

Dear authors,

It is with great pleasure that we announce the release of *HPA Fernando Távora at 100*. The publication of this issue has taken longer than expected because the participation has been numerous and generous. Our hope is that this issue will make an original contribution to the many researches that are being carried out on the work of an architect who emerges as decisive in the framework of post World War II architecture. We thank you for your contribution and look forward to receiving your comments. Finally, we would like to inform you that we also intend to produce a printed version of which we will keep you informed.

Kind regards

José António Bandeirinha
Antonio Esposito
Giovanni Leoni
with Giovanni Bellucci

Caras/os autoras/es,

é com grande prazer que anunciamos o lançamento da *HPA Fernando Távora aos 100 anos*. A preparação deste número demorou mais tempo do que o previsto, porque a participação foi numerosa e generosa. Esperamos que este número traga um contributo original para as muitas investigações que estão a ser realizadas sobre a figura de um arquiteto que surge como decisivo, no quadro da arquitetura do pós-Segunda Guerra Mundial. Agradecemos o vosso contributo e aguardamos com expectativa os vossos comentários. Por fim, informamos que também tencionamos produzir uma versão impressa, acerca da qual vos manteremos informados.

Com os melhores cumprimentos,

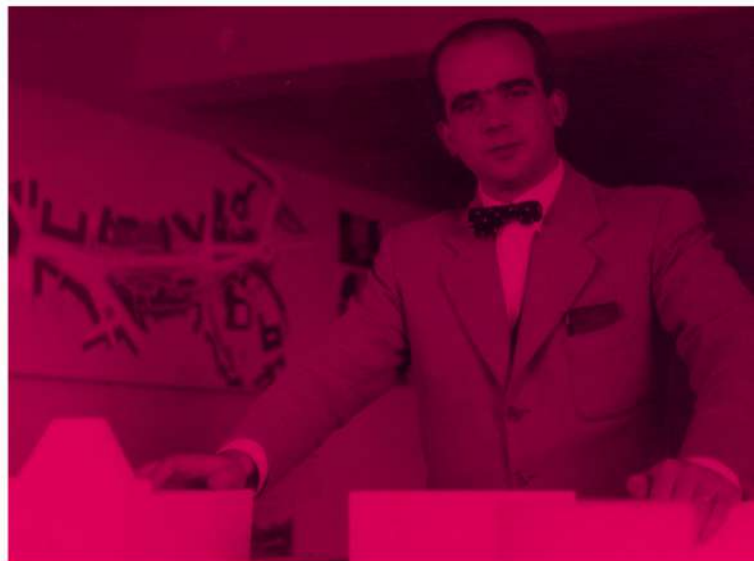
José António Bandeirinha
Antonio Esposito
Giovanni Leoni
with Giovanni Bellucci

Care/i autrici/ori,

è con grande piacere che vi annunciamo l'uscita di *HPA Fernando Távora at 100*. La preparazione del numero ha richiesto più tempo di quanto previsto perché la partecipazione è stata numerosa e generosa. La nostra speranza è che questo numero possa portare un contributo originale nel campo delle molte ricerche che si stanno svolgendo sulla figura di un architetto che emerge come decisivo nel quadro della architettura del secondo dopoguerra. Vi ringraziamo del vostro contributo e saremo lieti di raccogliere i vostri commenti. Vi comunichiamo infine che è nostra intenzione produrre anche una versione a stampa di cui vi terremo informati.

Un caro saluto,

José António Bandeirinha
Antonio Esposito
Giovanni Leoni
con Giovanni Bellucci



HPA
Histories of Postwar Architecture

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vol.V

1923-2023 **Fernando Távora at 100**

edited by

José António Bandeirinha
Antonio Esposito
Giovanni Leoni
with Giovanni Bellucci

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The curators would like to thank Bernardo and the entire Tavora family for their kind cooperation and usual willingness to support any initiative that enhances their father's work.

Special thanks to Fundação Marques de Silva, Arquivo Fernando Tavora for allowing the publication of the architect's drawings and graphic materials, marked FIMS/AFT.

Where not otherwise specified, Tavora's drawings have been digitized by Giovanni Leoni and Antonio Esposito in the studio of architect Fernando Tavora's studio, with his authorization, during the researches aimed at the publication of the monograph published by Electa in 2005. At present, these reproductions continue to be used in order to publish further studies on the work and figure of architect Fernando Tavora, with the consent of his heirs.

Cover picture: Fernando Tavora at the atelier of the Rua Duque de Loulé, Porto 1958 (FIMS/AFT, Ref.3.4050).
 In credit page: Fernando Tavora, Vila da Feira Market (photo by Alessandra Chermello).

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1923-2023 Fernando Távora at 100

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Avenida da Ponte: Knowledge of the City as a Tool for the Design of an Unresolved Place

Public Space, Urban Design, Fernando Távora, Álvaro Siza, Avenida da Ponte

/Abstract

The article analyses the two unrealised projects – by Fernando Távora in 1955 and Álvaro Siza in 2000 – for Avenida da Ponte in Porto and the public space project underlying the construction of the Casa dos 24. This analysis has made it possible to define how the historical and morphological knowledge of the city becomes an operative and compositional instrument of the project and at the same time is not a presupposition of immobilism, revealing the potential for a process of transformation of urban places updated to today's needs.

This article is excerpted from the writer's doctoral thesis: A. Fanfoni, *La persistenza del fenomeno dell'architettura nella "Città delle Costanti. L'attualità della lezione di Fernando Távora per la definizione di temi e strumenti utili al progetto degli spazi pubblici e dei luoghi urbani verso le linee guida di Smart City in Emilia-Romagna*, Università di Parma: Parma 2023 (Tutor Dario Costi, co-tutor Giovanni Leoni).

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The main purpose of this article is to derive some methodological indications of intervention for the transformation of city places from the analysis of three projects that used knowledge as an operational tool. The characters of historical morphology become, in the three cases, design references and simultaneously reveal the potential for triggering a process of urban modification adapted to the needs of today. Without resorting to historicism, the reinterpretation of urban facts shapes an idea of the city's progress based on the conscious actualisation of the past, certifying the possibility that historical knowledge is not, in architecture, a presupposition of immobilism but a possibility of actualisation through design. Three proposals for the transformation of the area of *Avenida da Ponte* and *Terreiro da Sé* in Porto will be analysed in detail. They are part of a story that reflects the international architectural debate on the design of places within the consolidated city throughout the 20th century. To understand the importance (and effectiveness) of the three proposals, it is necessary to reconstruct briefly the events that involved this portion of the city, placing each event in its cultural, political, and social context. This exercise will provide an overall reading of the debate and will help to identify the reasons that led to the formulation of subsequent proposals and the non-realisation of most of them.

Short Critical Review of Design Events from 1880 to 1955

Towards the end of the 20th century in Oporto, following a process of industrialisation that was affecting the entire region, it became necessary to build a new bridge to connect the city with the neighbouring Vila Nova de Gaia both at the lower elevation of the *Ribeira* and at the upper elevation of the historical core known as *Morro da Sé*, contained within the now disappeared *Murallha Primitiva*. Commercial traffic was then to be facilitated by the construction of a new axis crossing the existing medieval fabric, directly connecting the civic core of the city, the Praça da Liberdade and the Praça da Trindade, with the new D. Luis I. The area, strongly influenced by the presence of the Sé (the Cathedral), was characterised by a dense mesh of small public spaces that had social, ritual, liturgical and civic values distributed between singular buildings, such as the seat of the Municipal Council, and between common residential buildings. Then, in 1736, on the side front of the Cathedral, the *Galilè da Sé* (Cathedral Nartece) was built by the architect Nicolau Nasoni, i.e. a porticoed space in Baroque style that served as an entrance hall to the side door facing the public space located between the Cathedral and the *Murallha Primitiva* wall [Fig. 1].

