

*Landscapes of Care. Public housing across multiple
geographies: crossing theories and practices*



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Hybrid Landscapes in the Pearl River Delta

The case of Macau Modern Housing's approach

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Abstract

The present paper contemplates the ground of research on emerging forms of inhabiting spaces in contemporary urban territories, with a precise focus on Macau's 1960s housing production.

In order to settle a comprehensive understanding about inaugural statements of architectural modernity, in the field of modern housing, built in Pearl River Delta's region as a hybrid interpretation of Modern Movement's ideas in colonial Asian territory, this proposal aims to analyse and present a set of residential buildings and projects that show adaptations of Modern approaches to different cultures, climate, and environment.

The achievement of such goals is to be developed through a comparative analysis, based on archival research and a photographic survey, in order to derive, on one hand, an amplitude equation of adopted materialised theoretical matrix (forms, urban scales); and on the other hand, to identify variations between housing typologies' solutions, collective spaces, spatial distributions and technical systems (façade, cross-ventilation).

This classification needs to consider contextual factors, identify problematics and potentialities, and recognise architectural roles within Macau's generational urban growth.

Portuguese and local pioneers in Macau, such as Manuel Vicente, Raul Chorão Ramalho and José Maneiras, have demonstrated how the modern conception could be interpreted, understood, and enriched in terms of content. They were able to face and respond to diverse physical and social conditions, experimenting innovative solutions which remain currently interesting and valid.

This paper aims to document and value public housing works of other seas that, due to a tide of redevelopment guided by high commercial profit which seems not to consider the past, have not been conserved or valorised, and today may disappear. The landscape of care under analysis is part of the architectural scenario endangered of fade over time; his interaction with public interest and memory deserves further consideration.

Keywords: housing; Modern architecture; heritage; landscape; urban morphology.

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Introduction

The process of modern urbanization in the Pearl River Delta, in terms of urban planning and architectural language, has been developed mostly under the guidance of Western planning models, principles and practices, including few adaptations and revisions to meet local circumstances. The historical introduction of the architecture "of the West", followed by the rise of new modern experiments highlights the South China Sea concession's reality as uncommon case studies.

Macau, the former Portuguese colony, divided by two cultures, and simultaneously linked to both, plays an important role, in terms of investigation, on how modern principles, resulting from a Eurocentric condition, were crossed with far East's ancestral cultures, different climates and knowledges.

We have identified several instances that have extended our housing investigation to the urban matrix's exemplifications of tropical adaptation within architectural typologies in Macau. Specific public buildings dating back to the 1950s, conceived by local engineers with Portuguese education such as Aureliano Guterres Jorge, and João Canavarrô Nolasco, have ventured South China Sea's Lusophone former colony into the emergent domain of modern design. This is evident in structures like *São Lourenço Market*, *Long Va Tea House*, *Liceu Nacional Infante D. Henrique* (demolished), and the principal block of *São Januário Hospital* (likewise demolished), the last two masterminded by *Ministério do Ultramar* Planning Office.

A comprehensive examination of the aforementioned details relocates a design ethos presumed to be both Portuguese and indigenous. Such interactions, in the field of housing scale, occurred within the dynamic framework of post-war decolonization, navigating the intricate political landscapes of the region. During the early 1960s, a cohort of emerging architects established an Urban Planning department in Macau, positioned to supplant urbanization responsibilities GUC's¹. Within the Macau milieu, his daily life rhythm and peculiarity, young architects, guided by Portuguese education and inspiration, undertook architectural ventures that delved into the nuanced considerations of climate, culture, and site-specific context. Employing a modernist vocabulary, transposed as the action of the social state in the housing sector, which generates a relationship of care between state and society, framed by economic, social, and cultural parameters, they start to produce distinctive architectural manifestations. By re-thinking modern principles characterized by crossed paths within Macau's dynamics, the new department's architects embarked on a heightened phase of experimental innovation, profoundly influencing their design endeavours.

¹ Gabinete de Urbanização Colonial (1944–1974) of Portugal. Government office responsible for urban planning in Portuguese colonies.

Among the emerging professionals stand out Raul Choro Ramalho (1914–2002), Manuel Vicente (1934–2013), and José Celestino Maneiras (1935–). Their arrival introduced experiences rooted in Portuguese research of Modern expression, linked to the two major schools of thought, *Escola Superior de Belas-Artes de Lisboa* and *Escola Superior de Belas-Artes do Porto*, within the erudite character derived from the Survey on Popular Architecture (Inquérito à Arquitectura Popular em Portugal²).

