

74-14 SAAL and the Architecture# International Colloquium

SAAL (*Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local*), Local Ambulatory Support Service, was a program for the construction of houses in poor neighborhoods. It followed the revolutionary process which, in 1974, brought to an end half a century of dictatorship in Portugal. Although properly contextualized in a very specific historical process, nowadays it is still a tool to think, to question and to debate the issues and challenges of housing as well as its ineludible proximity to architecture.

To discuss SAAL, as an historical model, in light of contemporary circumstances, was the goal of the international colloquium *74-14 SAAL and the Architecture #* which took place in the University of Coimbra, between November 14th and November 16th 2014.

Looking back to the recent past, especially to the first three quarters of the 20th century, it is impossible to study the produced architecture without referring to its often direct relation to the Welfare State. In 1974-76, however, the country was convulsing, it was a time when the dictatorship's old social institutions were undergoing a process of substitution and renewal. That was when SAAL appeared as a decentralized service eager to reduce bureaucracy, as an ephemeral process that enabled the tripartite relationship between the state, the poor residents and the architects. SAAL built houses, SAAL accom-

plished serious and conscious reflection on the city and its planning processes, and SAAL accomplished architecture.

That reflection was spread over four converging and indivisible sets of ideas, separated solely by operative reasons, which constitute attributes that qualify *Architecture*, the word displayed in the title.

Therefore, the first one of these sections – *Portuguese* – focused on the importance of SAAL for the future and for the present of Portuguese Architecture. Undertaken in isolation, just as almost every cultural activity, the architectonic production in Portugal became international with SAAL, and at particular moments even gained the attention of European architectural criticism. It was from SAAL onwards that Portuguese architectural activity started to be known worldwide, although it never ceased to have only a residual importance in the political and administrative framework of local governance.

The second section – *Autonomous* – regarded the complex web of relations between architecture and commission, or, in this case, between architecture and power. Given the intertwined interaction between characters — contractor, architect, user — SAAL is an ideal opportunity to reflect on the maintenance of the idea of an autonomy of architecture. The specific matter of architec-

ture — methodological tradition included — resisted even when the political and economic circumstance involving the commission was drastically constrained by the immediate *functionality*. The urge to build new houses for the poorest people, in SAAL's case, or the current obsessive need to profit often called sustainability, were both evaluated in parallel during the course of the Colloquium.

The third section — *Inclusive* — and the fourth section — *Transrelational* — concerned the way SAAL became an essential study subject, regarding both the interaction with the residents, nowadays known as the participatory process, and regarding the dialog with other areas of knowledge, particularly with the social sciences.

The Colloquium was attended by about 70 people, and the main speeches were given by Alexandre Alves Costa (*Universidade do Porto*), Daniele Vitale (*Politecnico di Milano*), James Holston (*University of California Berkeley*), João Arriscado Nunes (*Centro de Estudos Sociais*), José António Bandeirinha (*Centro de Estudos Sociais, Universidade de Coimbra*), Jorge Figueira (*Centro de Estudos Sociais, Universidade de Coimbra*) and Nelson Mota (*Technische Universiteit Delft*). ■

José Bandeirinha
docomomo International member

Notes

Location Departamento de Arquitectura, Colégio das Artes, Coimbra, Portugal.

Dates 14-16 November 2014.

Organization CES, DARQ.FCTUC.

Partners Museu de Serralves, Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril, **docomomo** International.



01 Opening session. © *74-14 SAAL and the Architecture#*, 2014.

02 Álvaro Siza, *Operação SAAL de S. Vitor, Bloco da Senhora das Dores, Porto 1974-1975*. © Alexandre Alves Costa. Acervo do Arquitecto Alexandre Alves Costa — Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril da Universidade de Coimbra.