

CONTESTED MODERNITIES. POLITICS, CULTURE AND URBANISATION IN PORTUGAL

A Case Study from the Greater Lisbon Area

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The article analyses a long-term conflict centred on an abandoned shipyard situated across the Tagus from the historical city centre of Lisbon. Since 1999, ambitious plans to build high-rise office towers and luxury apartments on the deserted site polarized politics and public opinion in the area, and local struggles about what to do with this former industrial waterfront became a catalyst for debates that reverberated through the entire country, throwing into sharp relief conflicting cultures of modernity that compete for hegemony in Portuguese society. In our study that spans the years 1999–2007, we consider urban planning and the political controversies spawned by urbanist interventions as a privileged site for the investigation of the cultural construction of modernities.

Keywords: modernity, urban planning, political culture, Portugal, Lisbon

Moderna Almada [...]
E tens força e tens beleza
E desde que Abril surgiu
És a cidade portuguesa
Das que mais evoluiu¹

These lines from the song composed for the “Marchas Populares” of the year 2004 in the Portuguese municipality of Almada celebrate the community’s “force and beauty”. Such popular marches are annual public events in many Portuguese towns and cities, occasions on which marching bands, parades of local organisations, song contests, and folklore performances transform streets and squares into open-air stages, and serve to coalesce a fierce communal pride. The lines quoted above emphasize that since the revolution of April 1974 that overthrew the dictatorship of the Right, no other town in Portugal has undergone comparable growth and development

as Almada on the southern shore of the Tagus estuary, just opposite of the city of Lisbon.² Other stanzas of the song go on to rhapsodize the progressive character of the town, and emphasize that it is well-governed, has modern infrastructure, and offers employment to its residents. While it may appear odd at first sight that modernity is positively invoked as a matter of pride and achievement in a traditionalist cultural format, our essay will proceed to show how the community’s engagement with modernity articulates its history and expresses its specifically local “tradition of modernisation”. Indeed, the Marchas Populares are no relic of traditional popular culture either, but are an invented tradition of the 1930s³ that later on was promoted by the regime of the Estado Novo as part of its policy of folklorization, aiming for the creation of a nationalist cultural idiom based on an idealized Portuguese folk culture.

The emblematic modernity cheered on by the ur-

ban working-class celebrants in the street of Almada on June 23rd 2004, however, was not uncontested. Rather, another, radically different vision of modern urban life was competing with the communal pride of the children and grandchildren of migrants from rural Portugal who came here to work in the factories and who in the majority support the Communist-lead local government. This other vision emerged when the Lisnave Docks, one of the largest shipyards in the world located on the Tagus shore of Almada, specializing in oil tanker repair, was slated to shut down during the 1990s because its operations were going to be shifted to another area, further south on the Atlantic Coast. The huge dock land area situated across the Tagus from the historical city centre of Lisbon that fell into disuse at the beginning of 2001 became a catalyst for conflicts that reverberated through the entire country.

As early as 1999, ambitious plans to build high-rise office towers and luxury apartments on this site polarized politics and public opinion far beyond the Greater Lisbon Area. These plans engaged a vision

of modernity that endeavoured to put Almada – and with it, the entire Lisbon area – on a global map of world cities that serve as nodes of the international service economy and financial sector. In our essay, we will employ the increasingly heated and still on-going conflict over what to do with the abandoned shipyard as a case-in-point, arguing that it throws into sharp relief conflicting cultures of modernity that compete for hegemony in Portuguese society.

Modernisation in Social Discourse

The following article reports findings from an extended fieldwork project conducted in the Greater Lisbon Area from 2004 until 2007.⁴ We consider urban planning, and the political controversies spawned by urbanist interventions, a privileged site for the investigation of “glocal” practices. According to Roland Robertson (1998), globalization processes are always appropriated, resisted, subverted, and modified in local settings. Depending on differences in historically generated cultural circumstances and in political and economic frameworks, the effects

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Ill.1: View of the abandoned dry dock of the Lisnave Shipyards in Almada across the Tagus River from Lisbon.
(Photo: Eva Maria Blum.)

vary considerably. Robertson emphasizes the fact that as a consequence of globalization, “the local” is not obliterated but rather reinvented anew. As a country on the margins of Europe, both geographically and, for a long time also socio-economically, Portugal lends itself especially well to inquiries into the cultural construction of modernity. To pursue an “anthropology of modernity” (Kahn 2001) means to resolutely turn away from an understanding of anthropology as the study of the pre-modern and the traditional, that has constituted the original impetus of anthropological research. While modern societies have been of interest to anthropologists only because of the relics of traditional cultures they harboured and the pockets of not-yet-modern practices left by the onslaught of modernisation, the anthropology of modernity that emerged internationally in the 1980s focuses on the cultural dimensions of those institutions, discourses, and practices that are considered modern: the state and its bureaucracies, science and technology, infrastructure and planning, medicine and education, the economy and the military (see Rabinow 1989; Appadurai 1996). More precisely, an anthropology of modernity implies to inquire into how social actors make modernity relevant in their own lives, and to make modern subjectivities, the social imaginaries of modernity, and the transformations of social agency in modern societies, topical in anthropology. (See Frykman & Löfgren 1987; Herzfeld 1992; Geertz 1995.) This has also triggered self-reflexive inquiries into the role of ethnography as a form of modern knowledge production (Marcus & Fischer 1986; Clifford & Marcus 1986).

In our project, we looked at the region of Lisbon as one experiencing a spectacular and accelerated growth and expansion. Many of the dynamics that shape the Lisbon area can be observed in similar form in other southern European countries as well. As such, Portugal is particularly suited as a comparison case to other circum-Mediterranean countries, especially Greece and Spain, with whom it shares some of the same problematics of a rapid transition from a primarily agrarian economy, the legacy of authoritarian political rule and the achievement of democratization, and the decisive influence of Eu-

ropean integration. Even though political analysts and social scientists in Portugal readily place their society within that frame of reference, we would also like to point out some aspects that make Portugal a special case.