CTT Residential Block – Manuel Vicente

Manuel Vicente ascended as a preeminent figure among the cohort of emerging architects. Commencing his professional practice in both Macau and Lisbon from the 1960s onward, he consistently upheld an active engagement with the local social context. He endeavoured to elucidate how the Portuguese paradigm of public involvement could resonate within the intricate milieu of Southeast Asia.

In Macau, Vicente cultivated an appreciation for Asian latitudes incorporating diverse realities into architectural projects and yielding a distinctive liberty of form discernible in his body of work. His architectural production not only attests to his proficiency in adapting to indigenous building practices but also underscores his profound fascination with unravelling the phenomenological distinctions inherent to Chinese culture, especially about artistic dimensions of architecture. This exploration extends to nuanced considerations of light, colour, scale, and spatial proportions.

Within the temporal scope of the 1960s, some projects by Vicente significantly enriched the cultural dialogue surrounding public housing typologies as a foundational benchmark for architectural discourse.

CTT Housing Block stands as an architectural pursuit not only as a showcase of technical adeptness, but also substantively contributes to the broader cultural discourse of housing standards' improvement within the domains of housing typologies and climate control systems.

The building is located on the corner between *Avenida Almirante Lacerda* and *Avenida Ouvidor Arriaga* in the city centre of Macau. Conceived in 1963 and completed in 1965, with six storeys, this building was one of the first modern constructions in between the today consolidated urban grid and the historical site of *Freguesia de Santo António*, close to *Mercado Vermelho*, and it serves as a paradigmatic manifestation of architect's innovative approach.

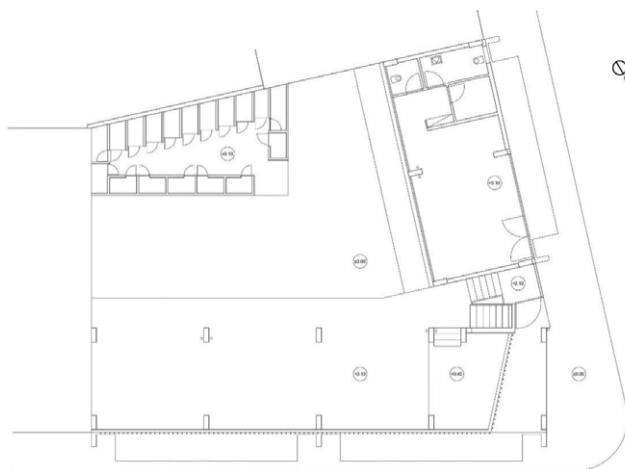
2 (1961. 1st edition). Comprehensive national inquiry, entailed by collaborative initiatives among architect groups, organizing and documenting autochthonous architecture, throughout Portuguese regions, giving rise to substantial ramifications. It conspicuously shaped the succeeding cohort of modernist architects, instigating a profound reassessment of contextual, pre-existing, and dimensional facets inherent to autochthonous elements in the execution of architectural endeavors.



Structured around a low-rise stacking of duplex apartments, this project strategically integrates brise-soleils, and sunscreens to modulate sunlight within living spaces and communal areas. In order to maintain the existing street shape, the outer perimeter of the building is aligned with the lot boundary, creating an L-shaped volume. The architectural composition revolves around an internal open patio and staircase, collaboratively engendering a ventilated micro-climate throughout the entire block. The ground floor mainly constitutes an expansive area characterized by an unobstructed layout, hosting the Post Office machine positioned street front, ceremonially at its focal point. The architectural configuration of exterior surfaces engages in a compelling inquiry into the dimensions of the standardized windows, with the explicit aim of optimizing climatic regulation within the office spaces. The architect, while locating the CTT post office station in the L's short side ground floor, releases and raises the L's long side body creating a covered open space, providing common/recreation areas, and a place for clotheslines along the galleries, as well as washing tanks. The whole ground floor is serving today as a public library (*Biblioteca do Mercado Vermelho*).

