

“Petites Folies”

Other Landscapes over Douro

arquitectura

experiência

design

instalações

escala 1:1

architecture

experiment

design

installations

1:1 scale

**Neiva, Ana¹; Viana, Marta²;
Gomes, João Nuno³**

¹ University of Porto, CEAU-FAUP / University Lusofona, ARQ.ID, Porto, Portugal
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3821-906X>
aneiva@arq.up.pt

² University of Porto, Faculty of Architecture, Porto, Portugal
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9994-7610>
up201603693@up.pt

³ ESAD – School of Arts and Design, Porto, Portugal
joaogomes@esad.pt

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O projeto “Petites Folies”, atividade satélite desenvolvida para a Porto Design Biennale 2021, propôs um conjunto de instalações, desenhadas e construídas coletivamente por estudantes de arquitetura e design de interiores, com o objetivo de reconfigurar as realidades locais de alguns espaços públicos no Porto.

Partindo da mesma quantidade de material, cada grupo construiu instalações profundamente relacionadas com os sítios pré-definidos, oferecendo diferentes pontos de vista, espaços de estar e novas polaridades, gerando uma rota pedestre evolutiva entre as seis intervenções.

Este artigo faz parte de uma investigação mais ampla sobre as potencialidades da escala 1:1, vista também como uma poderosa ferramenta de divulgação em arquitetura. Centrará-se no projeto “Petites Folies” para explorar o processo de conceção e construção à escala real, interações metodológicas entre arquitetura e design, criação coletiva, e técnicas de autoconstrução como parte de uma pedagogia prática.

A outro nível, explorar-se-á a competência social das intervenções de design e arquitetura no espaço público, sublinhando a relevância da ligação entre a universidade e a sociedade, através de um processo vivo e participativo, baseado no envolvimento sensorial dos criadores e na sua extensão ao público em geral.

“Petites Folies” project, a satellite activity for the Porto Design Biennale 2021, offered a set of architecture installations, co-designed and co-built in real time by architecture and interior design students, aiming at reconfiguring local realities through the placing of ephemeral structures at public spaces in Porto. Starting with the same amount of material, the student groups built site-specific installations, offering different points of view, assembling spaces and new focal points, while generating an evulative pedestrian route that linked the six interventions.

This paper is part of a broader research about the 1:1 scale potential, namely as a powerful tool for architecture disclosure, and will focus on the “Petites Folies” project to explore the process of design and construction of real-scale installations, architecture and design methodological interactions, collective designing, and do-it-yourself building techniques as part of a hands-on pedagogy.

On another level, this paper explores the social utility of design and architecture interventions in public space, underlining the creation of links between the university and the society, through a lively and participatory process, based on the sensory engagement of the creators, while reaching out to an expanded public audience.

THE 1:1 SCALE POTENTIALITIES

"Petites Folies" project is a positive statement on the power of 1:1 scale installations for disclosure and experimentation in architecture. While the small-scale model always entails a representation which cannot be experienced, as the observer can see, but not access the space, "the full-scale inhabitable model, on the other hand, elicits affective responses [and] asks from the viewer to become a co-actor in the making of the model space, in the process of completing a site-specific performative environment where exteriority and visibility are no longer privileged over interiority and haptic sense".¹

With no pretence to be exhaustive, it is worth mentioning some successful examples of the multiple potentials we advocate. There are many twentieth-century experiments on disclosing architecture through full scale interventions, either by allowing for the experience of an absent architecture, or to create an opportunity to test and communicate new ideas about architecture.

The Dwelling of our Time (1931) Berlin exhibition by Mies van der Rohe is probably one of the most original yet paradigmatic examples of public implementation of a real-life stage within an architecture exhibition. Even though it was planned to be a permanent intervention within the city, as the universally known Die Wohnung, at Stuttgart-Weißenhof in 1927, the exhibition took place indoors, showcasing low-rise houses and apartments "displayed as a fragment of a larger whole",² focusing on new values in modern domestic space. It was simultaneously experimental - building dwellings according to the architects' projects - but fundamentally establishing a complete scenario for contemporary living, including furniture and actors, arousing public curiosity to understand and test new ways of living.

Following the 1927 Stuttgart-Weißenhof exhibition, Theo von Doesburg underlined the relevance of immersive experience at

an architecture exhibition by specifically claiming for 1:1 actions that "it must be clear to everyone that the exhibition of separate works of art, architectural models and designs lacking an inner coherence is pointless and passé. On the contrary, the requirement should be the following: demonstration of an entity in which all parts (meaning: colour, furniture, utensils etc.) are organically combined (...) to place the visitor within, instead of opposite, the new environment and make him 'experience' it, instead of 'looking at it'".³

More than an effective tool to reach out to non-specialised audiences, the 1:1 scale can also be a key device for architecture research and theoretical discussion. The Domino House installation by Valentin Bontjes van Beek and the students from the Architectural Association at the 2014 Venice Architectural Biennale, Fundamentals, turned an abstract system into a full-scale performative object. The construction of a theoretical model, which had not previously materialised, revealed the spatial experience of the well-known 1914 conceptual design by Le Corbusier.

With regard to follies, understood as architecture for pleasure, amusement, without functional restraints, they are unique opportunities for architects and architecture students to experiment, testing materials, forms, languages, techniques, or more complex geometries and shapes.

Following the previous line of thought, they are also privileged opportunities for the public to endorse a direct and playful contact with architecture.

*Designed with no functional constraint, focused on the corporeal experience of space (...) manipulating real spaces generating a ludic interface (...), or commissioning site-specific temporary buildings (...), many are the approaches that keep following follies' imaginative attitude. Overlapping disciplinary borders, fomenting emotional engagement, and fostering the creation of knowledge through creative stimulation are, as demonstrated, contemporary and valuable strategies for reaching out to public audience.*⁴

"Petites Folies" project inherits these beliefs at 1:1 scale, to experiment and display architecture, strengthening the connection between architecture and society, and more particularly between the university and the city.

PORTO DESIGN BIENNALE 2021: THE OPPORTUNITY

"Petites Folies" project was born during a pandemic year, following the Porto Design Biennale 2021 (PDB'21) call for satellite activities that should react to that edition's central theme: Alter-Realities: Designing the Present.

