRANÇA 1982, p.128).

During this period, the resistance of modern Portuguese architecture is weak and disorganized, though it continues to be courageously present, above all in the realization of industrial or commercial buildings that will continue to be designed with a modern syntax. The Estação de Correios de Setúbal (1938-1941) by Adelino Nunes, the cinema Cine-arte (1938-1940) by Rodrigues Lima and the Cinema S. Jorge (1947), by Fernando Silva, both in Lisbon, the Cine-Teatro Batalha (1947) in Porto, by Artur Andrade, and the Coliseu do Porto (1939-1940) by Cassiano Branco are just some of the most significant examples of this silent battle of the modern.

### **The policy of the regime in the evolution of the Modern Portuguese Movement**

Following the political reversal of 1933, the repercussions on modern architecture begin to be gradually more felt, though initially camouflaged by a democratic appearance promoted by the organs of the state. During its first period, the Salazar government appropriated the concept of *modern* promoted by the new architecture, financing the construction of some of the most important modern buildings of the period, absolutely in line with the concepts of futurism and with the technological advances in many other European countries, such as fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The famous *Lição de Salazar*<sup>2</sup> born from this specific intention: to spread the government’s commitment to the growth and modernization of the country by adopting a modern architecture, in tune with the time.

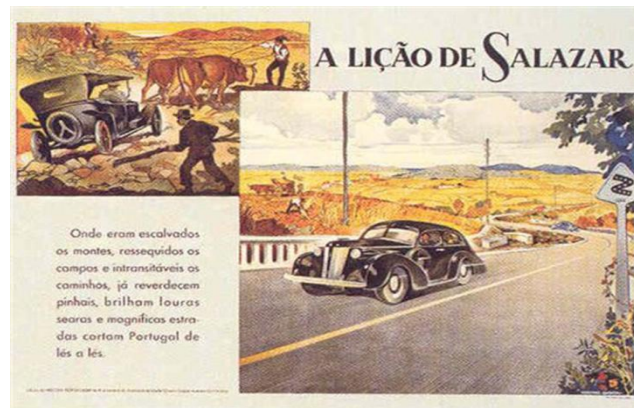


Figure 3 : *A Lição de Salazar*. Propaganda Leaflet.  
(comunidade.sol.pt/.../PORTUGAL-DURANTE-O-ESTADO-NOVO.aspx)

A new urban dimension is called upon to define the national territory. The proliferation of public and private vehicles is rapidly leading to the construction of roads and also to the improvement of public transport and road infrastructure. In Porto, the connection of the city with the peripheral “da Foz” zone and, in Lisbon, the expansion towards Bélem, Restelo and Ajuda are part of this widespread idea of progress and modernization. The construction of the *Autoestrada do Sol* in Estoril is a comparable example, although much more modest, of the 3,800 km of roads constructed in Germany between 1933 and 1938.

In the early years of dictatorship, therefore, modern architecture is an integral part of the government’s political plans. As they understood Duarte Pacheco and António Ferro (1895-1956), Salazar’s arm and mind, the Estado Novo had to convey an image of progress and renovation, testifying to the miraculous growth of the country under the benevolent direction of Salazar. A large number of public works carried out during this period stem from this political intention and are affected by the cumbersome presence of the State. One of them is the construction of the Instituto Superior Técnico (1929-1941), modern work of extraordinary architectural monumentality.



Figure 4: Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, *Instituto Superior Técnico*.  
(Arquitectos, n. 4, 1938, p.101).

Ardently desired by Duarte Pacheco and designed by Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, the IST is a remarkable example of portuguese modernism for several reasons: first, because it is the first portuguese public building designed and built under the supervision and under the auspices of the political regime; secondly, because it is the first major portuguese project of “public works” in modernist terms; finally, it is a work whose size and complexity go beyond the simple architectural design for to adapt to a resolutely urban scale.