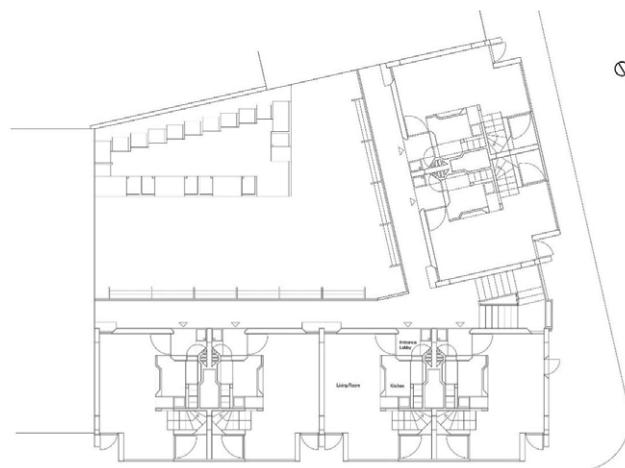
[Fig. 1]
CTT Residential Block, 1965, Macau;
© Centro de Documentação FAUP

[Fig. 2]
CTT Residential Block, 2023, Macau;
© Niccolò Arnaldo Galliano



[Fig. 3]

CTT Residential Block, Ground Floor, Own elaboration
based on CD-FAUP



[Fig. 4]

CTT Residential Block, 1st Floor, Own elaboration
based on CD-FAUP



Vicente's building hosts in total 18 minimal duplex apartments, 15 double rooms flats (54 m²), and 3 single-room flats (42 m²). Horizontal distribution leads to living entrances by an open gallery located on the interior side of the perimeter, which visually communicates with the interior patio. The middle central core of ventilated staircase, located in the centre of the two main wings, composes the vertical distribution line.

The apartment's internal organisation is simple and able to give comfort to its users even if intended to be extremely economical in terms of construction.

Upon entering the unit, the entrance floor is divided into an open kitchen, a small private balcony, and a main living room where independent stairs give access to the upper floor's bedrooms and bathroom. The outside corner of the entrance creates a separate laundry area integrated into the kitchen window, where a washing tank is orientated towards the gallery's sides.

In order to guarantee privacy to inhabitants, the entrance door is placed perpendicularly to the façade in a recessed area; this manner did not allow open views of the living room. A reduced number of windows given to the internal gallery were conveniently located in high position for privacy reasons.

Reasonable solutions to maximize available space were adopted, not only because of limited conservation costs but especially for available ground reasons. Duplex typology's configuration allowed maximum usable space profit; within the apartments, the upper floor gained the gallery area; within the whole building, the introduction of an elevator can be dispensed. Additionally, the double-floor unit solution guarantees internal privacy between living and sleeping zones, located at different heights.

[Fig. 5]

CTT Residential Block, 2023, Macau; © Niccolò Arnaldo Galliano

The building's original project provided natural cross-ventilation benefits to each unit in response to the hot and humid Macanese sub-tropical climate.

In terms of construction, the building is made of reinforced concrete structure and brickwork filler panels. The facades are guided by the structural grid; materials are rough, clean, and undecorated. The structure is the main actor of the building's functional skin, and the elevations show an unequivocal relationship between the exterior and interior. It is clear the attempt to enrich the set of facades with an accentuation of horizontal and vertical structural elements' marks.

A diverse array of climate control mechanisms joins the façade's scheme encompassing elements such as brise-soleil, louvers, perforated cement bricks, raised ventilation windows, and pergolas. These features collectively contribute to the creation of a sophisticated architectural entity, elevating a seemingly straightforward volumetric design into a multifaceted face. Notably, each functional component displays the strategic application of distinct fenestration and shading devices.

The adept integration of these elements, alongside a judicious use of concrete and brick, serves a dual purpose: on one hand, it signifies the functional distribution of the architectural plan; while on the other, it yields a novel aesthetic manifestation that is both Brutalist and heterogeneously composed. It is noteworthy that local South Chinese Architecture had historically evolved effective solutions tailored to the subtropical climate of the region. This expertise is evident in the temples, mansions, and other public edifices constructed within local tradition and interests.

The adoption of materials such as concrete, steel, and glass, in dialogue with environmental control systems, gives CTT Residential Block a strong character of innovation.

The nuanced understanding and application of revisited elements of regional architectural heritage are perceptibly filtered into Manuel Vicente's project, showcasing a deliberate effort to circumvent any semblance of cultural appropriation.