For many decades, the modernisation of Portuguese society was not an anthropological concern, but considered the domain of sociology. Sociology as a discipline did not come into its own until after restrictions on the critical inquiry into Portuguese society were lifted after the April Revolution of 1974 (see Viegas & Costa 2000). Conversely, anthropology came into being in Portugal as a “nation-building” discipline in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, along the lines of ethnological and folklorist endeavours in other European nation states that were concerned with salvaging and documenting authentic folk culture, and enlisting oral traditions and material culture in the construction of a national identity.⁵ In the twentieth century, ethnological research on the traditional cultures and folk arts of rural Portugal remained an important concern, especially throughout the rule of the fascist “Estado Novo”. After 1974, the discipline was able to develop new research concerns and to engage more intensely with theoretical discussions of the international anthropological arena. (See Branco 1982.) Since then, anthropology’s former engagement with defining, conserving and representing traditional Portuguese culture itself has become an important topic of contemporary researchers who inquire into anthropology’s role in the creation of museum collections (see Bouquet 1999) and the folklorization of expressive cultures (see El-Shawan Castelo-Branco & Branco 2003). More recently, the effect of the historical legacy of colonialism and the recent changes associated with globalization also come into the purview of Portuguese anthropologists⁶ who started to study immigration, multiculturalism, and the social problems of the urban peripheries.

“Modern Almada”: Migration, Industrialization, and Suburbanization

Almada is an exceptional community. Yet, even in its extremes, it reflects developments that are typical

for all of Portugal. Industrialization has transformed Almada and neighbouring communities since the 1940s, making it a magnet for poor migrants from the countryside, and later, for returnees from the former colonies. Its urban sprawl was generated by the immense population growth and the resultant, largely unchecked development of residential construction that started in the 1960s. In the last decades, the metropolitan area of Lisbon, and with it Almada, were attracting hundreds of thousands of people who left their homes in the depressed agricultural regions of inland Portugal and migrated to the industrialized areas near the coast, clustering around the port cities and metropolitan centres on the Atlantic Ocean. This still-ongoing process of “littoralization”, meaning the concentration of by now 80 percent of the Portuguese population in the coastal plain adjacent to the Atlantic littoral (see Machado & Costa 2000), coupled with labour migration to northern Europe and other overseas countries, led to the abandonment and “desertification” of inland agricultural economies. By the same

token, it created an immense urbanisation pressure, especially in the Lisbon and Porto metropolitan areas where today more than half of the Portuguese population resides. Situated across the river from Lisbon, Almada is an urban centre in its own right, but for decades it served as a valve to absorb the residential overflow of Lisbon and the areas north of the Tagus. The opening of the huge Tagus bridge in 1966, connecting Lisbon with the peninsula of Setúbal on which Almada is situated, was instrumental in this development.

The entire area administered by the municipality of Almada which stretches from the Atlantic coast beaches of Caparica to the heavily industrialized southern shore of the Tagus estuary, and incorporates numerous former villages, small towns and agricultural holdings, was shaped by this process. Slums and shantytowns with stark poverty were its most extreme effects. Rapidly built housing projects and high-rise blocks were created to ameliorate this situation, without any systematic framework of urban planning.⁷ Large parts of the territory of the

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Ill. 2: Billboard advertising the construction of a low-income housing project in Almada. In the background, Almada city blocks and the Cristo Rey monument are visible. (Photo: Eva Maria Blum.)

municipality of Almada are considered suburban, according to Portuguese terminology. What is called “suburbanisation” in Portugal does not necessarily refer to single-family homes for the middle class outside the city, but is often taken to mean substandard housing in blocks of buildings, considered rife with social problems, constructed on the urban peripheries. After 1974, state-induced slum-clearance programmes relocated many slum dwellers to such housing blocks.

The revolution of April 25, 1974, that did away with the political repression of the Salazar regime and ended the disastrous involvement in the overseas colonial wars, was faced with the immense challenge of eradicating social inequality in a country that was considered one of the poorest in Europe,

with an illiteracy rate of more than one quarter of the population as late as 1970. The democratization of the country, and the opening-up of society, allowing all sectors of the population access to education and social mobility, which since the mid-1970s was made possible by the April Revolution, continue to be a source of pride for large parts of the population even today, more than 30 years later.

In Almada, the Municipal Museum dedicates a considerable portion of its permanent exhibit on the past and present of the community to the local events of the Revolution and the contributions of the industrial and shipyard workers of Almada to the overthrow. The April Revolution thus is as much a reference point for collective memory and local identities as it was the most decisive catalyst for the

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Ill. 3: A panel at the exhibit commemorating the 30th anniversary of the April Revolution in 2004 at the local historical museum. The exhibit was created by the municipality and focused on local events in Almada under the title “To give wings to dreams”. (Photo: Eva Maria Blum.)

modernisation of Portuguese society. The modernisation trajectory of Portuguese society is marked by another, equally important passage point, Portugal's accession to the European Community in 1986. The accession to the European Community is generally considered to mark the point in time when agriculture declined considerably, and industrial production decreased in importance relative to the service sector.

Already in the 1970s, service professions started to increase considerably in Almada. In the course of the 1980s, the percentage of those employed in industrial production decreased from 40 to 30 percent of local employment. Still, among those, the workers in the shipyards constructing and repairing seagoing vessels constituted the strongest group, with 57 percent of all industrial workers employed in Almada in 1984. This particular industrial sector underwent massive changes due to globalization pressures. The Lisnave Shipyards, situated in the Cacilhas section of Almada right across from Lisbon, fell victim to the restructuring of its owner company, and one of the biggest dry docks for oil tankers in the world closed down in 2000, with far-ranging negative consequences for the local economy and employment situation.