PDB has been organised since 2019 by ESAD-IDEA, Research in Design and Art, and promoted by the municipalities of Porto and Matosinhos. The 2021 edition was curated by Alastair Fuad-Luke, developing from a central intention of finding a new relationality between designers and Others⁵, and comprised a series of exhibitions, conferences, workshops, and publications that took place over 54 days.⁶

Proposing Alter-Realities: Designing the Present as its central theme, PDB'21 intends to encourage the debate around design's ability to outline new solutions for collective problems, at a time when the world faces new challenges and uncertainty regarding the usage, planning, and sustainability of urban centres, citizen mobility and how public spaces can remain as catalysts⁷:

"We are tired of real, imagined or manipulated multiple crises. Inaction deepens our weariness, blunts our intellect, dulls our bodies and erodes our souls. We need to re-make worlds, re-animate ourselves and forge new relations while rejecting unsustainable hegemonies and divisive ideologies. Designing in the present can show us how to live better despite times of contagion and crisis".⁸

According to those principles, Fuad Luke settled on four major themes of interrelationships, which operate on complementary scales: Alter-Scapes, Alter-Care, Alter-Production and Alter-Livelihoods, to better explore design as a vehicle that enhances new, more exuberant ways of relating to the city and

daily life, and to concretise the scope and focus of the wide-ranging programme of the event.

The “Follies Project” targeted two of those four lines of action – Alter-Scapes and Alter-Livelihoods – the ones which implied the city’s physical space, the logical environment for an architecture intervention.

Alter-Scapes focuses on creating new perceptions of the city as a means to reorientate ourselves. What systems, objects, maps and interventions can we create to shift our current perceptions through alternative cartographies, mobilities, architectures and/or energy flows to “see” and experience our cities differently? (...) Alter-Livelihoods focuses on applying modes of designing that encourage autonomy, new relations and ways of being to explore more fulfilling ways of living, working, playing and giving/receiving.

*How can we co-construct these livelihoods through design to give us pleasure, restore our dignity and protect our well-being?*⁹

Aiming to meet both the goals of both Alter-Scapes and Alter-Livelihoods, “Petites Folies” project combined collective design, and do-it-yourself building techniques as part of a hands-on pedagogy, to meet the main goals of PDB’21 curatorial program:

“Experiment through materialising and prototyping; Grow new social imaginaries; Create fruitful, pleasurable and meaningful experiences; Promote walking as a means to navigate, explore and inhabit the present”.¹⁰

The winning proposal, authored by the architects and architecture professors Ana Neiva and João Nuno Gomes, was selected along with seven other projects from one hundred and eighty-one applications submitted from over forty countries, for its “ability to create new forms of interaction with the inhabitants and visitors of the city and the importance of the contribution of two educational institutions and their academic community in an active and integrated way in the PDB’21”.¹¹

The ambition

Based on the wish to be together again, to reconnect with the students and to freely create outside classroom constraints, the project engendered learning opportunities as well as summer sunsets among passionate people.

The experimental process comprised four stages: an architecture and design workshop, a “do it yourself” building experience in situ, the offer of a set of follies for public enjoyment, and finally, their transformation into a future social contribution. As a curatorial action, the project considered the potential of architecture practice as a collective and shared creative activity, expected to generate new polarities and points of interest, but mainly and foremost, to host life and to provide space for enjoyment, beauty, and pleasure.

On the other hand, the playfulness of the architectural exercise forms the basis of “Petites Folies” project, involving a fundamental pedagogical approach: to design with freedom, implying the nonexistence of previous solutions. Moreover, to take a playful attitude, apart from the evaluation context and programmatic demands, ignites creativity.

Playfulness [is], above all, a mental condition of the subject that is predisposed to freedom and, therefore, to imperfection, deviation and error. A mental condition in which the process is not rigidly directed toward a predetermined objective, but where the process gains relevance over the outcomes, determining it. But also, playfulness as simulation of the creative

*act in its manual aspect, manipulating matter, technique and form; playfulness that educates the hand that builds and the eye that observes in a continuous act of learning, of simulation of the processes and practices that build the knowledge of the architect.*¹²

Gathering around the same challenge - meeting to produce knowledge and to generate effective interventions in public space, to go behind the design act toward the concretisation of the imagined spaces - has a strong appeal to student engagement in the project. To be part of the city landscape, to contribute to positive social changes, and to build and to create collectively is, especially after a long period of social isolation, an unmissable chance for reintroducing fun into a learning environment.

The “Petites Folies,” site-specific architectural installations in public space, intended to reconfigure local realities and to redefine city routes through the creation of new reference points and landscape framing: Other Landscapes, Alter-Scapes. On another level, the follies demanded a direct interaction with the user, a corporeal experience, offering spatial interaction, inviting public to engage with unexpected and intriguing constructions: Alter-Livelihoods. The physical experience highlighted the rediscovery of the body through the scale of the follies’ interior space, while the construction of new agglutinating points of attraction and reference (Fig. 1), endorsing the polarization of squares, yards, and community areas, allowed for a rediscovery of the city of Porto.



Fig. 1 - Petites Folies distribution map along Douro river.

Network

Based on a pedestrian activity, closely linked to the curatorial proposal of Alastair Fuad-Luke, the elected intervention network articulates spaces of different scales and character that share, as a common denominator, the opportunity to contemplate a wider landscape through the definition of new frameworks and perspectives on the Douro river.

From the unexpected occupation of heritage sites (a churchyard, a royal garden, and a romantic park) to abandoned areas (a demolished historical neighbourhood and a community's lavadouro¹³), and also an institutional space (a school of architecture), a new path was established through rural and lesser-known paths, usually hidden from common daily routes. The intervention site selection also took in consideration a balanced distribution regarding distances, ranging from 0,5km to 1.5km, to allow a comfortable walking distance between the follies (Fig.2).

The route started in a churchyard

belvedere facing the ocean, a marginal and relatively unknown public space, Largo de Santa Catarina. Going up the river and consecutively twisting the perspective toward the Douro river, the user reaches an elevated platform in the proximity of Álvaro Siza's faculty of architecture, where the Arrábida bridge could be seen from a privileged point of view.

Not only changing viewpoints and landscape framings, but also solar orientation, the places would allow for contemplating the sunset – besides Santa Catarina's belvedere, Palácio de Cristal garden platform is also a privileged spot – and others, like Fontainhas' Lavadouro, to feel the warm morning sunshine.

