

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



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## Introduction

### **An Editorial Project as a Catalyst for Discussion and Construction of Architectural Ideas: Sophia Journal**

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The Sophia Journal editorial project, initiated at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto (FAUP) and its R&D Centre for Architecture and Urbanism Studies (CEAU), is a pivotal platform for discussing and constructing architectural ideas through photography, film, and other visual media. This initiative fosters international engagement, bridging academia with various professional and creative communities interested in architecture, photography, and urban studies.

At the core of Sophia Journal's mission is integrating contemporary visual culture with architectural discourse, significantly influencing scholarly and public debates. This focus is reflected in a range of high-impact publications, including peer-reviewed issues, special thematic volumes, and the organization of international conferences. Since its founding in 2016, Sophia Journal has provided a rigorous academic space for critical inquiry into the intersection of architecture, urban transformation, and visual narratives.

The journal's international conferences, initiated in 2010 with *On the Surface*, have played a crucial role in fostering dialogue on architecture and visual culture. These events have helped establish a global research network, positioning Sophia Journal as a key reference for exploring the role of photography and film in architectural and urban studies.

In addition to its editorial mission, Sophia Journal collaborates closely with the Architecture, Art, and Image (AAI) research group, which has been instrumental in promoting interdisciplinary studies. This collaboration has led to various initiatives, such as academic partnerships with institutions like the Liverpool School of Architecture and RIBA Photo Festival, further reinforcing the journal's global influence.

As visual culture increasingly mediates architectural experience, photography and film emerge as critical research tools rather than mere representations. Thus, Sophia Journal actively explores how these mediums can reframe architectural narratives, offering alternative perspectives on spatial transformation, cultural identity, and urban memory. The journal promotes visual research methodologies, drawing from interdisciplinary perspectives inspired by scholars

such as Marion Gautreau and Jean Kempf<sup>1</sup>, investigating photography's scientific, artistic, and documentary roles in studying architecture. These approaches enable critical reflections on the social, political, and historical dimensions of urban change.

One of Sophia Journal's key research focuses is the use of visual constructs to document and analyze architectural and urban transformations. This includes identifying sites undergoing renewal, conducting diachronic studies of urban environments, and exploring visual storytelling techniques that challenge dominant architectural narratives. Through these methodologies, photography and film transcend documentation, becoming active agents in reimagining the built environment. This critical engagement with visual culture not only enhances architectural discourse but also deepens our understanding of the socio-political forces shaping contemporary urban landscapes.

Accordingly, Sophia Journal's editorial and research initiatives will continue to challenge conventional architectural discourse, fostering an interdisciplinary, visually-driven approach to urban studies. By integrating print, digital, and visual research methodologies, the journal expands the boundaries of architectural knowledge, offering new perspectives on the role of image-making in shaping our understanding of cities and built environments.

### ***About “Landscapes of Care” and its concluding theme “Public housing across multiple geographies: crossing theories and practices”***

With this 9<sup>th</sup> Volume of Sophia Journal, we finish our third thematic cycle “Landscapes of Care” that had as its overall interest to understand and explore through diverse visual practices, with a specific interest in photography and film, how the physical environment is understood and shaped by a diverse field of study, practices and cultures. This means, besides other things, to better understand the relationship between culture and space and explore how culture, beliefs, behaviours, and practices, interacts with and shape the physical environment of different territories and their architectures, cities and landscapes, as well as to acknowledge contemporary discourses and usages of landscape concepts<sup>2</sup>.

1 Marion Gautreau e Jean Kempf, «La photographie documentaire contemporaine dans les Amériques», *IdeAs* [Online], 13 | 2019, posto online no dia 01 março 2019, consultado o 17 dezembro 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ideas/5099>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ideas.5099>

2 See the discussion of key conceptions of landscape circulating as part of the recent discourse i.e. landscape as a fundamental building block, a communicative medium, and a realm of imaginative constructs." Vera Vicenzotti. "The Landscape of Landscape Urbanism." *Landscape Journal* 36, no. 1 (2018): 75–86. <https://doi.org/10.3368/lj.36.1.75>. <https://lj.uwpress.org/content/wplj/36/1/75.full.pdf>.

In fact, as has been already explained in past Volumes<sup>3</sup>, the concept of landscapes of care has been widely adopted across disciplines, from health geography to architecture, offering a transdisciplinary approach to understanding space and place for care. It builds upon earlier research linking landscapes to sustainability and 'site' as an evolving concept, emphasizing dynamic interactions between theory and practice in design.

We believe that a comprehensive approach to design is needed to address environmental transformations, seeing architecture, city, and territory as living and inclusive organisms with complex spatialities. As global urban spaces undergo significant changes, embracing this complexity is essential, as Daniel Innerarity suggests<sup>4</sup>. Landscapes of care introduces a humanist perspective to urban transformation, countering technocratic and economic logics by valuing cultural heritage, identity, and sustainable development.

This approach promotes research that documents and enhances site identity while fostering urban transformations that prioritize well-being. Achieving this requires interdisciplinary collaboration, reorienting design through enriched documentation methods. Photography plays a crucial role as a critical research tool, enabling an affirmation of identity, memory retrieval, and alternative architectural narratives.

Therefore, *Sophia Journal* endorses visual and documentary research to examine the evolving perception of architecture and document transformation sites and undertake diachronic studies of urban transformation over time. Through international forums, it fosters critical reflection and active dialogue, advancing innovative documentation methods and reinforcing past and ongoing research.