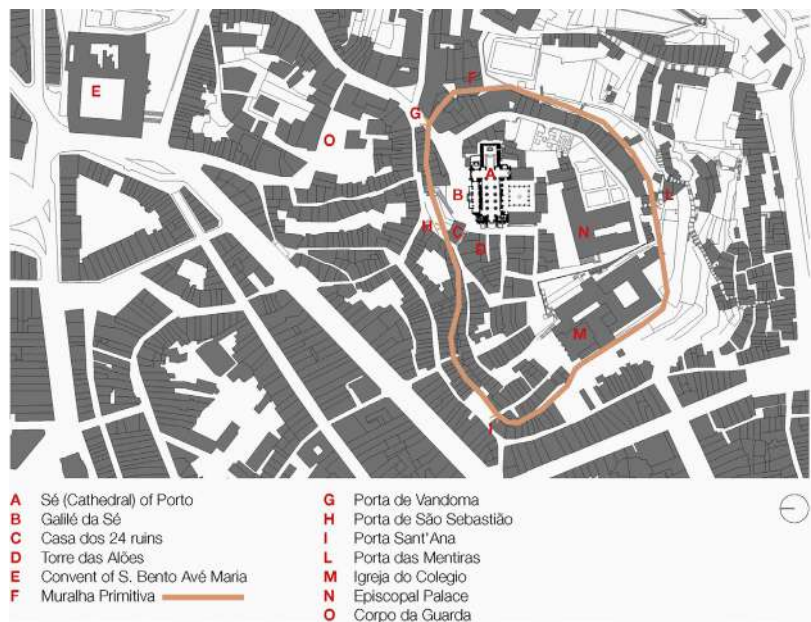
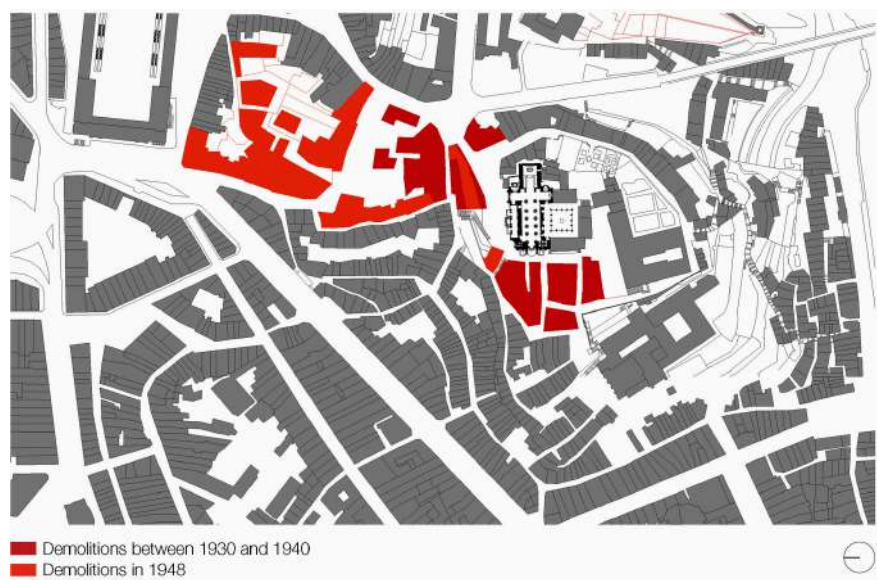


Fig. 1
Plan of the *Alto da Sé* area of the city of Porto before demolition in 1880.

The 20th century in Portugal was marked by a series of political and social transformations that also had repercussions on urban planning thinking. The opening of large avenues such as Avenida dos Aliados and Rua do Almada, in the wake of Cerdà and Haussmann's experience, responded to the need for salubrity, monumentality and efficient connections¹. The area earmarked for the construction of the new avenue was then affected by Gaudêncio Pacheco's 1913 and Barry Parker's 1915 projects, which showed an attitude insensitive to the city's real problems by proposing the design of a fabric formed by wide meshes in order to stitch together the centre of the historic city, which would suffer from a certain atrophy², with the expanding outer city. 1926 was the year that marked the end of democratic government for Portugal with the establishment of a military dictatorship that would end in 1933 to make way for a one-party regime, the *Estado Novo*, that would last until the mid-1970s. The regime, which looked to the Italian and German dictatorial experience, also promoted policies of glorification of the nation's origins in the field of town planning, defending the scenic prominence of the great national monuments and supporting development plans that were supposed to emphasise power through the theatricalization of urban scenarios, to the detriment of existing conditions. With Ezequiel Campos's proposal of 1932, the possibility of freeing the Sé, the Cathedral, of its neighbouring built fabric emerged for the first time in a clear way, in order to create a condition of monumentality with the Cathedral hill and the Baroque narthex as a perspective background. On the basis of these indications, in order to facilitate access to the D. Luis Bridge and with the aim of freeing the monument of the constructions placed on the main front, from 1930 until 1948 the *Direcção Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacional* (General Direction of National Buildings and Monuments) carried out a series of demolitions that did not follow a specific programme and that would strongly mark the appearance of these places³ [Fig. 2].



2

In 1934, Duarte Pacheco, Minister of Public Works and Communications, promoted the General Urbanisation Plans that envisaged major modifications to the fabric of the main urban areas for the implementation of which, also due

1 Teresa Pires de Carvalho, Carlos Guimarães, Mario Jorge Barroca, *Bairro da Sé – contributo para a sua caracterização Histórica* (Porto: Câmara Municipal do Porto, 1996), 80.

2 Manuel Luis Real, Maria Helena Gil Braga, *A Ponte e a Avenida – Contradições Urbanísticas no Centro Histórico do Porto* (Porto: Câmara Municipal do Porto, 2001), 73.

3 Pires de Carvalho, Guimarães, Barroca, *Bairro da Sé – contributo para a sua caracterização Histórica*, 80.

Fig. 2
Demolitions took place in the Alto da Sé area between 1930 and 1948.

to the lack of internal specialists, foreign designers who shared the ideological proximity to the regime's ideas were invited. It was for this reason that in 1938 Marcello Piacentini was invited to draw up a Plan for the new *Avenida da Ponte* and the Cathedral area. *Known and admired for his works in Brescia, he was called upon to transform the central area of the City of Porto into a monumental field. In Brescia he demolished part of the mediaeval historic centre to make room for the new Piazza della Vittoria (1932), and for the grandiose intervention of the Città Universitaria in Rome (1935)⁴ was called upon to transform the central area of the City of Porto into a monumental field. He drew up different proposals, some that partially respected the existing design by creating a perspective cone in the direction of the *Galilé da Sé* and others that distorted more the established layout⁵. The last proposal, or 'alternative proposal', envisaged the gutting of the building curtains located on the axis perpendicular to *Galilé* for the formation of a monumental avenue that would start from the Station of São Bento and end in an open space framing the Cathedral as its terminal part. Marcello Piacentini was succeeded by Giovanni Muzio, whom the Porto Municipal Council invited to collaborate in the elaboration of the Master Plan in February 1940. He also studied the problem of the *Avenida da Ponte* through the elaboration of various proposals that were united by the identification of a sequence of squares and monumental perspectives of the Cathedral inspired by a classical order of proportions and a rigorous purity of form and composition. Muzio's proposals echo some of Piacentini's intuitions and can be read as the result of an evolutionary process. The common traits are the use of the viaduct as a connecting element between the *Clerigos* elevation and the *Terreiro da Sé elevation*, the use of direct visual connections with the Cathedral and the establishment of a small area at the exit of the bridge's upper deck that regulated and oriented the various planned routes.⁶

The end of the Second World War marked the end of the season of celebratory monumentalism that had characterised the proposals of the 1930s and 1940s. In 1948 the second demolition of the Guardhouse lots took place, completing the actions carried out at the end of the 1930s. This time the action was even more complete, extending from the Cathedral to the Station, marking the definitive passage of the *Avenida da Ponte* at the rectilinear axis that connects São Bento to the D. Luis Bridge. This decision was endorsed by a series of internal proposals that followed one another between 1945 and 1955, which, however, did not substantially clarify the form and role of the public and private space that was created on either side of the avenue, in the portions freed from the Gothic lots. The fracture created by the opening of *Avenida da Ponte* without a specific project left unresolved many questions that had been addressed, albeit

⁴ Giorgio Ciucci, Simonetta Lux, Franco Purini, *Marcello Piacentini architetto 1881-1960* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2012).

⁵ Orlando Manuel Fernandes Lopes de Sá, *Marcello Piacentini, Giovanni Muzio: a avenida da ponte e o contributo italiano num laboratório de experimentação urbanística*, Integrated Master Thesis in Architecture, Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto, Supervisor: Prof. Rui Tavares, 2007, 81.

⁶ Fernandes Lopes de Sá, *Marcello Piacentini, Giovanni Muzio*, 101.

with a different attitude, before the war and that would be taken up again with different reasons, conditions, and stimuli from the 1950s until today. Architect Rogério de Azevedo, a Porto city councillor in 1955, expressed his dissatisfaction with the situation created, considering the avenue thus opened “a real work against the nature of cities”.⁷

Fernando Távora’s 1955 Project

After the end of World War II, the functional city of distances and empty spaces imagined in the Athens Charter and pre-war CIAMs became a model criticised for the scant attention paid to the civic places of public life. The new trend towards changing guiding principles is spearheaded by a leading figure on the international scene such as Josep Lluís Sert who, with a highly critical opening speech, inaugurated CIAM VIII in Hoddesdon in 1951. This speech addressed a multiplicity of themes that would later become the basis for confrontation in the following years. Sert proposed to bring people closer together within cities by creating the conditions for encounters through a network of city ‘hearts’, to think of architecture and town planning as two declinations of the same discipline, separating the routes of people and cars by freeing historic centres from the presence of the latter, and recovering the characteristics of the public spaces of the historic city⁸. Fernando Távora was one of the main supporters of this new disciplinary line debated within the International Congresses and is perfectly aligned with the idea that history should be used as an effective tool to contextualise and solve the problem of the project and no longer as an icon to be monumentalised. The Avenida da Ponte project tells us a new idea of modernity that is applied to contexts as a creative act rooted in its own space-time dialoguing with the surrounding conditions. If his predecessors saw an opportunity to build a modern and organised city on the rubble of the previous one, Távora rediscovers the urban value and denounces an aggression that requires a solution respecting the past: “Turning to the past is a necessary intellectual act for the construction of the future. In Porto, this attitude emerged as a necessity”.⁹ In general, those years represented for Fernando Távora the moment of formation on more precisely urbanistic issues, at the scale of the city or the territory, where the interest in the “basic phenomena of architecture”¹⁰ is linked to the context, be it urban or rural, and the attention to the specificity of the environments in which the building is inserted becomes a constant that will mark the architect’s work throughout his life.