An Incomplete Modernity?

In Portugal, society's engagement with globalization is interpreted against the backdrop of a specific modernization trajectory in the twentieth century, and indeed, also against the backdrop of an imperial colonial history reaching many centuries back. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, many Portuguese authors in the social sciences enlist classical modernization theories to assess the progress their society has made, especially during the past 30 years since the Revolution. Modernisation is considered to be a standardized process following a normative course for which the societies of northern Europe serve as a model. Analysts of the Portuguese modernisation process compare their country with other, more longstanding members of the European Union that are considered to be "further developed" and serve as a standard against which the develop-

ment of their own society ought to be measured. This type of comparison is a major theme in social science discourse in Portugal and can be considered quite influential outside of academia as well. In addition, a diachronic comparison of the Portugal of the past with that of the present is often invoked, with backwardness, traditionalism, authoritarianism, and the subjugation to centralized power as the most important traits of the past from which the present needs to distinguish itself – and sometimes, in the observers' opinions, does so only incompletely.

While many changes started in the 1960s and were accelerated by the achievements of the 1974 revolution, the process of modernisation is considered to have been speeded up considerably by accession to the European Community in 1986, with growing prosperity, the emergence of a middle class, the pluralization of society, and the spread of mass consumption as the most important changes. Ever since, the elimination of backwardness has become the most frequently voiced political promise, prevalent among all political parties across the spectrum (see Barreto 2000: 69). Even though experts attest to Portugal's impressive pace in attaining structural change, they are also very much aware of the fact that the process does not follow the model set by other societies to the letter, and that many goals still remain to be attained. For that reason, the pertinent social science literature and political analyses in the media continue to speak of the modernisation process in Portugal as being "imbalanced" (Barreto 2000: 68f), or else of an "incomplete modernity" (Viegas & Costa 2000: 6). This discourse relies on conventional models of modernisation and views the course of Portuguese societies primarily in terms of "deficits". Since EU accession, the multitude of subsidy programmes and infrastructural funds, that Portugal has been able to benefit from, has in a paradoxical way reinforced this self-image of Portuguese society as being in a position of lagging behind and having to catch up. Surely, the orientation towards Europe and towards the European Union is a very recent and in some ways still fragile development, fraught with difficulties in terms of fulfilling conditions set for the national economic and social policies. Yet, to

talk of the country as being “na cauda da Europa”, the rearguard of Europe, is widespread among journalists and politicians. In some cases, this serves not only to scandalize delays and deficits in developing society, but expresses nostalgia and mourning over the loss of a past “historical greatness” (see Lourenço 1997). This refers to the former hegemonial position as the centre of a large colonial empire which today has given way to a geographically and economically peripheral position within Europe.

Anthropologists in recent years have been exceedingly critical of the application of classical modernization theory when employed to assess “a society’s progress”, particularly in peripheral and non-Western societies. Indeed, to use institutions and values of northern European and North American cultures as a yardstick against which to measure the modernity of societies, tends to freeze most other societies in positions of “not-yet” or “not quite”, and to see them primarily in terms of lags and deficits. Instead of the teleological narrative of modernization, anthropologists propose to acknowledge “alternative constructions of modernity in the sense of moral-political projects that seek to control their own present and future” (Ong 1999: 23; see also Ong 2001) rather than straining to conform with criteria and scales imposed from the outside. The notion that there is not one universal type of modernity but rather “multiple modernities” (see Hannerz 1996; Kahn 2001) is an attractive one, as it brings within the purview of anthropology all those non-traditional social formations that anthropologists would hesitate to call modern according to a narrowly conceived Euro-American model.⁸ However, the anthropological critique of modernization theory is mostly concerned with chiding Western social scientists as being politically incorrect by not acknowledging non-Western societies’ ability to determine their own path into and through modernity. What these critiques to some extent obviate is that today, the image of an ideal type of linear progress is most prevalent and effective in non-Western societies themselves, firmly embedded in their political discourses and cultures of expertise. It is no longer the social scientists from abroad, but local analysts,

experts and decision makers who enlist this powerful trope of the modern. Cultural anthropologist Vassos Argyrou has repeatedly pointed out that modernity is not a goal to be reached but rather an identity that non-Western societies “tie themselves to [...] and submit in this way to other, more powerful societies” (1996: 1). In our paper, we explore how in Portugal, this modern identity is engaged by social actors in a variety of ways to pursue their political goals and cultural objectives.

Torres de Manhattan em Cacilhas: Towers of Contention

“Torres de Manhattan em Cacilhas” was the headline of the Portuguese newspaper *Expresso* on April 24, 1999. This marked the beginning of a protracted conflict about the future of the Lisnave Shipyards, at that point in time still operating but their closure considered imminent. The media attacked the plans proposed by the owner of the land, the real estate fund Fundo Margueira Capital, to build high-rise buildings on the site of the former docks in Cacilhas, the part of Almada where the Lisnave was located on the river front. The ambitious plans called for a spectacular project with skyscrapers of up to 80 floors, on a site directly across the river from the historical old town of Lisbon. The newspaper’s polemic enlisted the image of the Manhattan skyline⁹ that had been thrown into the discussion at the very first press conference on the project in 1999 by the Lady Mayor of Almada, Maria Emilia Neto de Sousa, who from the beginning fiercely opposed the plans. In the years to come, she would emerge as a formidable enemy for Ricardo Nunes, the managing director of the Margueira Fund, who was passionately committed to transforming the former industrial river front into a glamorous, internationally renowned urbanist project. His opponent, the mayor, is quoted in the newspaper as fearing that high-rises would keep the sunlight away from the community of Almada. “They are going to steal the sky that belongs to the people of Almada,” she is reported to have said. Her rhetoric was well-chosen to mobilize popular sentiment. Opposition to the project that was called “megalomaniac” or even “monstrous” quickly began to be

voiced in the public arena far beyond Almada. Some critics would focus on the vicinity of the project to the architectural heritage of Lisbon, arguing that it was misplaced so close to the old urban centre, others feared that the aesthetic impact on the southern riverside of the Tagus would be disastrous.¹⁰ The highest structure on the peninsular shore opposite of Lisbon had been, uncontested since the 1960s, the world-famous figure of Cristo Rey. That high-rise buildings – even at a considerable distance – should compete with it was a provocation.