It is therefore during the initial phase of Salazarism, linked to intense activity in the field of public works, that the new architectural forms of the Modern Movement are diffused. As argued by the architect Nuno Teotónio Pereira (1922-2016):

[...] *Esta promoção de obras públicas trouxe um importante impulso à arquitectura portuguesa na década de '30, justamente no momento em que se adoptavam em Portugal os figurinos do movimento moderno. Mas o novo regime, nos anos iniciais, e ao contrário do que veio a acontecer mais tarde, manteve uma atitude de indiferença perante a criação arquitectónica, não interferindo no trabalho dos arquitectos. Foi assim que uma série de edifícios públicos foram construídos, dando oportunidade aos arquitectos para exprimirem livremente as suas ideias de vanguarda*[...](PEREIRA 1997, p.33).

Soon, however, the most conservative faction of the regime did not take long to make its voice heard; citing climatic pretexts, concerning the inadequacy of modern buildings with the climatic conditions of the country, as well as the character of the portuguese people, the enemies of the modern strongly oppose the internationalism of the new architecture, associating it with something subversive and “communist”. Some of these criticisms were well founded: many of the new buildings were, in fact, inspired by models from central or northern Europe, with large windows without any structural protection to protect themselves from the summer sun of the Mediterranean countries, and were difficult to adapt to the climatic conditions of certain regions of Portugal. In addition, the lack of solid knowledge of waterproofing techniques was very often the cause of water infiltration and degradation of flat roofs, a situation that could easily be solved by the use of a traditional tile roof. The aversion to the new architecture was also linked to social and political reasons: everything that was “modern” became foreign to the portuguese tradition and therefore far removed from the cult of the “nation” imposed by the *Estado Novo*. On the other hand, it is fair to recall that, in the opposition to an architecture that was too “international”, certain aspects went beyond the political dimension. The principle of adapting to the place stems from a feeling of *regionalism* then developing in many other European countries, sanctioning the failure of the concept of International Style. This opposition, however, had the effect of diverting and limiting the first modern portuguese architecture “sufocada à nascença por razões políticas e ideológicas”(Ibidem), not allowing it to mature through practice and experience and to draw, from the beginning, the benefits and the rewards.

Political conditions were thus created for the manipulation of art as a tool of ideological propaganda in the service of a totalitarian state; and the architecture, a concrete expression of the work of a government which, through its policy of public works, made the country great and modern, was the first art necessary to achieve the desired objective. The alignment with the national taste, imposed by the State, of some architects belonging to the first generation of the Modern Portuguese Movement, can also be explained by this new interpretation. What must be noted is that, in Portugal as well as in other European countries which had a dictatorship, the architecture of the regime is in opposition to the “international” architecture animated by the Modern Movement. In this regard, the Spain of Franco, the fascist Italy and, above all, the Nazi Germany soon become the models of inspiration.

If the repressive attitude of the Portuguese government has never had the violent character of the Nazi regime - remember that the Bauhaus is closed on 19 July 1935 after having been subject to constant harassment by the Gestapo - its totalitarian control passes through a cumbersome presence. As recalled by Nuno Teotónio Pereira: “[...] o regime português utilizava de preferência métodos administrativos e intimidatórios, recorrendo à repressão directa só quando estes eram insuficientes [...]”(Ibidem, p. 35). This was an administrative control which, for the most important works, provided for the centralization of all decision-making powers in the hands of one person: the Minister of Public Works. The adaptation of portuguese architecture to the diktats of the regime did not only concern the great works of the State: the government insidiously exercised its power of decision even over private production through municipalities, of peripheral control bodies of strategic importance. The most monumental and scenographic aspect of regime architecture finds its maximum expression in public buildings representative of political power, while for many other small buildings, such as primary schools, the social housing quarters and the services buildings such as the post office, the architecture takes on a more intimate “portuguese” character through the use of traditional architectural elements, such as tile roofs, stone frames and moldings, pinnacles of baroque style and stylistic rebirths of all kinds. In the Portuguese architectural context, the decade of 1940 is therefore a period of profound contradiction, marked by a strong break between a modern and international architecture and an architecture of regime, deliberately “national” (BANDEIRINHA, 1996). Paradoxically, some architects of the first generation of the Modern Movement will become the authors of this split.