Fernando Távora’s can be defined as the first study that, with a certain sensitivity, attempts to restore the urban form that has changed because of the

7 Luis Real, Gil Braga, *A Ponte e a Avenida - Contradições Urbanísticas no Centro Histórico do Porto*, 50.

8 Josep Lluís Sert, “Centros para la vida de la comunidad,” in *El Corazón de la Ciudad. Por una vida más humana de la comunidad, CIAM 8, Hoddesdon, 1951*, eds. Ernesto Nathan Rogers, Josep Lluís Sert, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt (Barcelona: Hoepli, 1955).

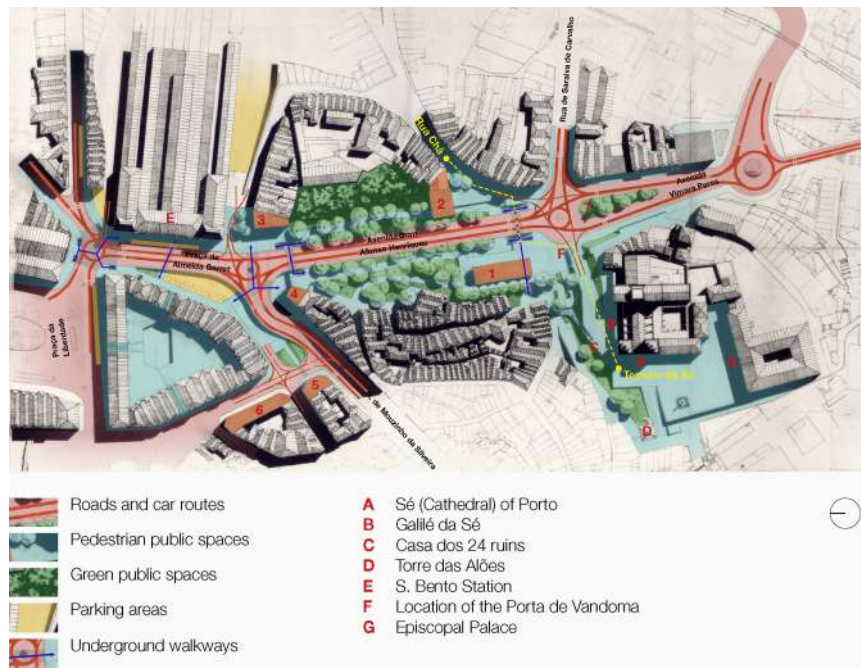
9 Fernando Távora, “La mia opera,” in Antonio Esposito, Giovanni Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa* (Milan: Electa, 2005), 11.

10 Associação dos Arquitectos portugueses, *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal. Volume 1*, 1980.

demolitions. In addition to this aspect, it is possible to detect in the proposal a decisive desire to question the tendency towards monumentalisation of the historic centre of Porto, approved and desired by the regime's government, through an understanding of the city and its historic form. If the previous projects were based on the construction of a new image of the city, the Távora project comes to terms for the first time with the restitution of the identity of places. Even though the project includes a strong infrastructural component, dictated by the incontrovertible need for a new and efficient road connection, the solution demonstrates an extraordinary attention to human routes, which are conceived with the same value as car routes. The author himself recounts the reasons that led to his commission:

[...] The mayor wanted to give the area a strong development, so despite the absence of a plan he had already demolished some buildings. My project had been preceded by many others, which were gradually rejected, some of which cut the Avenida in half and assumed the construction of incredible, hideous volumes. My plan assumed contained building quantities and, unlike Muzio and Piacentini, did not alter the road axis in the direction of Aliados.¹¹

These few words are of great relevance to introduce one of the main themes of the project, namely the understanding of the space freed by the demolitions. In the project the emphasis is placed on the perception of emptiness. The presence of a new structural axis that is totally unrelated to the medieval configuration suggests the use of a language poor in architectural elements, useful for emphasising the trace of the wound, but not lacking in density, which is recreated with a dense green design on both sides of the avenue [Fig. 3].



From the analysis of the documents, it is possible to think how the settlement proposal starts from the organisation of traffic flows and the desire to separate the latter, in a rather clear-cut manner, from those destined for human circulation, minimising the effects of an infrastructural intervention made necessary by the design assignment. By taking advantage of a natural depression in the terrain at the intersection of Praça de Almeida Garret, Rua de Mouzinho de Silveira and Avenida Dom Afonso Henriques, the architect inserted a

¹¹ The interview conducted by Giovanni Leoni and Antonio Esposito can be found in Fernando Távora, Álvaro Siza, "Lavorare 'insieme': conversazione tra Álvaro Siza and Fernando Távora sui progetti per Avenida da Ponte", *Casabella*, no. 700 (May 2002): 54-57.

Fig. 3 Analysis of the overall plan of Fernando Távora's project for the redevelopment of Avenida da Ponte, 1955. Graphic reworking by the author of the original plans preserved at Fundação Marques da Silva – FIMS/AFT.

three-armed roundabout suspended over a car viaduct. This allows pedestrians to pass through the trench, thus protectively linking the two sides of the avenue with the São Bento train station and the latter with Praça da Liberdade towards Avenida dos Aliados and with the intriguing network of streets to the west of the avenue. At the level of Avenida Dom Afonso Henriques the viaduct disappears, and the carriageway remains flush with the pedestrian paths on the outer sides and protected by wide green sleeves. At the height of the junction with Rua de Saravia de Carvalho the roadway widens¹² to accommodate a third roundabout that directs traffic eastwards or towards the Dom Luis Bridge deck. The innovation of the proposal, compared to the previous and many future ones, lies in confining the car routes perceptively outside the paths leading to the Cathedral hill, recovering the complexity and tension of the streets of the demolished medieval city through passages, stairways, bottlenecks, and paths articulated along the steep topography. A decisive role in this approximation is played by the trees that partly conceal the view of the Cathedral, partly protect human spaces from those of cars and recreate that condition of density typical of the 'urban forest' as a memory of the sequence of Gothic lots. This proposal is the only one that envisages the underground permeability of the pedestrian paths and still appears to be a desirable solution for this portion of the city. Another element of primary importance in the proposal is the desire to restore the layout of the historic city. The continuity of the city is a characterising element of Fernando Távora's architectural production, and this project bears witness to this. The succession of paths leading to the *Terreiro da Sé* culminates in two public spaces located on both sides of the Avenida. The first is on the eastern side as the end of the Rua Chã, the second on the western side, under the *Galilé da Sé*. In the Middle Ages, the Rua Chã was the route leading to the entrance of the walled city, passing under the arch of the ancient Porta da Vandoma, one of the gates of the primitive wall, demolished in the mid-19th century. This was undoubtedly a resting place on the approach to the Cathedral taken up by Távora thanks to the inclusion of a new building (2) that organises the space of an open space, occupied in the centre by a fountain, framing the side view of the Cathedral. Continuing the sequence, through a play of slopes, it is possible to pass in a trench below *Avenida da Ponte* and emerge in a new esplanade located on the slopes of the northern parvis of the Sé, under the Baroque narthex. Here is the only building proposed by Távora that does not serve to connect truncated portions of existing lots (1) and that in the project would have housed a special function: the Museum of the City. "For the first time in the history of Porto I defined the location of a building intended as a museum of the city's history, a requirement that now reappears in Siza's last plan".¹³

The sequence ends with the access plan to the *Galilé* which, unlike almost all past and future proposals, takes place diagonally, as in the conformation of the