The network privileges a strong diversity of scale (nano, micro, mezo) and configurations, urban integration, historical background, and solar conditions. This variety was also intended to promote a richer set of challenging conditions that would inform the different projects, emphasising the potentiality of architecture to react to site specificities

and to reconfigure them, keeping always in mind the common intention of rediscovering new landscape framings over the Douro river.

By creating an unexpected and anonymous path, it was aimed to encourage people to rediscover the city of Porto. Crossing rural, wild, romantic, and non-touristic zones, this route provides different perspectives and feelings reconsidering the most common and ordinary constructions as part of an extremely beautiful and surprising environment in the middle of a very urbanised city. Even for many of the direct participants in the project, who live in Porto, there were many surprises.

To design

The first phase of the project, a two-week design workshop, started precisely with a collective walk through the six intervention sites, which gave students the opportunity to get to know their colleagues and to start bonding together, and with the designated tutors.



Fig. 2 - Intervention sites. Follies 1 to 6, from top left to bottom right: Santa Catarina, Faculty of Architecture of University of Porto, Palácio de Cristal garden, Virtudes Garden, Fontainhas platform and Lavadouro das Fontainhas.



Fig. 3 - Petite Folie #1 work in progress.

The challenge was, over ten days, to develop the project of a folly directly related to the assigned site, that would contain an interior space, fostering a direct and intense interaction with the user, while providing new spatial experiences and landscape perspectives. Additionally, the groups had to consider a maximum area of nine square meters to build using ten OSB panels 2500x1250x15mm, forty 70x70mm by 6m-long wooden beams, three boxes of screws, twenty litres of blue paint, and some fluorescent red spray cans for punctual highlighting notes.

There was also the assumption that all connections should be made by screwing and that all structures should allow to be transported by truck after the end of the Biennale, entailing the need to be partially disassembled, considering the possibility of future reinstallation elsewhere. Except for these guidelines, participants were given complete conceptual freedom to develop the folly designs.

The six groups were made up of equally distributed architecture students from Faculty of Architecture of University of Porto (FAUP) and Interior Design Students from Superior School of Arts and Design (ESAD), enhancing possible complementarity and collaboration between areas of architecture and design.

Each group had a tutor, who was an architect, directly responsible for

accompanying the development of the design, but also to orientate the construction of the resulting follies.

The project evolution during the two weeks of design workshop was exciting and quite surprising, regarding not only the results, but particularly the interpretations of the site and the chosen methodologies. Though there was a series of common premises and the expectation of a quite similar, or at least relatable, formal result, imposed by the available materials and predefined colours, the groups proposed highly diverse approaches:

The first group, guided by Nuno Melo-Sousa, was assigned the Santa Catarina churchyard and quickly engaged with the dominant purpose of the area: a square dedicated to a chapel. Therefore, the idea of creating a pulpit which would work simultaneously as a direct reference to the existing chapel, creating a volumetric tension with it, and a mechanism to allow a privileged view of the river mouth as it would stand on the top of the existing wall, appeared early in the week (Fig.3).

The available and predefined space for its installation was a parking place, limited by two olive trees, parallel to the square's western limit, a one-meter high wall which worked as a parapet into the river. After studying the dominant alignments related to the pre-existing chapel, trees, and

limits, crossed with the usual paths into the square, the group quickly identified, at real scale, those lines of tension. Simulating the existing sidewalk space, the trees, and the square's west limit at the Casa Cor-de-Rosa¹³ wall, the group developed their folly around its main function, gradually simplifying its volumetric expression. Initially intended to have two symmetrical stairs and an extended balcony along the wall, it was reduced to a single volume, composed of a stair and an interior elevated space to observe the landscape, placed in an intentional tension with the chapel. The suspended blue "box," finally conceived as a viewpoint toward the river and sea, had a fluorescent red enhancement to the structure. The red external frame was taken further, constraining the entrance of the installation in a way that can be related to the shape of a cross, almost if the pre-existing church had direct influence on this idea.

Group 2, oriented by João Cruz, was given a vacant and peripheral platform at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto. Located among trees, the site had a central, flat platform with a very strong visual connection to Álvaro Siza's building and to the Arrábida bridge. The reference to the existing building was unavoidable, as much as the motivation to focus on framing the bridge. Additionally, this site represented another challenging

situation, as the platform rose nearly five meters above the FAUP buildings and had two different access points: coming west from the school (and folly 1), there was a straight stair with no balustrade; continuing east, there was dense vegetation blocking the passage and the continuity of the path toward folly 3.

The first intention was to create a connection between west and east embodied in a walk-through installation that would literally integrate the pedestrian route among the different "petites folies."

To do so, to position the "tunnel" – the first expressed concept – the group explored the dominant alignments of the place.

The process was somewhat turbulent and, during the week, the students realised that they were somehow shackled to this very rigid form and the tunnel evolved into a more dematerialised folly, made of two free-standing walls that would be inhabited transversally. Instead of creating internal space along the path, the option was to use the depth of the structures to create an "inhabited

wall," as Siza explored in the definition of space, encouraging different types of occupation and interaction. For the two free-standing walls, the group worked on the composition by optimizing the use of each wood beam, the same beam would be enough to build a full portico, repeated fifteen times (Fig.4).

The group designed three boxes based on different possibilities: either serving as a lower bench, a mailbox for people sharing objects or letters, and another for an ivy plant, emphasizing the intention



Fig. 4 - Petite Folie #2 work in progress.



Fig. 5 - Petite Folie #3 work in progress.

to connect with nature, creating several spaces for human appropriation, giving a functional dimension to the installation. Everything also became easier when the main intentions became clear and they tried out new possibilities and proportions, drawing with tape at 1:1 scale on the ESAD walls.

Pablo Rebelo was the workshop leader of the third group, responsible for a green platform at Palácio de Cristal garden, near the Romantic Museum of Quinta das Macieirinhas. This group developed a very different methodological approach to the challenge: instead of taking the site as first input for the design concept, Rebelo motivated the students to think about form and structure, to find a repeatable module capable of producing three-dimensional form, without incorporating function. This formal research, based on more abstract references – works of architecture, art installations, sculptures, and follies, such as those by Zumthor, Ponto-Atelier or E2A - and the fast definition of the strategy and general logic, allowed for intense proportional and composition studies on the structural design (Fig.5).

Obviously, these other inputs were brought into the project right after the first sketches, in which a sail or wind-breaker looking like structure began to appear. The horizontality of the cantilevered stone walls that defined the successive

platforms, strongly characterised the landscape and the intervention site; simultaneously the position of the platform – wide open to the river but hidden from people approaching from the park or the romantic museum – strongly determined the design of the installation.