Moreover, the “ephemeral” attention paid by the government to their professional category, previously marginalized in comparison to that of engineers, had led them not to oppose drastically the dictates imposed by the regime. Furthermore, the cultural and social context of the period was entirely in line with the new ideological propaganda.

[...] *A ação da censura à imprensa, os instrumentos de propaganda ideológica que o Estado utilizava para impor os seus valores e a ausência de uma cultura arquitectónica no seio da sociedade e no mundo da cultura, faziam com que tais valores ganhassem uma considerável aceitação e não encontrassem oposição organizada [...]*(PEREIRA 1997, p. 35).

The constraints imposed by the government were thus perceived as perfectly normal and they echoed the political context of the rest of Europe. To confirm this, a great exhibition on the modern German architecture has been exposed in Lisbon in 1941. Presented by Albert Speer, chief architect of the Third Reich, this event had a huge success with the public, as well as an important effect on the sensibility of many portuguese architects of the time. Subsequently, Luis Cristino da Silva, among others, will recognize in the German architecture of the Nazi regime the role of architecture of the future, identifying it as the only stylistic reference from which to take inspiration, setting aside the key principles of the Modern Movement. This admiration will be visible in his projects of the time, such as the Edifício Municipal de Praça dos Restauradores, in Lisbon, where German influence is quite obvious.

The increasingly important assertion of nationalist architecture, however, does not determine the total loss of the stylistic canons of the Modern Movement; although the projects are decreasing in number, they continue to emerge in the portuguese architecture, both in the capital city and in the city of Porto. It is interesting to note that, starting from the decade of 1940, the architecture of Porto and Lisbon begins to follow divergent paths. If in the capital the architects accept, with more or less conviction, the dogmas imposed by the regime, in the city of Porto a small group of stubborn architects move away from the state control attempts, allowing for a stylistic continuity between the pioneers of the Modern Portuguese Movement, mainly led by Carlos Ramos, director of *Escola Superior de Belas Artes* (ESBA) in Porto, and the new generation of architects such as Celestino de Castro, Viana de Lima, Artur Andrade. The reasons for this continuity are multiple: the distance of the city of Porto from the places of political control; the dependence of mainly private commissions (PEREIRA 1987, pp. 323-357). Thus it can be argued that the portuguese architecture of the 1940s is marked by two distinct directions: on the one hand, an architecture of propaganda characterized by self-commemorative expressions, specific to the style of the regime; on the other, a modern architecture made by a limited number of architects individually engaged in the search for new architectural forms.

### **The Congress of 1948: a form of political activism for the definitive affirmation of modern portuguese architecture**

The *I Congresso Nacional de Arquitectura de 1948* is the major event for the official recognition of modern architecture in Portugal. An act of political militancy against the regime, it must also be reinterpreted in the light of the great democratic changes of certain European countries after the Second World War, that also had a great importance on the portuguese political scene. At the international level, in fact, the socio-cultural context is marked by profound political transformations linked to the war, which will have a significant influence on the fate of modern architecture. From the architectural point of view, the end of the conflict will lead to the fall of the last obstacles which hitherto prevented the expansion of modern architecture in favor of nationalist and neoclassical styles; the cities resurrected from the devastation of war will become the main test benches of modern architecture.

The repercussions of the new emerging geopolitical structure in Europe are not slow to appear in the government of Salazar, both in its foreign and in its domestic policy. Beginning in 1943, when the fates of Hitler's Germany and the fascist Italy were almost sealed, Salazar, seeing the political rise of the Allies, decided very skilfully to embellish his dictatorial regime with a semblance of democracy, in order to ensure its political survival in the event of a scenario change in the direction of the European. The new democratic image of the government echoes many political choices that the Estado Novo realizes in those years: from the rapprochement with the Great Britain of Churchill, with the concession, before the end of the conflict, of the Azores air bases, subsequently used by US aviation, to the closure of the concentration camp in Tarrafal, in Cape Verde. And to the definition of new “democratic” parliamentary elections that determine the return of the opposition parties after their abolition in 1933.