The rational organisation of space of CTT Residential Block identifies the search for optimal and healthy conditions within the desire to establish an equivalence of structured spaces with the urban framework. Concepts such as the minimum surface area, dynamics of orthogonal lines, accesses through shared galleries, and public or semi-public use of ground floor plan platforms, can be interpreted as influent guidelines' characters of Modern Movement's path for collective housing.

The resulting architectural endeavour encapsulates a synthesis of functional innovation, climatic responsiveness, and a conscientious avoidance of inappropriate cultural borrowings.

[Fig. 6]

CTT Residential Block, 2023, Macau; © Niccolò Arnaldo Galliano



São Francisco Housing Complex – José Maneiras

José Maneiras is considered one of the most influential native architects among new-wave planners of the early 1960s. Once completed his architectural studies in Porto, he brought a breath of fresh air into Macanese's urban framework, designing numerous housing projects during his first decades of practice.

His primary objectives included minimizing soil disruption while concurrently prioritizing the facilitation of natural ventilation and solar control. However, architectural overarching aspects of Maneiras's contributions indicate relevant connections between technical considerations and research of plastic/cultural identity, always supported by careful attention to integrating his architectural structures within their respective sites.

A noteworthy illustration of Maneiras's innovative approach, in the field of public housing, is discernible in his 1962–1965 *São Francisco* Housing Complex.

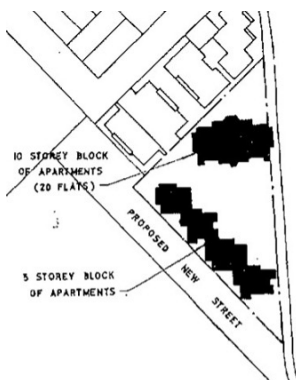
Located in the central area of Praia Grande, the architect's project approaches a triangular site of about 2100 m² with two housing blocks: a ten-storey taller building leaning over the whole and giving balance to the five-storey lower body, located on the south side of the plot. A public land lease established that 40 flats were to be built in two buildings (20 flats each); one for government use and civil servants' housing, while the other was to be sold by the land tenant.

After overcoming various real estate and governmental impositions, the layout of the different blocks was determined according to the best solar orientation, strongly conditioned by the triangular shape of the site.



[Fig. 7]
São Francisco Housing Complex, 2023, Macau; © Niccolò Arnaldo Galliano





The architect proposed a five-story structure, composed of four nearly cubical volumes arranged in a terraced formation with gradual setbacks. This design achieves a well-balanced volumetric arrangement within the triangular site, ensuring that each apartment enjoys exterior exposure with four walls. Taking into account climate considerations and wind orientation, the buildings were strategically designed to maximize solar exposure during winter while offering effective protection from heat during summer. Placing the lower building on the southern plot's side ensures that it doesn't obstruct summer breezes or winter sunlight for the taller building. Likewise, positioning the taller building on the northern side prevents it from casting shadows on the smaller structure and acts as a barrier against winter winds. While primarily driven by climate concerns, this layout, within setbacks and recess façades, also creates open spaces that enhance privacy for both buildings to the main avenue.

The five-story building hosts 20 flats, divided into two sets of ten flats with independent access. Each set has a common staircase positioned in the centre distributing 4 units per floor, 2 units per access.

[Fig. 8]
São Francisco Housing Complex, Urban Plot, Own elaboration
based on Archival Research

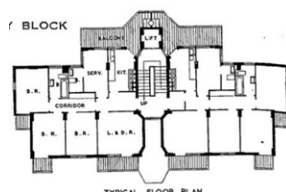
[Fig. 9]
São Francisco Housing Complex, 2023, Macau; © Niccolò
Arnaldo Galliano



The internal layout follows a functional distribution scheme combining traditional space necessities, mainly organized around three distinct interconnected cores. The first one, the living and dining zone, is located near the entrance and kitchen for convenience. The services zone and servant's housing facilities are also located in proximity to the entrance and living area. Lastly, the private zone, distributing bedrooms and bathrooms, creates a self-contained nucleus which provides privacy from other zones' activities. Living room and bedroom areas are always oriented towards the south and east sides. Minimization of windows on the west façade aims to mitigate excessive heat and direct sunlight exposure during summer afternoons, as well as ensures privacy to/from the nearby building.

