TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN THE PORTUGUESE INNER COLONISATION
The laboratorial case of Pegões

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Abstract
The intertwining of tradition and modernity is a rooted discussion within the Portuguese history of architecture since the mid-twentieth century. From then on, the dichotomisation of erudite and vernacular architectures, urban and rural cultures and settings, nationalist and universalistic values, seems to have been debated and reviewed. This paper aims to contribute to such de-essentialisation processes by focusing on the Portuguese Estado Novo project of inner colonisation conducted by the Junta de Colonização Interna (1936-1974), and examining the dialogues and frictions between its traditional and modern ideals and accomplishments as spatialised in one very particular colony – Pegões. On the one hand, the paper ponders upon the Portuguese colonisation’s neo-physiocratic basis, locating the tradition-modernity binomial in the intent to modernise the agrarian world while perpetuating its traditional lifestyle, simultaneously fostering an economic development, social control and national identity. On the other hand, the paper draws upon the laboratorial colony of Pegões, which was the first, the biggest and the only one built in Southern Portugal, to more thickly analyse the colonisation’s politics and fulfilments, and its understanding and uses of traditional and modernist ideals, aesthetics and representations. Special attention is given to the dialectics between political and economic agencies, social negotiations, embodied experiences, and meanings and affections, by looking into the official-written history of the colony and emotional-sensory memory of its settlers. This approach results from the work carried out within the scope of MODSCAPES research project (funded by HERA Uses of the Past), notably in what concerns its research line on the memories and perceptions of European colonisation policies, schemes and resulting landscapes.

Keywords: Traditionalism, Modernism, Heritage.

Introduction
The intertwining of tradition and modernity is a rooted discussion within the Portuguese history of architecture since the mid-twentieth century. Marked by political readings and social positionings, such discussion tends to assert a dialogical relation between modern architecture and vernacularisms. However, it
also sets apart modern movement and national architectures (Portas, 1978), modernism and critical regionalism (Tostões, 1997), in what is seen as the polarities and permeabilities of architecture within the Portuguese history of art (Costa, 1995). A recognised challenge here lies in definitions. Different authors use the terms modern architecture, modern movement, modernism, to refer to interchanging referents. According to McLeod (2017), such polysemy led to the banalisation of ‘modernism’ which nowadays needs adjectives and adverbs to be clear on purpose¹. This reflects the postmodern revision of the concept and its defiance of a hegemonic definition. But also the academic reluctance in thinking architecture beyond its technical and aesthetical frames, and within its political, intellectual and social milieu. In Portugal, attempts to overcome this bias led to contrasting readings of modernist architecture as an expression of a fascist regime (Brites, 2016) and its contestation (Almeida, 2008). However, despite the efforts to blur erudite and popular cultures’ apartness in light of postmodern hybridity, cultural binomials like the urban/rural or the tradition/intellectual keep being essentialised due to the nostalgic imagining of rurality and tradition as authentic and natural (Vellinga, 2007).

This paper aims to contribute to this discussion by drawing attention to the policies, schemes and projects of inner colonisation in Portugal, taking one colony as a case study. Broadly speaking, inner colonisation was carried out by several totalitarian and authoritarian European regimes inspired by neo-physiocraticist, modernist and political utopias throughout the 20th century, and aimed to develop agrarian economies and foster national and nationalistic identities through a modernisation of agricultural sectors, resettlement of populations, and rural planning and building². It therefore presents a unique case study to discuss the intertwining of tradition and modernity, rural and urban, popular and erudite categories.

Comparatively, Portugal was a poor rural country with scarce industrial development ruled by an authoritarian conservative regime that relied on

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¹ Some examples are the ‘high’ of Scott, the ‘anxious’ of Goldhagen and Legault, the ‘southern’ of CEAA, or the ‘other’ of DOCOMOMO.
² Its comparative analysis is the core subject of the research project MODSCAPES – Modernist Reinventions of the Rural Landscape, in the scope of which the research that led this paper was conducted.
different political standing elites and imposed a traditional order on society. Consequently, its inner colonisation project led by the Junta de Colonização Interna (1936-1974) during the right-wing dictatorship of Estado Novo (1933-1974), was volatile in ideological and technological guidelines, and constrained in scale and impacts.