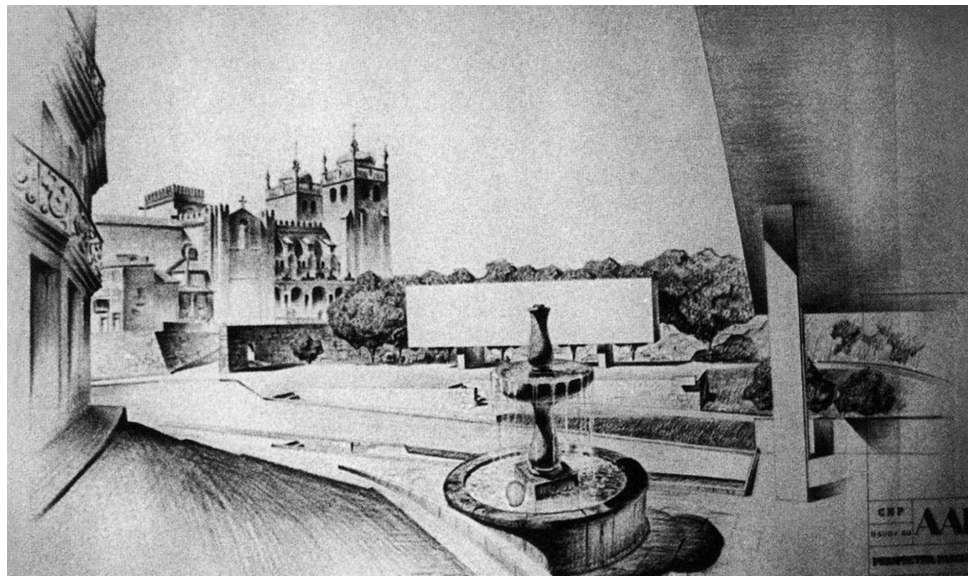
¹² The cross-section of the avenue is approximately 15 m and used to accommodate two lanes in each direction.

¹³ Távora, Siza, "Lavorare 'insieme': conversazione tra Álvaro Siza and Fernando Távora sui progetti per Avenida da Ponte".

original city. Indeed, reaching the Galilé from the front would have been a mystification of Nasoni's idea, who conceived it to occupy a cosy, lateral access to the sacred space, which was not meant to be seen from the front. This conviction, reflecting an extraordinary understanding of urban dynamics, will also be taken up in the project of Álvaro Siza and in that of the Casa dos 24 and will be one of the elements characterising the future debate. Unlike the projects presented in previous decades, Távora avoids overbuilding:

In my feasibility project, later altered by the Camara Municipal designer Robert Auzulle, the connection of the lower area to the archaeological zone was made through a sleeve of vegetation, thus eliminating the marginal buildings that previous solutions envisaged. I always felt that the green solution I had envisaged was a little weak to link the two poles, but I fought hard to avoid the construction of marginal strips of buildings that did not constitute a setting and did not integrate with the avenue.¹⁴

In fact, the project envisages only six new buildings, most of them redefining fronts truncated by demolitions facing the public space. Two of these (5 and 6) redesign the Rua Trindade Coelho frontage, which the project plans to extend to facilitate the connection with Rua dos Clerigos and the northern centre of the



city. Another building (4) reshapes the edge between Rua do Corpo da Guarda and Rua Mouzinho de Silvera due to the changed conditions of the public space located in front, articulating the two streets to the new situation. Two other grafts (2 and 3) conclude the sections of the Corpo da Guarda lot facing *Avenida da Ponte*, redefining the spatial relations with it, with the escarpment and with the pedestrian paths. In particular, the building that completes Rua Chã, suspended on pilotis, is conceived as entirely permeable on the ground and on the first floors, redefining the perception of the public space, circumscribing a protected point of lateral observation of the Cathedral and also allowing the passage of pedestrian paths [Fig. 4]. This building together with the one located below the narthex widening (1) were to house cultural functions as the Municipality intended, at the time, to create facilities for the Civic Museum and the City History Office. The communication between these two new bodies would have been ensured by a tunnel accessible from both sides of the Avenida that would have

¹⁴ Nuno Portas, "Arquitecto Fernando Távora: 12 anos de actividade profissional", *Arquitectura*, no. 71 (July 1961): 24.

Fig. 4
Side view of the relationship between the building proposed as the City Museum and the Cathedral, 1955 (FIMS/AFT).

continued to connect the new areas with Rua São Sebastião under the walls. It is interesting to analyse the relationship that would have been created between the *Galilè da Sé* and the new architecture located on its slopes and the dialectic between the different languages inserted in the context at distinct moments in history. It is useful to emphasise that the architecture proposed and visible in the perspectives are only the first prefiguration in a preliminary state, but they reveal a dialectical intent with the pre-existences and monuments that will characterise Fernando Távora's architectural production throughout his work. In this project, a series of themes emerge, albeit in an experimental and prototypical manner, that will distinguish the author's architectural production. Firstly, the search for continuity, seen as a succession of sequences characteristic of the consolidated city, as an objective that the urban and architectural project must achieve. Secondly, the valorisation of history through a profound understanding of the city's morphology, where the insertion of a new architecture is necessary within an overall design that accommodates, in a coherent form, realisations that are distinct in terms of era and purpose. Thirdly, the conformation of open space as the negative of built space, where the design of empty areas is based on the relationships of context, topography, distances, and proportions. Lastly, the search for functions that can amplify the collective vocation of the public space by facilitating its understanding and increasing opportunities for use. The proposal is not carried through to realisation because, as Álvaro Siza reminds us: "it leaves large portions empty and is not realised for economic reasons since the smallness of the new settlements makes the intervention insufficiently profitable".¹⁵ Many of the projects of the following years will disagree with the themes highlighted by Fernando Távora, which will only be recovered at the end of the 20th century thanks to two projects that can be seen as a completion of the reasoning begun by the author in the mid-1950s that still remains valid and highly topical today.

The following decades saw a succession of proposals for the redevelopment of *Avenida da Ponte* led by the Parisian urban planner Robert Auzelle, which were never put into practice, and which envisaged the use of the viaduct as a means of connecting the lower and upper parts of the city, without considering the Cathedral and the relations envisaged by Fernando Távora. In 1968 Robert Auzelle invited Álvaro Siza to draw up a detailed plan for the *Avenida* that included commercial areas, offices as well as a covered car park on the eastern side of the avenue, which by then had taken on the configuration that it still retains today. Siza then drew up a proposal that completed the urban fabric of the truncated lot harmonised with the new front on the avenue, preserving the idea of the urban void imagined by Távora thirteen years earlier on the opposite side but creating the conditions for the operation to be economically sustainable. The building perched on the escarpment symbolises the rupture caused by the demolitions by standing with a continuous glazed wall that could have mirrored the urban

¹⁵ Távora, Siza, "Lavorare 'insieme': conversazione tra Álvaro Siza and Fernando Távora sui progetti per Avenida da Ponte", 54.

void in front of it, where the project imagines a garden leading to the level of the hill, taking advantage of the topography of the site. The initial study envisaged terraces that would appeal to the memory of the city that was destroyed in the 1940s and would guide the ascent up to the Cathedral. Compared to the design culture of those years, that lacked attention to the context, Siza's design appears sensitive to the form of the city by introducing variations dictated by the relationship with the surroundings. The preliminary version was approved in 1968 and its development continued until 1974, when a dispute between the architect and the City Council decreed the end of the project.