The internal layout of the ten-storey building reflects structural similarities to the smaller neighbour. Despite the transversal positioning of interior spaces following horizontal disposal, the individual compartments and rooms maintain similar orientations as well as hierarchic distribution.

Vertical access is facilitated by a staircase and an eight-passenger lift located in the centre of the volume. To minimize expenses, the lift stops are strategically positioned midway between floors. This choice ensures that all ten floors are serviced with five stops, requiring occupants to ascend or descend a short flight of stairs with nine steps to access the lift.



[Fig. 10]

São Francisco Housing Complex, Floor Type A, Docomomo
Macau Archive

[Fig. 11]

São Francisco Housing Complex, Floor Type B, Docomomo
Macau Archive



In both buildings structural materials are protagonists in the facades; rough and raw surfaces were adapted plastically throughout the construction phase, and luxury finishes were omitted due to cost considerations. This architectural endeavour showcases inventive strategies in the incorporation of shading devices into the façade's design proposal, deeply rooted in functionalist principles and yielding a distinctive plasticity.

Consistently aligning with modernist ideals adapted to tropical contexts, Maneiras's architectural creations consistently prioritize natural ventilation and fixed sun-protection solutions. Beyond addressing climate control concerns, it orchestrates a communal piazza between the structures, deftly harmonizing the scale of the traditional city with a high-rise typology.

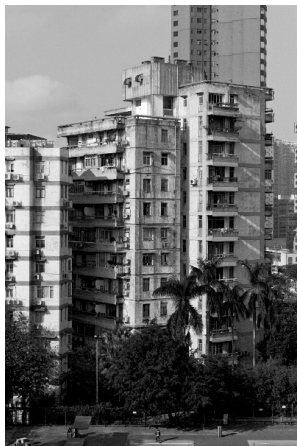
The São Francisco Housing Complex case study delves into the utilization of projecting buildings composed of functional typologies adapted to different users and embraces an effective architectural language to contend with challenges related to climate control. In this endeavour, Maneiras not only attains pragmatic solutions but also introduces aesthetically captivating responses, contributing significantly to the overarching theme of tropical adaptability within architectural paradigms.

[Fig. 12]

São Francisco Housing Complex, 2023, Macau;
© Niccolò Arnaldo Galliano

[Fig. 13]

São Francisco Housing Complex, 2023, Macau;
© Niccolò Arnaldo Galliano



Leal Senado housing tower – Raul Chorão Ramalho

During the 1960s a noteworthy contributor emerged within the Modernist discourse of Macau. Portuguese architect Raul Chorão Ramalho, whose professional engagements had been extensively intertwined within public commissions and the SAAL process in Portugal and Madeira, designed several public buildings in Macau. Projects such as Leal Senado municipal staff housing tower of 1966, Guia Kindergarten of 1964, the semi-detached residences for higher-ranking government officials at *Avenida Coronel Mesquita* of 1962 (completed in 1965), and the *Escola Portuguesa de Macau*, formerly known as *Escola Comercial Pedro Nolasco*, built in 1966, stand as significant contributions.

Within the public housing context, our focus goes to the 1966 Leal Senado municipal staff housing tower located in *Avenida Sidónio Pais*.

Ramalho's project stands for its urban introduction. Considering the site's context particularities, the building is located on the farther side of a rectangular plot, opposite to avenue's traffic and close to a back green mountain, seeking calm and privacy. The walkway to the building from the street entrance is supported by a central ventilated pergola path and a parking lot on the side. Within the promenade character, the covered walkway, sometimes ventilated and sometimes protected by the sun, is equipped with benches and green areas, encouraging socialisation among inhabitants.

[Fig. 14]

Leal Senado Housing Tower, 2023, Macau; ©
Docomomo Macau Archive

[Fig. 15]

Leal Senado Housing Tower, 2023, Macau;
© Niccolò Arnaldo Galliano



The architect assumes Brutalist principles highlighting the evident structural frame marked in the façade and protruding reinforced concrete elements within balconies' horizontal lines playing harmoniously with the brilliant plastic ensemble given by the ground floor's tiles covers.

Within twelve floors, the architect distributes two wings of apartments around a central vertical distribution core composed of ventilated concrete panels walls, steps up stairs and lifts. Each wing floor is located half a floor higher in comparison to the side one, ensuring entrance and living privacy. Ramalho composes his project's building with an interesting variety of apartment' typologies, from two to three-room units, combined with duplex compositions; the last four floors are occupied by four rooms higher class apartments. Social use spaces such as the foyer, terraces, meeting rooms and gyms are located on the ground floor, outside-accessible first floor and on the flat covered roof.