At first sight, then, the disproportionately adverse reaction to the plan, and the vicious polemics that developed between the protagonists on both sides, are similar to comparable antagonisms in other cities around the world. Plans to erect high-rise buildings close to or in historical city centres often lead to extremely polarized disputes between supporters and opponents (see Rodenstein 2006). In Portugal as well, the question whether skyscrapers of such scale are compatible with the urban building tradition of the country – and with its culture in general – was hotly debated in the media and public fora. However, a closer scrutiny reveals that the incendiary quality of the conflict had less to do with the height of the planned buildings but with irreconcilable differences in the politics and cultural orientations of those involved on opposite sides. In order to better understand this conflict, it is useful to look into the history and especially into the economics of the site.

In 1993, it first became public knowledge that the corporation who owns the Lisnave would close down the site at Cacilhas, consolidating its operations at the Setnave shipyards to the south of the peninsula at the port of Setubal. The municipal government refused to accept that decision and demanded that the jobs should remain in Almada. The municipality had shortly before passed a zoning ordinance for the entire community that defined the site as “industrial” and thereby excluded future uses as residential or office space. However, the central government who had the final say on the zoning ordinance disagreed with this declaration and cut the area of the Lisnave Shipyards out of the municipal document. The municipality saw this intervention by the central gov-

ernment as an attack on the community’s lawful right to legislate building zones within its territory, and promptly filed suit at the highest administrative court of the country. Independent municipalities, and elections for municipal officers and town parliaments, are very recent institutions in Portugal and did not exist before 1976. The political figure of the municipal government with a measure of independence from the central state is viewed as a progressive achievement that was made possible by the 1974 revolution, and any attack on the sovereignty of local power is considered onerous.

It can be assumed that the central government had moved against the continuation of the industrial use of the site as declared by the community’s zoning ordinance, in order to leave the issue of the future use of the shipyard site open. Alternatives to industrial uses had to be considered, because the outgoing company had saddled the state with a considerable financial burden. In the 1960s, the fascist regime of the Estado Novo had given over the area of the docks to the Lisnave¹¹ company on the condition that if the company ceased operations on the site, the terrain would revert to state ownership and the state, in turn, would recompense the company for the investments it had made on the site for the erection of structures. When in the early 1990s, the decision was made to close down the Lisnave Shipyards, it was determined that the Portuguese state would have to pay a compensation of EUR 210 Million to the company. In order to raise this sum, the state and a number of banks created the above mentioned real estate fund Fundo Margueira Capital, in which the Portuguese state holds the majority, and charged it with the task of developing a highly profitable real estate project on the site. This is where Ricardo Nunes – and the architects he committed to his plans – comes in.

While the leading politicians of the municipality of Almada belong to or have a strong affinity to the Communist Party and consider themselves heirs of the April 1974 revolution, the protagonists of the real estate fund represent a fundamentally different political culture. They carry on the tradition of an entrepreneurial elite that – while it supported the Revolution because the economic policies of the Estado Novo were

no longer in their best interests – has mostly opposed the reforms and measures of post-revolutionary governments, in particular the abandoning of Portugal's overseas possessions and the policy of dispossessing privately-owned companies.¹² Adherents of this camp had always been unequivocally pro Europe, while the Communist Party had been against Portugal's accession to the EU in 1986.¹³ While this entrepreneurial elite today holds a neoliberal view of the role of the state, the political milieu that the municipal rulers of Almada belong to regards the state as being the guarantor of the welfare of the people.

Ricardo Nunes, who at the time of these events was managing director of the real estate fund, had no connections to Almada prior to the project. He lived in Lisbon for much of his life and shared with the educated classes of the city a denigrating attitude towards people living south of the river Tagus. Other experts interviewed in the course of our research affirm that Lisbonians generally consider those on the other side as backward and provincial. Nunes himself in an interview¹⁴ called the residents of Almada “former peasants who had been transformed into factory workers” and entered into polemics against the communist-lead town halls of the municipalities on the other side. He accused the municipal government of Almada of having lost touch with present-day developments. In particular, he claims that they have not realized yet that Portugal has entered the post-industrial age:

The tragedy is that these town halls are trying to carry on the legacy of 1975 when the communists took power in these communities [...] They did so democratically because the population was working class, ex-peasants who had become factory workers. But the industrial revolution has come to an end. There is still industrial production, yet it does not operate with people anymore, but with machines. This is why it is no longer necessary that the political leaders in these communities defend the workers – simply because there are no workers any more. That's over. The society we are building today is a leisure society.¹⁵

When the municipal government of Almada rejected his project, he saw this as evidence of their backwardness. What he did not see, because he was caught in his own prejudiced world view, was that the municipal elite was far from backward. They were very much aware of the fact that de-industrialisation had become a dominant economic process, that the economic paradigms had changed, and that they needed to embark on a new type of modernization strategy in order to maintain and increase the welfare of Almada's population. Because of his preconceived notions of the motivations of the mayor and her supporters, he failed to take their opposition seriously. Because of his deeply ingrained anti-communism, he was also unable to realize that the communists, too, saw that globalization and Europeanization were processes that they could not escape or obviate, and that they needed to find a new compromise to pursue their goal of creating a progressive society.