Álvaro Siza's 2000-2001 Project

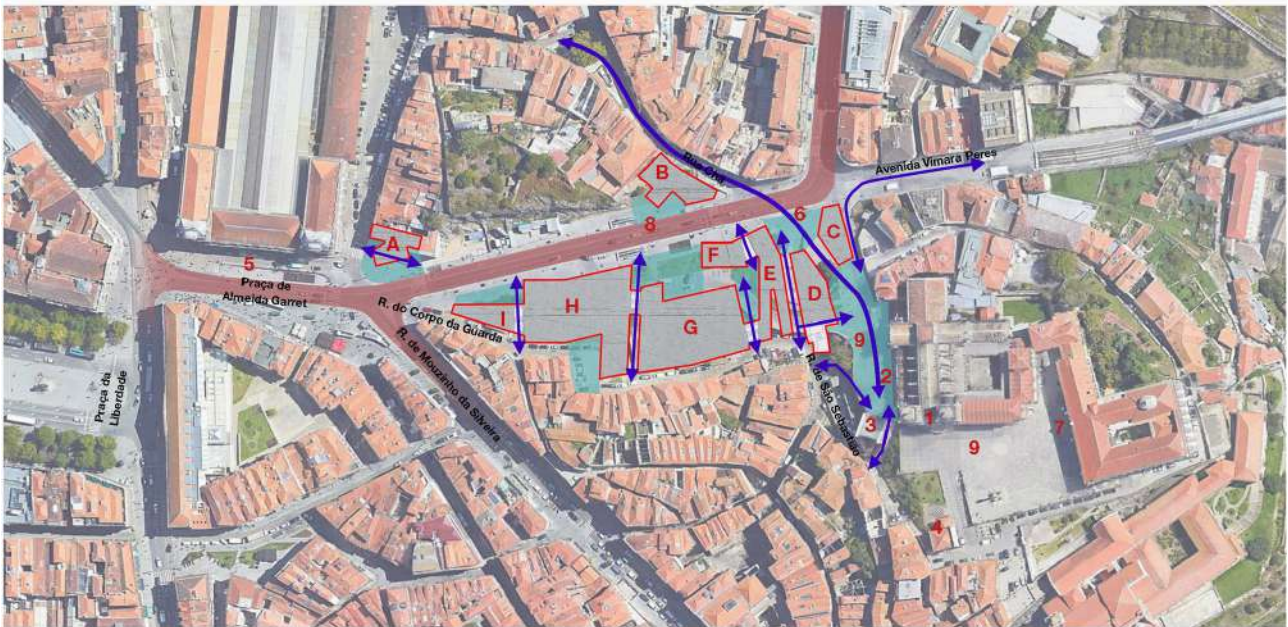
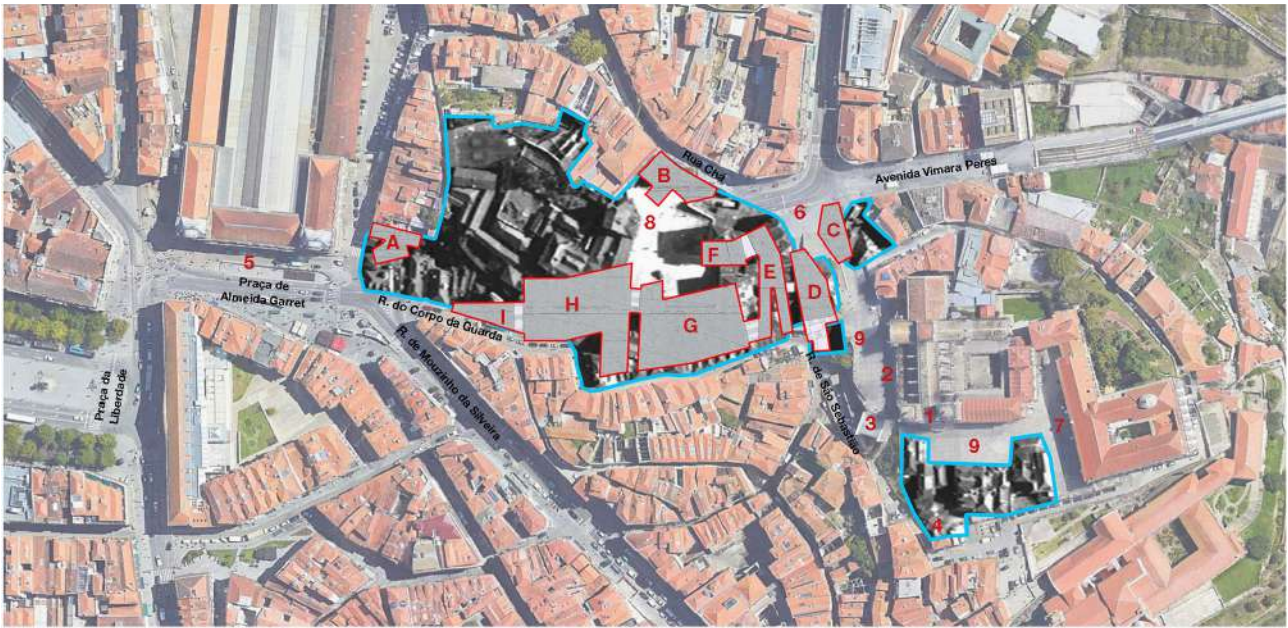
In 1974, the new republican government set up the CRUARB¹⁶, a commission responsible for the regeneration of Porto's historic centre, inspired by the values of the 1964 Venice Charter, with the task of preserving the heritage of cultural assets, providing the resident population with improved housing conditions, and stimulating the city's economic and tourist growth. Thanks to the Commission's work, Porto's historic centre became a UNESCO heritage site in 1991 and earned the nomination for European Capital of Culture in 2001. In the meantime, the area of Avenida da Ponte undergoes other alterations: firstly, following the closure of Ponte D. Luis Bridge, the avenue's dominant role as a vehicular link between the Historic Centre and Vila Nova de Gaia diminishes, and secondly, the construction of the Metro, which includes a stop in this very area, introduces changed requirements for this portion of the city. Architect Manuel Graça Dias recalls:

[...] the fundamental axis of connection to the south has lost the sense of emergency that the sanitisation of the city and the proto-rural concepts of the 1940s had given it. Today, the bridge is primarily a plan for public transport and therefore the 'hole', which was disastrously open at the time, can be closed and the road we have known for decades can be forgotten.¹⁷

Given these circumstances, in 2000 Álvaro Siza was commissioned to draw up a project that would promote the reconstruction of the urban fabric in the face of an avenue that was losing its role as a structural road axis in favour of new cultural, recreational, residential and tourist functions. The Porto City Council's brief initially envisaged the replacement and relocation of the existing São Sebastião market, the insertion of 100/150 flats, new local businesses, a 500-space underground car park, the City Museum, and new pedestrian

¹⁶ Comissariado para a Renovação Urbana da Área de Ribeira/Barredo, active until 2003 when it was replaced by *Porto Vivo – Sociedade de Reabilitação Urbana da Baixa do Porto*.

¹⁷ See the text by Manuel Graça Dias in Álvaro Siza (et alii), *Avenida da Ponte* (Porto: Porto 2001, 2001): no page numbers. Document consulted at Arquivo Arqtº Álvaro Siza. Col. Fundação de Serralves – Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto. Doação 2015.



- | | | | |
|---|------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Sé do Porto | 6 | Location of the Porta de Vandoma |
| 2 | Gallé da Sé | 7 | Episcopal Palace |
| 3 | Casa dos 24 | 8 | Largo do Corpo da Guarda |
| 4 | Torre das Alões | 9 | Terreiro da Sé |
| 5 | S. Bento Station | | |



5

accessibility to the Cathedral and the underground metro station¹⁸. The most innovative component of the programme, again after architect Távora's proposal in 1955, is the inclusion of a building dedicated to the City Museum, suggested to the Porto City Council by Alvaro Siza himself, who recalls: "[...] it is not enough to occupy the space with housing, because the area needs a strong project that gives life to the city [...]"¹⁹ [Fig. 5].

¹⁸ Letter dated 31 March 2001 addressed to the architect Álvaro Siza from the Municipality of Porto stating subject 'Programme for the redevelopment of Avenida da Ponte' (Arquivo Arq^o Álvaro Siza. Col. Fundação de Serralves – Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto. Doação 2015).

¹⁹ Távora, Siza, "Lavorare 'insieme': conversazione tra Álvaro Siza and Fernando Távora sui progetti per Avenida da Ponte", 56.

Fig. 5
Photo insert of Alvaro Siza's project for Avenida da Ponte in 2001 in the demolished context between the 1930s and 1940s (black and white) and below in the current urban context where the new public spaces and paths are highlighted (Graphic by the author).

The design idea on the western side of the boulevard envisages the re-evocation of the demolished fabric through the reconstruction of a dense mesh of buildings that prefigures the intention of recovering the relationship of scale between the destroyed city and the monuments:

Today (compared to 1968 and compared to the Auzelle plan) the way of conceiving the relationship between monument and urban fabric is different. Demolitions that free monuments almost always betray their character by emptying the sense of urban space. The progressive knowledge of the interventions carried out in the historic centres of European cities has consolidated the awareness of the relationship of complementarity between monument and urban fabric and between testimonies of different epochs as an essential condition of conservation.²⁰

The preliminary proposal sets out, on this side, seven buildings of different shapes and heights that reconstruct, without imitating their morphology, the demolished Gothic lots. Starting from the lower part of the avenue, Siza's project proposes a first building at the head (I), oriented towards the station, which houses on the ground floor commercial activities related to the Museum and on the upper floors' residences with five floors above ground. This block not only re-establishes the dialogue with the other wedge-shaped front at the corner with Rua Mouzinho da Silveira, matching its height, but also redefines the access to Rua do Corpo da Guarda and the Traversera de São Sebastião where the disused market is still located. Along this narrow, ancient street lost to demolition, which in the past led to the slopes of the walled city, Álvaro Siza redistributes the market cells on the western sides of bodies H and G, which form the fulcrum of the City Museum, restoring to the market its direct relationship with the street and the passage of people. The layout of the new buildings preserves the ancient memory of the mediaeval city, re-proposing the proportions and distances between the buildings, reduced to a few metres, interspersed with passageways contained by frontages three to five storeys high above ground. This conformation, still observable today in the district below the Cathedral, claims dimensions typical of the context in which it is inserted, giving rise to lively, complex public spaces and the setting for relational activities on a human scale. At the end of these connections, which are adapted to the topography thanks to the stairs enclosed between the fronts following a matrix that can be observed throughout the historic centre, a sequence of squares and urban *espalanadas* (terraces) is articulated that organise the space of the city between the *Avenida da Ponte*, the lots of the historic centre and the *Terreiro da Sé*. It is possible to assume that Álvaro Siza thought of the project with a future scenario in mind where cars would be banned from the *Avenida da Ponte*, imagining public spaces as new centres of civic life in the city. One of these places can be identified in the space between buildings E, F, G, H and B at the former

