

Carte Semiotiche 2024/1

Silver Age

Nuove culture della vecchiaia



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Carte Semiotiche

Rivista Internazionale di Semiotica e Teoria dell'Immagine

Annali 10 - Giugno 2024

Silver Age Nuove culture della vecchiaia

A cura di
Mauro Portello e Maria Pia Pozzato

SCRITTI DI

ALESSI E LOBACCARO, BELLENTANI E LEONE, BIKTCHOURINA,
BOERO, CARVALHO, CESARI, DE ANGELIS, GALLO,
GALOFARO, GRAMIGNA, LORIA, MAGLI, MONTESANTI,
PONZO, SANFILIPPO, TERRACCIANO, TSALA

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Rivista Internazionale di Semiotica e Teoria dell'Immagine
Fondata da Omar Calabrese
Serie Annali 10 - Settembre 2024

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in Semiotica e Teoria dell'Immagine
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Copertina
Helene Schjerfbeck, *Unfinished Portrait*,
1921, olio su tela, 44.5x50.1,
Finlandia, Riihimäki Art Museum ©WikimediaCommons
ISSN: 2281-0757
ISBN: 978-88-98811-88-5

© 2024 by VoLo publisher srl
via Ricasoli 32
50122 Firenze
Tel. +39/055/2302873
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Silver Age
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A Lifelong Neighbourhood: Alvalade in Lisbon, Portugal

di António Carvalho

Abstract

Alvalade urban plan was designed in the mid 1940's by João Guilherme Faria da Costa, for the expansion of Lisbon, towards North, in a period of strong demographic growth in Portugal (CML, 1948). It was an answer to housing shortage in the city, for different social classes, sheltering some lower income families who were displaced from the smooth spaces of the old city centre, as well as the fast-growing middle class and new inhabitants who fled to the city from the countryside, into this new suburban area where new striated spaces would be created in a modernist spatial language, based on the neighbourhood unit concept which has embedded clear semiotic concepts such as limits and thresholds, promoting identification and sense of belonging.

By then, in the middle of the 20th century, Portugal had a young and growing population for which new and modernist housing solutions were designed, making Alvalade district, a successful modernist urban laboratory.

The best proof of its success is that time passed by and half a century later, at dawn of the new millennium, Alvalade became a *NORC- Naturally Occurring Retirement Community* (Hunt & Gunter-Hunt, 1986): its initial population *aged in place*. The modernist habitat is now inhabited by older people who are no longer the stylish *MOD* inhabitants envisioned by modernist architects in the 50's, but rather the aged retirees, dependent on the social welfare system, whose daily lives are soothed by the overall quality of urban space and generous public facilities network.

That is one of the main points of this article: an urban area with plenty of public facilities makes it easier to *age in place* and therefore avoid institutionalization with its associated costs, thus becoming a valuable asset in terms of welfare policies. Besides, all the public investment in creating the network of facilities is already done, thereby keeping in place the older generations also means making sure they will use these facilities and keep them economically viable, in the frame of an ageing society.

Taking into consideration the World Health Organization concepts of *active ageing* and *age-friendly cities*, we propose to address a new way of designing the *new normal*: spaces designed for everybody, but having the most fragile citizens in mind, so that when time comes for citizens to experience special needs, the existing spaces and facilities will naturally provide the required solution without extra costs.

Alvalade district is undergoing a double pressure at present: it is one of the most aged areas in Lisbon, which requires urgent responses to help its residents to age in place by introducing new solutions and, on the other hand, Alvalade is one of the most sought-after residential areas by newcomers due to its central location and excellent provision of public facilities.

This means that the excellent modernist spaces of Alvalade are undergoing a refurbishing pressure both for older residents and for newcomers under 21st century standards of living. It deserves to be a case study of high-quality in city living, just like it was at its inception days.

Keywords: neighbourhood, lifelong, age-friendly, urban space, walkable.

0. *Introductio*

Alvalade urban plan was designed in the mid 1940's by João Guilherme Faria da Costa, for the expansion of Lisbon, towards North, in a period of strong demographic growth in Portugal in the middle of the 20th century, Portugal had a young and growing population for which new and modernist housing solutions were designed, making Alvalade district a successful modernist urban laboratory.



Fig. 1. Eduardo Portugal, *View of farming fields at Alvalade / Campo Grande*, 1945; Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa - Fotográfico.

