

ROGÉRIO DE AZEVEDO'S REGIONALIST DRIFT

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Abstract

The work of architect Rogério de Azevedo—mostly built between the late 1920s and the 1940s—always included the recourse to regionalism, whether as a response to government programs or as the architect's own initiative. Decisive for him was the between the city project the rural project

Despite the State's ability to work with regional types that could be constructed in series, purportedly in line with local sensitivities, a number of constraints and technical led the architect to adopt techniques and to appropriate languages into a singularly personal interpretation in which the modern and the vernacular are combined.

If in some cases State order was determinant, in others, particularly in projects of the late 1920s and early 1940s, the architect and his vision of the relationship between the placements, of the available materials and the expressive values that inform his work, are the reason of being of his works.

Keywords: Regionalism, Nationalism, Modern Architecture, Vernacular Architecture.

This paper discusses the public works of Rogério de Azevedo, namely those commissioned by and within the context of the Direcção Geral de Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais (DGEMN) (Directorate-General of Buildings and National Monuments) and the Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional (SPN) (Secretariat of National Propaganda), later known as the Secretariado Nacional de Informação (SNI) (National Secretariat of Information), during the 1930s and 1940s. From the beginning of his professional activity, Azevedo engaged both in private commissions and public work; his public work being as vast as his private projects.

As such, this paper addresses public works commissions which are evidently characterized by a nationalist context, and politically associated with the Estado Novo¹.

In fact, the historiography of this architectural period has been heavily influenced by a first wave of investigation, and it is still common to come across clichés and ideas that offer little or no resistance to serious research.

As Pedro Vieira de Almeida argued, if the work of this generation of architects was especially sensitive to the multitude of manners and a surprising versatility of languages, the case of Rogério de Azevedo was particularly astonishing (1986, p. 121).

Indeed, to exemplify this versatility, one often turns to the double projects Garage / Building headquarters of the newspaper *O Comércio do Porto*.

Rogério de Azevedo had an intense career defined by the refusal of modernity as the single paradigm for a formal pursuit. In works marked by a clear sense of modernity, we can first turn to the headquarters of the newspaper *O Comércio do Porto*, designed between 1928 and 1930, and characterized by an effort towards modernization, when compared to the classicizing eclecticism which had developed. Second, to the garage of the same newspaper, a structure contiguous to the head office building and designed between 1930-1932. The garage, a masterpiece of both Azevedo and the modern movement in Porto, sets tradition against innovation, and is characterized by a 'magnificent sense of mass, strong formal coherence and a distinctive artistic strength' (Almeida, 1986, p. 121). Finally, the daycare at *O Comércio do Porto*, from 1930, as well as the "Maurício Rialto" building, dated from 1941-1945, innovative due both to its vertical design and the relationship it established with public space.

The work of Rogério de Azevedo's was also characterized by the pursuit of a regionalist architectural idiom, as exemplified by the regionalized project-type for the primary schools in the center and north of the country, the Salazar school

¹ The Estado Novo [New State], by some also called Second Portuguese Republic, is the name of the authoritarian, autocrat and corporate political regime that existed in Portugal for 41 years, from the promulgation of the Constitution of 1933 until the April 25 Revolution of 1974.

and canteen, in Santa Comba Dão, from 1938, the pousadas regionais (regional guesthouses) of Marão, Serém and Serra da Estrela, all designed between 1938-1939, and finally the Hotel Infante de Sagres, from 1945, this last construction having been undertaken with the Português Suave style already firmly in place.

Alongside a wide-ranging program of intervention and restoration in built historical heritage, the Estado Novo developed a number of infrastructure and facilities projects in the 1930s.

Portugal, mostly rural and with a low level of economic development, was the object of a methodical and structuring politics of public works.

In the resulting bustle of 1930s, the more talented and innovative architects of Rogério de Azevedo's generation 'built the new panorama of the regime's works' (Tostões, 2003, p. 113). They further explored, without constraints, international idioms with which they had already experimented in their private commissions, relying on new construction methods, in an evident 'adaptation of modernism to the expectations of the authorities' (Martins, 1999, p. 120) and the cessation of a historicist and regionalist pursuit on the part of the State.

