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# Designing inclusive urban spaces



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## Urban production processes and the role of public space as a connective tissue: the case of Brandoa and Alfoanelos

*Maria Manuela da Fonte, Filipa Serpa, Ariana Marques da Silva*

### *Abstract*

In the second half of the 20th century, the northern boundary of Lisbon underwent a transformation from rural to urban as a result of migratory movements from the interior of the country to the coast with increasing pressure on the housing stock. It is in this context that extensive areas of informal settlements emerged, both in the city and in Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA). In response to both the housing shortage and the growth of informal settlements, solutions were provided through the construction of public housing neighbourhoods and also the development of private residential projects. This study aims to (i) characterize the processes of growth and development of the outskirts of Lisbon, focusing on two housing developments – one, built without legal authorisation (Brandoa) and the other built through a regular process of urbanization and construction (Alfoanelos) and (ii) to understand how this complex urban development process can be observed through the public realm, assessing its role in promoting urbanity. The study uses the analysis of historical cartography through its interpretative redesign, iconographic research, as well as a theoretical approach and definition of a legal and regulatory framework. This work is part of 'MetroPublicNet - Building the foundations of a Metropolitan Public Space Network as a support for a robust, decarbonized, and cohesive city: Projects, lessons, and perspectives in Lisbon' research project (FCT funding: PTDC/ART-DAQ/0919/2020).

### **KEYWORDS:**

*Housing, Public Space, Informal settlement, Brandoa, Alfoanelos*



## **Processi di produzione urbana e ruolo dello spazio pubblico come tessuto connettivo: il caso di Brandoa e Alfornelos**

Nella seconda metà del XX secolo, la zona settentrionale di Lisbona ha subito una trasformazione da rurale a urbano a seguito dei movimenti migratori dall'interno del paese verso la costa con una crescente pressione sul patrimonio abitativo. È in questo contesto che si configurano estese aree di insediamenti informali, sia nella città di Lisbona che nell'Area Metropolitana di Lisbona (LMA). In risposta sia alla carenza di alloggi che alla crescita degli insediamenti informali, sono state fornite soluzioni attraverso la costruzione di quartieri di edilizia pubblica nonché lo sviluppo di regolari progetti residenziali privati. Questo studio mira a (i) caratterizzare i processi di crescita e sviluppo della periferia di Lisbona, concentrandosi su due complessi residenziali: uno realizzato senza autorizzazioni legali (Brandoa) e l'altro realizzato attraverso un regolare processo di urbanizzazione e costruzione (Alfornelos) e (ii) comprendere come questo complesso processo di sviluppo urbano e di interazione positiva tra le due aree residenziali e il loro intorno possa essere osservato attraverso lo spazio pubblico, valutando il suo ruolo nella costruzione di un nuovo senso di urbanizzazione, negli ultimi decenni. Lo studio si avvale dell'analisi della cartografia storica attraverso la sua riprogettazione interpretativa, la ricerca iconografica, nonché un'analisi teorica e la definizione di un quadro normativo e normativo.

Questo lavoro fa parte del progetto di ricerca 'MetroPublicNet - Building the foundations of a Metropolitan Public Space Network as a support for a robust, decarbonized, and cohesive city: Projects, lessons, and perspectives in Lisbon' (FCT funding: PTDC/ART-DAQ/0919/2020).