One particular colony excels in the context of Portuguese inner colonisation: Pegões. On the one hand, looking at the past, most authors acknowledged Pegões as JCI laboratorial settlement due to its location, extension and material and social schemes of implementation. On the other hand, looking at the present, Pegões is still active in the agricultural sector, made a name in the wine business, as is under a process of heritagisation in political, social and intellectual arenas. Thus, Pegões is a particularly eloquent field to examine how different actors at scene physically and conceptually located and keep locating tradition and modernity in social space through social representations, relationships and practices that bring together popular and erudite culture, rural and urban features (cf. Low, 1996).

Still at an exploratory stage of research, this paper aims to stress how broader perspectives on built space can enlighten these entanglements, by putting into a dialogue official, intellectual and social discourses on Pegões, collected by documental and bibliographic research, exploratory fieldtrips, second-hand testimonies of settlers, and their online shared memories.

**The laboratorial and the exceptional case of Pegões colony**

Several authors have justified the laboratorial character of Pegões in JCI purpose to test its policies and plans development’s management (Guerreiro, 2015). However, this assertion calls for moderation. Indeed, Pegões was the first colony planned from scratch by JCI and its plans were presented in the same year of JCI’s organic reconfiguration (1942). Notwithstanding, Pegões evinces

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3 The previous colonies of Milagres and Sabugal were inherited from previous institutions operating on inner colonisation.

exceptional features that preclude undertaking it linearly as the prototype of Portuguese inner colonisation.

First, Pegões’ lands were state-owned, not common lands nor expropriated. They were donated in will by the charitable landowner Rovisco Pais to the Lisbon Civil Hospitals in 1932, ending up in JCI’s estate in 1937 (Pereira, 2004). Secondly, Rovisco himself had implemented a colonisation process in 1/3 of Pegões farmstead, attracting around 120 families from different origins (Mestre, 2009). This facilitated the process and avoided tensions within the debate that opposed landlords and progressist elites on the modalities of agrarian reformism. In third place, all authors acknowledge the twofold dimensions of JCI actions, one being technical-scientific and the other political-ideological (e.g. Silva, 2011). Hereof, considering that rurality was a key factor to inner colonisation as an economy space and a repository of national identity, and that Pegões was the only colony built in the Southern Portugal, on the outskirts of a major urban centre, and close to a main access to national borders, it is at least reasonable to question whether Pegões wasn’t foremost JCI’s chief act of propaganda.

These exceptional features might explain why Pegões excelled in material and rhetorical investments comparing to others colonies. Its 1942 plan was an extensive and diversified programme that included land clearing, manuring, hydraulic works, reservoirs, irrigation systems, road construction, houses typologies and several public facilities. These assembled three nuclei with plots organised along the hydraulic network of natural streams in Pegões Velhos and Faias, and an artificial system in Figueiras. Such a disperse mode of settlement, moderated in Figueiras, suited the idea of complete and self-sufficient agrarian dwelling units (casal agrícola). Each unit included 11ha of dry land for cereals production, 4ha of vineyard, 2ha of pine forest and 1ha of irrigated land, and a building that concentrated housing and farming facilities such as a stable, a

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5 Today’s village of Foros, between Pegões colony’s nucleous of Figueiras and Faias, resulted from Rovisco’s initiative.
6 Information collected through in different volumes published by JCI regarding the colonisation of Pegões in the ICS’s Archive of Social History and the archives of the Directorate-General of Agriculture and Rural Development of Portugal.
7 Plots differed in size: 20 ha in Pegões Velho, 18,5 ha in Figueiras and 15 ha in Faias.
pigsty, a silo, a poultry house and a rabbit hutch. Only a roofless dung was physically dethatched.

The formal and functional options behind the plans of the dwelling units in Pegões conferred them a sense of unity whilst simultaneously keeping apart people and animals, genders and usages, for the sake of new hygiene standards. These have been considered a modernist subtext of JCI’s action despite the buildings being asserted to be inspired in the traditional features that the Estado Novo reinvented as national architecture (e.g. Guerreiro, 2015).

Sill, modernism in inner colonisation is mainly associated with the functional, aesthetics and technical layouts of its public buildings, particularly in Pegões where paraboloide buildings stand out as exceptional expressions of Portuguese modernism. However extraordinary these may be, looking beyond architectural features, what is exceptional in Pegões is the abundance of these buildings. While other colonies fell short on public facilities, Boalhosa for instance has only two, in Pegões JCI actually built four schools, two churches, two medical centres, three training centres, three technical assistance centres, three breeding centres, along with storage buildings and several dwellings for technicians, teachers, social assistants, and visitants.

