

**INFORMAL CAPE VERDEAN SETTLEMENT IN
LISBON
BAIRRO 6 DE MAIO AND THE CHALLENGE FOR
URBAN PLANNING**

Abstract

Bairro 6 de Maio was built by immigrants from Cape Verde, a former Portuguese colony, in the 1970s and 1980s. It was one of the many informal settlements in the suburbs of Lisbon and is one of the last neighbourhoods left 'alive' after the 1993 PER Program demolished most of the spontaneous settlements and relocated their population to public housing. In recent years, the Municipality of Amadora, where Bairro 6 de Maio is located, has begun knocking down houses again under the auspices of the over 20-year-old PER, without creating real alternatives for the displaced population. Based on a critical analysis of this case study, this paper indicates the need for socially sustainable policies and programmes regarding informal settlements in Portugal and other European countries. It proposes a different and challenging approach to planning that is not based on legal rhetoric but comes from both defending people's fundamental right to housing and having a multicultural vision of cities.

Keywords

Informal Settlements, Lisbon, Post-Colonial Immigration, Housing Rights.

Introduction

This analysis of *Bairro 6 de Maio* in Lisbon is part of wider research on the manifestation of urban exclusion in Lisbon and Porto, Portugal's two major metropolitan areas. This study is based on a comparative perspective with the Brazilian context, where urban exclusion is a structural component in the formation of cities. It aims to provide steps to move forward in the understanding of how societal inequalities are manifested in the urban fabric. Informal settlements are certainly the most common evidence of this manifestation, due to both the historical reasons upon which their presence is based and the approach taken by policies that have been dealing with the phenomenon. Moreover, academic interests and political debates in European countries have generally ignored the phenomenon. However, it has been widely analysed in countries of the Global South, such as Brazil (Alvito, Zaluar 2004; Maricato, 2001; Villaça, 2001). South-North perspectives can contribute significantly to understanding urban exclusion (Tarsi, 2016) and designing policies and programmes regarding informal settlements.

After a brief presentation of housing policies in Portugal and the specific case study, this paper proposes a challenging approach to designing sustainable policies and programmes regarding informal settlements. The background of the following analysis is the body of post-colonial studies (Watson, 2009; Fortuna, 2012), the epistemology of the South perspective (Santos, 2014) and the body of knowledge and analysis regarding informal settlement policies and programmes (Roy, Alsayyad, 2003; Porter,

2011), which have been thoroughly investigated by the author in previous research (Tarsi, 2013; 2014).

Informality and Housing Policies and Programmes in Portugal

Informal settlements in Portugal are not a recent phenomenon. In the early 1900s, many people lived in these spontaneous and precarious neighbourhoods located in the suburbs close to Lisbon and Porto, Portugal's two major cities. At that time, the city's historic centres also suffered bad conditions, such as the *ilhas*¹ in Porto, which were the result of migration from inland and lack of public housing policies. The first public programmes came from concerns regarding urban sanitation. Two examples of these are:

1. the 1956-1966 plan for the *ilhas* of Porto, when the shanty houses were destroyed and the population was moved into new buildings;
2. the *Habitacões de Renda Económica* Programme in Lisbon from 1959-1969 (Nunes, 2013).

Notwithstanding these efforts, public housing made up only 10.8% of the total amount of houses built from 1953 to 1973 (Gros, 1994). After the Carnation Revolution in 1974, architects — such as Siza Vieira and Nuno Por-

¹ *Ilhas* are small houses near the city centre that were constructed for workers during the late 19th century industrial period. Their odd shape is due to a non-conventional division of land; the width of each lot is 5.5 m on the side facing the street and the length is 100 m running perpendicular to the street. The owner's house was built at the front end, while at the back a corridor was opened with small houses on either side (see CMP, 2001).

tas — carried out the SAAL experiences (Bandeirinha, 2007), which were inspired by a completely different approach: participation of inhabitants in the entire process of building new houses. Unfortunately, the experiment only lasted for two years.

Another consequence of the Carnation Revolution, and the resulting geopolitical reconfiguration of Portugal's former colonies in Africa, was a wave of immigration to Portugal from Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe. The majority of these immigrants settled in the metropolitan Lisbon area, which saw another immigration wave after Portugal joined the European Union in 1986. The city is now home to 80% of the country's Portuguese-speaking population of African origin (Malheiros, Fonseca, 2011). Those events created a massive need for housing that was not addressed by the government through effective housing policies. The presence of these communities, along with migrants from inland Portugal, led to the development of vast unplanned areas on the periphery of Lisbon. These settlements are called *bairros de lata*, a Portuguese expression for slum. In the 1990s, the presence of two major international events in Portugal — “Lisbon Capital of Culture” (1994) and “EXPO” (1998) — forced the country to address the issue of precarious housing, as the *bairros de lata* had become a source of national shame (Cachado, 2012). A solution to the problem was launched in 1993, with a nation-wide public housing programme called PER (Slum Relocation Programme) that aimed to ‘eradicate the slums’. It described the *bairros de lata* as a ‘social wound’ and as enclaves of poverty, mar-