The group confronted horizontality with a horizontal intervention. Blocking the views in the first visual contact with the installation, to mask the entrance and intrigue visitors, was a thought-provoking central goal of group 3, who wanted the installation to be discovered gradually.

After descending the stair and reaching the platform level, the folly's triangular structure would already be visible and the landscape would then be revealed. The folly did not define a clear usage or way of interaction, being more of a shelter to host people who want to pause and see the river and the sunset, allowing it to be informally occupied rather than defining a clear area for sitting or to frame the views.

The fourth site of the network, Jardim do Horto das Virtudes, formerly a royal garden, is today a highly occupied park, either by locals and tourists, for its central location and generous solar orientation, as it is organised around a valley along different levels. Furthermore, this place is very visible from the immediate surroundings, namely from the other

side of the valley, which is a very busy belvedere for a sunset drink downtown.

The architect Paulo Seco led the group 4 along the journey and soon motivated them to explore the constructive viability of the project, as the students' first idea had at its basis a landmark approach. Intending to suspend the building on the cantilevered wall and to affirm its scale on the landscape, made the technical aspects crucial to the design development. The construction planning, the wood junctions, and the proportion of the folly to guarantee its stability were the fundamental issues with which the group had to deal.

Opposed to other groups who took the interior experience of the installation as central concern, Virtude's garden team prioritised the gesture and only later worked on the interior character of the Folly. This strategy made Folly #4 work according to two different scales: the landscape scale and the interior bodily experience, to be tested on the higher platform.

Seen from a distance the upper part of the folly, with its floating blue panels detached from the rhythmic wooden structure, looks like a levitating whale, containing the most protected and covered space for meeting friends and enjoying the view, through with an inner frame painted with fluorescent red spray (Fig.6).

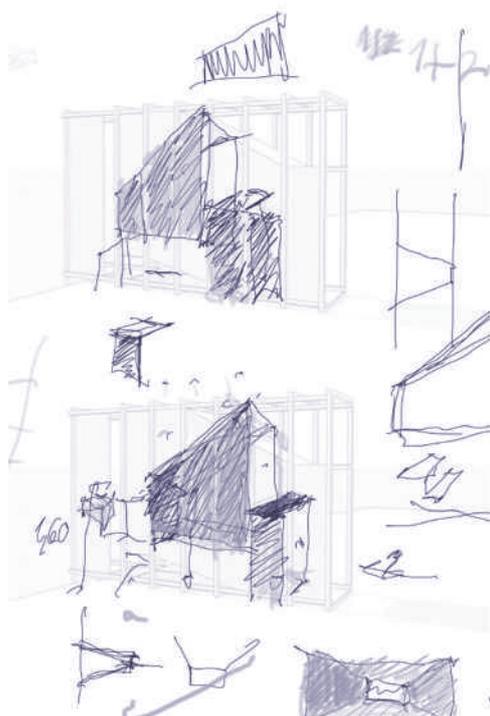
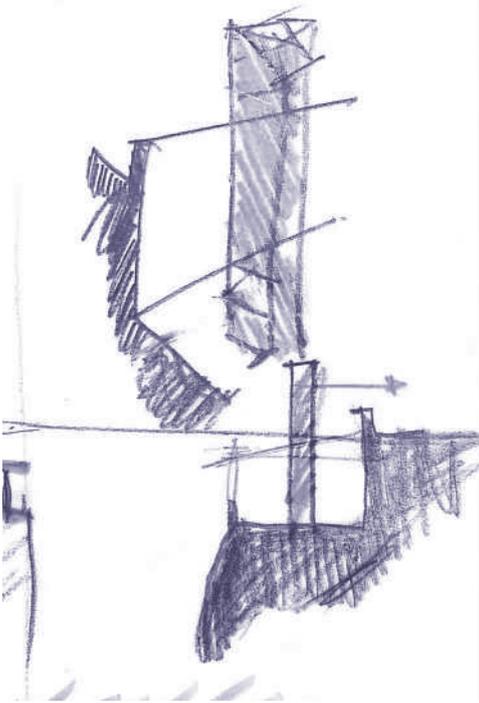


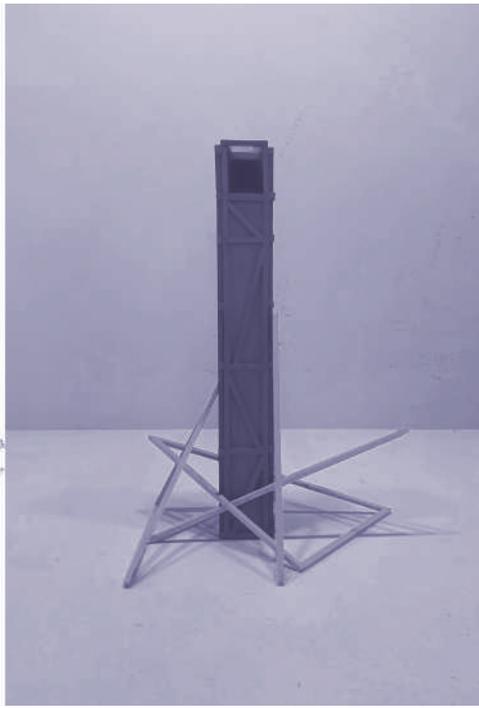
Fig. 6 - Petite Folie #4 work in progress.



Soraia Fernandes, tutor of group five, led the works on another vacant platform, this time at Fontainhas' area. Here, the river narrows and its slopes become steeper, creating beautiful framing of the Douro river. The vacant lot, on an intermediate terrace in the slope, is a fantastic belvedere upstream from a Luís I iron bridge, which had been the place of a recently demolished, historically working-class neighbourhood. To access this platform there was a magnificent and symmetrical stair, a pyramidal element which had a very strong presence in the site.

The group took a strong political approach, considering as the starting point its human heritage, around the idea of "transportable home": a structure that could be moved around by the visitors in a direct reference to the memory of the demolished houses, manifesting an underlying participatory intention. As the organization, for safety reasons, blocked this idea, the group tried to engage with the diagonals of the stairs and the framing of Luís I Bridge, first by proposing a formal relationship and, later, justifying it with a programme that could foster the active use of the terrace as an open auditorium.

