

Chelas, Lisboa. The modern heritage in time of crisis

*Original*

Chelas, Lisboa. The modern heritage in time of crisis / Ramondetti, Leonardo - In: Projects for an inclusive city. Social integration through urban growth strategies / Marina O., Armando A.. - STAMPA. - Skopje : City of Skopje, 2015. - ISBN 978-608-65584-9-9. - pp. 104-113

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2709657 since: 2018-06-15T10:04:32Z

*Publisher:*

City of Skopje

*Published*

DOI:

*Terms of use:*

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# Projects for an Inclusive City

Social Integration through  
Urban Growth Strategies

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## **SINERGI Project**

# **Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies**

The SINERGI Project (Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies) is a network of twinned cities that provides exchange of knowledge, experience and good practices of partner cities, Universities, civic organizations and social groups enabling better social integration through joint development of urban growth strategies. The project has enriched the sense of identity and mutual understanding between European citizens by bringing upfront problems and issues of urban life that are shared among them, but also by sharing common values, history and culture in an open dialog.

The network organized two seminars as a platform for creative and open debate between local authorities, academics, experts, civil activists and citizens from local communities about the problem of social integration in ever-growing cities. The SINERGI Book One: “The Projects for an Inclusive City” is the result of these two seminars. The purpose of this book is to provoke decision-makers and citizens to challenge their perception of the city and, through critical understanding of mutual interests and shared values, to create a sustainable and lasting network of cities and active citizens.



CITTA' DI TORINO



LISBOA  
CÂMARA MUNICIPAL

Leonardo Ramondetti

# Chelas, Lisboa

## The modern heritage in time of crisis

### **ABSTRACT:**

Chelas is a huge public neighborhood in Lisbon. Designed during the 60s as Metabolist city, Chelas has been developed in more than seven hundred acres and it is populated by forty thousand people. The neighborhood, created during the last fifty years, was an extraordinary laboratory for innovative policies and architectural avant-garde projects.

Nowadays, Chelas is something different. The economic and demographic crisis seems to have completely destroyed the strength of social programs sponsored by the municipality of Lisbon. The neighborhood that, until some years ago, was considered dangerous and overcrowded, now is marked by an exodus of population, an abandonment of buildings and a progressive disuse of public spaces.

Starting from the last years, many programs have been applied in order to face this difficult situation. The most practised and economically sustainable initiatives are programs based on "people social role". But these policies are slowly taking off in Chelas, where the capabilities processes are struggling to give results.

In conclusion, although Chelas shows many peculiar features, it helps us debate about at least one issue: the effectiveness of capabilities and self-protection programs in some problematic areas that were, until some years ago, protected by public services and welfare assistance.

**KEYWORDS:** *public city, modern heritage, participation, capabilities program, bottom-up process*

## 1 CHELAS, A MODERN CITY

Chelas is one of the largest public districts in Lisbon. It is composed of eight residential neighbourhoods located over seven hundred acres and populated by forty thousand inhabitants. The district was built during the latter part of the Twentieth century in order to solve the housing shortage that afflicted Lisbon until the 90s. The plan, based on the experiences of Le Mirail in Toulouse, Hyde Park in Sheffield and other characteristic projects of late-modernism, showed the weakness of the housing policies proposed by both *pre* and *post*-revolutionary administrations. These governments were characterized by a slow bureaucracy and a substantial incapacity in developing urban policies. This situation prolonged the realization of this part of the city for a huge amount of time that stretched from the Forties until the present day.

### 1.1 Chelas, *the flick of the tail of the dying modern movement in Portugal*

In fact, the design of Chelas' urban plan began in 1938, when the Polish architect Étienne De Gröer was commissioned by Lisbon town hall to plan the urban expansion of the city. According to the zoning of the historical centre, the *Plano General de Urbanização e Expansão de Lisboa (Plano De Gröer)* located industries and infrastructures along the coast and the residential areas inland.