The physical and material investments in Pegões translated into its social space. The 206 families of settlers that moved into Pegões, in 1952\(^8\), were by far the largest resettlement carried out by JCI. Only 313 houses were built and 253 inhabited in the whole of the other colonies. Such demographics cannot be understood solely as dimensional today, notably when political, intellectual and social discourses address the past of inner colonisation through their present engagement in acts of remembering and interpreting. After all, place as a conceptual category is a social construction that depends on the way multiple actors live, know, remember, contest and imagine social spaces (Feld e Basso, 1996).

\(^8\) Initial plans pointed at around 2500 people. The built plan accommodated around 1100 people. 288 families applied, of which 94 families were allocated to Pegões Velho, 50 to Figueiras, and 62 to Faias.
Overall, two issues deserve special attention here. The first was the idea of transforming rural workers in small rural landowners (Maia, 2018). JCI announced the colonies as an incubator of settlers for the colonial empire and a means to combat growing proletariat through the fostering of a rural population that guaranteed Portuguese nationality (SNI, 1945). But this would be pursued by attracting rural workers with the promise of ownership over agricultural self-sufficient private properties in a time of severe unemployment and poverty. Emplaced, this population would reproduce the traditional lifestyles that the State claimed to foster patriotism with the assistance of social control programmes and legislation on the indivisible, inalienable and inheritable nature of the colonisation plots⁹.

The second issue relates to forms of collective identification. In order to apply, settlers had to be healthy Portuguese men, hold agrarian experience, no record of misconduct, express love for work and family, and comply with the social and political order¹⁰. As stated in the Constitution (1933), family was the root of the Portuguese race, the basis for political order, and the labour force unit in rural space. Other forms of social identification were mostly discarded. In fact, nationwide, JCI’s calls for settlers resulted in the gathering of people coming from Southern to Northern Portugal in one single community, easing the fostering of a national but not regional ones. Religious identities were not discarded either, but its Catholic supremacy was latent in the building of churches and the colonisation’s framing in the agrarian social doctrine (JCI, 1962). In short, JCI put to practice the Estado Novo trilogy ‘God, Fatherland, Family’.

**Aesthetics and politics in the study of inner colonisation**

Most authors that address the topic of inner colonisation in Portugal through its architectural and urban designs acknowledge that features of tradition and of modernity were entangled in the programmes and plans of JCI. In Pegões, the

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functional and hygienic modern concerns with the house (Catarino, 2010) are counterpoised to the romantic reinterpretation of rural grammars in the image of a Portuguese house (Coelho, 2009). Dwelling types are simultaneously understood to have standardised housing conditions while avoiding urban erudite meaningless monotony (Guerreiro, 2015). But provocatively, by calling in other housing programmes of Estado Novo, like the urban Economic Houses, one could read these modernising traits conversely.

Comparable interrogations arise regarding public spaces. Urban arrangements are seen as displays of a modern territorial legibility (Guerreiro, 20015), but share dispositions with traditional villages. Mechanisation of agriculture is acknowledged a major goal (Sousa, 1964) but settlers were given traditional tools and performed traditional rural labour (Pereira, 2004). Modernist buildings in Pegões are extolled in aesthetic and technical features (Coelho, 2009), but their spatial and functional programmes translate a traditional social order and structure. So, the question to be raised is if modernist buildings in Pegões can be thought of as spatial strategies to perpetuate a traditional rural community, despite any modernity in their formal features, and whether this challenges their modernist conception.

Despite some efforts in providing modern life standards, JCI strived to politically and technically enforce tradition in Pegões by regulation and social control measures, but also through urban and architectural solutions that reinforced social classes’ divisions and rooted a self-representation of settlers as peasants. The problem of understanding its modern-traditional entanglement seems to lie in the distinct conceptualisation of modernism depending on this tradition being reinterpreted by a regionalist or a nationalistic purpose. However, regionalism and nationalism in architecture are not methodological distinct (Martins, 1999); and processes of tradition’s defamiliarization, interpretation and re-semanticisation have operated since the 19th century throughout Europe, both propelling movements of social reform and acting as repression tools (Lowenthal, 1985).
Moreover, following on Griffin (2007), modernism is as a quest for an alternative modernity to the societal erosion brought up by modernisation as a secularising force. Because it is cosmological, and not aesthetic, modernism became a powerful frame in political arenas. Herein the author asserted fascism as one of its expressions, recalling its palingenetic ultranationalism having fought traditional elites’ decadence through a totalitarian control of national life that aimed to regenerate its ethos. Foremost, Griffin’s argument apprises us to take caution in relating modernism to one or another political stance. Modernism encompasses fascism, but as cosmological phenomenon it extends way beyond. So, its analysis cannot be limited by looking at the world of things, unless it also takes into consideration the world of ideas.