The new process of industrialization and modernization of a country still too closely linked to its agricultural policy, as well as another public works campaign, this time aimed at designing large dams which would lead to a greater national self-reliance, energy-wise, must also be interpreted as the attempts of democratic propaganda carried out both in front of the major foreign powers victorious in the war and against the increasing pressure of public opinion in the country which demanded, with more and more virulence, more freedom. Although this “wave” of democratic hope did not place without victims - we mention, notably, the repressive action of the regime which continued to exist through public measures, exemptions, resignations, obstructionism that still affected opponents of power - many intellectuals of the time, including architects, found the strength to affirm their distance from the government, astutely trying to assert their rights.

The opportunity for a change of course in the portuguese architecture is also confirmed by an academic event which took place shortly before the Congress of 1948: the creation of a public competition for the construction of a summer house at the Alto do Rodízio, near Praia das Maças. Promoted by the magazine *Arquitectura*, in issue 16 of June 1947, thanks to the initiative of Professor Antero Ferreira and with the collaboration of the ESBA of Porto and Lisbon, this competition can be seen as a clear testimony of the request of independence of portuguese architects against the dictates of the Salazar government. The axis of the question is again the concept of “modern” in Portuguese architecture. The candidates admitted to the competition are all students of the ESBA Architecture Course in Lisbon and Porto and all portuguese architects who have graduated less than five years from that date. The event is welcomed with great enthusiasm. Of the seventeen preliminary projects presented, the jury, composed by the Professor Antero Ferreira, the architect Paulo Cunha, editor of the journal, the Professor Carlos Ramos and the ESBA student of Lisbon Pedro Cid, will select the most innovative from a formal and aesthetic point of view, awarding the first prize (Adelino Nunes and Cottinelli Telmo Award) to the architect João Andresen; while the second prize is awarded *ex aequo* to the work of the architect Vitor Palla and to the architects Manuel Rodrigues and Antonio Machado.

Beyond a few suggestions to carry out their project, the participants were given complete freedom in their submissions. In fact, as described by Carlos Ramos in the report of the results of the competition: “Foi o espírito dos candidatos que dominou e orientou todos os esforços do júri para uma melhor seleção” (*Arquitectura* 1948, n. 23-24). Autonomy in the design was finally being evaluated and rewarded. Two great portuguese associations involved in the dissemination of the Modern Movement are linked to this renewed cultural context: the ICAT (Iniciativas Culturais Arte e Técnica) of Lisbon and the ODAM (Organização dos Arquitectos Modernos) in Porto, which since 1947 and until the mid-1950s bring together most architects opposed to the stylistic constraints imposed by the government. Their architectural commitment, their objectives and ambitions are essential, not only to the definitive removal of part of the portuguese architecture from the impositions of the Estado Novo but also to the critical evolution of the principles of the Modern Movement, through a cultural reinterpretation. One of the first concrete actions in which the ODAM and the ICAT reveal their autonomy is the I Congresso Nacional de Arquitectura de 1948, authorized by the government due to the democratic semblance that it was trying to display (FRANÇA 1974, pp. 438-444).

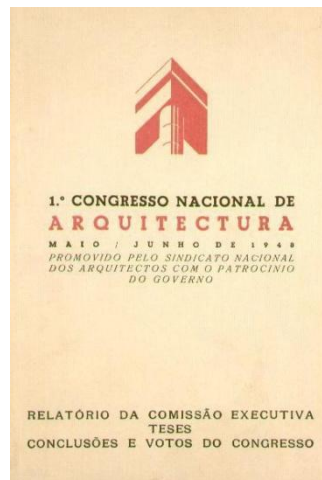


Figure 5: 1º Congresso Nacional de Arquitectura de 1948 – Relatório Comissão executiva. Cover of the book.