### **PAROLE CHIAVE:**

*Housing, Spazio pubblico, Costruzione illegale, Brandoa, Alfornelos*

## Urban production processes and the role of public space as a connective tissue: the case of Brandoa and Alfoanelos

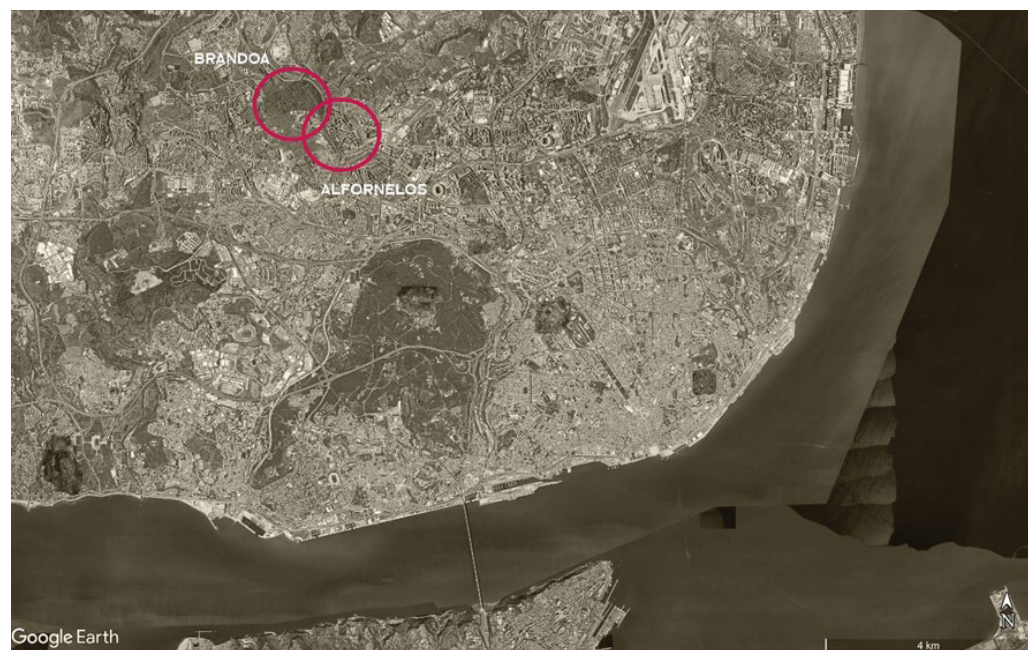
*Maria Manuela da Fonte, Filipa Serpa, Ariana Marques da Silva*

### Framework

During the 1950s and 1960s, Portugal experienced significant emigration, particularly to Germany, France, Brazil, and the then-Portuguese colonies, with Angola and Mozambique being the most prominent destinations. There was also considerable internal migration from the country's interior to the coastal areas, especially to the capital, as people sought better living conditions. However, a severe shortage of housing stock was revealed to meet these growing demands.

Until the mid-20th century, the northern outskirts of Lisbon were predominantly agricultural land, having undergone a transformation from rural to urban. This shift was driven simultaneously by public and private housing initiatives aimed at addressing housing needs and by large areas of informal construction emerging across the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (LMA). These last ones, built in underdeveloped rural parcels subdivided for building purposes without infrastructure or legal authorisation, were later defined in the Portuguese planning system as "AUGI" - Urban Areas of Illegal Genesis (Santos et al, 2024: 103).

Public and private, small and large, regular and informal housing developments began to appear, occupying rural areas and pushing urban development forward. This urbanization process formed the most common residential fabric in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area and represented a broader urbanization trend.



*Fig. 1 – Northern Lisbon: Location of Brandoa and Alfoanelos*  
Source: (Google Earth, 04. 2024)

The growth of informal settlements, both self-produced or privately driven, without a regular process of urbanization and construction in the north and south of the LMA, was one of the responses adopted by populations who were unable to find available and affordable housing within the regular city. Many of these housing areas were built in areas whose location placed them in situations of urban and social exclusion, either due to their distance from the city centre and the lack of transport and infrastructure. At the same time and in neighbouring areas, there was also expressive growth and consolidation of the city's structure through housing real estate developments.

Considering that the public space that surrounds and defines these residential urbanization processes has undergone significant transformation along time, it is important to assess its role in the construction of a new sense of urbanity in the metropolitan area public realm, over recent decades.

The aim of the research is to address the processes of production, development and urban transformation of AML housing areas under the scope of public space as a driver of urbanity, using two case studies as expressive examples of the process under analysis - *Brandoa* and *Alformelos* - in their, approximately, 70 years of existence, as well as the urban relation between them.