Focusing now on this 9<sup>th</sup> Volume "Landscapes of care: Public housing across multiple geographies: crossing theories and practices" the overall concern was to study and give visibility to contemporary photographic and visual practices that explore how architecture, in its broadest sense, can contribute to healing a planet in crisis, centred on a dynamic reading of the city that is conditional and conditioned by housing typology. Combining architecture, public housing,

3 See Pedro Neto. (2022). About "Landscapes of Care" and how contemporary photography can help to heal a broken planet. *Sophia Journal*, 7(1), 7. [https://doi.org/10.24840/2183-8976\\_2022-0007\\_0001\\_1](https://doi.org/10.24840/2183-8976_2022-0007_0001_1); Pedro Neto. (2023).

Interdisciplinary research reorienting the perceptions and understanding of Modern architecture and landscape heritage through an enriched documentary utilization, namely of photography and film. (2023). *Sophia Journal*, 8(1), 3-8. [https://doi.org/10.24840/2183-8976\\_2023-0008\\_0001\\_1](https://doi.org/10.24840/2183-8976_2023-0008_0001_1)

4 Following the idea of Daniel Innerarity of how we are living in complex democracies (see his latest book "Democracy in Europe")

habitat, and urban planning, the works that are published in this Volume forward an interpretative narrative about housing and those who live in it, analysing pilot projects with communities of practice capable of generating strategic visions about the possible future of city and territory, housing and the lives it (trans)forms, in this ontological relationship between the Man and house.

The significant theoretical papers and visual essays published, as well as the Editors' texts, substantiate a collection of analysis and projects structured through three major themes – “Resonances”, “Trans-Formations”, “Cycles” – which converge in a shared exploration of community agency, participatory urban transformation, and the power of visual narratives, highlighting how cooperative housing, adaptive urban practices, and photography collectively shape, document, and reimagine the built environment.

To demonstrate these points, consider for example, how participatory practices in vulnerable communities are examined in the theme “Resonances”, edited by Maria Neto and Joan Mac Donald, through “Bairros Saudáveis” project (Ramires, Ochoa) that showcases community-driven urban interventions in Portuguese neighborhoods, drawing parallels with the SAAL program after Portugal's Carnation Revolution, or “The Impact of Care”, exploring how design-build programs (e.g., Yale Building Project, Rural Studio) incorporate participatory housing into architectural education.

Then, the significant contributions in “Trans-Formations”, edited by Maria Neto and Paz Nuñez Martí, advocating the need to rethink dominant urban practices and embracing context-sensitive, participatory approaches to urban transformation that integrate architecture, photography, and social inquiry. Some cases in point that can be pointed out are “Hybrid Landscapes in the Pearl River Delta” (Galliano, Arnaut, Tostões) examining how modernist housing in Macau integrates Western and local traditions or “Territory as Threshold” reflecting on dissolving boundaries between city and landscape, proposing new ways of perceiving urban space through Benjamin's and Frank Lloyd Wright's ideas. Specialty interesting is the comparative study, “Errante: Contemporary Devices for Heuristic Reflections on Housing”, exploring three social housing projects—Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, Álvaro Siza's Malagueira, and La Borda in Barcelona, and discussing gentrification, community autonomy, and the impact of architectural forms on urban life.

The “Cycles” theme, edited by Igea Troiani and Jorge Tarrago Mingo, explores the evolving role of photography in capturing architectural and social transformations, particularly in public housing, drawing from historical and contemporary perspectives, referencing Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographic experiment, Walter Benjamin's reflections on reproduction, and Paul Valéry's predictions about the ubiquity of images. It is worth referencing this interesting idea

that is forwarded that we have moved beyond Benjamin's era of mechanical reproduction into a new phase of "multiperception," where images are instantly accessible, detached from physical space, and mediated by AI and digital technologies.

Within this thematic framework, we find contributions that connect theory and practice in public housing. One example is *Housing by People* (1976), which argues that when residents control the design, construction, and management of their homes, both individual and social well-being improve, or the case study, "Revitalizing Housing: The Vital Trajectories of Cooperative Systems" (Frigolett), analyzes Uruguay's mutual aid housing cooperatives. By integrating Turner's philosophy with systems thinking, it highlights how adaptability and shared responsibility sustain cooperative housing over time.

Sophia Journal is currently accepting submissions for its fourth thematic cycle "Landscapes of Repair", encouraging a humanist approach to urban transformation that transcends purely economic considerations. By exploring the impactful realms of photography, film, and various visual practices, we aim to highlight their significant contributions to the discourse surrounding architectural programs. Our goal is to draw urgent attention to the necessity of repairing our fractured planet. In doing so, we also seek to address and connect the multitude of challenges that contemporary cities and territories around the world are grappling with. These visual mediums not only document but also critically engage with the diverse and complex issues of our time, offering a unique perspective on urban and environmental crises. Through this lens, we hope to foster a deeper understanding and inspire actionable solutions to the pressing problems facing our global communities.

As for our prospective Sophia Journal Vol.10 No. 1 "Landscapes of Repair: The Role of Photography and Film in Documenting the Legacy of Modern and Contemporary Architecture and Public Spaces" it is interested in theoretical and field work using photographic and visual practices to explore and document both Modern and Contemporary Architecture and Public Space infrastructure. The call aims to understand and document architecture, building, city and territory as living and inclusive organisms, focused on recent past and present positive experiences that have shaped the quality of urban space, as well as on heritage resources for global sustainability.

All this means, on the one hand, to comprehend the relationship between culture and space, within the context of Modern Architecture heritage preservation, as it belongs to a recent past that has not yet been sufficiently recognised by the authorities, scholars and general public. On the other hand, to explore how culture, beliefs, behaviours, and practices, interact with and shape the physical environment of different territories and their architectures, cities and landscapes, as well as to acknowledge contemporary discourses and usages of landscape concepts.