The main idea of this paper was precisely to bring forward the above two key lines of reasoning into the analysis of how modern architecture, regionalism and nationalism intertwine. Furthermore, because the exceptional character of Pegões is located in past and present terms, its cannot be analysed in material forms apart from their contextual and dynamic imagination. Understanding space as meaningful implies looking into both its social production and social construction, i.e. the social, economic, ideological and technological factors behind its physical creation, and the meaning construed within the processes of social exchange, conflict and control that mediate its emotional and sensorial experience (Low, 1996).

It is in this frame that built space becomes a ‘means by which we give form to, and come to an understanding of ourselves, others, or abstractions such as the nation or the modern’ (Miller, 1994, p. 397). Through the social sciences lens, architecture is a process of objectification of culture that gives material form to cultural processes. It thus holds latent possibilities of meaning, because things, like people, have social lives (Appadurai, 1986, p.3). This frames heritage as, more than a thing, a ‘process of engagement, an act of communication and an act of making meaning in and for the present’ (Smith, 2006, p. 1). One is thus required to pay attention to current events in the understanding of the past, namely in Pegões, where an emblematisation as the laboratory of Portuguese
inner colonisation has built up its representation as the spatial locus of the dialogues between modernism, regionalism and nationalism.

(Re)imagining Pegões

Looking into written materials on Pegões and oral testimonies of its former settlers, deviations come to light. Of course, by nature of speech, distinct sources refer to different natures of reasoning. Literature emphasises the outputs of inner colonisation in depictions of policies, programmes and materiality. Former settlers share life stories and experiences, pointing out family and social networks, and remembering special and distressing events. But in the case of Pegões, there is moreover a different way of looking at the colony.

Erudite production and social actors set apart and bring together, respectively, the social production and social construction of Pegões as a place. Providing an illustration, most authors that address built space in Pegões consider that housing and public buildings were divorced in aesthetics and ideological frames, relating this gap to its traditional versus modernist languages and facilities; but settlers’ testimonies dilute both this matching and apartness in an imagining of the colony as a whole. Notably, their memories take built space as the locus of personal and collective experiences and emotions that remit to the two issues highlighted above in regard to JCI social project - ownership and identities.

Concerning their houses, former settlers share a fondness for its 'Portuguese architectural style'\textsuperscript{11} while resenting their children studying at petrol lamps’ lights, roads turning into muddy swamps during winter, access to potable water being difficult, and sinks being kept intact for guests while families used wooden cooking bowls\textsuperscript{12}. They remember women sewing and men playing cards in fun evenings\textsuperscript{13} in a performance of gender roles that was reproduced by the technicians in the agricultural fields and their wives in the control of hygiene and

\textsuperscript{11} Colonato de Santo Isidro de Pegões, facebook page, 25 January 2014.
\textsuperscript{12} Interview with Moisés by Sara Pereira, 27 October 2004.
\textsuperscript{13} Eulália Lebre, online comment in Colonato de Santo Isidro de Pegões, facebook page, 21 January 2015.
socialisation within the domestic space\textsuperscript{14}. Even the memory of suffering arises in contradictory nostalgic discourses that ‘\textit{wish to see the model again applied}’\textsuperscript{15}. Ownership and poverty are at the core of these feelings:

You were right to stress that point because nothing was given to us, I have heard many people saying that the settlers got their lands for free but they forget that in 1950 paying 250.000 or 300.000 escudos was a fortune for those who came here bringing only the clothes on their back\textsuperscript{16}.

Concerning public facilities, settlers remember public space and buildings through the lens collective activities and services that locate their emotions and experiences in space. The modernist architectures of Pegões extolled by literature are looked at as the doing of ‘\textit{crazy architects}’\textsuperscript{17}, but public buildings foremost represent an urban quality of life perceived in access to health care, education, leisure, labour and technical assistance\textsuperscript{18}. Settlers say mass was non-binding\textsuperscript{19}, but remember Catholic fests distributing treats, marriage to be a prerequisite and the foremen and his wife to be their godparents (Pereira, 2004). In the banquets and balls organised by JCI, settlers were invited to participate through in-kind contributions and dancing presentations but seated at different tables\textsuperscript{20}. Spatial experiences also convoke leisure activities preparing and going on summer camps, gathering to see films or radio broadcasts\textsuperscript{21}, going on tours to villages and museums that exhibit the national past\textsuperscript{22}.