This layout was changed in a second and a third plan, *Plano de Urbanização de Lisboa (Plano Director do Gabinete de Estudos de Urbanização)* in 1959 and *Plano-Base do Gabinete Técnico de Habitação* in 1962. During that period a great migration from the countryside caused overcrowding in the historical centre. This situation led the technicians of GEU and GTH to design Chelas as a new urban pole for the eastern part of Lisbon.

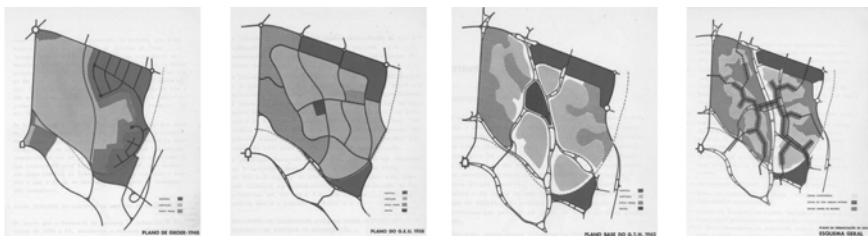


Figure 1. Evolution of Chelas' urban plan between 1948 and 1964

Finally in 1964, the last *Plano de Urbanização de Chelas* showed a radical alteration of the urban structure abandoning the idea of creating a monocentric area in order to realize metabolistic forms. The urban design proposed 'does not follow the rationalist model, and highlights, through the formal options taken, the influence of the latest design concepts that

dominated the 60s (Heitor, 2001,143). This change was due to the architect José Rafael Botelho, leader of the design team. Botelho learnt urban planning at Paris University and after he worked at London Council when he was strongly influenced by the theories of Team X. For this reason, Botelho rejected the normalizing vision of functionalism (need-type man-kind) in order to base his designs on the enhancement of plurality and cultural differences (Heitor, 2001).



Figure 2. Plano de Urbanização de Chelas, 1964

This new approach could be clearly seen in the morphological conformation of the final plan for Chelas: Botelho, in line with the works of Fernando Tavora and some other prominent members of the University of Oporto, tried to reinterpret the traditional architectural elements (the *house*, the *street*, the *neighbourhood*) in order to find a compromise between modern and historical architecture. He imagined Chelas as “a *unicum* extremely identifiable” (Portas, 1968). This *unicum* should symbolise “services and residence characterized by different typology of housing, that should be well connected by spaces for collective uses” (Portas, 1968). According to this idea, Botelho tried to design a system in which the external circulation would give a form of the buildings, and the buildings would give a shape to the internal circulation system (Heitor, 2001). By using this kind of approach, the transition of scale between the house and the city should be guaranteed by the circulation system, which

transforms the territory into “a mechanical artefact structured to create movement” (Banham, 1962)

## 2 VISIONS FOR A FRAGMENTED TERRITORY

When construction began in 1966, it was evident that the project would take a great deal of time to reach completion. The lack of public resources and infrastructures in the area were the most relevant obstacles. Chelas was created *step by step*. The final result was a fragmentary realization: Chelas became an area composed of different neighbourhoods according to different phases of construction. An experimental territory in which some of the most important Portuguese architects tried to define a specific idea of a Portuguese public city. Gonzalo Byrne and Vitor Figueiredo in the Seventies, Tomas Taveira in the following decade, PROAP at the end of the 90s are just some of the most famous designers who tried to execute effectively the plan drawn by Botelho. However, all these attempts failed and Chelas was transformed into a *mosaic*.

### 2.1 Chelas as *archipelago*

Today, Chelas can be considered as an *incomplete territory* composed of *fragments* different from one another. Starting from this consideration, there are two possible visions for this area: the first considers Chelas as an *archipelago*; the second considers Chelas as a system composed of *castles*, self-sufficient nuclei. On these two visions, the public programs and the policies are investing in a non coordinate way.

The first scenario still imagines Chelas as a unitary system that could be created by working on the *spaces in between*: the residual areas, the infrastructural axes, the abandoned waterfront. A huge territory formed by “*islands* surrounded by the almost inaccessible sea of motorways” (Alves *et al.*, 2001, 24). In this vision the sea becomes the most important element that should connect all areas. The possibility of this approach has been showed by the plan for the Eastern Hospital Park designed in 2009 by the architect João Falcão Pedro De Campos with the landscape architects NPK. Despite many critical issues due to financial investment, the project still imagines Chelas as a *unicum*.