²⁰ Álvaro Siza, *Technical Report of the Preliminary Redevelopment Project of Avenida D. Afonso Henriques*, Porto, 20 December 2000 (Arquivo Arqtº Álvaro Siza. Col. Fundação de Serralves - Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto. Doação 2015).

square Guardhouse forecourt, where Siza envisages a public space overlooked by businesses, the foyer of the Museum and accesses to vertical connections with the car park and the Oporto Underground. One can easily think of the potential of this public space in the future perspective of an avenue without cars, or reduced to a minimum. The place would be part of a sequence approaching the Cathedral hill as in the historic city before the demolitions, a concatenations of open spaces interspersed with narrowing and passages. Within this narrative Siza envisages recalling the ancient memory of the access to the Terreiro da Sé in the position of the Porta da Vandoma:

When I was given a programme, I partially reconstructed the fabric around the cathedral by inserting two blocks (C and D) that take up the diagonal entrance towards the cathedral and developed the Museum with a continuous underground part and with detached volumes in such a way as to reconstruct open spaces so as not to isolate the Traverera de São Sebastião, obtaining public spaces of greater dimensions towards the Avenida and smaller dimensions towards the interior.²¹



6

The sequence ends in the northern broad of the Cathedral, where the public space between the *Galilè da Sé* and the new *Casa dos 24*, which was under construction at the time, is recovered. On the opposite front, at the top of the rock face left exposed, as in Távora's project, two buildings for commerce and residence (A and B) are planned to conclude the truncated heads of the curtain walls of the Guardhouse. These two volumes are a clear reference to the 1955 proposal, which envisaged precisely two buildings in the same current position to resolve the visual and spatial relationship with the São Bento Station to the

²¹ Extract from the speech in the video Álvaro Siza, *Obras e Projectos – Requalificação da Avenida D. Afonso Henriques*, <https://espacodearquitectura.com/>

Fig. 6
Comparison of Fernando Távora's 1955 and Alvaro Siza's 2001 proposals for the Avenida da Ponte (Graphic by the author).

north and the Rua Chã attack to the south [Fig. 6]. Siza imagined, as Távora did, a great permeability of the two buildings that would have organised the public space at ground level with retail activities. The plastic modelling proposed for these two blocks emphasises the contact with the rock, characterised by its irregularity and hardness, “covered over time by a light patina, highlighting the consolidated historical datum of a gash in the urban fabric”²² as “witness to the cut made for the opening of Avenida da Ponte”²³.

Analysing the proposal in its entirety, it is possible to extrapolate certain themes of primary relevance. Firstly, Siza uses the contrast between the singular fact and the fabric made of “banal” constructions²⁴ to trigger a relationship of complementarity that is necessary for the reading of the monument that also depends on this contrast²⁵. At the same time he seeks spatial continuity through the creation of a “fractured built ensemble”²⁶ that in its negative conforms public spaces of dimensions consistent with the scale of the original context and shows the urban scars so that the signs of the fractures, which have marked even damaging evolutionary processes, are used as a component of the project²⁷. Finally, it uses innovation as a preservation strategy where the preservation of the consolidated city takes place through the maintenance of certain notable points and thanks to the insertion of new architecture that amplifies the dialectic between empty and built space using history as a reference and demonstrating how the city cannot be crystallised to a given situation but must continue to develop in accordance with its memory and the condition of the moment: “Without the instantaneous archive of Memory there is no invention; and no key will open the exact doors”.²⁸

In March 2001, the Presidency of the Câmara Municipal de Porto responded to architect Siza’s preliminary study with a series of suggestions for modifications for a later phase²⁹ that would mark the abandonment of the proposal in a few months because, as the architect himself explained:

22 Távora, Siza, “Lavorare ‘insieme’: conversazione tra Álvaro Siza and Fernando Távora sui progetti per Avenida da Ponte”, 56.

23 Álvaro Siza, “Recovery of the Avenida da Ponte and project for the city museum”, *Casabella*, no. 700 (May 2002): 58-63.

24 The term is used by Álvaro Siza himself in the video *Obras e Projectos – Requalificação da Avenida D. Afonso Henriques*.

25 This idea emerges in a text by Álvaro Siza: “[...] (cities) do not grow out of immediate beauty. Beauty reveals itself by slow and long accumulation and selection. [...] Sometimes the temptation arises, so present today, to seek at all costs the singularity that is not part of a continuous fabric, constructing a banality laden with illusions and paradoxical repeated originality.” In Álvaro Siza, *Porquê um arquitecto e porquê eu?*, in Álvaro Siza, Carlos Morais (eds.), *01 Textos*, (Porto: Civilização Editora, 2009). 297.

26 See the text by Alexandre Alves Costa in Álvaro Siza (et alii), *Avenida da Ponte* (Porto: Porto 2001, 2001): no page numbers. Document consulted at Arquivo Arqtº Álvaro Siza. Col. Fundação de Serralves – Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto. Doação 2015.

27 “The rocks that are the result of the cut made remain exposed, because the patina of time has already made them beautiful and because they are a sign of the city’s history. It is a trauma that has had complicated repercussions but has marked the city and must be left as the idea that the gesture envisaged”. Álvaro Siza in the video *Obras e Projectos – Requalificação da Avenida D. Afonso Henriques*.

28 During the delivery speech of the Keys of the City of Porto collected in Álvaro Siza, *As Chaves da Cidade do Porto*, in Siza, Morais (eds.), *01 Textos*, 323.

29 Câmara Municipal do Porto, *Opinion on the proposed preliminary study for the redevelopment of Avenida D. Afonso Henriques*, 19 March 2001 (Arquivo Arqtº Álvaro Siza. Col. Fundação de Serralves – Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto. Doação 2015).

[...] the project is not formally disapproved, but there is the approval by the Municipal Council of an opinion that, in short, destroys the entire concept of the project, with criticism from top to bottom, from various angles. The only thing that has a favourable opinion is the City Museum, but, on the other hand, they say it is too big, because there is no money³⁰. Despite the project never being realised, it is possible to observe its relevance in the words of the architectural critic Paulo Varela Gomes: 'The volumetric unity of the whole and its programmatic and path links seem to put an end to the "tear" in favour of the existence of an avenue. [...] I believe that a granite and rough-skinned Avenida da Ponte would be essential to make us believe that it is possible to sew tears in cities without obligatorily placing the narcissistic smile of architecture in its place.'³¹

La Casa dos 24, an Architectural Object, a Place, a Story: it's all there³²

As already mentioned, it is conceivable that Alvaro Siza's project stemmed from his knowledge of the historical vicissitudes of the Alto da Sé, and was inspired by the guiding principles of the 1955 proposal and, by his own admission, of the *Casa dos 24*: "When architect Távora showed me the project, I already had a contract for the work on the Avenida da Ponte, and I immediately thought that this tower should become the cornerstone of the project".³³

Indeed, in 1994 Fernando Távora was commissioned to carry out a study for the arrangement and renovation of the Cathedral's western parvis, which had undergone major alterations since the 1940s as a result of demolitions [Fig. 7]. Up until the 1930s, the Cathedral of Porto was immersed in a medieval structure made up of clusters of houses surrounding the building and was in an off-centre position with respect to the route of the walls [Fig. 8]. For this reason, the public space to the north of the Cathedral was externally accessible through two passages: the Porta da Vandoma, located at the end of the Rua Chã and the Porta de São Sebastião, adjacent to the former seat of the Municipal Council. The stretch of wall between these two gates was the only one in which there were no constructions leaning against the line of the ancient *Muralha Primitiva* and therefore represented an open space, overlooking the city, with dimensions defined by perimeter structures, within which important



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Fig. 7

Álvaro Siza's hand points to the maquette of *Casa dos 24*. Frame from the video *Álvaro Siza, Obras e Projectos – Requalificação de Avenida D.* Afonso Henriques.

30 Álvaro Siza, quoted in Eduardo Covelinhas, "Avenida da Ponte Congelada", *JN Journal de Noticias*, May 30, 2001.

31 Paulo Varela Gomes, *Avenida da Ponte* (Porto: Porto 2001, 2001). Document consulted at Arquivo Arqtº Álvaro Siza. Col. Fundação de Serralves – Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto. Doação 2015. 18.

32 The title of this paragraph refers to an extract from the text by Eduardo Souto de Moura, "The Tower of Távora", *Casabella*, no. 700 (May 2002): 64.