Presented by the Government in the context of events for the celebration of “15 Anos de Obras Públicas”, through the person of J.F. Ulrich, Minister of Public Works after the premature death of Duarte Pacheco in 1943, The I Congresso Nacional de Arquitectura is inaugurated on May 28 1948, in conjunction with another national propaganda event, the II Congresso Nacional de Engenharia, which was held in Lisbon in June of that same year.

If, on the one hand, the intention of the celebration was to pay tribute to Duarte Pacheco, who had done much to improve the nation’s infrastructure, it also masked the will to congratulate the work of Estado Novo *vis-à-vis* other European states as well as against the public opinion of the country. Thus the attempt to give prestige to the underpaid professional class of architects was born from the desire to exert a certain influence on them, as had already happened with Duarte Pacheco. But the times were now changed and the I Congresso Nacional de Arquitectura clearly proved it. Against all odds, thanks to the large number of participants and the zeal and initiative of the younger generation, the architects who took part in the Congress took a critical stand against the institutional power: they denounced the stylistic constraints present in the process evaluation of architectural works, while openly promoting the principles of the Modern Movement and the Charter of Athens.

In this respect, the propaganda effort of a number of Porto architects will be essential; through the ODAM, during these years, they pledged publicly to: “divulgar os princípios da arquitectura moderna, formar uma consciência profissional, criar entendimento entre arquitectos e artistas plásticos, obstar ao amadorismo praticado, valorizar, enfim, o indivíduo e a sociedade portuguesa” (*Ibidem*, p. 438).

Funded by the Sindicato Nacional dos Arquitectos (SNA), the Congress is organized by an executive committee composed of Cottinelli Telmo, President of the Congress and the SNA; Porfirio Pardal Monteiro, Miguel Jacobetty Rosa and João Faria da Costa, members of the Board of Directors and Treasurer; and finally Paulo de Carvalho Cunha, Secretary General. Among the many conditions imposed to the Committee, the most important one was the total absence of censorship on the communications presented; a requirement openly demanded by members of ICAT and ODAM for their participation in the Congress.

It was divided into two distinct themes: “A Arquitectura no plano nacional ” and “O problema português da Habitação”. To the first theme were addressed the vast majority of the papers presented, while only nine concerned the national housing problem. The need to clarify the concept of portuguese architecture and to clarify the dichotomy between modern/international and traditional/national, which had for years interested the country’s architecture, was obviously the preoccupation of most architects participating in the event. Despite the presence of important personalities of the first portuguese modernism, such as Cottinelli Telmo, Pardal Monteiro and Carlos Ramos (presences absolutely essential to the success of the Congress), a new generation of modern architects, represented by Keil do Amaral, Miguel Jacobetty, Viana de Lima, Armenio Losa, Januario Godinho, addressed in their interventions the main problems of portuguese architecture. The aspects discussed in the various communications were manifold: from the need to remodel certain state official bodies (*1º Congresso Nacional de Arquitectura*, 1948. Relatório Comissão executiva, p. LIX) to the need for new institutions that would protect the architect’s profession; from the reorganization of the teaching of architecture to the realization of measures that would ensure a better professional practice; from the problematic of the so-called “feição portuguesa dos novos edifícios ” to the portuguese problem of the house, given the conditions “francamente deficientes” in which most of the population, both urban and rural, lived (*Ibidem*).

The so-called “feição portuguesa dos novos edifícios ”, namely the aesthetic aspect to be given to the new buildings, was one of the most important issues discussed. This in no way had to depend on the constraints imposed by the State but only on the design sensitivity of architects, the only ones involved in defining architectural styles to follow. Through this question, for the first time, it claimed for the need of an architecture in tune with the times and needs of modern man and, above all, the freedom for architects to follow their ideals and architectural standards without being considered *antipatriotic*.