ginality and illegal activities, such as drug trafficking and prostitution (Cachado, 2013), thus stigmatising both the spontaneous settlements and their inhabitants. While the PER continued into the early 2000s, it appears to have learnt little from the social housing experiences developed in Europe during the 1960s and 1970s, which were barely criticised for

clustering disenfranchised communities together into massive housing blocks, while ignoring the distinctiveness and cultural practices of immigrants. (Lages, Braga, 2016, p. 2)

The programme contributed greatly to the peripheralisation of the socio-economically weaker population and to the building of severe socio-spatial exclusion islands, which can be easily stigmatised.

A Post-colonial Informal Settlement: Bairro 6 de Maio in Amadora

Amadora is one of the municipalities of the metropolitan Lisbon area that has seen a massive, spontaneous occupation of its land due to its proximity to Lisbon itself. *Bairro 6 de Maio* is one of the many informal settlements built by immigrants from Portugal's former colonies, in this case Cape Verde, during the 1970s and 1980s. The neighbourhood is quite developed structurally² (Fig. 1), despite the high density of its population and the low quality of its buildings. In other municipalities, the 1993 PER Pro-

² In 2015, the author observed and worked with HABITA while the association dealt with the displacement of the *Bairro 6 de Maio* community and supported its inhabitants throughout the process. It was also an opportunity for the author to visit other neighbourhoods, do informal interviews and learn about the situations of families. For more information, see <www.habita.info>.