“Portugal dos Pequenitos”: A Cultural Conflict

The closure of the Lisnave Docks had originally been scheduled for 1996. When Nunes and the real estate fund were charged with developing the site and began working in 1995, they had anticipated an early start for their urbanization project. However, the closing-down was delayed twice, until at last, the shipyards ceased to operate at the end of 2000. Before it closed down, one and a half thousand workers still worked there.¹⁶

Charged with launching a project to rebuild the site before 2002, Ricardo Nunes quickly took action. When the plans developed by the first architect commissioned by him did not please him, he began to pursue a vision of his own: He wanted high-rises. He refreshed old contacts he had to Hong Kong and Macau, started to network with the protagonists of the London Docklands project, and was able to win one of the most prestigious Portuguese architectural firms, the studio of Manuel Graça Dias and Egas José Viera, known for their unconventional designs, for the project. Nunes envisioned “a complete urban formation” for fifteen thousand new residents, including an entirely new infrastructure and “attract-

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Ill. 4: The emblematic gantry arch still dominates the site of the former Lisnave Shipyards and is clearly visible even from across the river. None of the proposals to convert the site to new uses dared to suggest a removal of the “porticus”. (Photo: Eva Maria Blum.)

tions” such as a huge shopping mall. The architects suggested that it should be connected to Almada by way of an elliptical avenue. At the centre of the new project were high-rise towers of more than 80 floors. Clearly, under the condition of having to create a high financial return, the decision for sky scrapers represented a smart solution of multiplying the number of square metres of residential and commercial spaces that would be produced. Yet, for Nunes, the Towers as they were going to be called represented not merely an economically profitable strategy. Rather, he was inspired and even driven by the mission to bestow high-rises on the Lisbon area. A new city to rise like a Phoenix from the ashes and to counteract the banality of the endless suburbs, modelled after the great metropolises of the world such as Chicago, Singapore and Hong Kong, was his intention.¹⁷ The last November edition of the weekly newspaper *Expresso* in 2000 contained a poster and a brochure on the project “Torres de Manhattan em Cacilhas”. It was titled “Eppur si muove” – taking as a cue Galileo’s famous saying “And yet it moves”. The brochure goes on to say – in Portuguese – “eve-

rything is in motion, is developing around us. There is progress”. The text was also published on the website of the project. It hails the new promise of overcoming the evils of the industrial age with the new vision of a leisure society and a better future for everybody. “The Towers of Almada will have the force of what the future will be. They are a commitment to the evolutionary trajectory of development and progress.”¹⁸ The zone of the Margueira, once one of industrial pollution, so it promises, will become one of fresh air and clear views. Only the high-rise constructions will allow Almada to enjoy once again the spectacular beauty of the riverside landscape from which it had been cut off by the Lisnave docks.

In an interview published on December 7th, 2000, in the regional newspaper *Jornal Outra Banda*, Ricardo Nunes claims that the Towers will have an enormous aesthetic presence and are a symbol for modernity. He rejects the interviewer’s criticism that they clash with the texture of the built environment along the southern riverfront, and claims that the towers, on the contrary, respect what he calls the memory of the locality which he characterizes

as a site known for technological innovations. Such a daring solution would put Lisbon on the map of European metropolises.

One of the leading firms in corporate consulting in Portugal had been commissioned by Nunes to develop a feasibility study on the economic potential of the project. The author of the study, the renowned economist Ernâni Lopes, strongly proposed to Nunes the creation of a new urban region joining both sides of the Tagus estuary. This metropolitan area, composed of Lisbon proper and the municipalities and areas south of the river, would then become a veritable global city, able to compete with other European urban regions for attention and investments. The project, initially known as “Elipse”, taking its name from the beltway that would connect it to the rest of Almada, was given a new title, “Ulissul”, an artificial composite name joining Lissabon and “sul”, the South, with a reference to the mythical founder of the City, Ulysses. The rebuilding of the former Lisnave shipyards in Cacilhas thereby became just one element in a much larger plan that aimed for a comprehensive strategy for the entire Lisbon Area, integrating Lisbon with the southern side of the estuary where Almada is situated.

When opposition to the project massed, Nunes became increasingly polemical and topped his earlier plans with an alternative project that included one structure of 500 m and another of 350 m,¹⁹ modelled after similar projects in Shanghai and elsewhere. Opponents of his vision were derided by him as the lobby of the “tijolinhos” – in Portuguese this means “little bricks”. While this is the conventional building material of small structures, Nunes drew the analogy to criticize what he considered the narrow mindedness of his opponents. But in order to launch the project, the Fundo Margueira Capital needed not just the consent, but the active participation of the municipality of Almada. However, the Lady Mayor and the officials of the municipal government sternly refused to negotiate. Without their support, Nunes was threatened to become a lonely fighter for a lost cause. In the interview conducted with him in the context of our research, he himself considered the community’s unwillingness to even

discuss the project to some extent as politically motivated. Having vowed to fight for the jobs of the departing shipyard, the local political leaders could hardly enter into negotiations about an urbanization project on the site of the shipyards as long as they were still operating and when presumably some jobs could still be saved. Otherwise, they would have lost credibility with their voters. Also, so Nunes suspected, they were not happy about the prospect of the creation of an entirely new, largely middle-class residential area, adding ten or even fifteen thousand new residents who would most likely not vote for the Communist Party, thereby endangering the power base of the Municipal Chamber of Almada.