33 Álvaro Siza in the video *Obras e Projectos – Requalificação da Avenida D.* Afonso Henriques, cit.

activities of urban public life took place. On this site, in addition to the Cathedral and its appurtenances, from the 15th century until the end of the 18th century, was the seat of the Municipal Council, also known as *Paço da Rolaçom* or *Casa dos 24*, a name of popular origin that recalled the twenty-four city guilds, related to the different trades, that met here. The tower-house from 1518, as mentioned in the descriptive report by Távora accompanying the recovery project³⁴, was in the form of a turret with a height of 100 palms (about 22 m) and a gilded roof. It stood on the stones of the ancient wall, only six metres away from the Cathedral, “as if to challenge the episcopal power”³⁵. In the 1940s, the Sé would be cleared of the residential building leaning against it to open up a noble perspective of the episcopal complex, forming the current *Terreiro da Sé*, a terraced courtyard overlooking the surrounding medieval alleys open in all directions³⁶. When Fernando Távora was invited to give an opinion on the development of the Cathedral area, only irregular stone walls remained on site, forming a wedge of ruins that acted as a buttress of the hill at high altitude. In the preliminary programme proposed in the descriptive memorandum of



8

June 1994, the architect manifested his intention to design a building that would utilise the remains of the existing structure by leaning against them a new construction that would be used as a space for cultural tourism and as a place to organise an effective exhibition of Porto’s urban phenomenon³⁷. The conditions that were set by the proposal were to take into account the strength of the urban and architectural space of the environment, to confront the impact on the landscape, to take advantage of the views of the city acquired as a result of the demolitions, to respect the significant patrimonial value of the existing structures without further museifying the area, and to revalue the historical, architectural and urban heritage of the city. The project, as recalled by Álvaro Siza, tackles for the first time the theme of recomposing the spatial structures of the Cathedral Hill, dialoguing with the city, and composing the public space:

34 The short descriptive memoir accompanying the project was found at the Fundação Archives Marques da Silva and can be read in Italian in: Esposito, Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa* cit., 172. The description of the ancient tower is attributable to the Portuguese historian Artur de Magalhães Basto (1894-1960).

35 Francisco Portugal e Gomes, *Restauro e Reabilitação na Obra de Fernando Távora. O Exemplo da Casa dos 24*, April 2008.

36 Cleusa De Castro, “Collage, Fernando Távora e a Casa dos 24 do Porto”, *Arqtexto*, no. 15 (2009): 2-21.

37 Fernando Távora, *Memória Descritiva e Justificativa*, in *Empreitada de recuperação dos antigos Paços do Concelho*, pág. 127, Arquivo Histórico do Porto, 1998.

Fig. 8

Relationship between the Cathedral façade and the façade of th Capila dos Alfaiates before the 1940 demolitions (photo by Domingos Alvão).

There has never been a reconsideration of rebuilding the houses that were four metres from the façade. This is a consolidated problem because the Gothic nature of the Cathedral found its reason for being in the relationship with the curtain wall. With the reconstruction of Casa dos 24, the controversy became topical again. It was argued that this building would jeopardise the very existence of the Cathedral, but the reality is that the project resolves two needs: the first is to consolidate the battered edge of the hill, the other is to make an intervention based on historical facts that can become the access and foundation stone of the inevitable process of reconstruction of the Avenida da Ponte.³⁸

Acknowledging the importance of the integrity of the historic city Fernando Távora implements an intervention of urban regeneration by operating on the void produced by the transformations of the system, inserting the ruin and the contemporary architectural gesture within this process. The author's awareness of the city and his overall knowledge of it allow him to reorganise the urban environment following precise guidelines that re-establish proportions and tensions of space, creating new conditions of use updated to the present.

Observing the preliminary drawings of 1995, the building contributes to the organisation of the public space by restoring the predominant elements and strong points: such as the frontal relationship between the Baroque *Galilé* and the *Casa dos 24*, the diagonal access to the *Terreiro da Sé*, the narthex-nave-patio sequence of access to the interior spaces of the Cathedral and the prominence of the stairs giving access to the parvis from Rua São Sebastião, outside the ancient walls. Two public spaces are also created using paving and the arrangement of the green spaces in front of the north and west entrances of the Cathedral, separated by a considerable narrowing (up to 6.5m) caused by the footprint of the new building [Fig. 9]. In this regard, Alvaro Siza says that

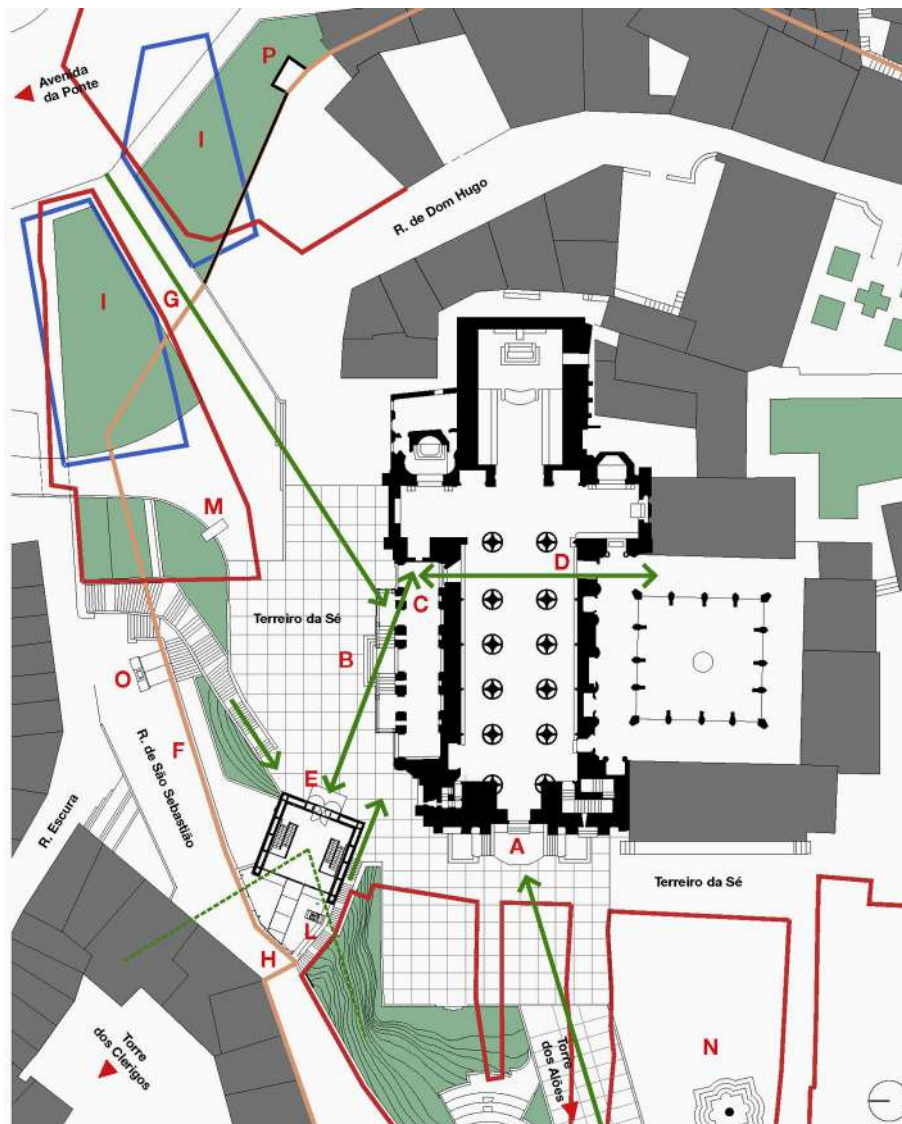
The tower gives new meaning to Nasoni's loggia, which, originally surrounded by buildings, followed a shape and had dimensions appropriate to the space. It also gives meaning to the position of the equestrian statue of Vimara Pares. It makes one realise how right the position of the old access road was, which I, therefore, re-propose by redesigning a similar small road that frames the old houses well.³⁹

Since there were no elements certifying the exact shape of the old building Távora seeks the meaning of the operation in the history of the place by elaborating a "simulacrum"⁴⁰ that refuses the imitation of the original creative process proposing an intervention syntactically located in the present and strongly rooted in the past. The building "without a programme" of the *Casa dos 24* allows Fernando Távora to construct a narrative with a strong symbolic

38 Álvaro Siza in the video *Obras e Projectos – Requalificação da Avenida D. Afonso Henriques*.

39 Távora, Siza, "Lavorare 'insieme': conversazione tra Álvaro Siza and Fernando Távora sui progetti per Avenida da Ponte", 56.

40 Andrea Fanfoni, "Abitare le tracce della città," in *Parma città d'oro, Progetto Urbano Strategico e Atlante Civile dell'Architettura*, eds. Dario Costi, Francesca Magri, Carlo Mambriani (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2021): 198-209.