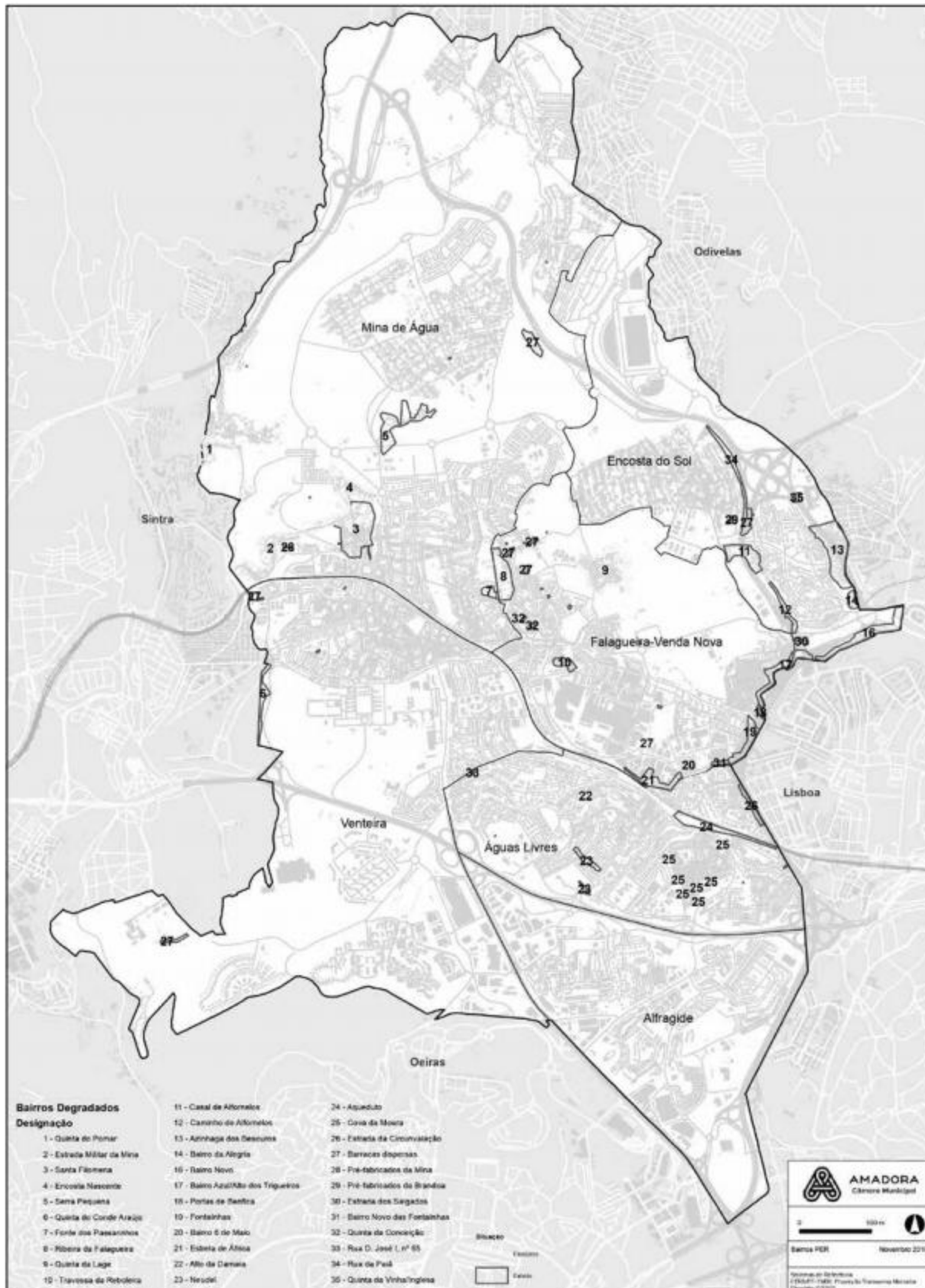


Fig. 1. Situation of informal settlements in Amadora, November 2016. (source: www.cmamadora.pt).

programme demolished most spontaneous settlements and relocated their populations to public housing. However, in Amadora³, this process did not begin until 1995 and was never completed, leaving many informal neighbourhoods still ‘alive’ (Fig. 2). Amadora is currently undergoing a major transformation due to the extension of the

³ There were thirty-five informal settlements housing 26,000 inhabitants in Amadora at that time (Henriquez, 2016).

SETTLEMENT	Bairro 6 de Maio
TOTAL N. OF FAMILIES	429
SOCIAL RENT	78
PER-FAMÍLIAS	13
PAAR	35
PAAR+	5
PAAR 06/05	45
PROGRAMA RETORNO	13
TOTAL	189
%	44,06
EXCLUSION	168
%	39,16
N. OF EXISTING FAMILIES	72
%	16,78
TOTAL OF SOLVED CASES	357
EXECUTION OF PER %	83,22

Tab. 1. Execution of the PER program in Bairro 6 de Maio (source: CMA 2016).

Blue Line of Lisbon's underground system. Consequently, this has put a lot of pressure on real estate in recent years and, since 2015, the Municipality of Amadora has begun knocking down houses under the auspices of the now 23-year-old PER (Fig. 3). According to the municipality's data, 6,745 houses have been affected by the resuscitated programme (CMA, 2016). In 2000, the municipality launched programmes to diversify their response to the housing need, fundamentally changing the paradigm from building public housing to directly financing families so that they can address their needs through the private market. These four programmes are:

1. "PAAR, Aid for Rehousing", which provides 20% of the value of a newly-constructed public house, which can be spent as desired by recipients;



Fig. 2. The Bairro 6 de Maio (photo: E. Tarsi).

Fig. 3. The demolition of the settlement (photo: E. Tarsi).

2. PAAR Mais (Plus), which provides 40% of the value of a newly-constructed public house towards buying a house on the market;
 3. PAAR 06/05, specifically designed for the *Bairro 6 de Maio*, which provides 60% of the value of a newly-constructed public house (CMA, 2017) “Return”, which finances immigrants to ‘go back’ to their country of origin.
- There were more than 400 families living in *Bairro 6 de Maio* before the evictions began. As shown in Tab. 1, the

programme excluded 40% of them due to changes in their life situations, even though the city deemed their cases to be solved. Moreover, as the actual number of inhabitants and their socio-economic situations had never been updated after the start of the 23-year programme, all the people who were not living in the neighbourhood when the programme was launched were automatically excluded from rehousing. The only options offered to these families were either a fifteen-day stay in a charity shelter or two-month' worth of rent in a new house. Unfortunately, those programmes did not take into consideration the socio-economic conditions of the inhabitants, whose average income was the equivalent of 200 to 400 euros per family. Many of these people now have no housing options and are living temporarily in relative's house or on the streets⁴.

This case study shows the lack of efficient housing policies and the urgent need for new solutions to defend people's fundamental right to housing. The behaviour of the Municipality of Amadora highlights both the inadequacy of the legal approach to housing needs and the deep-rooted racism found in government institutions.

A Challenging Approach to Planning

Thanks to an in-depth analysis of "policy dissemination regarding informal settlement" in Portugal written by Ancensao (2010), since 1914, we have had two clearly defined options of either 'clearance and rehousing' or 'up-

⁴ The real situation of many inhabitants has been made public by both HABITA and many newspapers.