He also interpreted the sustained opposition to the project as a cultural conflict, proclaiming himself a “cultural crusader”:

This is first and foremost a cultural question. I believe that the Towers represent a challenge to their modesty, their smallness. They feel that to build these towers right in front of their noses attacks their smallness. In the North, in Anglo-Saxon and Saxon countries, they have towers because they feel confirmed by them in their sense of greatness. Here, in the South, we have developed a culture of smallness, of being satisfied with being small, of not wanting to offend.²⁰

He contends that in order to enter the European stage and to compete with other countries as an equal, Portugal will have to abandon this traditional mentality. In the metropolitan area of the country’s capital, there is a need for symbols of growth and greatness and this is what the “vertical configuration” of his visionary skyscrapers promise, so he claims. Sardonicly, he associates the opposition of the municipality to his plans with their wish to remain moored in a “Portugal dos Pequenos”. This “country of the small people” is not just a metaphor – it is a theme park built during the regime of the Estado Novo, consisting of minituarized tableaux of all of Portugal’s towns and cities. However, in contemporary discourse,²¹ the “Portugal dos Pequenos” is often used metaphorically along the same lines that

Ricardo Nunes employed it in the interview within the framework of our research. It criticizes a traditional tendency of Portuguese social actors to “think small” and not to have the courage to embark on big endeavours. As such, this smallish Portugal contrasts with the expansive colonial empire of past centuries, and is invoked by those political actors who bemoan the loss of historical greatness that the decolonization to their minds represents.

The Demise of “Ullisul” and the Rise of the “Cidade de Agua”

Exchanges between Nunes and the political leadership of Almada became increasingly acerbic. Both sides enlisted the media and the internet, the Fundo Margueira also used conventional advertising campaigns.²² While Nunes did not hesitate to call the municipality’s methods “Stalinist”,²³ the Lady Mayor firmly declared her defiance against the top-down “dictatorial” stance of the real estate fund: “This is not the Latin America of the generals”.²⁴ The Fundo Margueira Capital had been installed by the Ministry of Finances, but openly declared support by the central government was conspicuously absent. This is the more surprising against the backdrop of how the government conducted the huge construction effort on the site of the 1998 Expo that Lisbon hosted. Then, the state took on an entrepreneurial role and lifted any restrictions on development rapidly and easily, so that an entirely new quarter of the city on the site of a formerly industrial waterfront on the northern shore of the Tagus River was created within the space of a few years.²⁵

When the Lisnave Docks were about to go out of business at the end of 2000, the local parliament of Almada took action and decided to advertise an international architectural competition for developing the waterfront. The “intervention area” mapped out for this new project included the former Lisnave site, but was much larger, including an area of more than 100 hectares of the neighbouring quarters of Cacilhas and Cova de Piedade, two parts of Almada that included old village centres, industrial areas, and modern housing developments of the 1960s and 1970s. This decision completely ignored the existing

proposal by the Fundo Margueira Capital, and when Nunes submitted his plans for the Towers to the municipality for approval in February 2001, it was voted down promptly by the municipality. Meanwhile, the Lady Mayor had met with the Minister of Finances, his ministry originally having commissioned Nunes and the real estate fund with developing the site. Also, José Sócrates, the then Minister of Planning and the Environment who would later become Prime Minister, issued an official declaration in the aftermath of the Lady Mayor’s meeting with representatives of the state. In the press release, he unequivocally rejected the plan of the Towers arguing that the huge financial debt that the government had incurred with the closing of the Lisnave should not be paid for by abandoning basic principles of city planning and zoning.

In May 2001, the competition for an architectural plan for the new intervention area, now called “Frente Ribeirinha Nascente”, the emerging river front, was internationally advertised. The groundwork had been laid by a highly professional team of civil servants working for the municipality of Almada, consisting of urban planners, engineers, and environmental experts. This team had also developed a unique methodology of having all stakeholders including the residents participate in the planning process. Instead of the top-down planning strategy that Nunes had tried to implement, a participatory project development was envisioned. In the summer of that year, Nunes conceded defeat and left his position as managing director.²⁶ As it would turn out, relations between the Fundo Margueira and the municipality later improved, and to this date, the new management and the municipal government are cooperating well. In October 2002, the winners of the competition were made public. It was an international architectural consortium, consisting of the Portuguese architectural firm Santa Rita Architects, the British-Portuguese company W.S. Atkins who are known for their expertise in decontaminating former industrial sites, and the internationally renowned British star architect Richard Rogers. At the first discussion forum with local residents, Rogers showed his talent for publicity when he said that

now, the site would no longer be transformed into a “Manhattan”, but perhaps in its place, a new “Venice” on the Tagus would emerge.

It is important to note the elaborated set of negotiations, discussion fora, and meetings between citizens and the architects established for this project is not legally binding in Portugal. The law merely requires that completed plans have to be made accessible to the public and a public hearing has to be held. With its emphasis on bottom-up participation and the inclusion of all stakeholders including the real estate fund in the planning process, the municipal administration took up a tradition of civil society-oriented urban planning that had emerged with critical planners and architects in opposition to the regime of the *Estado Novo* during the 1960s. After the revolution, instruments of grassroots participation were often used in the slum clearance projects that created new housing for the poor, and to some extent, became staples in the training of young planners and architects at the universities.²⁷

The new plan for rebuilding the Lisnave site and revitalising the adjacent parts of Almada was made public in 2005 under the title “Cidade de Agua”.²⁸ The local parliament had allowed for a building density that would enable the production of one million square metres of build-up space. Nunes, by comparison, had aimed for two million square metres. Yet, even the new plan would not be able to completely renounce high-rise buildings. Indeed, it will comprise a number of buildings of close to 120 metres height, that is, about 35 floors, and is planned for a total population of twelve thousand new inhabitants, little less than what Nunes and his architects Graça Dias and Viera had in mind. The Water City will preserve the original channels and basins of the docks and augment them with gardens and parks. Fifty percent of the buildings are going to be reserved for residential uses, thirty percent for office spaces and commerce, nine percent each for culture and education and for uses by the community, the remaining two percent for maritime functions. What distinguishes the Water City from the earlier plans proposed by Nunes is that it is much better articulated with the existing city space of Almada and

that it has a strong ecological component which was lacking in the earlier proposals.

