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## *Identity of Portuguese architecture in the media reflexes of global*

### abstract

The subject of identity has crossed the history of Portuguese architecture. This matter has been discussed also in comparison with the architecture of other countries. The question of whether the design of Portuguese architecture has accompanied the developments of international architecture design divides the authors of the history of Portuguese architecture.

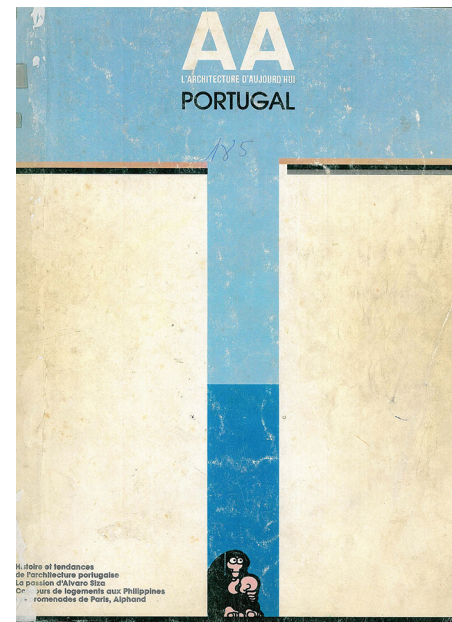
After providing a brief overview of historiography under the subject of identity, we will make the presentation of the case of international dissemination of the architecture of the North of Portugal between mid-1970s and during the 1980s, through events (publications, exhibitions, conferences, awards) with greater relevance. We will demonstrate that, in this period, the Portuguese

architecture accompanied and was even on top of the developments of international architecture.

It is to mention the coincidence between the positioning of this Portuguese architecture and the appreciation that certain international movements had been making of alternatives to global styles, such as the Modern Movement and subsequently the Post-Modern eclectic styles, which came to be identified as the Third Way / Critical Regionalism. It is also to point out that the international affirmation of a Country regarding the specificity of its architecture has obviously other examples besides Portugal, and that the international appraisal of these 'local' specificities dates back to previous decades.

### keywords

Identity, Portuguese architecture, international dissemination, global, local.



## The history of Portuguese architecture between borders

The history of Portuguese architecture was dominated by the objective of building a complete theoretical discourse that if possible would find distinctive characteristics, its identity. The larger distances between reflections result from different evaluations on the contemporaneity or the gap between the Portuguese architectural practice and the European and American practices (e.g. Nuno Portas, Ana Tostões).

The participation of Portugal in international exhibitions has raised discourses of identity that tried to reflect in the architecture of its pavilions. However, only in the last Universal Exhibition (Paris, 1900), was the Portuguese pavilion first built by a Portuguese architect (Souto, 2011). The dominance of the French Academies of Fine Arts that informed the teaching of Portuguese architects and later the political dominance of 'Estado Novo' in international representations (Acciaiuoli, 1998) withdrew architecture from the expressions studied here, and above all it was not an object of attention by itself as it is in the case of our study.

Some authors demonstrated and expressed the idea of identity in those days, others, however, denied it because it meant provincialism to affirm that Portuguese cultural life has beaten the closure that the national political life may have restricted it in the period of "Estado Novo". For these authors, the Portuguese architects have always been much closer to the international movements than it seemed (e.g. Pedro Vieira de Almeida, Rute Figueiredo). The continuity of this fact can be easily proved in present times not only by the similarities between the national architectural production and what is made "out there" (e.g. Ana Milheiro), but also by the number of foreign publications interested in what is made "here", and more recently by what "our" architects build "outside" (e.g. Ricardo Carvalho). Given this argument some authors who are convinced of the identity of Portuguese architecture answer that this is another trait of its character: its "universalist" condition (e.g. Alves Costa).

## Portuguese architecture on the global scene

The exponential growth of the number of participations of Portuguese architecture in international events from the mid-1970s demonstrates unequivocally, as aforementioned, the update of what was done locally with what was happening at the global level, and with Siza's architecture, in particular, gaining a prominent place.