Figure 3. *Plano de Pormenor do Parque Hospitalar Oriental*

## 2.2 Chelas as group of castles

On the contrary, the second scenario considers the *space in between* as a dangerous area. It is not a sea but a *mountain range* that divides the territory. In this scenario there is no territorial unity, but the differences of each area could be increased in order to create *cities in the city*. An approach that has already been experimented in other places: for instance the designs of the atelier Lacaton&Vassal for the Paris suburbs or the intervention of Hawkins & Brown architects in the housing complex of Park Hill in Sheffield. In Chelas the last construction designed by the PROAP in 2000 aims to create a virtuous self-sufficient area. The vision of Chelas as a territory composed of *castles* means the separation, closeness and densification of some parts of the district. The aim is to create a territory composed of few but strong nuclei.

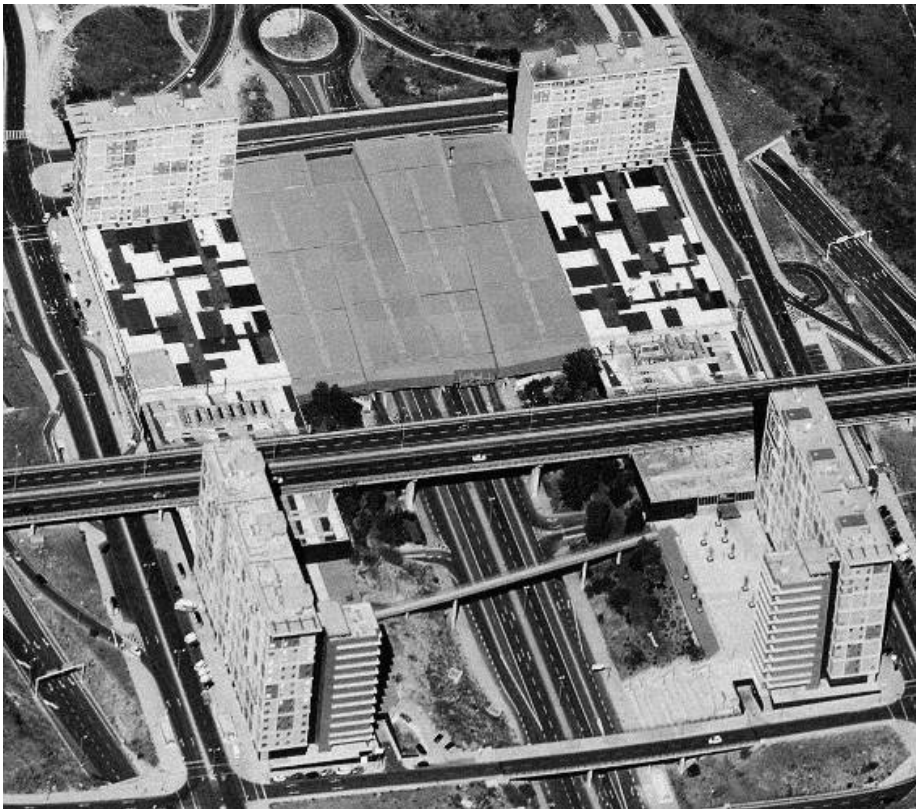


Figure 4. *Quadra do Chelas, PROAP architects, Zona O*

### 3 CAPABILITIES PROGRAMS AND BOTTOM-UP PROCESSES

In spite of these two traditional scenarios, in recent years, the Municipality of Lisbon has provided many capabilities programs and bottom-up initiatives. The most important programs for the area of Chelas are Viver Marvila and BIP/ZIP, both developed in 2008. Sustainable initiatives in line with other Northern Europe or Southern American experiences.

