

SIZATLAS

Filling the Gaps for World Heritage

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To Álvaro Siza

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IBERIAN PARALLELS:

SIZA'S 'PLACE' AND PORTELA'S 'TIME' IN THE REVISIONIST PROCESSES

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Portugal and Spain, particularly Galicia, provide two fertile contexts for a comprehensive reflection on the overcoming of modernist movements that dominated the first half of the twentieth century.

Their particular geographic, political, and industrial conditions led to lagging, slow technological development. This was compounded by their cultural isolation, which influenced all architectural activity in the twentieth century (García 2005, p. 12). Sharing similar cultural roots and having spent a substantial part of that century under authoritarian political regimes, these two peripheral countries experienced the first signs of scepticism and rejection of the premises of the International Style side by side, albeit with their backs turned to each other.

Despite sharing borders and many socio-economic circumstances, it was through occasional international events that their main figures intersected and influenced each other. It could be said that mutual discovery was gradual and only effectively recognised after regime transition and European borders opening.

This paper offers an overview of a comparative reflection on Álvaro Siza's and César Portela's early works, contextualising and articulating their architectures, and respective theoretical approaches, within the broader architectural production of the time. By systematically analysing the formalisation of some of their seminal works,

particularly those from the 1960s and 1970s, our research also seeks to interpret the short and long-term impact of the two on their corresponding circles (Tavares 2005, p. 47), identifying their contributions to some of the most significant currents of revisionist processes in the second half of the past century... until their later recognition fostered by authors such as Alexander Tzonis, Liane Lefaivre or Kenneth Frampton (Lefaivre and Tzonis 2003, p. 56).

In addition to the morphological characterization through a graphic systematisation of the mentioned works, the study is supported by a series of interviews conducted with the mentioned authors (Moreno 2011, p. 62), in which some of the most widespread collective assumptions in academic circles are confronted with their perspectives and inevitable frustrations.

Álvaro Siza Vieira embodies a divergent approach, based on a contextualised and specific interpretation of architectural problems (Frampton 2018, p. 39). The Portuguese architect advocates a morphological interpretation of 'place' and absorbs the surroundings with an abstract yet reconciling gesture.

Although not directly involved in the most significant ideological process in mid-twentieth century Portuguese architecture (the unavoidable '*Inquérito*'), he is often seen as its operative agent. Siza professes the maturation of a legacy of regional restlessness the greatest exponent of

which was Fernando Távora but can actually be traced back several generations (Tostões 2016, p. 33). However, it should be noted that Siza's persistence led him to a rapid stylistic emancipation and a unique and singular path. Nuno Portas praised him both domestically and internationally (Portas 1986, p. 45) as a sublime realist who intuitively synthesised the principles of Christian Norberg-Schulz and epitomised the best aspirations of resistance to postmodernism (Portas 1998, p. 78).

Somewhat younger than Siza, César Portela had an intense and tumultuous academic career, marked by prolific political protest and cultural activism, having completed his studies in Barcelona. However, his first experiments outside prevailing doctrines were carried out in his native Galicia, where he felt almost exiled. Unlike Siza, Portela is consciously speculative and openly aligned with specific movements (Portela 1984, p. 28). Together with his equally influential wife Pascuala Campos, he committed to Aldo Rossi's approach in combating modernism. Based on the morpho-typological reading of the built urban fabric, his design approach is marked by the redefinition of stereotyped models that should be contextualised through cultural and, paradoxically, technological means (Centellas 1991, p. 21).

Less constrained by institutional and administrative limitations, Portela's legacy refers to the achievements of more isolated but highly complementary figures in the Galician narrative, with Alejandro de la Sota and Xosé Bar Boo at the forefront. Contrary to Siza's exceptional identity approach, Portela aspires to a systematisation of the architectural problem. His relationship with the place

is technical and less plastic, although still figurative (Portela 2006, p. 17). His dilemma, like de la Sota's, concerns the adaptation to the evolving construction market and the potential combination of local resources. Indeed, he had to deal with a much larger, more active market than his Portuguese counterpart.

Siza and Portela's point of contact, or rather their shared territory, seems to be the region of Santiago de Compostela. In the 1970s, the region's intellectual activity and political convergence resulted in a series of culturally significant works that coherently materialised marginal currents. This period was fundamental for the consolidation of the Critical Regionalism principles, formalised during the following decade (Frampton 1992, p. 132).

Despite their differences, both oeuvres reflect a reformist stance toward the theoretical canons of the early twentieth century: Siza's contextualised abstractionism resonates with Portela's updated iconicity. The latter process was developed to enhance the site, the former to express its time. In conclusion, their distinct approaches reveal valid critiques of modernist assumptions, establishing a parallel that is neither wholly antagonistic nor purely complementary.

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