Nonetheless, many of the facilities programs which were developed at the national level make use of the regionalist project-type, highlighting particular elements and materials from their traditional forms and in a manner both conscious and intentional.

Such regional concerns do not appear to be connected to the ideological stance of the commissioning party nor to inspiring models of supposedly nationalist design, particularly because they did not yet exist at the time.

Just as in other projects, the Ministry of Public Works also entrusts these project-types to modernist architects outside its own structures, thereby sidestepping the organization's insufficiencies while, at the same time, improving cost control measures, easing planning, and also increasing the Ministry's ability to intervene.

The preference for the modern, made by this generation of architects with early modernist training, who alternated between regionalism and historicist eclecticism, is an ad hoc approach that is contingent upon the building's purpose, its localization, and the materials used in its construction. For them, modernism was merely one additional style at their disposal, a new way of building, integrating a functionalist and rationalist concept of architecture (Martins, 1999, p. 121).

On the other hand, the increasing use of international models in the construction of modernist public facilities is understood by those in power as yet another "style". A style moderated by monumentality and the values of dignity inherent to the public work. At this time, the idea of modernity, allied to that of progress, also serves to increase the State's political strength.

Rogério de Azevedo did not escape the contradictions that characterized colleagues of his generation. Similarly to them, he projected some public facilities using a diversity of idioms, as illustrated by the town halls of Vila Flor (beginning of the 1930s) and Póvoa de Lanhoso (1937), as well as the building of the port authority of Viana do Castelo (1933).



Figure 1. The garden and town hall of Vila Flor, 1949. (http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_94LABD71AQg/TFIDYjZUcI/AAAAAE2I/amnr6YajuLU/s1600/Vila+Flor+Antiga+++C3%A2mara+Municipal+%281949%29.jpg. 16/6/11, 3pm)

Some examples of works promoted by the Ministry of Public Works and undertaken as regionalized project-types are the penitentiary buildings, the post office building, the medical facilities (and sanatoriums) of the Assistência Nacional aos Tuberculosos (National Tuberculosis Assistance Program) or the Bairros das Casas Económicas (Economical Housing Neighborhoods). Through his work, Rogério de Azevedo is somehow related to these last three groups.

Perhaps the most paradigmatic case of programs achieved through project-types is the regionalized approach to the Escolas Primárias Oficiais (Official Primary Schools) which, built in series from 1935 on, evolved in 1944 into Escolas Centenárias (Centenary Schools).

The program of pousadas regionais (regional inns) of the SNI, from 1938-1939, although not a program of projects-type, was based on the prerequisite of regionalism, *benefitting* from the same limitations as the Escolas Primárias Oficiais. This program was also premised on the idea of a building model, an evidently political approach and the result of the increasing affirmation of values in accordance with the spirit of the Comemorações Centenárias da Independência e da Restauração Nacionais (Centenary Commemorations of Independence and National Restoration) of 1940, of which the program was a part.

By 1932, the DGEMN had an architecture department which was directed by Guilherme Rebello de Andrade and was able to design elementary schools. The efforts undertaken by this department resulted in the 1933 presentation of a *Memory/Memória*² defining the rules that should be followed in the design of such school buildings:

- The projects must be conceived *'in harmony with the characteristics of regional architecture, accomplished not only through the use of typical regional materials but also through climatic variations'*³.

² *Ante-projecto do Plano Geral de Tipos-Regionaes de Escolas Primarias Oficiais a Construir em Série – Memória*. Lisbon, 14th December 1933. Signed. Chief of Department, Arch. Guilherme Rebello de Andrade. *Processo de Expediente-Geral*, DGEMN –DGCE archive.

³ *Ante-projecto do Plano Geral de Tipos-Regionaes de Escolas ...*, p. 1.