[Fig. 16]

Leal Senado Housing Tower, 2023, Macau; © Niccolò Arnaldo Galliano



Highlighting a rational design, the architect proposes minimum format housing looking to guarantee comfort and appropriate proportions.



[Fig. 17]

Leal Senado Housing Tower, 2023, Macau; © Niccolò Arnaldo Galliano



[Fig. 18]

Leal Senado Housing Tower, 2023, Macau; © Docomomo Macau Archive

[Fig. 19]

Leal Senado Housing Tower, T2, T3 & Duplex Floor,
Own elaboration based on SIPA-DGPC



Interior layout follows functional distribution schemes combining traditional space necessities with innovative hierarchical solutions ensuring features as: flexible open kitchens to living rooms located on the overcast internal side of the apartment, next to the ventilated stairs core; privacy between night and day use areas; available external terraces to most compartments.

The veracity of materials and the subtleness of architectural details are applied with a ton of elegance combined with functionality showing the enormous architect's mastery of the housing programme.

The structural articulation incorporates elements such, as shading screens, and louvers, facilitating a nuanced response to the complex spatial configuration. Balconies profiles and guardrails are used as a means of sunlight protection, and, in some cases, side panels' balconies are applied as shelter from northern winds.

The façade, within a combination of structural horizontal line and orthogonal window openings tactically regulates the design of both exterior and interior skins. This meticulous integration reflects at the same time functional dialogue between interior and exterior, and an astute consideration in terms of shadowing elements for climatic responsiveness and spatial harmony within the broader framework of Macau's tropical climate.

Leal Senado Housing Tower deliberately fosters an intricate interplay of in-between reflections gathering urban, external, internal, public and social considerations, additionally introducing the presence of gardens, passages, patios and recreation areas. This intentional design achieves a harmonious integration of necessities, tailored to the specific functional requirements of modern living, standing as an exemplar of architectural sophistication within Pearl River Delta's scenario.

[Fig. 20]

Leal Senado Housing Tower, 2023, Macau; © Niccolò Arnaldo Galliano

Conclusion

We highlight public housing case studies as examples of innovative practices in terms of design, and urban and cultural circumstances within 1960s Macanese urban context.

Manuel Vicente, Raul Chorão Ramalho and José Maneiras found themselves in Macau at a global time of supremacy of modern principles and amid an uncommon period of urban growth. Guided by the affirmation's moment of international and modern language, they were looking to bring together local and foreign, tradition and modernity, combining economic and functional interests with social actual needs.

The architects, with different backgrounds, approaches, and ways of experimenting, frame their projects guided by different plastic goals and are capable of expanding our understanding in terms of architectural language, social landscape, location, residents' use, and neighbourhood.

Along with Macau's generational urban growth of the second half of the 20th century, the introduction of pivotal innovations reveals relevant cultural identity interpretations regarding architectural roles and foundations. Notably, these design choices draw inspiration from both Chinese tradition and Mediterranean influences, thereby establishing a dialogical relationship between the building and its context. As part of Macau's planning and architectural historical consolidation of more than 5 centuries of Euro-Asian cultural interconnection, it is with the arrival of this kind of projects that something has changed in the housing proposal from domestic to urban scale.

In order to disseminate and produce broad knowledge and debate, the analysed projects combine global colonial housing policies and site-specific actions on public housing interventions.

Macanese 1960s architectural production, framing colonial cultural context along multiple geographies, stands as a contribution centred on a dynamic reading of the city and crossing condition of housing typology. Combining architecture, public housing, habitat, and planning, the present paper seeks to explore an interpretative narrative about urban living and those who live in it.

This comprehensive understanding seeks to present and valorise part of the architectural scenario endanger of fade over time; a symbol of practices capable of generating strategic visions about possible future guidelines of city and territory.

Presented projects intend to show how the modern conception could be interpreted, understood, and enriched in terms of content, producing on one hand Architecture which generates a relationship of care between the state and society, framed by economic, social, and cultural rights, and in the other hand Architecture able to respond and reflect local conditions as an element of socio-territorial cohesion.

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