Games and Follies at Urban Scale

Two examples in the education of Architects

follies
jogos
urbanismo
educação arquitetónica
planeamento

follies
games
urbanism
architectural education
planning

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Citation: R. Florentino; V. Sellari; S. García Fueyo; D. Casas-Valle (2021). Games and Follies at Urban Scale. *UOU scientific journal #02*, Two examples in the education of Architects. 70-75.
ISSN: 2697-1518. https://doi.org/10.14198/UOU.2021.2.07

Date of reception: 06/11/2021
Date of acceptance: 20/11/2021

O conhecimento urbano é obrigatório nos cursos de Arquitetura. Contudo, as matérias para entender a evolução das cidades, o seu planeamento, projeto e gestão, têm a sua própria complexidade, especialmente quando relacionadas com aspetos técnicos, ligados aos Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável, como mobilidade, energia, economia e alterações climáticas. Para preencher esta lacuna, diferentes autores consideram que uma aproximação lúdica pode ser útil no ensino universitário e até para melhorar as práticas profissionais. Este artigo comenta dois casos de projetos académicos em universidades portuguesas, que partilham o interesse por soluções urbanísticas através de *follies* vinculadas ao enquadramento regional. Para além da complexidade específica, ambos demonstram que instrumentos flexíveis, sem se prescindir do uso de metodologias mais tradicionais no processo de educação da arquitectura, poderão ser especialmente relevantes para as próximas gerações, num contexto digital de ensino universitário.

Urban knowledge is mandatory in the Architecture syllabus. However, the subjects to understand the evolution of cities, their planning, design and governance, have particular complexity, especially the ones regarding technical issues, linked with Sustainable Development Goals, along with mobility, energy, economy and climate change. To solve this gap, different authors argue that a ludic approach can be useful for university lessons and even to improve professional practices. This paper discusses two cases of academic projects in Portuguese universities, with the common aim of designing urban solutions as follies connected to the regional environment. Despite the specific complexity, they both prove that these flexible tools, although not preventing the use of traditional methodologies in the learning processes of architectural education, can be especially relevant for the next generations in a context of digital university training.

The project of Bernard Tschumi at Parc de La Villete (Paris, 1982-98) introduced the Follies as a landmark in architectonic discourse. The visual impact of the several red "dots, lines and surfaces", in the green public landscape, proved particularly interesting for urban design creativity and imagination. Somehow, it was perceived as a liberation from functionality, with a more ludic approach to architectural composition. This work was relevant both for his career and the diversity of contemporary architecture. But his influence for urban theory did not reach the same significant or comprehensive level, because the city is a whole complex system, concerning other issues like planning and land management.

In architectural education, urban and regional scales are certainly mandatory in our courses. However, they involve additional methodologies not often very well understood by students. In the last chapter of his First Lesson, Bernardo Secchi (2000) presented an interesting analogy of Urbanism with games. In fact, the city should not be seen as a puzzle, where the box cover gives you a perfect image of how it looks. The goal, as urban designers or puzzle builders, is to get those pieces together in the right order. In urbanism, the analogy can be the same program or typology next to each other.

More examples of this relationship are the Mikado, with its linear pieces, to be removed from a pile without touching the others [and achieve good external results, as the strategies of Urban Acupuncture nor this.] (Lerner, 2003). Or the Monopoly game, where the real estate is directly connected to an exclusive financial perspective of the cities. In the experience of teaching Urbanism in the education of future Architects, we present these analogies at the beginning of the course, trying to introduce this complex subject in a more flexible and ludic way, opening the students' attention. In recent years, the practice of the Sudoku game is another interesting vision to understand the "so called" city of 15 minutes walking (Moreno, 2019), with mixed-uses located near housing and places of employment.

In this era of digital economy and social restrictions during the pandemic, the use of games as a pedagogical tool became common, not only among children and young students, but also in the development of some professional activities. They offer more creativity for urban design, which maybe does not prevent the use of the traditional methodologies, but can be especially relevant for the next generations in a context of digital university training (Azevedo, 2021).