- The aim was for local people to assimilate the new buildings, and thereby to avoid hurting their 'ethnic sensibilities' through 'the use of exotic elements of forced "rationalism" that scorned tradition'⁴.
- On the other hand, the correct understanding of «rationalism» uses and combines '*local elements with new construction*'⁵.

Three main conditions are established for plan conception:

1. Based on the plan for a single school-unit place, to resolve the plans for subsequent schools;
2. To conceive of these plans in order to make use of all land regardless of its northern exposure;
3. To standardize school construction by grouping together schools, even if such groups include schools with a different number of seats.



Figure 2. Elementary schools in Bairro de Casas Económicas of Ramalde. Porto, 1953. Teófilo Rego Archive, Casa da Imagem, Fundação Manuel Leão, PT-FML-TR-PES-16-068.

⁴ *Ante-projecto do Plano Geral de Tipos-Regionaes de Escolas ...*, p. 1.

⁵ *Ante-projecto do Plano Geral de Tipos-Regionaes de Escolas ...*, p. 1.

This document comes to constitute the foundation of the new regionalized project-types developed by architects Raul Lino and Rogério de Azevedo which will receive approval in 1935. Lino designed the schools in southern Portugal and Rogério de Azevedo the ones in the north and center.

According to the *Memória*, the project's use of space is designed to be at a bare minimum. The central space of the school is the classroom.

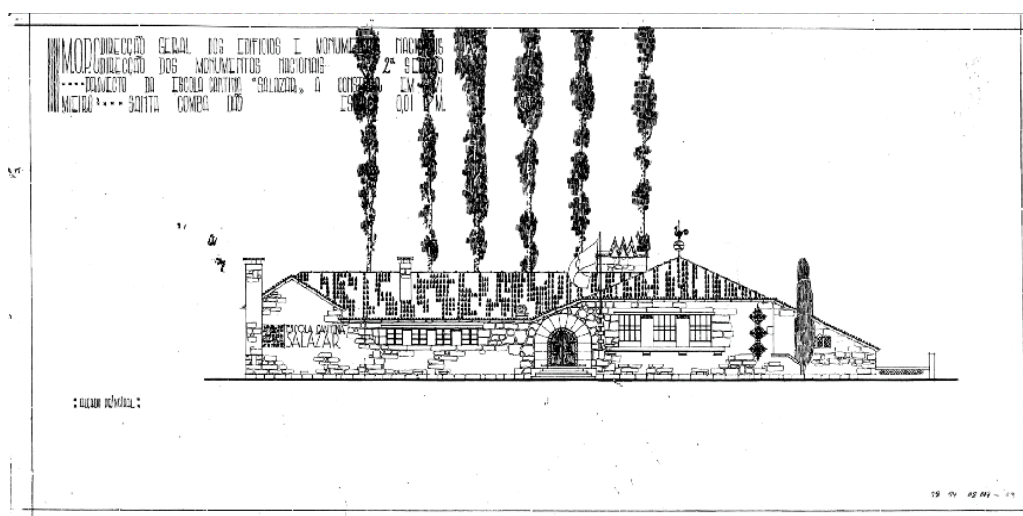


Figure 3. Escola-Cantina Salazar (Salazar School-Canteen). Vimieiro, Santa Comba Dão. Main elevation. DGEMN Archive: SIPA, IPA nº PT021814080009, Desenho.009487.

Apart from the regionalized school-types, in 1938 Rogério de Azevedo designed the special project of the Salazar Canteen-School in Santa Comba Dão. Throughout his career, Rogério de Azevedo had built upon several basic elements (module: classroom, recess area/porch, teachers' room, canteen, toilets), *'typologies, whose adaptability and flexibility of solutions found their maximal expression in the special project for the Salazar School-Canteen'*, *'a work that synthetizes the values defined in the previous regionalized projecttypes'*, The Salazar Canteen-School also makes reference to the 1930 project of the Lourosa Primary School (Pimentel, 2014, p. 55), the origin of almost all his school projects.