Unlike the other groups, the solution came after many discussions and formal possibilities and had, as reference, an installation by João Mendes Ribeiro for



UIA Berlin.¹⁵ It was a sizable installation, necessary to gain a presence in such a wide and empty platform, while creating a tension with the pre-existing pyramidal stair, using not only its volume but also its formal configuration (Fig.7).

The entire structure works with a tapered effect, opening to the landscape behind the Luís I Bridge, and becoming narrower toward the houses, constructed with a clamping triangulation. The fluorescent red spray was used to highlight a window, framing the memory of the pre-existing central axis of the demolished neighbourhood.

Finally, the sixth group of Lavadouro das Fontainhas, led by Mariana Sá, faced the strongest pre-existing conditions, as the place inherited not only the communal washing tanks but also the memory of a demolished shelter with remaining structural metal beams that heavily conditioning the volumetric development.

Simultaneously, this major concern became the motto for the project, and the group spent several days studying the structure, the modules, and the current occupation of the place with regular visits to the site. After many different proposals, which valorised some common issues, such as the centrality of the tanks' axial distribution or the rhythm of the existing structure, they came to the most



Fig. 7 - Petite Folie #6 work in progress.

unexpected one: a periscope that visually connected both levels, the tanks with Fontainhas sidewalk, five meters above.

In fact, from the beginning, there was already the intention of creating a landmark along with a living space, and all the formulated solutions were hybrid, with interior and exterior spaces. Nevertheless, the absence of interior space was replaced by the surprise and opportunity to see the other that is not there but appears to be, or the trees above the wall, or the tanks in a central perspective viewpoint simultaneously with the plan view from above. To support the periscope, there was a star-shaped structure, painted in fluorescent red, detached from the main blue volume which extended its occupation into the platform (Fig.8).

While in the first week, it was clear that the FAUP architecture students led the way, namely on the site interpretations and pre-existing elements analyses, assuring the site-specificity of the interventions, the command tended to change during the second week when the construction of a 1:20 model was the challenge. The interior design ESAD student skills, with greater experience on self-construction programmes, manifested in the follies configuration and constructive detailing, being a key contribute to the final outcomes of the workshop.



Fig. 8 - Petite Folie #5 work in progress.

To build

As planned, construction started right after the intense architecture and design workshop, where the students developed not only a conceptual project but detailed construction plans to prepare the do-it-yourself construction. Each of the following three weeks saw the

construction of two of the follies, gradually completing the walking route from Santa Catarina churchyard to Fontainhas's Lavadouro. The groups had strong support from their tutors and some FAUP and ESAD staff, helping them face some planning mistakes, as well as necessary adjustments to site and constructional

issues. For the large majority this was their first contact with a building site. The assembly of the structures was particularly challenging for some of the groups, either to assure stability or to coordinate the prefabricated partial elements with transport to the site and the assembling sequence (Fig.9).



Fig. 9 - Work in progress construction weeks of all teams. Follies 1 to 6, from top left to bottom right.

For the first group, at Santa Catarina churchyard, the stability of the structure was the key issue. Implanted at two slightly tilted platforms at different levels – the street and the sidewalk – the four-meter-high folly was quite narrow and had a relatively small base compared with the suspended part of the pulpit, which made it especially vulnerable to wind forces and to the internal balance provoked by the weight of the visitors moving inside the upper part. The external ribs extended its connection to the ground, aiming at stabilising it, while creating some tensed diagonals which contributed to its structural cohesion.

As the group pre-cut the interior OSB panels, at the time they prefabricated the ribs, there was a need to adjust their final geometry due to light variations on the internal dimensions occurred during the construction, as it was crucial to assure the complete enclosure of the space, to affirm the only intended openings toward the landscape.

Group 2, building at FAUP platform,

faced a special difficulty regarding access to the installation. The west straight stairway had no balustrades and there was a need to assure safe access to the platform. With a rigorous rationalization of the available materials, the group built a balustrade made with wooden props and a cable to connect them; this solution also contributed to indicating the existence of the folly on top of the stairs. Moreover, they had to create a transitional pavement, connecting the stair to the platform. This was only planned after installing the folly, which also did not follow the planned alignments and had to be adjusted on site to a better positioning. Finally, to guarantee the continuity of the route toward the east, they carefully cleaned a path among the vegetation, ensuring its organic quality and the respect for the surrounding nature, full of ipomoea flowers that beautifully matched the blue colour of the Folly.

The platform at Palácio de Cristal garden concealed a gentle slope on the terrain that would interfere with the structure of the folly. The triangular

frame repetition would be conditioned by the slight drop on the ground, though this would only be revealed with the installation of the OSB panels which exposed the misalignment of the structure. This setback made the group dismantle all the panels and define an autonomous horizontal reference to safeguard the horizontal appearance of the installation.

For Virtudes garden there was a great expectation concerning the construction of the voluminous vertical element. The group had studied it in detail: first it would be assembled on the lower level of the garden, then transported using the ramp to position it vertically, and only at that point it would be relocated along the wall to its final place. In addition, this group had only one day and a half to install the folly because of delays with the municipal licences.

Nevertheless, the group managed to build a large part of the structure in only one afternoon with much less effort than expected. They assembled the long tongue at the lower level, just as planned,



Fig. 10 - Petite Folie #1 at Santa Catarina churchyard.
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but then they managed to hoist it up with a rope into a vertical position right on the place. After that crucial moment, the structure was completed at the upper level, and in the next day finished with the OSB installation.

Fontainhas belvedere auditorium also represented a challenging building task as the volume was not orthogonal, entailing many diagonals and non-orthogonal intersections. This aspect led the group to first test the construction at FAUP's patio close to the carpentry workshop. This strategy allowed them to build the entire auditorium, from the structure to OSB panels cover and steps, then identify all the pieces, dismantle and transport them to be reassembled on site. Besides requiring double the amount of work, and transporting every piece of wood down a very steep stairway, the ground conditions on the site did not help the reassembly of the structure, as it interfered with the connections among the wood beams, therefore changing the diagonals and the relative positioning of the components.

Finally, the challenging site of Lavadouro das Fontainhas posed as its main constraint the difficulty of elevating the pre-assembled vertical elements between the existing steel structure. It came in two entire pieces that had to be mounted on site, and later students had to climb up to insert the mirrors, hence enabling the periscope. Nevertheless, the main structure was surprisingly stable and it was simple to install the perimeter triangles that increased the stability of the structure. During the design and construction there was a discussion on how and where to place some auxiliary elements to allow people to sit and linger at the platform, something that was present in all the other follies and that was a premise since the beginning. The group ended by building an extra triangle on the floor to mark a centrality and allow people to sit together and enjoy the landscape.