It was in 1976 that editions dedicated to architecture in Portugal appeared in several countries at the same time, particularly in Spain (Arquitecturas Bis), in Italy (Lotus International and Casabella), and in France with a memorable monographic issue of L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui (L'Ojd). It is necessary to give a highlight to the initiative of Portas as a disseminator of Portuguese architecture. Vittorio Gregotti became one of the main international disseminators of Siza's architecture. His first article about Siza in one issue of Controspazio of 1972, where Portas also published an article, together with the aforementioned number of L'Ojd constituted the international publications referred by those we call international "second generation" disseminators, through which they gained knowledge of Portuguese architecture.

National and international "second generation" disseminators contributed to the consolidation of international dissemination of Portuguese architecture, greatly dominated by Siza's architecture. From among the national advisers we highlight José Paulo dos Santos in his activity in England, and Carlos Castanheira in Holland. From among the international ones, we point out Markku Komonen in his activity in Finland, Laurent Beaudouin in France, Brigitte Fleck in Germany, Toshiaki Tange and Toshio Nakamura in Japan. It is necessary to add to these advisers the role that several editors had by the frequency and quality of Portuguese architecture spreading. We highlight Xan Casabella López de Obradoiro, Josep Lluís Mateo of Quaderns, and Luis Fernandez-Galliano of A&V and Arquitectura Viva in Spain; Pierluigi Nicolini of Lotus International, and the above-mentioned Gregotti of Casabella in Italy. We must also add other events that increased the number of participations of the Portuguese architecture from

less than ten in 1976 to more than thirty in the 80s, and over sixty in the beginning of the 90s, reaching more and more distant geographies.

As result of this process of international recognition of a certain particularity of the architecture carried out in Portugal, in 1988 four awards from diverse geographical origins were assigned to Siza, which preceded the consecration award, the Pritzker Prize in 1992. They were: from Spain the Gold Medal of Architecture, from the European Community the Mies van der Rohe Award, from Finland the Alvar Aalto medal, and from the United States of America the Prize from Harvard University.

## Global in relation to multiple locals, the contribution of Portugal

We show as a paradigmatic example of international affirmation of Portuguese architecture the overcoming of the unfavourable context for its dissemination in one of the leading international centres for discussion and dissemination of theories of architecture, England in the early 1980s. In England, it was privileged the dissemination of 'post-modern style' architecture.

As stated by Wilfried Wang and Geoff Markham, in England there was little desirability for the dissemination of architectures of other countries (1). Markham, (author of two articles in Building Design in 1981, about Hestnes Ferreira and Gonçalo Byrne), states that in his opinion, the designated 'School of Porto' was not unknown in England. It was, however, seen as the last bastion of modernism, still far from foreseeing the recognition it would obtain later (2).

Wang claims to have founded gH magazine grounded in a working network with colleagues from the South: Portugal (the referred José Paulo dos Santos), Italy and Greece (3). Wang and Santos wanted to fight the Post-modernism of Charles Jencks, author who dominated the English magazine Architectural Design (AD) (4). However, it was precisely in the 7/8 issue of the magazine AD of 1982 that Siza's work was published for the first time as an example and following the development of the Kenneth Frampton's theory, which was designated as 'Critical Regionalism'. Frampton

became one of the greatest disseminators of Siza's work.

It is worth noting that the international affirmation of Portuguese architecture was obviously not a unique process of Portugal. We point out as an example the case of Finnish architecture. Petra Čeferin argues that the current widespread international knowledge of Finnish architecture is largely due to the initiative of dissemination by Finnish architects, who organised and promoted exhibitions in various countries of the World between 1957 and 1967 (Čeferin 2003).

In parallel with the argument drawn above, our opinion is that Portuguese architecture accompanied the international movements also in these years of the 70s and 80s of the last century. Portuguese architecture has local characteristics which are appreciated and valued in a global level. Under a postmodern interest in the difference that devalues the homogenisation, the same happened with other countries/regions, such as in Europe, Catalonia, Ticino and Greece. Certain Portuguese architecture meant a faction of critical resistance, which made it stand out from other regions, given its political, cultural context and its specificity.

## Footnotes

- (1) Wang's interview, 3/10/2012, and Markham's, 10/6/2012.
- (2) Ibidem.
- (3) Wang's interview, 19/11/2012.
- (4) Ibidem.

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