Whilst positive at large, settlers’ shared memories unveil how control over forms of socialisation aimed to enforce particular identities, these being family-related, class-related, religious and civic. The latter calls for attention. JCI promoted livestock parades, domestic care awards, sports and folklore demonstrations, training courses on pottery and female chores in Pegões (Pereira, 2004). These

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Interview with Custódia Vilela by Sara Pereira, 26 October 2004.
\item Interview with Mr. Vilela by Sara Pereira, 27 October 2004.
\item Maria Moreira, online comment in Colonato de Santo Isidro de Pegões, facebook page, 26 January 2014.
\item Interview with Florêncio Pinto by Isabel Lopes, 18 July 2008.
\item Interview with Inocência Eustáquio by Isabel Lopes, 21 August 2008.
\item Interview with Luís Vida by Sara Pereira, 27 October 2004.
\item Interview with Francisco Vilela by Sara Pereira, 27 October 2004.
\item Interview with Moisés by Sara Pereira, 27 October 2004.
\item Interview with Vilas Boas by Sara Pereira, 27 October 2004.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
boosted settlers’ self-representation but, more importantly, enhanced their social capitals by creating the opportunity for each settler to be a better peasant than is colleagues, a fitter worker to agrarian life, and more conscious men of family duties. Social mobility was thereby made possible, as shown by memories of national farmer meetings and scholarships to attend agrarian course. But it was set within the limits of the social group of the settlers.

**Modernity and tradition as cultural heritage in Pegões**

Summarising, settlers’ memory is based on personal experiences that highlight JCI’s strategies to instil and crystallise the idea of the Portuguese folks as peasants in love for their Church, family and work, who knew their place in national society. This is particularly important to think about the ways Pegões is nowadays emblematised on the basis of its materiality. If places are not inherently valuable, heritage is the set of processes engaged with the act of remembering and forgetting and attributing meaning (Smith, 2006). This means that discourses on architecture and related social and cultural practices, and not architecture per se, are the production of heritage. Hence, the constitution of Pegões as a parish in 1958 is just as important as its visiting by the political elites of Estado Novo; the municipality’s implementation of a Safeguard Plan contributes to the heritagisation of the colony as much as the publishing of monographic volumes (Pereira et al, 2009) or the broadcast of a settlers’ meeting in national news.

Of course these acts empower settlers’ representation of Pegões. Memories shared online are clear on the idea that 'if they had explained this when we were young, we would have dealt better with the prejudice and discrimination of being the children of settlers’

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23 Interview with Francisco Vilela by Sara Pereira, 27 October 2004.
25 May 2014, SIC television broadcast.
memory of a ‘space of living memories that represents the identity of the county’ (Pereira et al, 2009). Authorised heritage discourses hold the power to enunciate official heritage, but they also determine ‘the way we think, talk and write about heritage’ (Smith, 2006: 11).

The anxieties that are implicit in the different discourses about Pegões as heritage are illustrative. The municipality is concerned with the preservation of architectures that symbolise a historical event of social, agrarian and architectural value. Architects denounce the pathologies and dissonances that threaten an exceptional specimen of their modernist past (Pereira et al, 2009). Former settlers too bemoan the colony’s state of conservation and disfigurement, but are simultaneously referring to its architectural preservation and its social continuity.

There is indeed an apartness in the way settlers, political and intellectual actors engage in remembering and construing meaning towards the future. Their stated goals are explicit: settlers gather personal stories to keep the memory of the colony alive; elites propose the rehabilitation of Pegões’ core centre in respect to its material integrity for future generations being presented with architectural authenticity. The point here is that such disconnection results from self-referenced discourses of those in positions of power that privilege monumentality and expertise on the basis of an innate value of material repertoires and obscure other forms of identity and heritage performance. This allows essentialised understandings of modernism to remain uncontested because it depoliticises the social production of Pegões and detaches its representation from the settlers’ social practice and experience of place. It thus works against itself, leaving behind the idea of a colony as a political, intellectual, economic, social and cultural whole where modernism, regionalism and nationalism intertwine.

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27 Idem.
28 Quitéria Lobo, online comment in Colonato de Santo Isidro de Pegões, facebook page, 26 January 2014.
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