grade and/or rehabilitation under technical supervision'. The majority of written policies and planned interventions came from the historical approach to sanitation, which was based on the government's concern (albeit rhetorical) about the living conditions of the working class or its attempt to improve the workers' quality of life. While this approach protected the right of inhabitants to housing, it also produced such negative effects as peripheralisation and social exclusion of public housing neighbourhoods. This case study has found that these government concerns have since disappeared. There are three clear indications of this change in attitude. 1) In an interview with the daily newspaper *Público*, the President of the Municipality of Amadora claimed that it would make no sense to take a new census of the neighbourhoods because "everybody would come here to solve their housing problems" (Henriques, 2016) and that the government is not able to solve all housing issues. These statements are based on her belief that the welfare state must end and lead to the stigmatisation of people needing social and economic assistance. Since the economic crisis, discussion on social rights has been systematically attacked due to the reduced power of the government (Abreu et al., 2013). The creation of the "Return" programme (CMA, 2017) as an alternative to housing, in which the government proposes that citizens 'go back' to 'their countries', reflects current mainstream rhetoric calling for immigrants to 'go back home'. Moreover, the programme appears to ignore the fact that the majority of slum inhabitants either were born in Portugal or have lived there since the immigration waves between the 1960s and 1980s. The main rhetorical

argument used by the municipality has been legality: anyone not originally registered in the PER programme has no right to a house and “there are not enough resources for everybody”. Another rhetorical argument, which is even more dangerous, is that “we offered solutions to everyone but many of the people did not accept them” (Henriques, 2016). This approach stigmatises poor people, particularly people from African, without taking any responsibility for the failure of the applied policies.

These situations create a new framework with respect to the experiences of the past, which showed a lack of strategic approach, from an urban planning point of view, and a violent disrespect for the fundamental rights of people, from a political point of view. The relationship between urban planning and the informal city is based on a paradox. Informality, which is the suspension of government control, allows the legality argument to be altered at will, as described in Agamben’s theory on the ‘state of exception’ (Agamben, 2003). In this specific case, application of the rules, specifically of the PER programme, was done as a violent practice that did not respect fundamental rights⁵. Old people, sick people and children were left in the streets without any social support. This called attention to the Amadora case and many voices spoke out in favour of the inhabitants. Three examples of these are:

1. while considering the case of another informal settlement (Santa Filomena), an ombudsman asked the

⁵ Various interviews with inhabitants revealed that city officers pressured families into choosing a programme, though none fit their needs, and threatened to leave them with nothing. They also claimed that the city never advised them about when they were going to be evicted.

- city to stop evicting inhabitants until housing solutions could be found for them (Soares, 2015);
2. a UN reporter on human rights pointed out the need for a new strategy after her visit to Portugal (Fahra, 2017);
 3. members of the Assembly of the Republic asked the municipality to suspend evictions, with no results (Lusa, 2017). It appears that no efforts were effective in convincing the municipality to change its strategy.

The case study of Amadora is certainly an extreme example but is not the only situation in Portugal that calls for new urban planning tools and public debate on housing rights and informal settlements, as well as a new national housing policy. Since November 2016, Portugal's new government has created a parliamentary working group on housing with a mandate to create a new national housing policy: this will be a very complex and challenging task. Considering that policies and programmes regarding the phenomenon of informal settlements have produced no effective responses, this paper stresses the need to build a new framework for the planning of informal neighbourhoods in European metropolises. This new approach should be based on the following three principles.

1. Turn stigmatisation into valorisation. Informal cities have always been seen as opposed to legal ones. A *favela* is a place of chaos, unlike a formal city, which represents order (Alvito, Zaluar, 2004). Wacquant has pointed out that territorial stigma is just as limiting as racial or gender stigma (Wacquant et al., 2014), as is fuelled by the media and dominant ideology, along with discriminatory and aggressive attitudes of the police or institutions. Inhabitants of informal settlements experience

this stigma in concrete terms in their daily life. However, this dichotomy could be transformed into a positive value. Differences could be a strong component of the identity of an informal area. What has been considered a stigma, reinforced by ethnic concentration, could be a step forward in the construction of multicultural cities that valorise differences instead of denying them.

2. Defend the rights of a specific community — which is both settled and socially and economically organised in a specific place — to remain in that same place. Both relocation and peripheralisation caused by public housing programmes must be avoided. This would also prevent regional segregation, i.e., the tendency to concentrate disadvantaged social classes into the same area of a metropolitan city (Villaça, 2001).
3. Respect cultural differences in the use of urban space. As opposed to the rest of the city, the informal city reduces the barriers between public and private spaces, which are usually completely different from those of the planned city. Private spaces remain permeable to the outside, even if they are defended by doors and gates. Domestic spaces, which are often quite small, have multiple uses. Public spaces, as they are designed for formal cities, do not exist. However, there are areas that the community defends from privatisation that are used for public purposes. Finally, the community's social life takes place on the streets that have been freed from vehicle traffic.

Multiplicity and complexity have always been the main characteristics of urban spaces in European cities. Public housing programs of the past, inspired by the rational-

ist movement, denied this complexity and created spaces without identity. It is possible to change this paradigm and invest in rehabilitation programmes that both respect differences and help build democratic, multicultural cities and societies.

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