To enjoy

To mark the end of each working week there was the plan to visit the newly completed structures and celebrate

together with music and a toast to all the collective effort and adventures of those intense weeks. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 restrictions there was only one complete inauguration of the first two installations: people gathered at Petite Folie #1 (Fig.10) having as a soundtrack a cello player performing nearby the structure, and walked together, following the red spots along the route, toward Petite Folie #2 (Fig.11), where there was a DJ playing.

For the following openings, after the construction weeks, students and tutors walked together, revisiting the path they had taken as the first activity of the workshop and rediscovering the follies from a distance, finding new fresh viewpoints. At the end of the three weeks of the construction of all the follies in the network, the complete route between all points was sealed, and people could travel between them, navigating with Google maps or following the red-spot signs.

As Charlie Chaplin reputedly used to say, a building is a special place because



Fig. 11 - Petite Folie #2 at Faculty of Architecture platform.
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of its architecture, but it is the people who make it special by participating in it. With this idea in mind, we must think about the relevance of public participation. The audience feedback is always an essential element in any project or event; particularly for a biennale, for which the capacity of producing social impact contributes to its success.

Even integrating PDB'21 as a satellite activity, "Petites Folies" project represented an intense source of content, disseminated through social media with expressive engagement and, over the weeks of construction toward fruition, reaching an exceptional audience and public appeal. It is important to mention that this project attracted not only specialized audiences, colleagues and peers, but unexpected visitors who posed the most interesting questions.

When people approached students during the construction weeks, they asked for simple, general information about the ongoing structures, leading the students to realize that an idea is only well explained

when it is reflected upon countless times. The need to explain the follies – why, what and what they were being built for – forced them to focus on the essential aspects of each project and to be able of summarizing their conceptual ideas in one sentence.

Other visitors tried to find the reasons behind certain details, even when they happened to be constructive mistakes. This occurred, for example, at Santa Catarina's Petite Folie #1, when gaps were left between the first OSB panels, a consequence of the natural inaccuracy of the auto-construction process, which led visitors to think it was entirely intentional.

This small event helps us to remember architecture is rarely built under perfect conditions, neither does it answer to all questions, nor solves all issues, and it is subject to constant reinterpretation. Architecture fosters people's imagination, leading sometimes to a natural appropriation of the creators' ideas. Álvaro Siza repeatedly says that people often try to find a reason behind all aspects of his

architecture, when he keeps discovering references and purposes about his own work through the eyes of others.

According to what we heard, the functionality of the follies was frequently questioned, especially in the more sculptural installations such as Palácio de Cristal Petite Folie #3 (Fig.12 and13) and Virtudes garden, Petite Folie #4 (Fig.14 and15): "What is this object is for?" "Can I climb up the blue tongue?" "What will I see through that hole?"

We had also noted the young people intensively interacted with the students, offering help to build, revealing a strong desire to be part of the construction as they seemed to be having fun. Later, they became interesting playgrounds for kids, but not exclusively, as we found a dancer freely interacting with the structure of Folie #3 on one afternoon.

At more peripheral places, like Fontainhas, the configuration of the Petite Folie #5 (Fig.16) – the auditorium – was fundamental to attracting people to inhabit