While it is to be expected that most of the apartments in the Cidade de Agua will be beyond the economic means of the average resident of Almada, the project is not being opposed by the population. At the initial public meeting where the plan was presented, the residents who were present appeared to welcome the project. A positive aspect for the residents is the fact that the proposed plan will allow for unrestricted access to the waterfront. A network of pedestrian walkways and a promenade on the riverfront is an integral part of the new plan. When the Lisnave was opened in the 1960s, the residents of Almada were effectively cut off from using the riverside where before many local uses such as boating and a public beach had existed. The plan for the “Cidade de Agua” now promises to return the riverfront to the people.²⁹

The municipality of Almada is particularly committed to the creation of employment opportunities on the new site. While the Margueira Fund is thinking of creating a business district for global corporations, coupled with administrative units of the central government, the municipal government is working towards developing a number of cultural institutions that will address the new residents and office workers as well as the resident population of Almada: A cultural centre for the entire region that will host exhibitions, events, and concerts, a library, and a museum devoted to the local tradition of shipbuilding. The political leadership of Almada is also negotiating with the Universidade Nova of Lisbon which has an antenna in Almada and may open another small campus on the Lisnave site. In the adjoining quarter of Cova de Piedade, a local cultural centre with bookshops, art galleries, cafés, exhibition halls, and rooms to be used by local associations and civil society groups, is also envisioned. This strong emphasis on making cultural events accessible to the entire population, indeed, is not a new policy of the community that was invented for the Cidade de Agua. The municipality has an impressive track record of acquiring historic buildings within its territory and converting them to public use. Thereby, a

number of small museums has been developed within the city limits of Almada. The town is also well known throughout the region and beyond for its very active cultural life, hosting one of Portugal's most important annual theatre festivals. A new element in the community's policies, however, is a strong emphasis on environmental issues and the commitment to sustainable urban development. Almada is currently developing its own Agenda-21 strategy.³⁰

The commitment of the political leaders of the community to the Cidade de Agua project implies a new orientation, indeed, a new definition of what they mean by "modern Almada". The modernity that they are striving to create for their community is quite different from earlier notions of progress by industrialisation, infrastructure, and adequate housing. Unlike their former opponent, the inventor of the Torres project, they have been able to adopt new goals and find a compromise that, so they hope, will allow them to both ensure the welfare of the population, and to hold on to their political power base in the municipality. Globalization, so they believe, requires of the local government to take responsibility for economic growth and the environment alike, for health and well-being as well as for social integration. They profess to act locally while thinking globally. The three main elements of this new concept of a modern Almada, namely public investments in cultural politics, sustainable and environment-friendly development, and a strengthening of civil society, of course, strongly resonate with major elements of the EU's agenda for European integration. The municipality is actively seeking cooperation with other towns and cities throughout Europe and making use of the existing frameworks for funding and networking, offered by the EU, to further its goals. The new modernisation strategy of Almada is a globalized practice that integrates non-local, European elements with a specifically local landscape of historically invested experiences and a political culture shaped by the liberation from dictatorship.

Conclusion

We had started our research project with the assumption that in modern societies, architecture as

well as urban and regional planning serve as arenas of discourse where the meaning of modernity is being negotiated between various sets of actors. Previous studies by anthropologists had suggested this assumption (see Holston 1989; Rabinow 1989; Berg, Linde-Laursen & Löfgren 2000). It turned out that Portugal is particularly suited for inquiries into the role of architecture in the shaping of society. Certainly, there are obvious reasons why planning and construction are considered important activities in Portuguese society, as the still-ongoing littoralization, the after-effects of uncontrolled urban and suburban development, the often equally disastrous consequences of tourism, and the management of the immense architectural heritage of historic towns and villages all present huge challenges to architects and planners. Yet, beyond their narrowly defined professional role, architects and planners in Portugal are respected as public intellectuals, they regularly write full-page articles in newspapers of national distribution, and are invited to deliver social commentary on the radio and in television.

Our research focussed on the struggles surrounding the deserted docks and yards of the former Lisnave Shipyards, dominated by the "porticus" of the huge gantry that can be seen all the way from Lisbon, spanning the years from 1999 until today. As we have seen, asymmetries between social actors involved in such an arena – local and central governments and their bureaucracies, experts in the fields of planning, architecture, engineering, and environmental affairs, big corporations and small and medium sized companies, NGOs, citizens' groups, media, and other civil-society actors – have to do with differences in the political and economic power they hold. However, their power to shape the direction of a modernization process also rests on their ability to mobilize cultural meanings, and to employ cultural strategies successfully, in order to achieve authority and resonance for their objectives. Following a conceptual move suggested by Anna Tsing (2002), we can describe the conflict between the municipality of Almada and the Fundo Margueira Capital as the clash of two conflicting "modernization projects" that relate themselves differently to

stories of progress. According to Tsing, projects are “relatively coherent bundles of ideas and practices that are realized in particular times and places [...] Projects may articulate with each other, creating moments of fabled stability and power. They may also rub up against each other awkwardly, creating messiness and new possibilities” (Tsing 2002: 472). The modernization trajectory envisioned by Ricardo Nunes would have catapulted Almada out of its narrow local confines into the global arena. However, his vision failed and became “messy”, precisely because it was not sufficiently re-embedded into local frameworks of meaning. Conversely, Mrs de Sousa, the political leaders, and the planners of Almada were able to seize new possibilities by skilfully and cleverly joining non-local and local objectives and options. There is a global strategy which reinvents their community along the lines of a post-industrial modernity. However, for sure, the last chapter in the long saga of the Margueira has not been written yet.

Notes

- 1 Translation:
Modern Almada [...]

You possess force and beauty,
And since the April came,
You are the Portuguese town
That has developed the most.