- A** Main entrance to the Sé (Cathedral) of Porto
- B** Entry to the Galilé da Sé
- C** Side entrance to the Cathedral
- D** Entrance to the Cathedral Patio
- E** Entrance to Casa dos 24
- F** Muralha Primitiva disappearance trail ———
- G** Location of the ancient Porta de Vandoma
- H** Location of the ancient Porta de São Sebastião
- I** Location of buildings proposed by Alvaro Siza ———
- L** Position of the statue of the Knight
- M** Statue of Vímara Peres
- N** Ancient pillory of Porto
- O** Chapel of São Sebastião
- P** Remains still visible of the disappeared Muralha Primitiva
- Demolition in the 1940s ———
- Relationship axes restored by the project ———

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character where architecture becomes a gesture and visual reference that organises perspectives and urban routes as well as a civic temple of the city. In the 1960s⁴¹ Távora often drew the temples he visited in Mexico, Japan and Greece, and on this occasion, it is possible to think of the architecture of the Casa dos 24 as the transposition of a civic temple of Porto's history. The

41 Fernando Távora, *Diário de 'bordo' (1960)* (Porto: Associação Casa da Arquitectura, 2012).

Fig. 9
Layout proposed by Fernando Távora for the Terreiro da Sé area of the city of Porto.

characteristic that leads one to think of the sacredness of this place is the sequence created in the entrance facing the public space of the *Terreiro da Sé* where, at the threshold, there is a compression due to the limited height of the architrave supporting the entrance door, followed by the subsequent expansion of the empty space inside the room. The height of the door, on which we find the engraving “Antiga, mui nobre, leal e sempre invicta cidade”⁴² is deliberately reduced to its essential dimensions (2.20 m) to provoke that unexpected sensation dictated by the sequence of different heights that can be observed in many sacred structures with a central plan, such as, for example, the Baptistery of Parma where the pilgrim was drawn inside by a round arch that tapers towards the entrance threshold to then open into a diaphragm of great height. If architecture becomes a temple, its path of approximation also takes on a different value, which in this case is dictated by the



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articulation of the plane where the work is placed in the city. The new tower removes horizontality from the Cathedral esplanade and the *Terreiro da Sé* ceases to be “just an immense and anonymous belvedere above the city”.⁴³ The passage projects the visitor into an interior closed on three sides and open towards the historic city by means of a large opening that introduces the visitor into an unexpected dimension “as if for a few moments he were gathering in the discovery of what a city is, of what this city is”.⁴⁴ Observing today the layout of the hill that houses the Cathedral of Porto and analysing the potential that the intervention proposed by Álvaro Siza could have had, it is inevitable to refer to the Acropolis, as Paulo Varela Gomes points out [Fig. 10]:

[...] the project takes as its own the tower of Távora at the side of the Cathedral, adding other volumes that can make the scenographic platform created around the Cathedral a true Acropolis of Porto near one of the noble entrances to the city. It is one of the strongest, most controversial, and most praiseworthy ideas of the project.⁴⁵

42 ‘Ancient, very noble, loyal and always invincible city’ is the motto of Porto.

43 Francisco Barata, “La regla y la Excepción. Dos Proyectos de Távora para Porto”, *DPA*, no. 14 (1998): 54-63.

44 Barata, “La regla y la Excepción. Dos Proyectos de Távora para Porto”, 54-63.

45 Paulo Varela Gomes, *Avenida da Ponte* (Porto: Porto 2001, 2001). Document consulted at Arquivo Arqtº Álvaro Siza. Col. Fundação de Serralves – Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto. Doação 2015. 18.

Fig. 10

Relationship between the Casa dos 24 and the Porto Cathedral. In the background the baroque *Gallie da Sé* by Nicolau Nasoni. Photo taken by the author walking up the stairs of Rua de São Sebastião, October 2022.

On his 1960 trip, Fernando Távora carefully studied the relationships between the elements of the Acropolis and their connection to the city. Arriving in Athens for the first time in June 1960, Fernando Távora wrote: “[...] I saw a lot and understood little”.⁴⁶ In fact, it is conceivable to believe that this first travel experience, which was followed by others in subsequent years, was foundational in the understanding of the relationship between architecture, place and landscape, a characteristic trait of his entire authorial production. In that journey he relied on drawing and its didacticization to introject concepts that would emerge in crystal-clear form almost forty years later, in the design of *Casa dos 24*. By drawing a parallel between the drawn and written analysis of the Acropolis and the project of the tower at the side of the Porto Cathedral, it is possible to recognise similarities in the point of observation. In Athens, Távora, drawing the Acropolis from the outside, identifies three levels of reading, with a classical matrix, of the elevated layout: the natural terrain i.e. the basement, the supporting walls i.e. the body and the profiles of the buildings i.e. the crowning. In Porto, the situation of the Cathedral hill is very similar: at the low elevation the *Avenida da Ponte* with the void created by the demolitions represents the natural terrain; at the intermediate elevation the walls of the hill represent the supporting walls and the high elevation of the *Terreiro da Sè*, stripped by the demolitions, represents the crowning, the “prestige of the sacred place”.⁴⁷ The design of the tower fits in as a completion of the monumental layout, restoring unity to the landscape seen from outside. As with the Parthenon in Athens, in Porto the cathedral plays a central role in the overall vision of the monumental complex, which, however, finds its *raison d’être* and the measure of proportions lost in the relationship and dualism with the surrounding elements. The Erechtheion, the Statue of Athena and the Parthenon that contributed “to the balance of the composition”⁴⁸ become the Romanesque *Sé*, the Baroque *Galilè*, the equestrian Statue of Vimara Peres and the contemporary *Casa dos 24*, an essential element to balance the harmony deprived to the complex by the demolitions. The second element that gives rise to important design choices that can be traced back to the Athens experience is the observation from inside to outside the installation. Távora, in the Acropolis, studies the position of the Statue of Athena, in front of the Erechtheion, as an element of balance, then imagining it inside the temple, in its original location, as the protagonist of the sacred space. In Porto, the Statue of the Fighter, which the architect places in front of the great window, becomes a ‘venerable’ object, soaring from the slopes of the building and standing out in the imagined frame, representing the value, immortality and sacredness of the image of the city that is offered to the visitor from inside the building. Looking back over his design parabola in this building, the architect

46 Távora, *Diário de 'bordo'* (1960), 367.

47 Taken from the caption of the drawing placed in Notebook B, no. 13, 9 June of Fernando Távora, *Diário de "bordo"*, Italian edition edited by Antonio Esposito, Giovanni Leoni, Raffaella Maddaluno, *Fernando Távora, Diário di bordo*, (Siracusa: LetteraVentidue, 2022): 399.

48 Távora, *Diário de "bordo"*, 400. From the caption of the drawing placed in Notebook B, no. 14, 9 June.

performs an extraordinary synthesis of the values that guided him throughout his life, as analysed by Eduardo Souto de Moura:

It is the synthesis of the concepts that Távora elaborated, little by little, in his works. The building could only be realised by knowing the site and the pre-existing building, understanding the Baroque, the importance of Niccolò Nasoni and the relationship with the loggia on the side of the church. The external arrangement, the placement of the different elements, such as the statue, the views and alignments it obtains demonstrate an erudite knowledge of the acropolis of Athens.⁴⁹

Despite the premise, the validity and the necessary character of the proposal, the project of the *Casa dos 24* underwent fierce criticism⁵⁰ and opened a debate that lasted for several years, ending with the convocation of a judging commission in which Álvaro Siza was also present, who defended the work by speaking of

a unifying element of the city that is powerful and intelligent enough to break the gap between the Cathedral hill and the rest. It was a provoked detachment, it was not a historical detachment, and it contained tensions that were revived in a ridiculous way, such as the comments that were made about the attack on the Church. After its appearance, the only comment that could be made was that it was necessary.⁵¹

Conclusions

As the analysis of this experience has shown, the three proposals analyzed “[...] based on the study of the evolution of the city and its small, large transformations, using historical documents and observing the testimonies engraved in the territory”⁵² have been inserted in the constant flow of modification of the city, proposing very distinct languages but strongly rooted in place and time. The knowledge, in the three projects, has become a compositional tool of the architectural work, which in turn lends itself to the organization of urban space as if it were a device at the service of the city itself. However, it is necessary, to emphasize how the bodies in charge of preserving knowledge were, in the cases given as examples, those who hindered, and in some cases even blocked, the execution of these works. Today Avenida da Ponte remains an unresolved project that suffers from the non-implementation of the proposals for the development of the avenue, which however have brought to the attention of the discipline of urban design a multiplicity of useful themes in the processes of transformation of places that should constitute the architect’s knowledge base for intervening in the ‘heart’ of the city.

49 Souto de Moura, “The Tower of Távora”, 64.

50 A letter available at the Fernando Távora Archive at the Fundação Instituto Arquitecto José Marques da Silva dated 9 December 1998 from the IPPAR institute (Instituto Português do Património Arquitectónico) communicates the preliminary dissent to the execution of the project.

51 Valdemar Cruz, *Retratos de Siza* (Porto: Campo das Letras, 2005): 31 (translation by the author).

52 Siza, “Recovery of the Avenida da Ponte and project for the city museum”, 58-63.

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