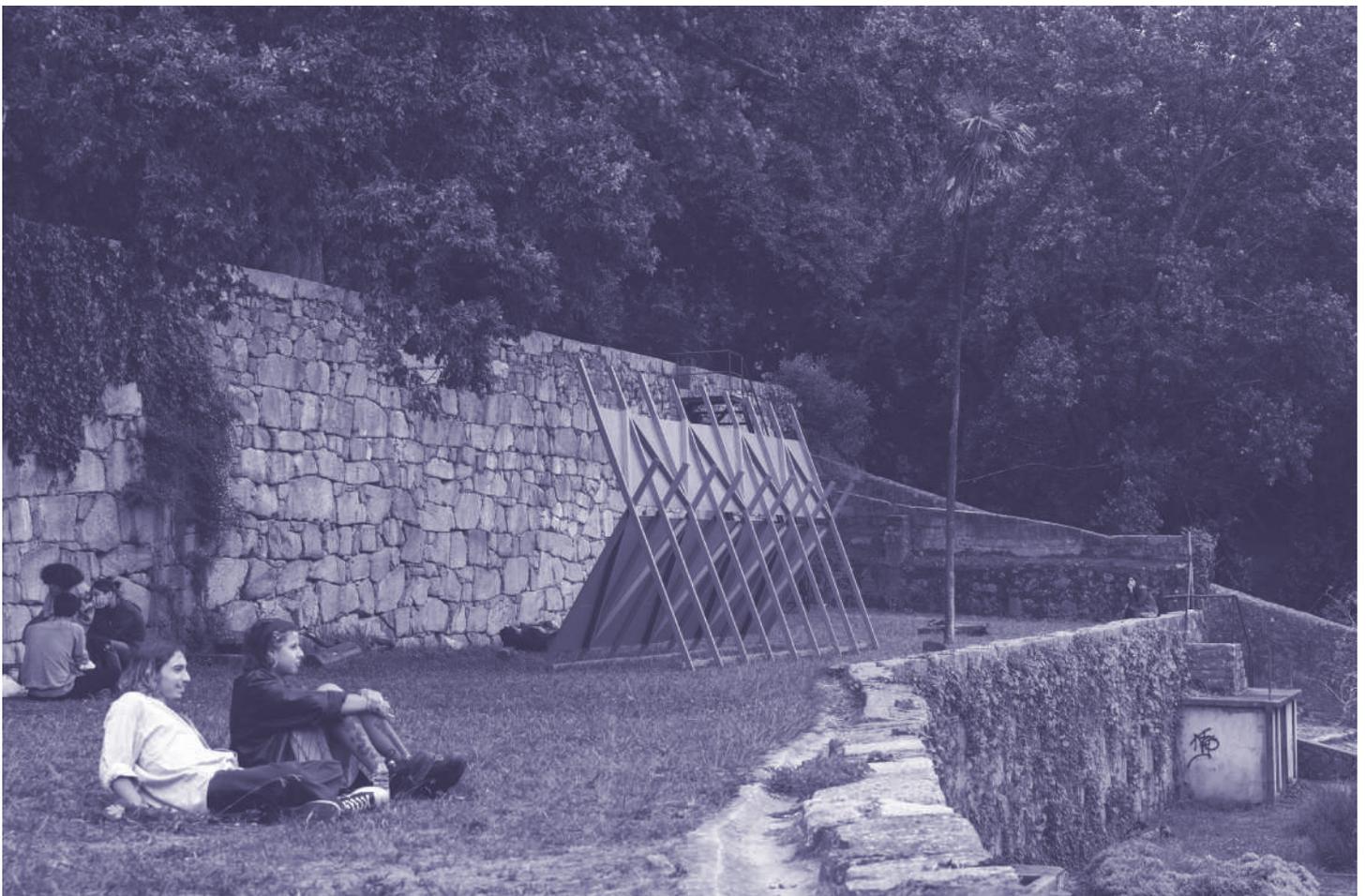


Fig. 12 - Petite Folie #3 at Palácio de Cristal.
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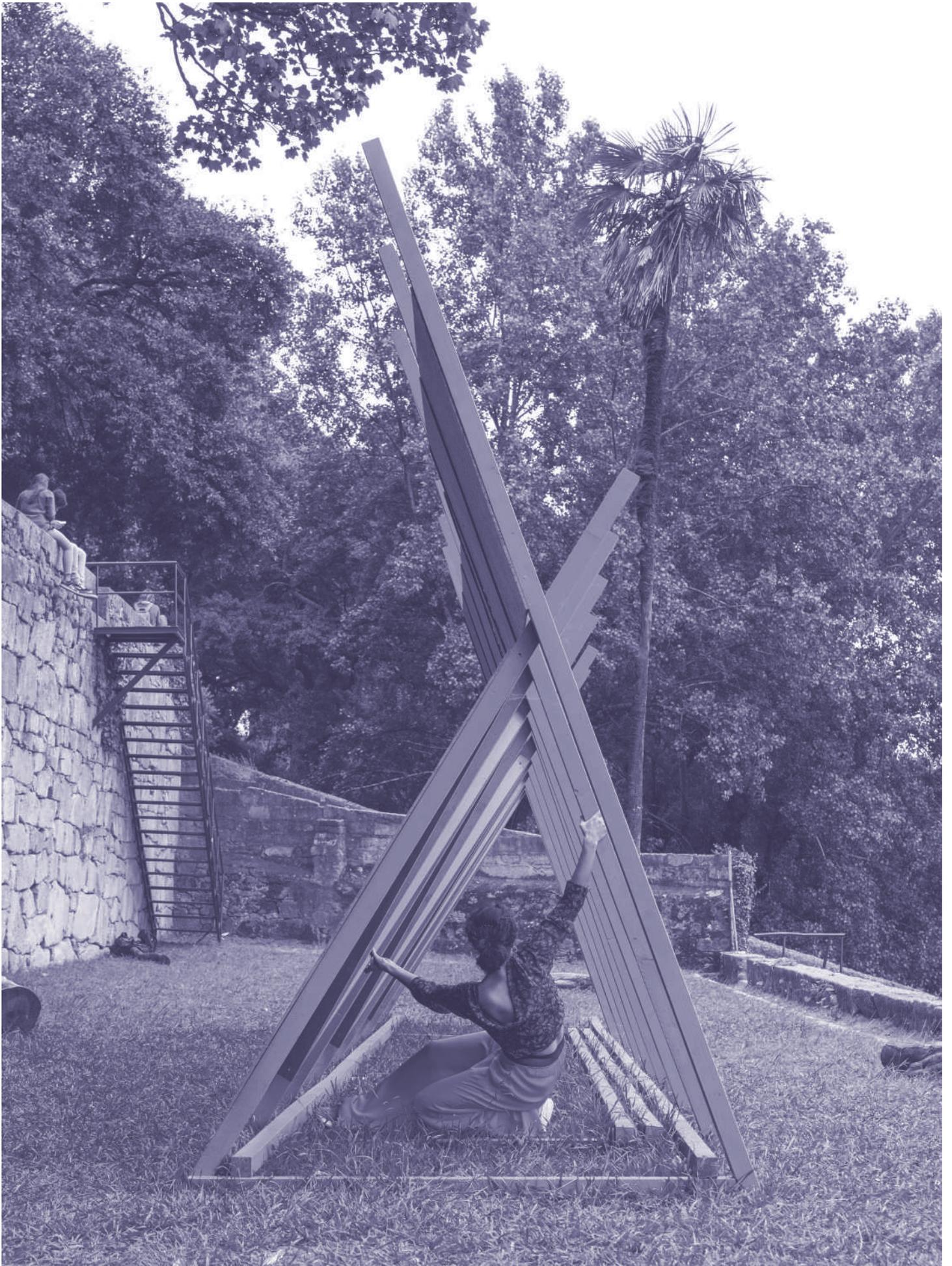


Fig. 13 - Dancer performing at Petite Folie #3 at Palácio de Cristal.
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Fig. 14 - Petite Folie #4 at Virtudes Garden.
© Alexander Bogorodskiy



Fig. 15 - Petite Folie #4 at Virtudes Garden seen from Passeio das Virtudes.
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Fig.16 - Petite Folie #5 at Fontainhas platform.
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it, encouraging encounters, relaxing and leisurely moments, serving as motto to bring people together, to occupy a vacant lot, while trying to rediscover a certain normality in the occupation of public space, as has been desired by everyone for so long. Accordingly, Petite Folie #6 (Fig. 17) at Lavadouro das Fontainhas, with the ludic and surprising effect of the periscope, delighted visitors from the oldest to the youngest.

“Petites Folies” was perhaps so successful for being a site specific situated experience, promoting experimentation and interaction with structures in public space, inherent potentials of the 1:1 scale. The students, the teachers, and the school staff were all essential to this project: besides building all the six follies, they were inherently a keen communication channel for publicising the project and explaining it to visitors. Once again, the communication and collective and interdisciplinary acts of sharing were powerful mechanisms to nurture knowledge and sensitivity. We also “believe that the quality of a project,

whatever its extension, is obtained through interdisciplinary work, through the capacity for dialogue and coordination and not through the architect’s specialized knowledge for this or that performance”.¹⁶

Balance

As displayed, “Petites Folies” had a big impact on fields of both production and fruition, allowing a different experience of architecture creation as much as public rediscovery of city spaces and its architecture. In other words, as acts of experiment and disclosure in architecture.