The best proof of its success is that time passed by and half a century later, at dawn of the new millennium, Alvalade became a *NORC- Naturally Occurring Retirement Community* (Hunt & Gunter-Hunt, 1986): its initial population aged in

place. The modernist habitat is now inhabited by older people who are no longer the stylish MOD inhabitants envisioned by modernist architects in the 50's, but rather the aged retirees, dependent on the social welfare system, whose daily lives are soothed by the overall quality of urban space and generous public facilities network.

Aiming at a global urban environment, Alvalade Plan was organized into "urban cells", still following Clarence Perry's *neighbourhood unit's* concept, therefore proposing a clear street hierarchy with main traffic avenues with commerce and offices, distribution streets and local streets for housing (some of which in cul-de-sac), as well as a parallel network of pedestrian streets.

Besides the very large amounts of housing, the plan also previewed a balanced distribution of public facilities of different sizes and scopes, from a hospital campus, a technological campus and a sports park for the working class, to food markets, public schools of different levels, cinemas, gardens and urban parks, all of these connected by public transportation systems (airport, trains, trams, buses and later the metro).

Therefore, Alvalade had from its inception a modern concept of urban living, trying to create global conditions for new ways of living in the city (in a period of dictatorship ruling which allowed the seizing of the huge former private farmland), building ahead the whole infrastructure network and defining clear rules for different property and housing types in order to organize a clear social and economic mix of different groups under common rules.

By doing so, the plan was gradually built in the following decades (from 1950 to 1970s) through design competitions or direct commissions, gathering the contribution of many skilled architects from different generations, but mostly young, who contributed with innovative solutions, already very much influenced by the Modern Movement.

This global vision of the new city, at first quite isolated still from the city centre, required from the very beginning the provision of all the public facilities to overcome the isolation and offer the inhabitants the intended quality of living in the community. Different people and social strata were attracted and settled in Alvalade, from the lower classes who were displaced from their unhealthy housing in the smooth spaces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) of the city centre to the new bourgeois classes who aimed to live accordingly to the new car and machine culture in clear striated spaces.

1. *The Urban Plan*

In 1945 Alvalade was still a rural site made of farms, a continuum of natural landscape surrounding Lisbon (Fig. 1), when its urbanization was decided by the government through the approval and publication of its "Plano de Urbanização da Zona a Sul da Avenida Alferes Malheiro" (also known as "Plano de Alvalade") designed by João Guilherme Faria da Costa (1906-1971). The author is considered to be the first architect urbanist in Portugal, having majored in urban design at the Institut d'Urbanisme de l'Université de Paris in 1935, therefore benefitting from a broader view of international trends and solutions in urban design which he would apply in Alvalade Plan (and many other urban designs throughout his career). This would be essential to create the foundations of the modernist Lisbon.

In the mid 1940s, the city of Lisbon, being the capital, attracted countryside peo-

ple from all over Portugal, looking for better living conditions. Portugal had not been involved in the Second World War due to a neutral status negotiated by the dictator António Salazar who ruled the country from 1932 to 1968, so the city was not recovering from the global devastation like most central European capitals. On the contrary, Lisbon needed expansion to deal with both the incoming rural population and the increasing urban middle class: the first in need of shelter and work, the latter in need of solutions for their new standards of modern living¹. The expansion of Lisbon towards North was then initiated, for which the urbanization of the farmlands of Alvalade based on Faria da Costa's plan was determinant. The plan was framed by four clear urban limits (Fig. 2): the railroad tracks in the South, the avenue to the Airport in the East, the avenue Republica / park Campo Grande in the West and finally the avenue Alferes Malheiro (which names the plan) in the North.



Fig. 2. Faria da Costa, *Plano de Urbanização da Zona a Sul da Avenida Alferes Malheiro*, 1945. The plan limits are: north – Av. Alferes Malheiro (nowadays Av. Brasil); west: Av. Republica / Campo Grande; south: train line to Sintra / Av. Frei Miguel Contreiras; east: Av Airport (nowadays Av. Almirante Gago Coutinho).