[...] Quanto à “Feição Portuguesa” dos novos edifícios: *Que se considere que, nem os arquitectos prestam bom serviço à Nação quando, ao construírem edifícios novos com processos e materiais novos, dão às suas concepções uma expressão plástica que não traduz os ideais artísticos e as possibilidades técnicas dos nossos dias, nem a Nação aproveita inteiramente a colaboração que os arquitectos podem dar ao progresso do País, se lhes for cerceada a capacidade criadora. [...] Que os arquitectos portugueses repudiem toda e qualquer insinuação de que a sua obra – quando se exprima de maneira diferente da considerada como “portuguesa” – representa albeamento da sua personalidade profissional e, o que è pior ainda, da sua nacionalidade [...] (Arquitectura 1949, n. 29, pp. 4-5; 1º Congresso Nacional de Arquitectura, 1948. Relatório Comissão executiva, p. LXII-LXIII).*

As for the housing issue, however, it was hoped that urban plans would be organized according to the modern rules of urban planning which, according to Armenio Losa, were too often were ignored “in an unconscious attitude that turned its back on the future”. Fundamental in this regard should have been the revision of the occupation criteria of the ground according to the principles of the Athens Charter and the adoption of collective homes that, rationally designed, should meet the spiritual and material needs of modern man. The aim was to create healthy and hygienic homes, within which to live according to the comforts of a modern life:

“[...] os benefícios e as alegrias tão prodigamente oferecidos pela Natureza devem voltar para o alcance imediato dos homens, assegurando-se, para isso, aos edifícios uma boa insolação, desafogo, e rodeando-os de arvoredo, quanto possível; e ainda que só uma industrialização eficiente da construção civil e um adestramento possível adequado dos técnicos e dos operários permitirá levar a cabo a extraordinária tarefa de dar casas económicas, higiénicas e confortáveis a todos os que necessitam delas [...]”(1º Congresso Nacional de Arquitectura, 1948. Relatório Comissão executiva, p. LX)

Equally avant-garde were the theses of Miguel Jacobetty, according to which architecture was derived from function, and of Viana de Lima who hoped for a house organized in the spirit of the “second era of machinist civilization” (1º Congresso Nacional de Arquitectura, 1948. Relatório Comissão executiva, p. 215), entirely in line with the principles of rationalism of Le Corbusier. The architecture directly derived from Le Corbusier’s written and architectural work, therefore, seemed to be the only possible architecture; the only way to achieve a solution that was at the service of modern man.

At the same time they did not lack contrasting theories : like that of Cottinelli Telmo, about the idea of an architecture that was both national and international; that of the architect Mario de Oliveira, who in a clear opposition to the government, did not completely recognize himself in the principles of international architecture, hoping rather for an architecture in which portuguese tradition was re-thought through modern aesthetics; or that of Pardal Monteiro, which in the communication *A tradição na Arquitectura* reiterated the conflict between tradition and modernity, combining the concept of “tradition” in architecture with that of “purity”; or even that of Mauro Bonito, architect of Porto, who was interrogated on the concepts of “regionalism” and “tradition” revised in the most dynamic and modern key.

These are considerations that were relevant to a cultural context developed in those years; a context that had found in the 1948 Congress an escape valve. An environment full of illusions and hopes where the professional independence of the role of the architect could be reaffirmed with courage and conviction. Years after the event, Francisco Keil do Amaral, one of the main actors in Congress, remembered this gesture of bravery as something extremely important, in which the vitality and the generous commitment of many architects had determined the fate of national architecture. A new generation of architects, strong in professional conscience and in their own decision-making power, had thus made it possible to leave definitively the “fear” of a modern architecture, determining a decisive turning point in the history of portuguese architecture in the years to come.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> One of the most important commemorative events in Salazar’s politics, it became an event among which to mythify the imperial past of Portugal with the intention of creating an attractive historical memory to bring to their advantage.

<sup>2</sup> In 1938, in order to celebrate the ten years of the Salazar government, seven posters bearing the title *A Lição de Salazar* were created to inculcate and spread the values of the Estado Novo to the entire portuguese community.

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