



Questioning Architectural Housing Strategies of the 1970s and 1990s to Planning the Future

Caroline Maniaque, Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Normandie, FR, caroline.maniaque@gmail.com

A review of *Living in Lisbon*. Exhibition curated by Marta Sequeira at the Centro Cultural de Belém (Centro de Arquitetura/Garagem Sul), Lisbon, 17 October 2023–28 April 2024. What lessons can we learn from collective housing built since the 1970s? What account has been taken of existing unoccupied properties in Lisbon? This exhibition answers these questions by displaying some of the most charismatic architectural housing strategies undertaken in the Portuguese capital over the past 50 years.

Keywords: middle-class housing; Lisbon; architectural strategies



Lisbon, like many European capitals, is experiencing a middle-class housing crisis. Statistics reveal that property prices in Portugal have risen since 2014 by more than 6% a year. Lisbon has been the hardest hit municipality in the country along with surrounding municipalities, where people pushed out of the city centre have flocked to. The Portuguese Plano de Recuperação e Resiliência has allocated 2.7 billion euros to tackle the housing crisis, the hope being to accommodate 26,000 families. But is the architectural community prepared for this challenge? What lessons can we learn from the experience of collective housing built since the 1970s? What are the implications for transportation and infrastructure? What account has been taken of existing unoccupied properties in Lisbon? What implications might there be for architectural heritage and the attractiveness of the city for tourists?

It is in this context that the architect and scholar Marta Sequeira curated an exhibition *Living in Lisbon* (17 October 2023–28 April 2024). The exhibition ‘seeks to present some of the most charismatic architectural housing strategies undertaken in the Portuguese capital over the past 50 years of democracy, to make the current situation visible and also to present plans for the future, by bringing together ideas and proposals from professionals of different areas: Sociology, Geography, Landscape and, above all, Architecture’. A good mix of original drawings, models, analytical diagrams, explanatory texts, and photographs effectively engaged the visitor, and spaces within the exhibition hall were allotted for public discussions and presentations (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1: View of the exhibition *Living in Lisbon*, Centro de Arquitetura, 2023. Photo: Tim Benton.



Figure 2: View of the exhibition *Living in Lisbon*, Centro de Arquitetura, 2023. Photo: Tim Benton.

The exhibition opened with a video of public demonstrations that took place in the streets of Lisbon in 2022 to demand political solutions to the housing crisis. Another screen showed images depicting the 1967 floods in Lisbon, the arrival of cooperatives as a housing solution, and the crisis after 25 April 1974, date of the fall of the Salazarist dictatorship, which had ruled Portugal since 1933. This section successfully summarized the urban, social, and political context of the last 50 years.

The rest of the exhibition was divided into three sections. In the first one, examples of public and private housing were exhibited in the form of models and original drawings. Documentary films from the 1950 and 1960s as well as extracts from fictional films accompanied this section, providing an excellent introduction to the problem of housing in Lisbon. It did not, however, probe the political and social issues very deeply, nor did it address questions pertaining to maintenance and management. For example, the Pink Panther social housing complex (1972–1979) in Chelas, Lisbon, designed by Gonalo Byrne and Ant3nio Cabrita and much appreciated when it was first built owing to its layout of the buildings creating a sequence of spaces through several urban armatures (street, square, block, internal street, and passageways between buildings) faces many various difficulties today, with parts of it privatized and restored but the public sections of it remaining poorly maintained (**Figures 3 and 4**).

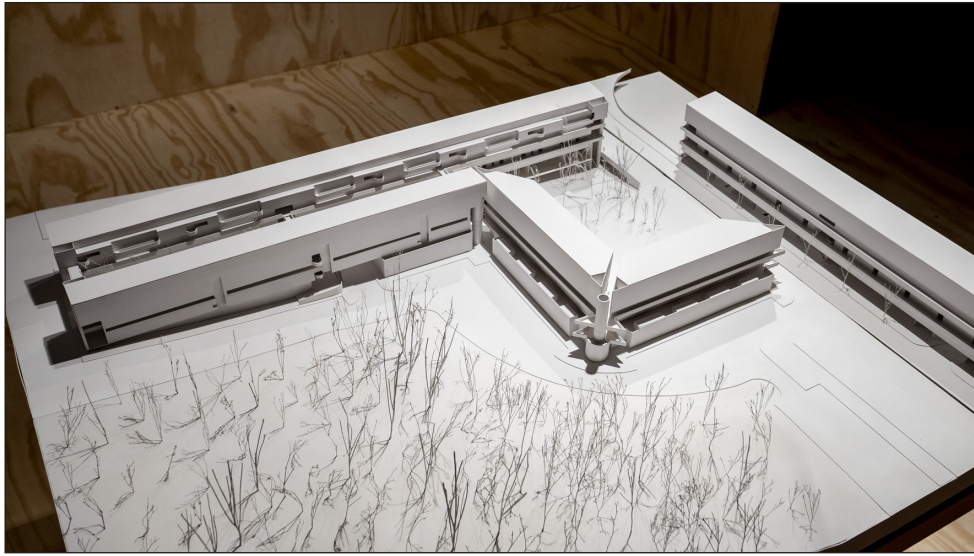


Figure 3: Model of the Pink Panther social housing complex (1972–1979), *Living in Lisbon*, Centro de Arquitetura, 2023. Photo: Tim Benton.



Figure 4: Gonalo Byrne and Antonio Cabrita, the Pink Panther social housing complex (1972–1979), Chelas, Lisbon. Photo: Tim Benton, 2023.

The central section provided background to the current housing situation through analytical diagrams and models that conveyed information such as the location and density of empty houses, the number of short-term rentals, the density of apartments owned by foreign investors, and so on. The three-dimensional demographic models based on the city plan were particularly impressive. These models and diagrams

demonstrated that many of problems, such the fact that many apartments are used only for a short period and are otherwise vacant, cannot be resolved by architectural means alone (**Figure 5**). The exhibition provided a useful framework for debating the substantial investment that the government has proposed to make to address Lisbon's housing problems.



Figure 5: Scale models executed by the firm Dholetec, 2023. Collection, processing, and analysis of data from the national statistics institute, *Living in Lisbon*, Centro de Arquitetura, 2023. Photo: Tim Benton.

In the third section, selected architectural firms presented their proposals for collective housing projects. Urban landscaping designs as well as designs for individual housing units that emphasized reutilising existing buildings, using sustainable construction practices, incorporating functional flexibility, and encouraging cooperative construction systems featured among these proposals. Most effective were the three-dimensional models of different demographics and social conditions based on the city plan that indicated the extent to which the most desirable parts of the city (with the best view and proximity to the estuary) are mostly in the hands of foreign investors and that shone a light on the empty properties abandoned by those who have moved into the modern suburbs. On the other hand, it is not clear that this information

was been taken into account in the architects' projects. For example, there were no schemes for infrastructural developments or reform of the transportation system (as was the case, for example in the planning for greater Paris).

The exhibition concluded with nine three-minute filmed interviews in which landscape designers, sociologists, architects, and urban planners including Helena Roseha, Inès Lobos, João Luis Carrilho da Graça, João Seixas, and Silvia Benedito reflect on the city of Lisbon in recent years and make suggestions. This section, described as presenting 'hypotheses for actions', contributes to an ongoing open debate that will have to consider a variety of factors beyond the architectural ones that were the exhibition's focus so as to take into account the needs and aspirations of future tenants.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