The new project-types of the schools of the Plano dos Cententários, approved in 1944, were based on the regionalized project-types of 1935. However, *'the introduction of other concepts and requirements would come to modify, as well as dilute, the way in which each architect expressed himself'* (Beja, 1990, p. 248), thus profoundly altering the particular character of the buildings designed by Rogério de Azevedo and Raul Lino.

Indeed, the next two decades witnessed the progressive effacement of the architects' individual design with these structures having been reduced, though a process of increasingly impoverished interventions, to standardized, expressionless buildings with hints of a stagnant and decorative regional picturesque, finally transforming the school-spaces in a single type: the courtyard(s)/shed(s) and classroom(s).

On the other hand, in 1938, with the integration of tourism into the preliminary program of the Centenary Celebrations, in line with the *política do espírito* (politics of spirit) created by António Ferro in the SPN,

a global and integrated propaganda policy, of psycho-social action, of aesthetic lesson, of socio-cultural transformation: the cinema, the theater, the newspaper, the radio, the festivity, the poster, the shop window, the exhibition, the decoration, the 'good taste', the graphic design, the advertising, the tourism, the invention of the regime's modern cultural façade (Portela, 1982, p. 59),

Apart from the historicist and folk-inspired tourist routes, other networks are considered fundamental: the tourist offices and state-run guesthouses. To meet the needs of tourism propaganda, a nationwide network of pousadas regionais is created across the country.

[A]n innovative idea at the time, which connected an obviously modernizing dynamism—through [a] new [sense of] comfort and the systemic/national characteristic of the initiative—with a conservative and regionalist impulse which called for the 'return to traditionalism' (Fernandes, 1999, p. 159).

In this way, António Ferro combines the necessary standardization of the tourism sector—countering individualism and amateur initiatives—to the concept of difference, a country that coexists with but is distinct from others, paying attention to folk resources, instilling them in their intermediaries—the various tourism commissions and councils under the direction of the municipalities.

These different aspects are summarized, according to Salazar, in the campaign for the *reaportuguesamento* ('relusification') of Portugal, making Portugal Portuguese again (Pina, 1988, p. 151) a movement inspired by the '*integral ideas of a mythical ruralism, nostalgic for [Portugal's] peasant origins, which was applied through the Estado Novo's regionalist representations*' (Melo, 2001, p. 252). Such efforts sought the transformation of the image of Portugal, a unification of all the different countries within the same country. Salazar had set the theme and António Ferro reinforces and clarifies the idea.

In August 1940, the first state guesthouse, Estalagem do Lidador, is inaugurated. Located in a remodelled inn, this guesthouse comes to define, at a practical level, the model for a small hotel business which ought to be '*healthy, peasant-like*'⁶ (Ferro, 1949, pp.48-49).

With SPN as the custodian of national '*good taste*'⁷, on the 10th of April 1942, the first of seven purpose-built pousadas opens its doors, the Pousada of Santa Luzia, in Elvas. The first of the seven small hotels that should not look like hotels, these '*living models*' spread throughout the country, with an interior designed by the Serviços de Turismo (Tourism Services) and the technicians of SPN, and where the guests should '*constantly*' feel that they are in the region where the guesthouse is located, without a break of the '*continuity between the*

⁶ Quoted from a speech by António Ferro on 16 August 1940 during the opening ceremony of the Estalagem do Lidador, in Óbidos.

⁷ In June 1941, as a consequence of its activities, SPN launched the *Panorama* (1941-1974), a Portuguese magazine on art and tourism. In its inaugural edition, the editorial described the magazine as a place in which the liveliest and most characteristic aspects of the country could be evoked; the "Campaign for Good Taste" was already announced in the inaugural edition. *Panorama*, n.º 1, ano I, 1941.

*indoors and the outdoors, between the house and the surrounding land*⁸(Ferro, 1949, pp.68-

69). New pousadas continue to open until 1948, when the phase of the *politica do espírito* applied to tourism and, in particular, to the regional pousadas, finally comes to a close, ending a process begun in the late 1930s.

The inspiration for the concept and the program of the new facilities comes from Spain: the *parador* state-run hotels, but especially the *albergues de carretera*, the inns along Spanish roadways.

