

Public Housing Renovation *Plus* Space Transformation

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In the 1950s, the “Plan of Improvements for the City of Porto” (*Plano de Melhoramentos da Cidade do Porto, 1956-66*) set off the construction of many public housing complexes to solve the need for housing, as industrialization had caused migration to cities. By that time, one main code was published - the *Regulamento Geral das Edificações Urbanas (1951)* - which till now is the most important document to regulate construction activity. This code covered certain legal aspects, but it was quite general with respect to building restrictions. Public housing complexes built in Porto in the 1950s, 60s and 70s do not present nowadays satisfactory quality level (constructive, but also architectural and residential), failing to comply with some of the present regulations and living standard expectations. In the last few years, some of these urban morphological units have been renovated in order to fulfill current Portuguese codes of practice (under revision, following recent EC directives). The renovation strategy is targeted on technical improvement of housing envelopes, sometimes improving outdoor space, and rarely addressing interior spatial transformations.

One municipal housing reference case from 1953 in Porto, presently under deep renovation, shows how architecture may be instrumentally capable of positively transforming these housing complexes, dignifying both interior and external residential spaces. This paper recalls the urban regeneration that might result if deeper housing refurbishment is contemplated on a municipal strategy. In times of uncertainty, is it reasonable to claim renovation *plus* space transformation without necessarily a much higher investment?

Keywords: urban and residential quality; public housing renovation; interior space enlargement; typological transformation; minimum areas.