Furthermore, the way general documents are presented, as the European Urban Agenda or the Sustainable Development Goals, with technical requirements like mobility, renewable energy, climate change and neighbourhood self-sufficiency, asks for more flexible answers, in terms of place-making. To the usual planning concerns, it is recognized that design always adds value, even for the regional scale (Neuman and Zonneveld, 2018). And there is evidence that participation increases when applying methodologies that explore games with stakeholders and local citizens as players (Sousa, 2021). This paper discusses two academic projects developed in Portuguese Universities of Architecture, with the common scope of including proposals for Follies connected to the urban environment.

A STRATEGY FOR CASCAIS, LISBON (PORTUGAL)

Five years ago, an Italian Erasmus student of Urban Ecology and Sustainability, at Lusófona University, achieved an interesting balance between the regional and local situation for the municipality of Cascais in the Lisbon metropolitan area. Addressing the porosity of the territory, with its voids and irregularities, the research found nature-based solutions, presented for different urban programs.

The study tried to find possible territorial landmarks, at large and small scales. The proposal addresses the whole municipality in order to reshape the settlements through public facilities and slow mobility. Starting a route from the coast, following the waterlines and ecological corridors, using the potentiality of the architecture and landscape heritage, to increase their attractiveness, it also crosses agricultural reserves, to develop a project in which they act as an integrated part of "landscape tourism". These urban elements, either points or lines, work together to create a network of spaces that can improve both local and regional levels and contribute to sustain the artificial division introduced by the infrastructures.

The strategy considers a long term logic, but also an immediate future, where, for example, it can start from the coast or one waterline and then continue to follow up reaching all of the municipality. It represents the idea of possible developments through the creation of new places along the waterlines with plenty of interesting areas (Fig. 1).

Then, at a smaller scale, like a zoom-in, it presents operational "dots" as Follies, as centralities and multifunctional spaces, that are not dependent upon a specific program, because the design took in consideration the general strategy.

This model shows the objective of implementing a landscape regeneration for Cascais to become a multifunctional and polycentric municipality, able to develop those sustainable tools, ecological areas and green / blue infrastructures. The creation of new multifunctional places for public and economical activities (in grey) have two main purposes: to connect the areas intersected by infrastructure and to re-shape the edges of the urban areas in order to solve the flooding problem through water storage elements that can contain the excess water.

The proposal for this territory aims, finally, to address the voids and irregularities, with the purpose of regeneration, providing a better and sustainable structure. In this way, new centralities can be created, the municipality becomes a "polycentric" system, more organic and less scattered, not only from the present omnidirectional flows to the coast.

These Follies are punctual devices/ operations independent from a specific place, with common characteristics but also different purposes, connected to the five goals of the project:

Fig. 1 – Sustainable and Urban Ecology Proposal for Cascais, Lisbon (Sellari, 2016).

Fig. 2 – Urban activities in waterfronts (García Fueyo, 2021).

a) Quality of life: providing recreational activities, promoting a variety of mixed-uses and revitalizing the urban centers, strengthening sports equipment, leisure and green spaces;

b) Sustainable mobility: enforcing public transport and encouraging slow mobility by increasing cycle paths, not only in the waterfront, but also in the municipality hinterland;

c) Healthy environment: developing actions to restore and maintain the ecosystems and biodiversity, filling the gaps between places through the construction of parks and gardens, preserving the landscape system and the territorial identities.

d) New centralities: promoting innovation and encouraging the establishment of research units and healthy tourism as economic activities, greening the degraded industrial land, encouraging social entrepreneurship, and creating facilities for business and technological areas;

e) Flood solutions: through the designing of the new public spaces incorporating areas where the water can flow so as avoiding damage, especially in the urban centers, and also adjacent agricultural land and rural activity.