The diverse outcomes were the result of different methodological approaches rather than exclusively spawned from site interpretation or the consequences of the same briefing. Moreover, avoiding functional demands gave place to rich formal investigations focused on plastic and constructional aspects of architecture.

The experimental aspects of the workshop, as an opportunity to produce architecture, bringing together skills and methods from architecture and interior

design, proved the potential for research through practice and the laboratory potential of 1:1 scale interventions or, in other words, folly construction.

The “Petites Folies” site-specific architectural structures explored new ways of bringing architecture and design to the city, through a wide-ranging curatorial discourse, softening architectural disciplinary boundaries toward the public sphere. Especially during pandemic times, where many cultural events such as exhibitions or lectures were online, it was essential to find alternative ways to maintain bonds among people, reinforcing the sense of belonging and the democratic occupation of cities. It is crucial to prioritize human connections throughout the physical interactions at safe places.

Art installations and ephemeral architecture such as follies can contribute to the activation and rediscovery of spaces that might be hidden from everyday life.

They are instrumental to reassuring the return to the square, the plaza, the belvedere, the garden, the courtyard, the

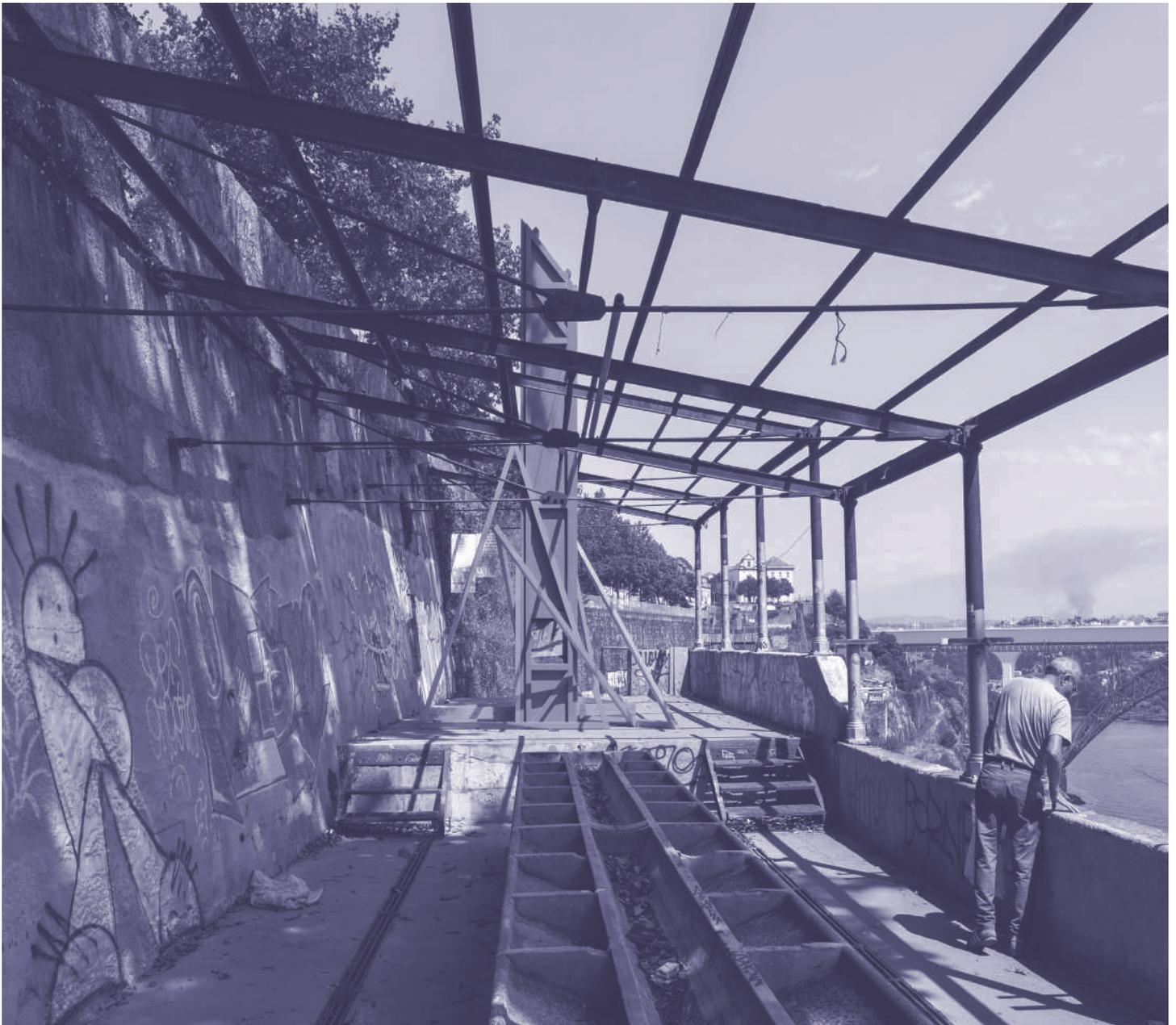


Fig. 17 - Petite Folie #6 at Lavadouro das Virtudes.
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institution as places of poetry in which to reconnect with each other. As Denise Scott Brown once said, "Architecture can't force people to connect, it can only plan the crossing points, remove barriers, and make the meeting places useful and attractive".¹⁷

END NOTE

With the end of the biennale, the Follies were expected to be sold at auction, the revenue from which would repay social support associations in the respective parishes. Meanwhile a possible afterlife for the "Petites Follies" is on the table, which has postponed the end of the project and the planned auction.

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⁶ PDB'21 programme took place from June 7 to July 25, 2021.

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¹² Ginoulhiac, M. Brincadeira, Projecto e Liberdade. Revista Internacional De Educación Para La Justicia Social, 6(1). 2017. pp.21-30.

¹³ Public tanks formerly used by local communities to wash clothes.

¹⁴ The workshop's first week took place at Casa Cor-de-Rosa, FAUP's research centre dedicated building, integrated in the school garden. The students worked together at the building ground floor, exploring its direct connection to the

exterior space and the terrace.

¹⁵ "Paisagens Invertidas" (Inverted Landscapes), Portuguese Pavilion for XXI World Congress of Architecture UIA, Berlin 2002.

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