

Nova Oeiras – the Plan for the Residential Neighbourhood

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The so-called "Plano de Urbanização da Unidade Residencial de Nova Oeiras", (Urban Plan for the Nova Oeiras Residential Unit) was designed and supervised by architect Luís Cristino da Silva (1896-1976) for about twenty years, from 1953 to 1974 – together with architect Pedro Falcão e Cunha (in architecture) and architect Gonçalo Ribeiro Telles (1922-2020) in landscaping terms..

Unlike the plan in Areeiro, also by Cristino, Nova Oeiras is one of the least known urban residential plans in Portugal, yet one of the most successful and qualified, within the spirit of the Athens Charter (1933) a modern post-war architecture magazine. Nova Oeiras is also unique in having in its design concepts of the Garden Cities (1898, by Ebenezer Howard), and of the Neighbourhood Unit (by Clarence Perry, in the 1920s).

Nova Oeiras is as impressive as its Lisbon counterpart, Olivais-Norte Plan (from 1955, by Pedro Falcão e Cunha), and includes other dimensions and complexities, such as the extensive one-family houses. The definition of a community centre (now "trio Comercial") and a wide structured surrounding area - besides the unifying character provided by a landscaping plan with balanced and integrated green areas. Nova Oeiras Plan therefore has the three-fold value of an innovative landscape design, modern urban plan and architecture that includes more traditional typologies (the so-called "Português Suave" architecture in some of the houses) and more contemporary ones (in the blocks and towers, as well as in other houses), which is a consequence of it having been build along three decades, from about 1955 to 1971.

Cristino, on commenting modern urban planning at the time, stated that: "A Carta de Atenas chegou à conclusão de que se devia viver conjugando as necessidades funcionais com a vida salutar do campo. De maneira que trazendo o campo à cidade,

através de amplos espaços verdes onde se vivia em blocos, grandes e espaçosos, sempre dando uma proporção de ar, de higiene, para que se pudesse viver ao sol, que Corbusier tanto amava." (LCS, interview, 1971, to the magazine *Arquitectura*).

AS far as we know (which was confirmed by Gonçalo Ribeiro Telles, in *Luís Cristino da Silva...*, exhibition catalogue, FCG, 1998), Cristino "signed" the Nova Oeiras plan, gave it his name, will have intervened in its design and supervision; but its "concept" was that of Pedro Falcão e Cunha (a young architect and Cristino's former student), who was called on by his master to, together with Ribeiro Telles, provide a service to a more enlightened customer who accepted building an obviously modern suburban area, without the need for compromising with past concepts in terms of design, construction, traditional urban planning or regional architecture design. We must praise Cristino for his vision to call on the right people for the job.

Nova Oeiras, whose low population density (today we could classify it as "luxury"); ample green spaces; ingenious and intelligent grading between the "garden-city" model of houses (rather extensive) and "large scale" main towers; its functional "neighbourhood unit" type of organization evidenced in its "shopping centre" at its core, with its side by side semidetached blocks, towers and equipment, shows Cristino da Silva's visionary perspective.

The pre-plan of the residential set (that of Quinta Grande in Oeiras, owned by Sociedade Nova Oeiras Limitada), whose design was by Cristino da Silva and Falcão e Cunha, was implemented in 1953 (as "Plan for the Nova Oeiras Residential Unit") and approved in 1954; construction apparently was mostly carried out between 1958 and 1969. There is knowledge of a "Localization Plan" from 1960 which is very similar to that in the pre-plan, with the exception of the shopping centre's more regular design and a different systems of footpaths (the final design is from 1961). The plan was changed/added to in 1962 (the year when the "Plan for the Nova Oeiras Residential Unit" is also known), 3 new towers are included, as well as a 20-storey tower, which is never built (1968-74). The plan suffered minor changes in the following decades, which did not change its essence (a tennis club in the 1980s, some green areas outside the landscaping project by Telles in the 1990s).

Nova Oeiras has also multi-family housing projects. The projects for the blocks date from 1958 to 1961 and were possibly designed by Falcão e Cunha. However, the three-fold design of the six ten-storey towers (whose author is not identified) constructed in the 1960s, remind us of the design of Areeiro tower, whose shape is also triangular. Furthermore, if we look at their grids, in along vertical line, the back stairways and the bright internal main stairwell "bomb", these all remind us of the Areeiro tower. I should also mention that, in the interview I made as a student to Cristino in 1972, there was a model of that tower placed in evidence in his studio, in Avenida Pedro Álvares Cabral in Lisbon. Cristino will return to the ~concept of the tower in Nova Oeiras, when he makes a series of sketches for implementing the referred "monumental twenty-storey tower" at the northwestern top of the residential unit. Could this evidence his wish to finally take possession, through an impressive and monumental design, of a project that he never felt as his own?

Nova Oeiras Plan included an excellent landscaping project (by Gonçalo Ribeiro Telles and Edgar Sampaio Fontes), with many trees and bushes typical of Mediterranean and

southern European flora, which included innovative “wind studies” and detailed “mixed borders” - whose result is still visible today in a large part of the area. Nova Oeiras also endured continuous changes in detailing (which never placed the overall design at risk) and recent complements (some of which of not very high quality). Nova Oeiras is an experimentalist, innovative, strong, and solid work from which there is much to learn.



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