The paper presents the urban process of the two case studies, as well as the process of construction and transformation of the infrastructure and public spaces that impact them along the years, arguing that the progressive process of consolidation of a metropolitan public realm has a decisive impact on the construction of essential urban qualities in territories initially defined as peripheral.

The research methodology included complementary approaches, such as, consultation of both the iconographic and administrative archives of the *Amadora* City Council, as well as interviews with actors linked to the local administration, namely from Encosta do Sol Parish Council, City Council and the architect responsible for the first Urban Plan for *Brandoa* territory. As an analytical approach, drawing was used as a way of understanding and interpreting the place and the changes that occurred, through overlapping historical and thematic layers that define the urban area, with a focus on understanding urban systems and evolution over time. Complementary, a bibliographic review, viewing of documentaries and fieldwork were carried out.

## **The Small Great History of the Neighbourhoods**

### *Brandoa*

The Quinta da *Brandoa* (*Brandoa farm*), where the *Brandoa* neighbourhood would later be established, was located on agricultural land along a steep slope covering 54 hectares, just over 1 km from *Pontinha* and *Carnide* in Lisbon. It was part of the *Amadora* parish council, which then belonged to the municipality of *Oeiras* (before the creation of the *Amadora* municipality).

To better understand the origins of the neighbourhood, it is necessary to trace the hi-

Fig. 2 – Brandoa neighbourhood, prior 1957

Source: Available at <https://jf-encostadosol.pt/viver-a-freguesia/historia/bairro-da-brandoa/> - Accessed 26 August 2023



story of the estate, which dates to the 16th century and had remained in the same family for generations. In 1941, it was sold, and the heirs of the new owners managed it over the following decade. The family's difficult financial situation led to the farm being mortgaged to the *União Continental* (Casaca and Eufrásia, 1988). To solve their financial issues, they received a business proposal to promote a “division” of the property without a legitimate title.

The owner agreed together with *União Continental*, they would “divide” the land, effectively becoming untitled real estate developers (Bruno Soares and Dores, 1984).

In the following years, *Quinta da Brandoa* was gradually subdivided and sold in plots, with half of it sold by the end of 1958 (Casaca and Eufrásia, 1988). This type of process, is typical of informal neighbourhoods, driven by landowners and developers operating outside the formal urban planning mechanisms. As noted, “the developer of the clandestine subdivision always tries to avoid the expenses of urbanization, limiting them, in general, to opening trails with an excavator, in different directions” (Salgueiro, 1977: 37).

The urban policy in force in the 1960s proved to be incapable of implementing programs to respond to the growing need for housing, faced with the population increase, unlike previous decades. It also proved incapable of repressing the extensive advance of irregular construction, diminishing the risks of this kind of development (Bruno Soares, Ferreira, and Guerra, 1985).

The process of selling and developing the neighbourhood went through various stages, shaped by the professional and social profiles of the buyers and the type of construction, ranging from single-family homes to collective residential buildings for rent. The neighbourhood's location offered a cheaper alternative to the widespread housing shortage, particularly for poorer populations. Residents benefited from its relative proximity to Lisbon's city centre, despite the lack of public transport (Bruno Soares and Dores, 1984).

The neighbourhood's first phase of growth was characterized by a slow and steady pace of construction, with mostly single-story or two-story houses. Starting in 1964/65, the pace of construction accelerated, and higher buildings (5-6 stories) began to appear.



Fig. 3 – Brandoa neighbourhood in the 1960s Source: <https://www.Brandoa.jf-encostadosol.pt/viver-a-freguesia/historia/bairro-da-brandoa/> - Accessed 26 August 2023

Speculation grew, both in the sale of plots and their subdivision, leading to rising land prices and rents. Buildings became even higher, with one example reaching 10 floors (Bruno Soares and Dores, 1984).