But these boundaries were not intended to be limitations on the contrary, the plan was clearly structured, connecting the green fields of Alvalade to the existing city: in the south the suburban railroad leading to Sintra (to the West) and Azambuja (to the East), being a strong physical barrier, was overcome by the use of urban bridges in the avenue to the Airport (nowadays Av. Gago Coutinho) in the south-eastern limit and in Av. Roma, while Av. República was overpassed by the train with a flyover; this way the urban continuity for cars and pedestrians (connecting Areeiro Square in the South and the Airport Roundabout in the North) was granted for a better mobility and walkability which still works today. The same happened in the central area where the new Av. Roma created a direct connection (over the train tracks) to Londres Square in a rather consolidated

southern area. In the cross direction, defining the first third portion of the plan, the avenue Estados Unidos da América connects the Entrecampos Square to the Av. Roma and Av. Airport: it was a pre-existing planning decision (Costa, 2002) intended to connect the river shore (in the East) to the future bridge over the river (in the West), a major traffic infrastructure to cross the city (that only would be fully completed in its eastern connection after the Expo'98 investments, five decades later). As described, the Alvalade Plan had this clear distribution of interface spaces, having its author acted almost as the original “pontefice” (Giannitrapani, 2017) creating these bridges and passage points (above, under and at level) connecting the exterior and the interior, places of mediation between the urban tissue that “was” and the new one that “would be”.

2. The Urban Cells

Besides the aforementioned main connections to the existing city and to the outskirts of town, namely to the nearby airport (inaugurated on 1942), the *Alvalade Plan* was essentially based on a system of *urban cells* (as the author named them), separated by thresholds of main streets, clearly influenced by the concept of the *neighbourhood unit*² (Perry, 1929), trying to mix functions and different housing types, in a quest for neighbourhood identity, which the buildings’ designs, by different authors, would consolidate in the following decades.

Faria da Costa himself would follow the building site of the urban cells, especially in the first years (the overall plan took about 25 years to be completely built), in dialogue with the different authors who designed the buildings (being their co-author sometimes), accepting new suggestions and adapting the initial solution (Costa, 2002), therefore turning Alvalade Neighbourhood into a real urban and architectural lab, without losing its overall coherence.



Fig. 3. Clarence Perry, Neighbourhood Unit, 1928. New York Regional Survey, vol.7, 1929
This diagram clearly shows and explains Perry's intended hierarchy for urban space.w

The Alvalade Plan followed the urban principles defined by Raymond Unwin's book “Town Planning in Practice: an Introduction to the Art of Designing Cities and Suburbs” (1909) for the *garden-city*³, as well as the example of Radburn⁴, in the U.S.A., designed in 1929 by C. Stein and H. Wright (Gatti, sd), under the

influence of Clarence Perry’s *neighbourhood units* (Fig. 3) “and also the classical urbanistic theories proposed by the French School between the two World Wars, the expansion plans of northern European cities, and the Dutch experiments in the decades 1920/30” (Alegre, 1999).

Reflecting these concepts and influences, the Alvalade Plan uses innovative principles from modernist urban design such as distributive organization of functions and facilities, street hierarchy (avenues, streets, dead ends, and pedestrian alleys), state acquisition of private lands, the opening of urban blocks interiors for public use, mainly for green open areas (Lamas, 1993 cited in Alegre, 1999).



Fig. 4. António Carvalho, 2013, after Faria da Costa, *General Plan of Alvalade Neighbourhood, 1945*. Each of the 8 urban cells of the Alvalade Plan is structured around a school (in blue) in the center. In orange colour are the main commercial/retail areas.

This design option proved to be crucial for the success of the plan: by creating eight urban cells, Faria da Costa created the conditions for the natural rise of local identities, to the sense of belonging to the different places, within a global neighbourhood feeling.

As we can see on the general plan of Alvalade (Fig. 4), each urban cell is confined by main avenues traced in blue (equivalent to Perry’s “main highways and arterial streets” in Fig. 3), thereby creating a clear hierarchy in the urban space and, at the

same time, a clever articulated response to topography and to some pre-existing elements, minimizing the inevitable earth moving.

3. *Demography in the 1950s: a Perfect Pyramid*

Official population census in Portugal only started in 1960 but it portrays a growing young population in a perfect age pyramid: a large base of babies and youngsters and a thin top of older people 65+ years of age (Gonçalves & Carrilho, 2007). This means that when Alvalade Plan was designed in the mid 1940s, it was meant for this social reality of a very young population, when families were still large, with several children and quite often hosting in the same household different generations (grandparents, parents, and children).

Actually, that was one of the urgent reasons behind this planning decision: low-income families were going to be displaced from Martim Moniz, a very central but crowded downtown area where their homes were going to be demolished to be rebuilt according to new modernist principles of design⁵ and public health. Therefore, providing them with shelter was the main reason why the social housing of urban cells 1 and 2 were the first to be built, immediately upon the plan's approval (Alegre, 1999; Costa, 2002).