With a plan *'then considered to be very not urban, mainly geared towards regional spaces in rural areas of the country'* (Fernandes, 1999, p. 160), the projects for the pousadas to be built by DGEMN, seven in total, are entrusted in 1938 to three architects of the modernist generation who had already shown themselves to be able to dialogue with traditional values: Miguel Jacobetty Rosa, Rogério de Azevedo e Veloso Reis Camelo.

The sites are considered as a strategy of intervention in the territory. They are aimed at endowing the country with modern hotel structures and seek to meet the requirements, not in the abstract, but of objective intervention in national territory, *'building a coherent and rational structure'* (Lobo, 2006, p. 44) and offering continuity to what had previously been argued for these types of structures.

Rogério de Azevedo is charged with the projects for the three pousadas in the north: São Gonçalo, in Serra do Marão; Santo António, in Serém, Vale do Vouga; and São Lourenço, in Serra da Estrela.

Rogério de Azevedo played a decisive role in choosing the sites where his pousadas would be built. Working in collaboration with Januário Godinho, Azevedo additionally committed to using locally-sourced materials for construction.

⁸ Quoted from a speech by António Ferro on 10 Abril 1942 during the opening ceremony of the Pousada de Elvas.

Among the seven pousadas simultaneously projected and begun (the Pousada de Santiago do Cacém constituted an exception, and was the penultimate to open), special reference must be made to the pousadas of Elvas and of Marão. Both have a complex structure distinct from the domestic scale of housing, not only due to the interpretation of the program but also to their formal composition and land implantation. Whereas the pousadas located in Serém and in S. Brás de Alportel are those that most adhere to a common type, and approach a domestic scale, the Pousada de São Lourenço, with its uncluttered and compact quality and its strong foundation, breaks with this possible identification. The Pousada de Santiago do Cacém, which also presents a foundation, is characterized by a strong sense of axially. Finally, the Pousada de São Martinho do Porto most approaches the idea of a housing block, unrelated to the landscape (Pimentel, 2015, pp. 329-330).

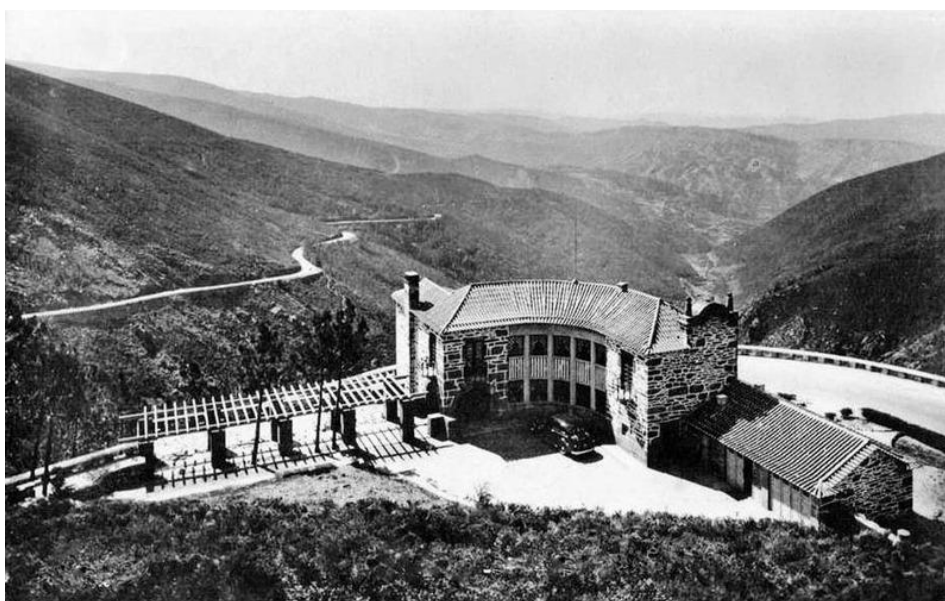


Figure 4. Pousada de São Gonçalo, Serra do Marão. Archival photograph
(http://restosdecoleccion.blogspot.pt/2012/01p_rimeiras-pousadas-de-portugal.html, 21 May 2012, 6pm)