On February 26, 1969, a six-story building collapsed in Brandoa, sparking panic and perhaps awareness. Two days later, in the early hours of February 28, an earthquake struck Lisbon, causing damage and casualties. The local population gathered in the muddy streets, mourning, which, according to *Diário de Lisboa*, “lent a sadder atmosphere to the already sad clandestine neighbourhood”, however, no buildings collapsed that night or in the nights that followed (*Diário de Lisboa*, 1969).

### *Alformelos*

Simultaneously, during the 1960s, southeast of Brandoa, the urbanization process of rural land began in the municipality of Oeiras, bordering the municipalities of Lisbon and Loures, on the estates of “*Casal de Alformel or Alformelos*” and “*Quinta da Correia*.” This joint operation between landowners would result in the *Alformelos* neighbourhood.

The first step was taken on September 5, 1962, when the owners of “*Casal de Alformel or Alformelos*” submitted a Program for Urbanization to the Oeiras City Council (to which the *Amadora* parish belonged before it became a municipality) through the firm “*Estúdio G Borges de Sousa, Lda*” (Proc. 1167/62). The plan indicated the intention to urbanize the 30.78 hectare of rural property. Although there was no formal project yet, the scale of the proposal aimed to extend the urban fabric of Lisbon and *Pontinha* urban centre in the Loures municipality (currently *Odivelas*). The plan envisioned creating a “*Satellite Garden City*,” emphasizing that all constructions, regardless of type, should integrate with the terrain and its natural features, prioritizing open spaces and green areas (Proc. 1167/62).

The boldness and scale of the proposal prompted the *Oeiras* City Council to consult the Lisbon Regional Plan Office, given the regional impact of the project. However, Lisbon’s Regional Plan Office, which was still under development at the time, rejected the proposal, recommending that the land remain rural.

In 1965, considering the guidelines of Lisbon’s Master Plan and Lisbon’s Regional Plan,



Fig. 4 – Brandoa neighbourhood – the start of urbanisation work (1970s)

Source: <https://Brandoa.jf-encostadosol.pt/viver-a-freguesia/historia/bairro-da-Brandoa/>- Accessed 26 August 2023



a new “Preliminary Urbanization Study of *Casal de Alformelos*” was submitted by a different team, led by architects Correia Simões and Nunes de Oliveira, along with civil engineer M. Rodriguez Cuña. This study considered the constraints of Lisbon’s Regional Master Plan, particularly regarding the proposed major regional transport routes that would cross the property—such as the port road and railway belt—as well as potential urban areas. Additionally, the Lisbon Master Plan’s radial road connecting to the port access road at the *Venda Nova* junction was included. The study proposed two roundabout junctions, addressing the considerations of the master plans. The proposal was approved with the indication that the Autonomous Roads Authority should be the one to develop the intermunicipal road layout project (Proc. 1221/65).

The urbanization and construction process for the future *Alformelos* neighbourhood only began in 1969, led by a new team, including urban architect Mário B.A.S. de Menezes and engineer M. Ramos da Cruz. This initiative resulted from private investment in the development and construction of land belonging to two agricultural properties: *Casal de Alformel or Alformelos* and *Quinta da Correia* (Proc. 1285/67). This partnership between landowners was unusual and complex but reflected a larger collective effort, with the primary goal being the production of capital. The *Casal de Alformel or Alformelos*, covering approximately 31 hectares, belonged to “A Industrial de Construções Cruz e Cruz, Lda,” while the 19-hectare *Quinta da Correia* was owned by “Alves Ribeiro, Lda.”

The proposal for the Preliminary Urbanization Plan intended to constitute a link between the surrounding residential areas, including *Pontinha*, *Venda Nova*, and Brandoa. Given the intended low density, the proposal allocated land for social housing to accommodate residents of nearby informal settlements and foresaw that the proposed facilities would also serve the surrounding residential areas.

Urbanization works began in 1972 but were interrupted, leaving the trace of the roads on the land. The works resumed after the 1974 revolution. During the period when the construction was halted, the site served as a recreational space for children and young people living in the surrounding neighbourhoods, particularly in Brandoa.