So, from 1947 to 1950, about two thousand social dwellings were built to house these displaced families (and others), in a quite isolated new area of the city. In that sense, the 1950 aerial photo of the area (Fig. 5) deserves a careful analysis because it shows the public strategy in terms of public investment at the city scale but also at local level for the residents. In this photo we can identify some metropolitan infra-structures already built or in high stage of development, such as: the already finished Avenue Gago Coutinho connecting the city centre to the airport in the Eastern limit, the urban park Campo Grande on the Western limit, connected to one of the ancient entries to the city from North, the Avenue Alferes Malheiro in the Northern limit, connecting the airport to Park Campo Grande and, finally in the Southern limit the train line to Sintra. Under construction, we can see the new main avenues of the plan: Estados Unidos da América, Rio de Janeiro, D. Rodrigo da Cunha but, most important, avenue Roma at the axis of the already built Psychiatric Hospital Júlio de Matos (a regional facility). But in the middle left of the photo, we can see the social housing units concentrated at urban cells 1 and 2 around Avenue Igreja, spreading to East where all the commercial spaces are concentrated at the ground floor of middle-class housing.

We are talking about 2000 (large) families, either displaced from the city centre or newly arrived in Lisbon (migrants from the countryside) that were sheltered in



Fig. 5. Unknown author, *Aerial view of the Alvalade infra-structures works underway, in the rural setting, 1950, Lisboa, Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa – Fotográfico*. We can see the priority given to the social housing urban cells 1 and 2, already built (in the middle-left side), the commercial area along Av. da Igreja and cell 3, the Hospital Julio de Matos, and the private detached houses along the already completed Airport Avenue (diagonal, from bottom to right, overpassing the Sintra train line, and ending at the Airport Roundabout).

a still quite no man's land. These families needed facilities for their daily life other than just shelter and that was clearly provided to them from the beginning, also based on the neighbourhood unit's principles (Perry, 1929): schools, commerce, gardens, parks, transportation, employment. It is worth therefore to take a closer look at the urban cells, to understand its underlying qualities (and constraints).

4. The Urban Cells

4.1. Urban Cells 1 and 2

A clear adaptation of Perry's principles, the primary school occupies the centre of each cell, assuring easy and safe access for the children who could walk to and from home using an alternative network of pedestrian alleys, in a square block of about 450 meters on each side (corresponding to an embedded narrative program). Cul-de-sac residential streets give a clear residential feeling to the area. The peripheral avenues concentrate the commerce, especially at the traffic junctions as recommended by Perry, where the main public transportation points (bus stops, metro stations) also are located for a balanced distribution in the larger urban space. These two urban cells are symmetrically separated/connected by Avenue Igreja, whose western end was provided with an underpass for pedestrians and bicycles connecting it safely to the urban park Campo Grande⁶, therefore assuring an important leisure space in the vicinity, traditionally attended by higher social classes⁷. Later, in the 60s a public swimming-pool was built in the center of the park.

4.2. Urban Cells 3 and 5



Fig. 6. António Carvalho, *Urban cells 1 and 2*, 2013

As seen before, the commercial sector of Urban Cell 3 was built simultaneously with cells 1 and 2 (Fig. 5), the same happening to urban cell 5 but, curiously, only for the front buildings along Avenida Igreja but not the social housing behind them. This strategy reveals maybe a clear notion of urban scenography (completing both sides of the avenue, which later would be completed by the church⁸ placed on the avenue axis in 1955) but also a pragmatic option as these are the only buildings with commerce on the ground floor in this cell. In its northern half, urban cell 3 incorporated an industrial sector made of different kinds of warehouses, thereby offering other alternatives in terms of urban uses. But while cells 1 and 2 have primary schools, maybe because Urban Cell 3 has a middle school (therefore with a wider range of service for older children), it was located facing the main Avenue Roma, being used as an urban reference as well. Something of the kind also happened in Urban Cell 5, with a high-school attended by teenagers from the whole Alvalade neighbourhood, right next to a public sports park including a stadium, swimming-pool, tennis courts, running tracks and green areas, facing Avenue Rio de Janeiro, a central position in Alvalade plan.

4.3. Urban Cells 4 and 6



Fig. 7. António Carvalho, Urban cells 3 and 5, 2013.