The regionalist program was achieved through seven very different small constructions at the scale of a private house or a small hotel, making use of the '*programmatic distribution of levels*' (Lobo, 2004, p. 89) and the panoramic

dining room composed of articulated, cylindrical and prismatic volumes of a modernist approach, concealed under the weight of the eaves, the arcades, the porches, and the pergolas, and the roofs covered in stone or in whitewashed plaster, depending on the region. These are carefully sited buildings that evidence an uninterrupted continuity with the topography and which, strategically dominating the surrounding territory, are enveloped by the scenery in an expressive openness of interior spaces to the landscape.



Figure 5. Pousada de São Lourenço, Serra da Estrela/Manteigas. Photograph published in Mafalda FERRO; Rita FERRO - Retrato de uma Família. Fernanda de Castro, António Ferro, António Quadros. Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 1999, p. 161.

In buildings, such as the *gesture* of the Pousada do Marão, the *stability* of Serém and the *unclutteredness* of Serra da Estrela, the dynamism of volume composition, the organic articulation of the volumes spaces with the topography, the controlled scale and the use of construction materials typical of each region are reflected in the expressionism of its textures and tactile expression. These constructions are solidly anchored to the ground, carefully embedded into the

terrain in uninterrupted continuity with the topography, resulting in a strategic domination of the surrounding territory.

These are buildings which reveal '*conceptual schemes that anticipate formal approaches*' (Tavares, 2012, p. 49), namely the recognition/*choice* of location as a starting-point for the definition of a strategy. A task which, as Manuel Botelho wrote in 1987 for the journal *rA*, fundamentally rests upon

the articulation, relationship and hierarchy of spaces between themselves and in relation to the exterior. Such concerns, preceding questions of idiom or of material use, reveal a profound comprehension of the essence of architecture (Tavares, 2012, p. 49),

together with the definition of the environments to consolidate, in an ordered and coherent synthesis of constructive systems and formal suggestions of diverse origins.

In short, Rogério de Azevedo was indeed an architect of his generation. Conscious of the times, Azevedo was always open to new ideas without ever ceasing to be a disciple of Marques da Silva, or renouncing his Beaux-Arts training.

His classical training did not prevent him from embracing modernism and the new techniques and idioms of the twentieth century, neither did it hinder his recourse to non-erudite practices. Thus, Azevedo always remained free from the mere reproduction of models, formulas or ideals, instead having achieved in some of his works a synthesis of sometimes dispersed and distant practices and images.

In accord with his vision of architectural practice, the works of Rogério de Azevedo are comprised of a diversity of styles and architectural forms, yet they are not entirely dissimilar to his colleagues of the same generation. Like them, owing to his classic humanist training, Azevedo was prepared to employ modern values, and was at times himself aware of the innovative quality of his proposals.

Reconciling modernity with tradition, his practice does not appear to have provoked in him a conflict between modern, traditional or even vernacular values, nor did it prompt a contemporaneous critical debate. His authorial imprint was not grounded in the formal coherence between one project and another, nor did he endeavor to create such consistency.

Belonging to a generation of architects with early modernist training, for whom the exercise of the modern, alternating between regionalism and historical eclecticism, was not an ideological, social or philosophical choice, Rogério de Azevedo devised an approach to the design process that precluded theoretical reflection. These were a series of isolated choices, dependent upon the building's purpose, its localization, and the materials used for construction. For this generation of architects, the modern was just another available style, a new way of building which integrated a functionalist and rationalist vision of architecture.

Indeed, Rogério de Azevedo follows an autonomous path in which the classic, traditional and modern are mixed. Even when his approach was challenged, Azevedo never considered himself cornered and, instead, constantly renewed his capacities and preparation as a builder. While it is doubtlessly a path which is difficult to fit within applicable discursive or formal categories, Azevedo's architectural practice offers the continuity of a generational transmission of a certain kind of project design of which the architect Januário Godinho is an example.

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