The process of infrastructure development and construction was relatively swift, with

the neighbourhood starting to be inhabited during the 1980s. *Alfornelos* has always been associated with *Brandoa* and *Pontinha*, with its road connection provided by an access road running across the neighbourhood, which limits the two phases of construction carried out between the 1970s and the late 1990s.

Private initiatives addressed the growing housing demand by building 4,000 housing units on this area. As it consolidated, the neighbourhood accommodated a middle-class and upper-middle-class community. It is organized into cells, separated by hierarchical roads—both primary and secondary—that provide access within the cells. The residential buildings range from 4 to 12 stories, either in line or in towers, with various facilities organized within these cells. The urban model proposed incorporates some modern principles in the organizational and hierarchical structure of the roads and cells, and is supported by several educational, sports and religious facilities.

Their proximity, land use, and population have always connected the two neighbourhoods. Some residents of *Brandoa* worked on the construction of *Alfornelos*.

Over the past 25 years, the neighbourhood has been consolidating, particularly in terms of improving public spaces and its integration with the surrounding area as initially defined in the urban project.



*Fig. 5 – The urbanisation and construction of the Alfornelos neighbourhood – 70s/80s*

Source: <https://www.Brandoa.jf-encostadosol.pt/viver-a-freguesia/historia/bairro-de-alfornelos/>



Fig. 6 – The streets of Brandoa in 1970: the animation of the Brandoa fair on Estrada da Brandoa in what is now Rua Luís Vaz de Camões (left); another street, muddy (centre); the rubbish bin as a children’s game. Source: Vasconcelos, M. (1970)

### Transformation process

The events of 1969—the collapse of a building in *Brandoa* and the subsequent earthquake—marked a significant turning point in the neighbourhood’s history. *Brandoa* became the centre of attention for public authorities and national and international media, being described journalistically as “the largest clandestine neighbourhood in Europe” (Bruno Soares and Dores, 1984:2).

The local and government authorities faced scrutiny over the development of such a large “clandestine” neighbourhood. In response, the City Council acted by issuing notices to halt the construction of buildings and outlining ways to legalize the existing structures. That same year, the National Laboratory of Civil Engineering (LNEC) established a set of measures for the legalization of the buildings (Casaca and Eufrásia, 1988)<sup>1</sup>.

The recovery and regularization of urban structure and constructions of *Brandoa* required exceptional measures from political, legislative, financial, and planning perspectives. *Brandoa* had to be addressed within the broader context of housing shortages and informal construction, requiring an “operative planning” due to the speculative nature of the neighbourhood’s origins and the social and safety issues faced by its residents (Vasconcelos, 1970).

The municipality responded to the lack of adequate living conditions and high population density through the General Urbanization Plan for *Brandoa* -Falagueira, developed by architect Maurício de Vasconcelos. In January 1970, a multidisciplinary team led by architect Luís Bruno Soares developed the *Brandoa* Recovery Plan, addressing severe urban problems related to accessibility and infrastructure, including water supply, sewage, electricity, and street paving. More than just an urban planning exercise, it aimed to resolve serious urban issues through an “action-plan” approach, with a sequential and immediate identi-

fication of problems and solutions. The plan was completed in two years and published in March 1974 (Fonte, 2012), just a month before the April Democratic Revolution.

Alongside public facilities and infrastructure improvements that significantly enhanced the community's quality of life, including the construction of primary schools and other integrated facilities, the regularization of public transport routes, despite high levels of need persisted.

Despite the 'threshold of legality' in which the Plan was drawn up and implemented, there was an upgrade of Brandoa, in which little or nothing new is built and half of the plots remain vacant (Plano 77-80, 1977). "*Brandoa* is no longer just a clandestine neighbourhood produced 'in secret' and 'on the margins'. *Brandoa* is a real neighbourhood, achieved and recognized" (Plano 77-80, 1977).