These two urban cells have totally different characters from each other and yet, they are tightly connected in their common limits of Avenue Dom Rodrigo da Cunha: the formally strong sequence of housing blocks set perpendicularly to the avenue. Actually, if we compare figures 2 and 4, we see a clear difference: what had been designed as a traditional “corridor street” back in 1945, was redesigned and built as a “modernist block sequence”, offering the city public green spaces in between the housing blocks. According to some authors, this was the result of a lesson learned⁹ from the plan’s author who was disappointed with the backyard green spaces in urban cells 1 and 2, hidden from the public eyes and quickly abandoned and degraded (Costa, 2002). Thus, Faria da Costa accepted the suggestion from the blocks author, Joaquim Ferreira, to set the buildings opposite to the avenue in a modern setting. A talented young landscape architect, Gonçalo Ribeiro Telles, the first to work in the municipality, would design these public green spaces in a modernist approach also. Urban Cell 4 is an exclusively housing cell, devoted to higher social classes with their detached or semi-detached villas along curvy streets which follow the topography (with a middle school in the center, on top of the hill), bordered in the outer limit avenues with apartment buildings. Urban Cell 6 on the contrary, is a quite mixed area, with apartment buildings and commercial ground floors along different street types (dead ends, avenues and a pre-existing diagonal rural street which can be seen in Fig. 5), reconciling the natural topography with special functions: the church at the end of Avenue Igreja (urban cells 1,2,3,5 to the West) is located at the peak of a hill, also in the axis of Avenue Dom Rodrigo da Cunha (urban cells 4,6 to the East); but also the high-school, tennis sport centre and the big public park Mata de Alvalade with preserved the natural topography descending towards the Airport Avenue.

4.4. Urban Cells 7 and 8



Fig. 8. António Carvalho, *Urban cells 4 and 6*, 2013.

These two urban cells are also quite different and mixed, incorporating some pre-existing elements, thus adapting to some circumstances such as: the Sintra-Azambuja train line in the southern limit, the Avenue Estados Unidos da América, the existing buildings in the middle of cell 8 and the existing street of Entrecampos in cell 7. Urban Cell 7 has a strong commercial character along Avenue Roma on both sides (once again we have a pair of cells connected by a main avenue) famous in Lisbon for the quality of its shops in the 60s and 70s. In the center we have a primary school surrounded by apartment buildings. On the western limit, almost parallel to Avenue Republica we see the commerce concentrated in the pre-existing Rua de Entrecampos. Urban Cell 8 shows somehow a duality, with the eastern part almost exclusively residential (apartment buildings and row houses), a primary school in the middle and in the western part a commercial area where almost all the apartment buildings have commerce in the ground floor (including the pre-existing ones in the middle).

Again, in all these planning decisions throughout the different urban cells we can recognize a narrative program of use even though space cannot be considered in deterministic terms as explained by Giannitrapani (2017) and the performance of the final users must confirm or deny this proposed contract which, in Alvalade case can be considered a success for its adoption by residents and citizens in general.

5. *Demography in the Year 2000: NORCs and Elder-friendly Cities*



Fig. 9. António Carvalho, *Urban cells 7 and 8*, 2019

A new millennium, a new century, a new demographic reality: by the year 2000 Alvalade was already one of the most aged neighbourhoods of Lisbon (Villaverde Cabral, 2012). Five decades after its foundation, the original population of large young families was just a past memory for the older residents who aged in place (Pastalan, 1990), in their *empty nests*¹⁰ because Alvalade had already become a NORC - *Naturally Occurring Retirement Community* (Ormond, 2004). This means that due to the normal urban process most families moved in quite simultaneously (or at least in a short time frame) and due to social inertia, property ownership (Moreira, 2008) or to personal preferences most of the residents remained and aged in place, thus converting Alvalade in a NORC, very much in line with the global tendency in the planet.

That's a reason why the World Health Organization came up with the concept of *elder-friendly cities* (WHO, 2007), promoting a worldwide network of communities adapted to an ageing planet, around a set of eight parameters: housing, trans-

portation, outdoor spaces and buildings, community support and health services, communication and information, civic participation and employment, respect and social inclusion, social participation. Directly linked with it is also a previous concept introduced by the same organization, the concept of *active ageing* as the “process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age” (WHO, 2002). Thus, together these concepts intend to promote the adjustment of our cities to the new ageing reality of their populations to promote quality of life for its ageing residents by improving or creating the eight above-mentioned parameters, some of which are directly connected to architecture and urban space. We’ll try to focus our analysis on those spatial now for the case-study of Alvalade.

