

The roadway infrastructure and the morphological transformations of the territory

Ivo Oliveira

This proposal of communication stems from research conducted at the University of Minho, entitled "The common place: Proposals based on the reinvention of the infrastructure", for the purpose of a doctoral thesis guided by the architect Maria Manuel Oliveira and by the geographer Alvaro Dominguez. In order to become familiar with the structural elements of the contemporary transformation of the territory of Santa Maria da Feira, themed drawings will be presented based on data collected during the various visits to the territory. In the drawings, the various elements which compose the roadway space are represented separately or together, thus allowing for an explicit but evidently partial vision of a territorial reality, which is extremely complex.

The importance of the drawings derives from their ability to describe the themes that most inform these places and reveal the relationships that, as in a city, are established between the architecture and the territory, and whose heuristic value helps explain the interest with which the architects dissect these places.

To try to understand the construction processes of the territory of Santa Maria da Feira we relied on a fundamental text of Manuel de Sola-Morales (2003) "Las formas del crecimiento." Sola-Morales believes that the construction process results from a timely combination of three operations: Land Division, Urbanization and Construction. With regard to the territory that is beyond the city's limits, several investigations have affirmed the special importance of Land Division in the structuring of the urban form and in the understanding of its spaces and transformations.

However, in Santa Maria da Feira, we believe that the quantity and diversity of changes occurring in its roadway infrastructure, the way they are informed by generic and sectorial practices, have contributed to Land Division and Construction losing their centrality in the characterization of the territorial structure. This fact leads us to raise the question once again: What is the most structural operation composing the area in Santa Maria da Feira?

We recognize the importance of Land Division in determining urban form, which in the city remains articulate with building and its continuous replacement. In the territory of Santa Maria da Feira, the formal diversity of the occupations and uses of the divisions, turned it over the years into a stable support, and supposedly resistant enough to many daily transformations. However, the most recent Urbanization operations, which in the context of Santa Maria da Feira we prefer to call it infra-structuring operations, with very specific methods, have profoundly transformed the territorial structure.

Several highways, bypasses, structural roads, profile corrections, nodes or junctions, plots of increasingly significant dimensions which join parcels of land which are later divided, tend to appear in a fragmented form in the territory. Both are based on regulations and legislation that tends to reduce the formal diversity, to make a uniform pattern of the Plot and Building on the roadway space, and seek above all to ensure that each actor does not see his performance space invaded by practices that put into

question his technical, administrative and even legal independence. Each entity that embodies this sectorial practice acts on a space which does not own but which determines, strongly, its organization and management. That approach assumes a decisive role in the contemporary transformation of the territory and has strong implications in its space.

The Land Division which explains many of the ancient morphologies, can today be seen as a step in a path that led us to a logic of sectorial production. The construction of a new road , the implementation of street lighting, the placement of a power supply line, the review of a profile, the constant redrawing of topography, the introduction of a pavement , or the normalization of the boundary walls happen according to increasingly more distant logics from what is Land Division reality . The practice is sectorial and has difficulty in systematizing performances and in bringing coherence to the landscape. The main role of Land Division is becoming a kind of nostalgic dream.

This viewpoint allows us to say that we should join to these deeply rooted morphologies in Land Division, the morphologies which sectorial practices, which play a part in the infra-structure planning of the territory, are producing. This would lead to a better comprehension and representation of the territory It is common to hear that the urban has different morphologies. The task now is to represent them and to put into practice a conceptual framework which may lead to the reinvention of their spaces.