WATERFRONT FOLLIES IN BUEU, VIGO (SPAIN)

An improved pedagogical approach is in place nowadays in the Architecture and Urbanism course at the Portucalense University. In this second case study, it was the work of a student with his Master's Thesis (García Fueyo, 2021), for the small village of Bueu on the north coast of the Vigo metropolitan area. As in the previous academic proposal, this one started with ludic games' analogies, introducing this methodology for urban planning and management. It allowed for a clear identification of the different activities taking place in the area (Fig. 2).

In addition, the project reflects upon David Chipperfield nearby project, Ria de Arousa in 2016. That plan presents a similar strategy connected to the Galician regional landscape, as this one presented here concerning particularly the waterfront of Bueu.

In general, the small and medium-sized towns with urban waterfronts show a strong relationship between the harbour, it´s infrastructures and dynamic activities, and the urban centers. However, the evolution and the functioning of the city and the harbour (in space and time), each one with very different logics and interests, often results in disjointed and fragmented public spaces.

The project was based on two main achievements. The first one, to identify the dynamics that generate the disarticulation and fragmentation of the maritime harbour areas in medium and small populations. As in the case of Bueu, the central position of port infrastructures generates many barriers to the urban center. The outcome of this study results in several organizational principles for place-making design and the planning of medium and small urban areas waterfronts. Beside the site-specific elements, these principles give an important input for the achievement of the second goal, namely the development of an urban design project for the reorganization and revitalization of the Bueu waterfront, making a more balanced relationship of public space between the harbour and the urban center. A working methodology included acquiring knowledge from the municipality of Bueu, consulting books, articles, cartography, academic theses and other cultural studies about the region. The research also included several meetings with the local authority and harbour authority, along with discussions with archivists and writers of local publications. Site visits, that included the study and analysis of human behaviour, taking notes and photographs, were a continuous task during all the journey of the project. This open process made it possible to identify the dynamics and complex coexistence of different activities on a daily base, and the frictions between the urban areas. The case of Bueu demonstrates that waterfront facilities have a direct influence on the character of public space. It is therefore relevant that harbour areas should not be forgotten or projects made without planning and responding to people's needs. This means that further transformations of waterfronts should always go beyond the actual restrictive view point of serving economic interests, administrative and political bureaucracy.

The research was completed with an urban design project for the intervention in the central waterfront of Bueu (figure 3). At this time, the space is dominated by many vehicles (driving and parked), giving a fragmentation and discontinuity to the public space. The project establishes conditions that organizes this area as a social place with more space for people to enjoy for leisure activities, meetings, walks, sports, cultural and social events, with the continuous sound of the sea in the background.

The intervention includes a variety of Follies designed for the different public spaces and includes the design of new routes to allow continuity for pedestrians along the coast, which goes beyond the intervention area itself (figure 4). The proposal lays down a new basis for urban design in Bueu, aiming to connect the waterfront with its central area, and establish the structure for further developments.