6. Alvalade from the Elder-friendly Perspective

In order to consider the eight topics proposed by WHO, we’ll analyse the global plan of Alvalade neighbourhood according to each parameter, providing a visual analysis of the range of influence of each parameter in the urban space understood in the context of culture (Lotman, 2020), and considering the importance of *walkability* (De Certeau, 2020; Campoli, 2012) as a design and policy criterion.

6.1. Housing

Housing is spread all over the neighbourhood, being one of the major driving forces of the plan, as explained before. Thus, looking at Fig. 4, we can see represented in grey all the exclusively residential buildings (of many different typologies, meant for different social classes and family dimensions). Most of the orange buildings represent commercial spaces (shops or offices) on the ground floor and housing in the upper floors as a general rule. About the buildings we can say that many of them were provided with elevators from the beginning, which is a fundamental accessibility asset. But many others (all the social housing for instance) were not, so it requires an individual evaluation to find a solution for accessibility. Nevertheless, the fact that many buildings are a repetition of the same typical project (for economy and fast construction), solutions can easily be replicated, as we have proven before (Carvalho 2013).

Having been designed mostly by highly qualified modernist architects, most of the buildings have been internally updated to answer the needs of older age. Simple replacement of bathtubs by shower plates, addition of grab bars in bathrooms, etc., became a common intervention to help residents to age in place (the municipality even pays this type of small interventions under the program “Lisbon City of All Ages”), as well creating ramps at the building entrances to overcome steps and enhance accessibility to elevators, promoting autonomy. On the other hand, the diffused presence of balconies (so useful during the COVID-19 pandemic) allows older residents to be the real “eyes on the street” (Jacobs 1961) in the safety and comfort of their homes. The municipal program “Radar” (involving social workers, local police, and neighbourhood stores) also spots older people living alone, inviting them to enter the Radar Network so they can get regular phone calls checking on them and offering other support to overcome urban isolation.

6.2. Transportation

Alvalade is well served by public transportations systems, allowing almost *seamless travels* (Hanson, 2004) from origin to destination, using different transportation systems: the city airport is about 2000 meters away from the neighbourhood centre (Praça Alvalade). The suburban/regional trains have one station at Roma-Areeiro, also connected to the metro, in the southern limit of the neighbourhood. Two metro lines cross the neighbourhood, passing under Avenue Roma and Avenue República, with several stations within a 1000 meter walking distance, thereby providing a quite good range of service to most housing areas. Several bus lines go through the entire neighbourhood, with a quite even distribution of bus-stops, considering a 400 meters walking range to the housing areas. This is important to assess how comfortable can be the use of public transportation (Davis, 2002), considering the distances but also the frequency of daily displacements within Alvalade's limits or occasional longer displacements to further away city areas. Taxi stations exist also, even though the local habit is to freely halt a taxi along the streets whenever needed. In addition, the new cell phone apps help to book a taxi anywhere, anytime (and the city is well provided with a few private web companies: Uber, Bolt, Mytaxi). Recently other shared economy transportation systems appeared as well: shared bicycles, shared cars, shared scooters, making individual displacements even easier than before (specially for younger people, but also used by some brave older people). The recent municipal policy of offering free pass to public transportation to all +65 residents (and youngsters under 23) is also intended to promote the intensive use of all public means, wider mobility, and displacements, thereby supporting community life and ageing in place.

6.3. Outdoor spaces



Fig. 10. António Carvalho, *Transportation stops (rectangles) and walking range (circles)*, 2019

For this topic, we will consider the main outdoor spaces (gardens, parks, squares) as the area is very well provided of small public spaces in the vicinity of the residential areas, which is a major asset for the neighbourhood identity and sense of belonging of its residents (Carvalho, 2017). This means that most apartment buildings have small green spaces nearby, therefore offering the possibility of sitting outside without walking much.

As mentioned earlier, the global quality of landscape design in Alvalade is excellent thanks to the quality of young landscape designers, whose apex was Gonçalo Ribeiro Telles. Many squares between residential buildings were immediately provided with the necessary green elements but also with public furniture (benches, paper baskets, water fountains, public light, playgrounds) making them lively spaces. Benches that serve all ages, are now very useful to older residents who can get out of their apartments and sit quietly in the shadow (or sun) of the nearby garden, watching life happening around.