#### 3.1 Viver Marvila program

The program Viver Marvila, organized by the Câmara Municipal de Lisboa (CML) and the Instituto de Habitação and Reabilitação Urbana (IHUR) in 2008, aims to work with the population of Chelas for the redevelopment of the buildings and the public spaces (*Program of Integrated Intervenção*, 2013). The association is composed by architects and sociologists who carry of the instances of the local population in order to drive the actions of municipalities in Chelas. The program integrates social actions and urban regeneration operations. The residents' participation is necessary, but the public investment (in sense of financial operation, organization, designs and planning) is essential. The interventions with a major impact were realized in 2008 and 2009, when part of the buildings of the architect Tomas Taveira, known as “Corredor da Morte”, was demolished and the public spaces in the neighbourhood was upgrading. Starting from this point, many other small operations have been realized inside the neighbourhoods, such as the creation of pedestrian areas and the maintenance of the buildings. At the same time, the program Viver Marvila intervened also in the areas outside the neighbourhoods, in fact during the last three years, sixteen hectares of land were planned for urban gardens and a skate-park was created (*Program of Integrated Intervenção*, 2013). These actions are also linked to social initiatives in order to help the vulnerable population of Chelas.



Figure 5. Viver Marvila, program of rehabilitation in Zona I

### 3.2 BIP/ZIP program

In 2008, the same institutions promoted also another program for the problematic areas of Lisbon. The *BIP/ZIP, Bairros de Intervenção Prioritaria/Zonas de Intervenção Prioritaria* is a plan of actions included in the *Programa de Habitação de Lisboa* (PHL) contained in the *Plano Estratégico de Habitação*. The initiative, in line with the principles of the SAAL program, is gaining more and more attention not only for the results, but also the methodology of implementation. The BIP/ZIP is a five-year program considered a “second generation strategic plan for sustainable development” (*Cartas dos BIP/ZIP*, 2010). The proposals of the program are: improving the city, attracting new population and turning the crisis into an opportunity (*Cartas dos BIP/ZIP*, 2010). The project was divided into three phases. The first one, called *know*, took place from October 2008 to April 2009. In this phase maps were elaborated based on social, urban and environmental data in order to better know the districts. The second phase, called *debate*, took place between March and June 2009. It involved a group of fourteen politicians and technicians of the CML in order to develop a strategic matrix for the projects classification and the identification of intervention areas. Sixty one Bairros Críticos (*Cartas dos BIP/ZIP*, 2010) were identified, later expanded to sixty seven. The third phase, called *action*, took place cyclically every year starting from 2010. This part is activated through the application of different projects for each areas. Initiatives must be submitted in partnership between at least two entities, which may be institutional or non-institutional (associations, foundations or cooperatives). The projects must be developed in an annual plan and they can apply for a maximum of 50.000 euro. The applications are valued by municipal technicians which assign to each project different scores and priorities depending on the area. The first four-years cycle of the initiative ended in 2014. The success of BIP/ZIP program has increased nominations and budget (which went from a million to a million and six hundred thousand euro). In Chelas the BIP/ZIP active in recent years have varied on average between seven or nine, with projects of different size and nature.



Figure 6. BIP/ZIP PRODAC NORTH, *Ateliernob*

#### 4 THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE INHABITANTS. A WEAK RESOURCE

Both vision, Chelas as *archipelago* or Chelas as a territory composed by *castles*, are now in stand-by. The design of Chelas as a great park, already approved in 2011 today has not a certain date of implementation. The current economic situation seems to assign it to an uncertain future, surely after 2020. Similarly It is not realistic hypothesis of private investment for the rehabilitation of Chelas' buildings.

Nevertheless, both the city and the district changed during the last years. Hit by a large phenomenon of *shrinkage*, Lisbon has lost about a third of its residents in the last twenty years. The city is characterized by a progressive ageing of the remaining population and an abandonment of many buildings. A difficult situation, that has a greatest impact in problematic areas such as Chelas, where the population over the age of 65 (the thirty percent of the total) increased of the eighty-percent in the last decade and the twenty-five percent of the buildings at present result empty.

