

ABSTRACT

The research originates from the detected contradictions in two specific experiences, from both the professional and researcher field, focused in urban restructuring operations in locations with a character of centrality recently acquired. The first of these experiences lies in the solutions presented from the architecture standpoint to the public debate opposite to the City of Valencia Plan for the district of El Cabanyal. Proposals that, despite the desire to realize an intervention from the territory and for the inhabitant, proved impervious to the existence of urban poverty of some gypsy families that did not seem to be considered part of the community. The second experience is the SAAL Operations case, led in the revolutionary Portugal between 1974 and 1976 and with the aim to intervene in the degraded habitat of some of its central neighbourhoods. While this program originally focused on issues related to the rights to the city, nowadays we are witnessing a situation where reflecting on urban poverty has been replaced by the attention given to the architectural projects emerged from the program.

The same problem is observed in the two situations: the architectural project is able to read the urban space in a physical key, even being aware of issues related to cultural identity but it does not seem to be sensitive to the process of increasing inequality. It reduces its contribution to mere accommodation, shielding itself in its discipline efficiency and legitimizing its action through the citizen involvement that was behind both

situations: the revolution of April 25th in the Portuguese case and the citizen resistance to the City Council since 1998 in the case of Valencia. In both cases, through one or another type of mechanisms, there was a change in the way power relationships lead to the production of urban space. However, considering the influence of the various correlations of forces in the process of shaping the territory is an opportunity that allows us to study these phenomena of urban restructuring in a different way, and gives rise to three questions, that articulate the thesis.

- What elements of the territory are likely to be used in an intervention strategy aimed at reducing social inequalities?
- What role do population play in the formulation and development of these processes?
- What are the potentials and resistances found in the field of the architectural project to ensure the performance of these objectives?

To answer these questions the thesis presents a specific case study: the development of the city of Porto over a wide time period, between 1864 and 2014. This study is based on the conviction that a different reading of the SAAL process, not so much developed in continuity with the foundations of modern architecture but as a rupture with the power relations

in the production of urban space, could lead to different understandings of the disciplinary action. The objective of this research is to relate the different formalization of urban space, specifically from housing policies aimed at the most vulnerable populations, with different correlation of forces between populations, technical and formal organs of power in shaping the territory. This study will be linked with two cases: the experience of remodelling districts aimed at ending the slums in Madrid, between 1979 and 1989, and the mentioned case of El Cabanyal, that oppose to the latent urban restructuring operations in the east territory of the city of Porto and give continuity to consolidated dynamics disputes over urban space. Thus, the thesis is divided into two sections:

- A first section to move from understanding the city as manufacture to infrastructure. This based on the Marxist perspective, i.e. opposing the interests of capital to the needs of the population, with mediation of a State that instrumentalizes housing policy. It is a first division of power, where in the first phase (until the revolution of April 25th) the power lies in the economic and political elites and, in a second, it is conditioned by a revolutionary and collective action of the poorly housed in alliance with the movement of the armed forces. This section will assume the opposition to the characteristic housing policies of the Estado Novo with the Copernican change that will mean the SAAL program.

- A second section that accepts the influence of the production system, but understands that the dispute over the urban space occurs in a field where the social partners are freer than what was indicated in the first section. This section will proceed to an understanding of power not as centralized anywhere, but circulating through networks and understanding, therefore, that the fuses but also resistances to change are found in the particular manner in which the various social frameworks are articulated. This second section will abandon the analysis focused on bibliographic emptiness to use the participatory methodology aimed at formulating the problem in networks going beyond simple generic and dominant use of public discourse.

The findings suggest that it is less interesting to alter the models produced than to act on the structures of production of urban space. After demonstrating that power relations are ubiquitous and affect the same formulation of academic knowledge, the idea that it is not so important that architecture is rooted in the physical context as to the laws that deter-

mine the evolution of the urban system, is established (which also includes, as a specific aspect, the adjustment to the forms of occupation of space). To prevent the development of a self-referential architecture and hence its exploitation by the big capital, it is important that between the territory and the architecture does not stand the usual theory, but the social structures that can assume different production realities. For this to happen, we must admit that on many occasions the need to refer the dominant academic knowledge is not so much that this nurtures the social transformation required, but rather nourishes the whole internal and external exchanges necessary for professional development .

One end that will justify that part of the necessary social change should be through the creation of new formulas and production structures, new ideas that can undo the connivance of the dominant share of architecture with the dominant ideas that reinforce the process of social inequality that we would like to reduce.