Pavements have always been a challenge in Lisbon because of the local tradition of the artistic pavement “*calçada à portuguesa*” (Portuguese cobblestone pavements). Made of small limestone cubes, this kind of pavement is often decorated (especially in squares) in black stone patterns, which in Alvalade also translate the modernist geometrical preference. The problem is that limestone tends to get smooth and slippery, therefore dangerous, especially on hills. Besides, quite often the big trees have spread their roots superficially and moulded the flexible stone puzzles, creating uneven and dangerous pavements for people with poor eyesight or balance problems. Recently the municipality has been introducing some improvements, to enhance safety: mixing limestone cubes with granite cubes (increasing roughness of the surface), creating some dedicated paths in porous concrete for smoother walk (in the same colour shade of the limestone for better integration) and creating new smoother paths for pedestrians across the gardens and squares as a safer alternative. Tactile paths for poor-sighted or blind people have also been created in the main sidewalks, leading to the crossings. All sidewalk curbs have been systematically lowered (in the past three decades) and provided with ramps for wheelchair accessibility. Recently, pedestrian traffic lights have been provided with countdown displays which give a clear understanding of the remaining time left, making the crossing of the avenues much safer.

6.4. Public benches



Fig. 11. António Carvalho, *The three main parks and walking range*, 2019

The public bench is not a topic listed by WHO (2007). But we consider it an element of vital importance (and often neglected) in city life especially for older people: the existence of public benches along the streets are a reason for older people to choose one path or the other, because its existence “enunciates” the comfort of sitting, resting and keep moving — in an *active ageing* concept, this is a valuable urban asset (Carvalho, Heitor & Reis Cabrita, 2012). Alvalade was quite well provided of public benches from its inception days, both in green spaces but also along the avenues, namely the intense commercial avenues where older people (and everybody else) can sit and watch the flow of people along generous sidewalks (Fig. 13). We can find benches with different designs: vintage models from the 1950s, other updated in the 1990s, other ones designed by the architects to be part of a global design concept of modernist buildings with public benches in front. Having public benches to sit may help to go out shopping or just sit and see the crowd — and that’s a wonderful reason to do it for so many lonely seniors in our cities. In that sense, the amusing observations on spaces by George Perec (2020) could almost correspond to a funny diary of an older resident in Alvalade, reacting to the urban life around.

6.5. Community support and health services



Fig. 12, António Carvalho, *Location of public benches (red rectangles)*, 2019



Fig. 13. António Carvalho, *Public benches along Av. Igreja*, 2012.

Alvalade was always provided with several main public facilities¹¹ for different ranges of users, from national scope, to regional, city or local. Once again, we'll analyse the walking radius according to the intended range of users. So, we can find at national and regional level: the LNEC technological campus, the Alvalade health campus with many different buildings, some of national influence, others of regional and local service, the BN national library, the UL-University of Lisbon, the Lusofona university. At city level we have: the INATEL sports campus, the park Campo Grande (with swimming-pool and gym), the park Mata de Alvalade. At local level we find: three catholic churches, several churches of other religions, the schools, two municipal markets, three post offices, many pharmacies, one theatre, one cinema, and several banks.

The four remaining WHO topics for an elder-friendly city: “communication and information, civic participation and employment, respect and social inclusion,



Fig. 14. António Carvalho, *Location of the main public facilities*, 2019.

social participation” are not easy to represent spatially on a map. But from their characteristics, we can easily understand that they result from the urban fabric density and the dynamics of local activities and economy: it is easy to understand that a low-density suburb will not offer the variety and intensity of a densely populated fabric like Alvalade.

7. Newcomers and Old Movers

We hope that at this point the described qualities and potentialities of Alvalade are quite clear. And these different layers, sometimes invisible to the distracted eye, are what makes a rich and complex city life (Perec, 2020). Therefore, it will be no surprise to state that Alvalade is still today one of the most sought-after areas in Lisbon, both for housing and for other economic activities. And yet, this NORC is keeping up with the life cycles: population came in the 1950s, grew old in place, has died or is dying and being replaced by younger generations, whose children are going to the existing schools. On the other hand, in such an aged district of the city, the older residents still make viable many old local shops, pharmacies or new convenience stores — personal trust between sellers and old customers being a valuable asset as Jacobs (1961) clearly explained. But older residents are as well the “eyes on the street”, watching the urban life for recreation, walking the dog while everybody else is at work or in school. They still go out and attend the cafés and many pastry shops (especially in Av. Igreja) as well as the existing public facilities, keeping the normal cycles of life in the neighbourhood. Meanwhile, many new shops and activities for the new generations have been popping up, providing surprises and a sense of renewal, of life. In short, Alvalade continues to be a flowing ecosystem of newcomers and old movers.