Starting from this situation, the resonance of participatory programs and bottom-up policies, such as BIP/ZIP, don't seem to have relevant effects. This condition is due to many weaknesses of this program. Firstly the selection methods for the projects. Researcher Roberto Falanga and architects *Ateliernob* declared that sometimes the technicians failed to evaluate the proposals, and they approved useless actions for some

areas. This instance is due to the non participatory choice of the interventions, where the district inhabitants are not involved. Other critical aspects are the financials and time limits. The lack of time and resources does not allow the development of long-term plans and the design of strong territorial actions. In addition, most of these process involve only a small part of the inhabitants in the implementation of the proposed activities. Another important weakness is that the program presents also a lack of territorial integration. The action is currently too punctual and not inserted and coordinated in a more extensive vision and has the risk to vanish soon. Finally although the program is present as urban intervention, most of the initiatives are social actions. Architectural proposal and more incisive spatial actions are often categorized as “*white elephants*” (Cartas dos BIP / ZIP, 2010): projects that are interesting but impossible to be realized.

In conclusion, the actions promoted by these participative programs result interesting, especially for the processes (even more than for the results). The implementation of these projects is appreciable. However, they can be considered as a *painkiller* against a structural crisis that is not possible to be solved in that way. Place as Chelas needs social infrastructure. A *network* capable of taking care of the place and hold together and coordinate all these interventions. If this *network* would not be present in the future, probably the effects of this process are going to disappear (similar already happened in Chelas with the project *Lisboa Capital do Nada*, *Marvila 2001*). At present, it is necessary to think how is possible to create this infrastructure, that could be imagined as an *endless workshop* that aims to configure Chelas as “territory in continuous transformation”. Chelas, which is always been an incomplete area (waiting for the completion of the buildings, the realization of efficient infrastructures, the realization of the park, a good system of welfare), at present cannot expect the completion of what is missing. Today where all the transformation are stopped because of the crisis, this *social network* may be the only chance to rewrite this territory. A chance that is, at present, still too weak.



Figure 7. Image from *Lisboa Capital do Nada*, *Marvila 2001*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

These reflections are parts of the master thesis *Chelas, Lisboa. Five Explorations*, supervisor prof. Angelo Sampieri, conducted during last year between Lisbon and Turin and discussed at Politecnico di Torino in December 2014.

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## **Acknowledgments**

This book was made possible with the support of EACEA within the 'Europe for Citizens Programme' 2007 – 2013 for the SINERGI Project (Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies). The content of the book is a result of two SINERGI thematic seminars. The first SINERGI thematic seminar entitled "Learning from the Cities" was held in Zagreb, Croatia in July, 2014. The second SINERGI thematic seminar "New urban issues, new approaches" was held in Lisbon, Portugal in April, 2015. The selection of texts that were presented during the two seminars have been used for the book "Projects for an Inclusive City". The structure and the content of the book is a result of the projects, research and activities of the participants of SINERGI thematic seminars, put into perspective of the debate about inclusive and exclusive cities, comparing the existing situation in city management, legislation and urban practices with the objective of further development of critical and creative debate and exchange of knowledge between decision-makers, city administration, experts and citizens.

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**With the support of 'Europe for Citizens Programme' 2007 - 2013**



## **Credits**

### **Editors**

Ognen Marina  
Alessandro Armando

### **Publisher**

City of Skopje

### **Proofreading**

Evgenija Zafirovska

### **Printing**

ALPEKO GRUP & Saniko Printing House

### **CIP - Каталогизација во публикација**

Национална и универзитетска библиотека "Св. Климент Охридски", Скопје

316.334.56:711.8(082)

316.334.56:911.375.1(082)

PROJECTS for an inclusive city : social integration through urban growth strategies / edited by Ognen Marina, Alessandro Armando. - Skopje : City of Skopje, 2015. - 328 стр. : илустр. ; 25 см  
Фусноти кон текстот. - Библиографија кон трудовите

ISBN 978-608-65584-9-9

а) Урбана социологија - Јавни простори - Зборници

COBISS.MK-ID 99804426

With the support of 'Europe for Citizens Programme' of the European Union



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