Words by Maria dos Anjos Rodrigues Martins, Music by Mário Alexandre Pereira and Viana Caldeira Lopes. The text was published in the programme of the 2004 Marchas Populares by the Municipal Chamber of Almada.
- 2 However, the main population growth occurred before the revolution. In 1940, the population of Almada was only at 30,000, while in 1970, it had reached close to 110,000. In 2001, the census counted 159,550 inhabitants of Almada according to the Centro de Documentação do Museu da Cidade de Almada. The song's reference to the community's growth appears not to refer to a population increase, but to its economic and infra-structural development instead.
- 3 They were created in Lisbon in 1932 as a programme for a popular amusement park and grew into annual events that staged contests of folklore groups from the old Lisbon neighbourhoods. The Marchas gradually took the place of the traditional patron saints' feasts. In his historical analysis, Daniel Melo points out that these events were appropriated by the regime for its own political purposes from the 1950s onward (see Melo 2003). After the revolution, the Marchas Populares were discontinued. In 1979, the Lisbon Marchas were taken up again. Today, the Marchas that are being celebrated in many towns receive extensive media coverage and are aimed for the television audience.
- 4 The project is affiliated with the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology of Frankfurt University. It was funded by the German National Research Foundation DFG 2004-07. It was conducted by Eva Maria Blum as principal researcher under the direction of Gisela Welz. Preliminary research was done by Eva Maria Blum during 2000-04. Interviews were conducted with architects, city planners, politicians, representatives of the Margueira fund, civil servants in various functions and with residents in Almada itself as well as in neighbouring communities and the Greater Lisbon Area. Additionally, extensive participant observation at many public events and meetings was conducted, and a plethora of archival materials were analysed. Also, protagonists of the Portuguese discourse on urbanism and city planning, most of them well known architects and planners or social scientists, were interviewed. In Lisbon, the project cooperated closely with the Department of Anthropology at the ISCTE University and in particular with Professor Jorge Freitas Branco.
- 5 See Pina Cabral 1997, Leal 1999 and 2000.
- 6 As examples for this new trend in Portuguese anthropology, see for instance Bastos and Bastos 1999 and forthcoming, Cordeiro et al. 2003, Malheiros 2000 and 2002, Mapril 2002, Sanches 2006, and Silvano 2002.
- 7 Another problem associated with suburbanization in Portugal is the fact that most buildings outside of city limits have been constructed illegally without building permits. This also holds true for many cases of middle-class suburban developments.
- 8 For an overview and a critical assessment, see Welz 2004.
- 9 Needless to say, in Lisbon like anywhere else in the period before 9/11, to speak of the towers of Manhattan merely meant a reference to spectacularly high buildings, buildings that would seem out of place in other cities.
- 10 Interestingly enough, this argument completely disregarded the fact that the southern shoreline of the Tagus since the beginning of the twentieth century had been disfigured by industrial installations of various kinds.
- 11 The influential Portuguese industrialist family Mello was one of the partners in the company CUF that founded the Lisnave shipyards. Lisnave had very early on started to expand internationally, first with the construction of dry docks in Bahrain in 1977.
- 12 After the revolution, industrial companies and in

- particular huge landholdings of the aristocracy, were brought under state control. Later, these measures were retracted. In addition, state-owned enterprises started to become privatised in the 1980s. See Freire 2000. For an ethnographic account of the post-revolutionary restructuring of Portuguese agriculture, see Dracklé 1991.
- 13 Since then, the Communist Party has somewhat changed its stance. The Communist Party-dominated municipal government of Almada, for one, is strongly advocating European integration today.
- 14 Interview Ricardo Nunes conducted on March 6, 2001.
- 15 Interview Ricardo Nunes conducted on March 6, 2001.
- 16 During the high times of the shipyard, there were up to 10,000 workers employed on the site.
- 17 From an article in *Construção Limitada* of Sept. 1, 1999, published on the website www.civilium.net/infocil/manhattan.shtml, accessed on Jan. 3, 2005.
- 18 *Expresso* November 25, 2000; www.ulissul.com, accessed December 2005.
- 19 *Expresso* May 19, 2001.
- 20 Interview Ricardo Nunes conducted on March 6, 2001
- 21 See articles in newspapers such as *Expresso* on Feb. 12, 2005, and *Jornal das Letras*, March 15, 2005.
- 22 Nunes found that three huge billboards that the Fundo had placed at strategic points within the town of Almada were removed by the municipality within a day. Nunes subsequently accused the municipal government of censorship in public.
- 23 This is a frequent criticism voiced by political opponents to the Communist Party in Portugal that – unlike its Italian sister party, for instance – has never officially distanced itself from Stalinism.
- 24 *Expresso* April 24, 1999.
- 25 For a more detailed analysis, see Ferreira & Indovina 1999.
- 26 In a letter to the mayoral office of Almada, sent early in 2002, he announced that he stepped down from his position of the board of the real estate fund: “I take this opportunity to praise her Excellency for the honour and pleasure to have had you as my most faithful enemy for all these years. I want to emphasize the contrast between the iron determination of those who opposed me and the muddy cleverness of those who should have defended me.” Original e-mail received from Ricardo Nunes on Feb. 8, 2002.
- 27 For more information on the implementation of the strategy for citizens’ participation within the framework of the Frente Ribeirinha Nascente project of the municipality of Almada, see Blum 2007.
- 28 Meanwhile, the plan has been published as an attractive coffee-table book in Portuguese and English with many photographs. See Câmara Municipal de Almada 2006.
- 29 In the collective memory of Almada residents, “bathing at the Margueira beach” is an important topic which was reactivated in the discussions of the new project of the Cidade de Agua. See Blum forthcoming.
- 30 Almada is one of 27 Portuguese municipalities that are developing a local Agenda 21, and also belongs to the network of European municipalities that have signed the Charta of Aalborg, committing themselves to sustainable development.

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