We can still say that in terms of representation, the new urban space, considered as cultural organism and context (Lotman, 2020) was clearly enunciated through the hierarchy of streets, enhanced later by the architectural design of its buildings, on a spatial discursive level: the main avenues (Av. Estados Unidos da América, Av. Roma, Av. Brasil) concentrated the most representational and referential buildings. In fact, along these avenues the striated and perspectival alignment of modernist buildings standing high on top of its “pilotis”, perpendicular to the avenues enunciate a new image for a new lifestyle, introducing the wide car lanes and abundant car parking areas (from the early Fifties, a time when cars were a rare commodity), therefore showing the urban space as a sequence of quite abstract volumes (and yet with poetic design gestures like the big openings on the open-air terraces, framing the blue sky) becoming “referential buildings” (Giannitrapani, 2017). At the crossing of Av. Estados Unidos da América with Av. Roma, four “mythic buildings” stand out in shape, colour and volume, in a “substantial” way: apparently similar, these four buildings are all different in their specific volumes and articulation with their own lower bodies that create the transition to the other directions. It is on their ground floors that some meaningful spaces (two main cafés, mythical references in the neighborhood for the intellectual debates among its regular customers, or two banks and a post-office) attract the residents and create an urban hub as if it was a square, which is not, proving its representational and iconic power in the city as one of the strongest urban images of Modernist Lisbon.

All this makes Alvalade a lively district of different people where seniors can displace themselves on foot or by public transportation and go to the public services

they need or their favourite places. In a scenario of a rapidly ageing society it is realistic to keep in mind that the “new normal” future citizen will be older, thereby all public facilities and investments should reconsider their typical user and target groups as not necessarily the young anymore, but rather the aged or ageing citizen who tends to live longer (but not necessarily with good health), therefore requiring more support from all public and private facilities. This is not a pessimistic view of the future but rather optimistic, considering the goal of contributing to an active ageing (WHO, 2002) process, creating spatial conditions for citizens to age in place, in a continuous recreation process (Lotman, 2020) under a similar profile to the one described by Pereg (2020) for his observer citizen in different types of spaces.

Note

¹ This social duality is superbly portrayed in a cinema film of 1963, “Os Verdes Anos” by Paulo Rocha, where the Alvalade neighbourhood is the real setting for the movie.

² The *neighbourhood unit* was a concept introduced by Clarence Perry in the USA, at the beginning of 20th century, following some clear urban principles: a total population of 5000 to 9000 inhabitants; a school located in the center, so that children could walk safely, away from heavy traffic; placing the main heavy traffic streets on the outside borders, along with commerce, therefore creating the neighbourhood limits; designing the inner streets with a lower hierarchy to avoid passing through traffic; saving at least 10% of the unit’s area for gardens and free spaces, to promote leisure and social interaction.

³ One of the best examples is a suburban area in London, England, the garden-city of Hampstead — or Hampstead Garden Suburb (1906), its official name — designed by Raymond Unwin, following the Letchworth Garden City, also by Unwin and Parker, much inspired by Ebenezer Howard (1898).

⁴ Radburn introduced in the U.S.A. the dead-end streets (or cul-de-sac) which we can also find in Alvalade in urban cells 1, 2 and 5, mainly at the social housing ensembles.

⁵ Faria da Costa had also conceived the urban design for Martim Moniz in 1943, even though it was never built.

⁶ Campo Grande is a historical green space in Lisbon, dating back to the 14th century, the largest in the city centre still today, that was totally redesigned in 1945 by architect Keil do Amaral following a tornado destruction in 1941.

⁷ It was a traditional leisure area for aristocrats until the early 20th century, who used to attend horse races there.

⁸ “Avenida Igreja” means literally “Church Avenue” in Portuguese.

⁹ This planning decision by Faria da Costa must be recognized as quite remarkable and very open-minded, as the buildings along Avenue Dom Rodrigo da Cunha were designed in 1949, thus the result of what we would call a very sharp “post-occupation evaluation” of the results in urban cells 1 and 2, built from 1947 to 1950.

¹⁰ American expression used to describe homes where the children have grown and left, and only the older parents remain in family dwellings that are now too big, too empty.

¹¹ Besides the public facilities, Alvalade is richly provided of a great diversity of private facilities of all kinds of services and business areas, probably due to the centrality of the area and its good provision of public transportation, making it easy to get here from other areas of the city.

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