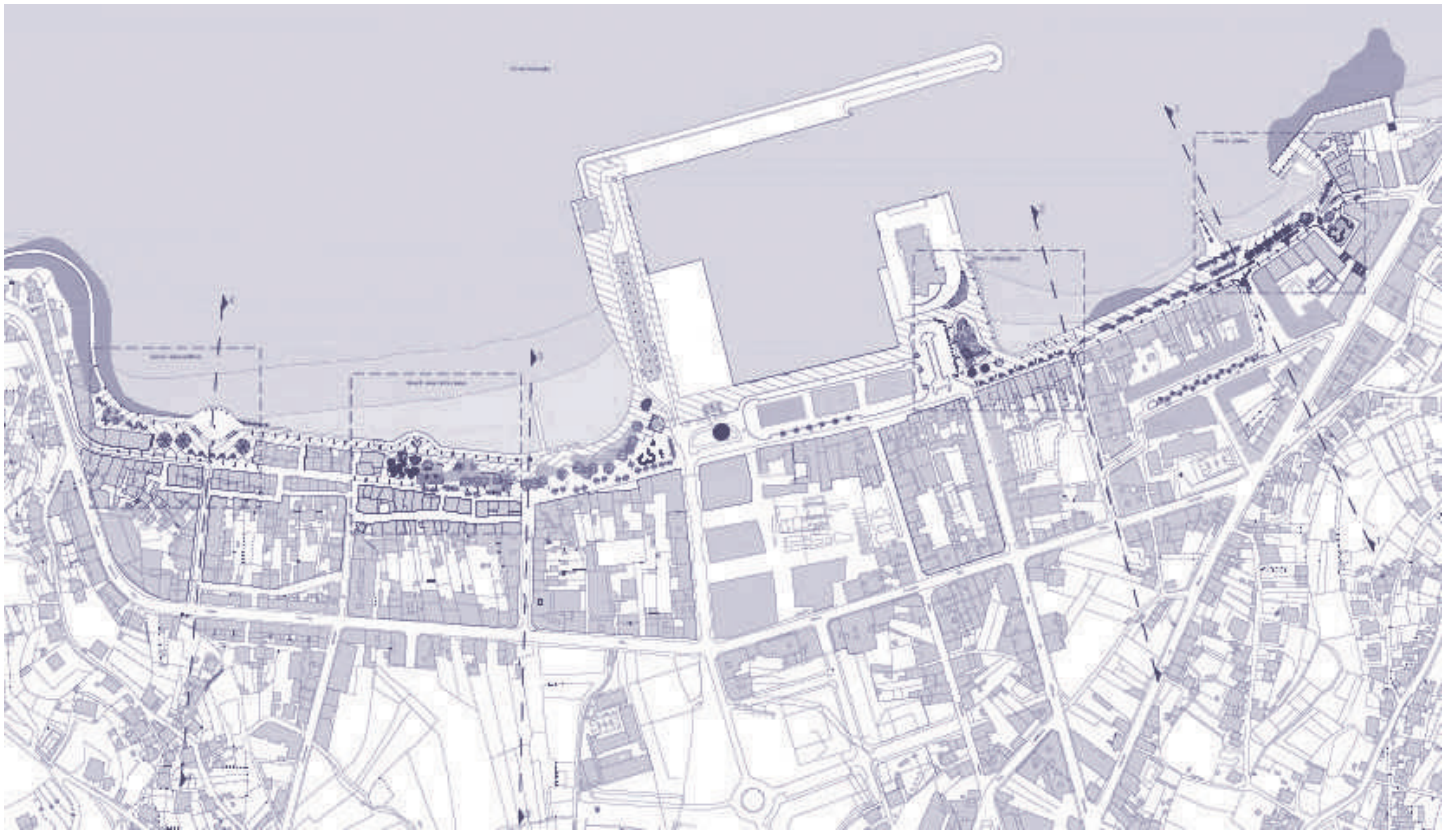

Fig. 3 – Proposal of Urban Design for Bueu, Vigo (García Fueyo, 2021).

Fig. 4 – Urban Follie in the waterfront of Bueu (García Fueyo, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

Despite of their specific and respective complexity, the two cases presented in this paper contribute to the argument that innovative processes should be introduced in the education of Architecture and Urbanism.

As mentioned before, the board games are very useful to understand the evolution of cities, that must comprise a comprehensive system which combines planning, management and urban design. Different techniques can be explored as teaching tools, including escape maps (Tapia, 2020).

In addition, these two academic projects confirm other results for further discussion; the design of Follies presents interesting proposals and a ludic approach that can generate more creative and flexible solutions for public spaces, especially relevant in times of uncertainty, such as the present.

They widen the planning perspectives for the municipality of Cascais in the first project, and the attractiveness of the urban/ waterfront interface in the case of Bueu, which also will be beneficial at a larger scale.

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