As a result of the plan, property owners had expectations of legalization, leading to a reduction in the pace of construction. However, no legalization actions were taken by the authorities. *Brandoa* continued to be considered "illegal", contrasting with the situation in other non-regular neighbourhoods in the LMA after 1974 (Bruno Soares and Dores, 1984).

The lack of action, where neither legalization nor demolition occurred, led to the consolidation of other informal neighbourhoods. Over time, *Brandoa* became isolated from other "clandestine" neighbourhoods due to its size, emerging as a "symbol of permitted illegality" (Salgueiro, 1977: 47). *Brandoa's* location and its peripheral condition placed it, from the start, in a state of exclusion. However, the process initiated through the *Brandoa* Recovery Plan (1970) paved the way for its transformation and integration, allowing it over time to adapt and reinvent itself with possible adjustments. The demographic matrix and the consequent demand and growth of *Brandoa*, closely resembling the specific aspects of the housing problem in the LMA, stem from rural exodus and the strong population concentration witnessed in the LMA (Salgueiro, 1985). The high demand for housing would also increase in the Lisbon region and across the country, as a consequence of the exodus from the former colonies starting in 1975, with many finding refuge in *Brandoa* and *Alfornelos*.

Portugal was undergoing significant political and social transformation after the revolution. The first residents' committees emerged in *Brandoa* and other informal neighbourhoods. In 1979, the municipality of *Amadora* was created, along with the Parish Council of *Brandoa*. The 1980s would be a time of major transformation. The municipality allocated space for the establishment of the *Brandoa* health centre and advanced with the construction of several facilities—nurseries, playgrounds, markets, schools. In 1983, the "Technical Office for the Recovery of Illegal Areas" in *Brandoa's* Urban Area was created, aiming to inform property owners and residents, curb unauthorised construction, rehabilitate the existing housing stock, finance plans and construction, legalize existing buildings, and build infrastructures. From 1983 onwards, the first legal subdivision of *Brandoa*, in the western part, was underway (Casaca and Eufrásia, 1988). In 1984, Regulatory Decree 37/84, dated April 27, declared *Brandoa*, as covered by the *Brandoa* -Falagueira General Urbanization Plan, a critical area for recovery and urban redevelopment. At the same time, in the early 1980s, the first housing licenses in *Alfornelos* were issued for the already built southeastern part of the neighbourhood, and the first residents began to settle there.

The relationship between the two neighbourhoods started to form consistently and permanently.

After 20 years, with the creation of the Special Recovery Office for Brandoa, objectives were set for the “Redevelopment of the Brandoa Urban Core” (2001) (PROQUAL Program) and intervention in this AUGI, where 80% of the buildings were constructed without a licence (PROQUAL-CCDRLVT, 2001). The PROQUAL Brandoa project began by developing initiatives aimed at characterizing the physical and social fabric of the territory. Two studies were carried out with the objective of “Characterizing the Residents and the Housing Stock of the Brandoa Urban Core and elaborating the Urban Structure Master Plan—Global Study of Brandoa” (Antunes, 2011).

At the same time, the transformation of the metropolitan road network, which resulted in the construction, already in the new millennium, of major access roads—CRIL and IC16—(as foreseen in the initial intervention proposals for Alfoanelos), as well as the local road network, connects Brandoa and *Alfoanelos* to other neighbourhoods in *Amadora*, *Odivelas*, and Lisbon, transforming them into spaces of continuity.

In the 1940s none of the neighbourhoods existed; at the beginning of the 70s, the Brandoa neighbourhood was practically fully occupied and had only one access road, while *Alfoanelos* began its process of infrastructure development, which would be consolidated in the 80s and 90s. Access routes became more fluid between neighbourhoods and between municipalities; from the 2007s onwards, the neighbourhoods were consolidated and new facilities were created, while at the same time there was major investment in crucial road infrastructures.



Fig. 7 – Brandoa and Alfoanelos: Evolution of urban neighbourhoods’ development from 1945 to post-2007  
Source: Research Project MetroPublicNet, 2024

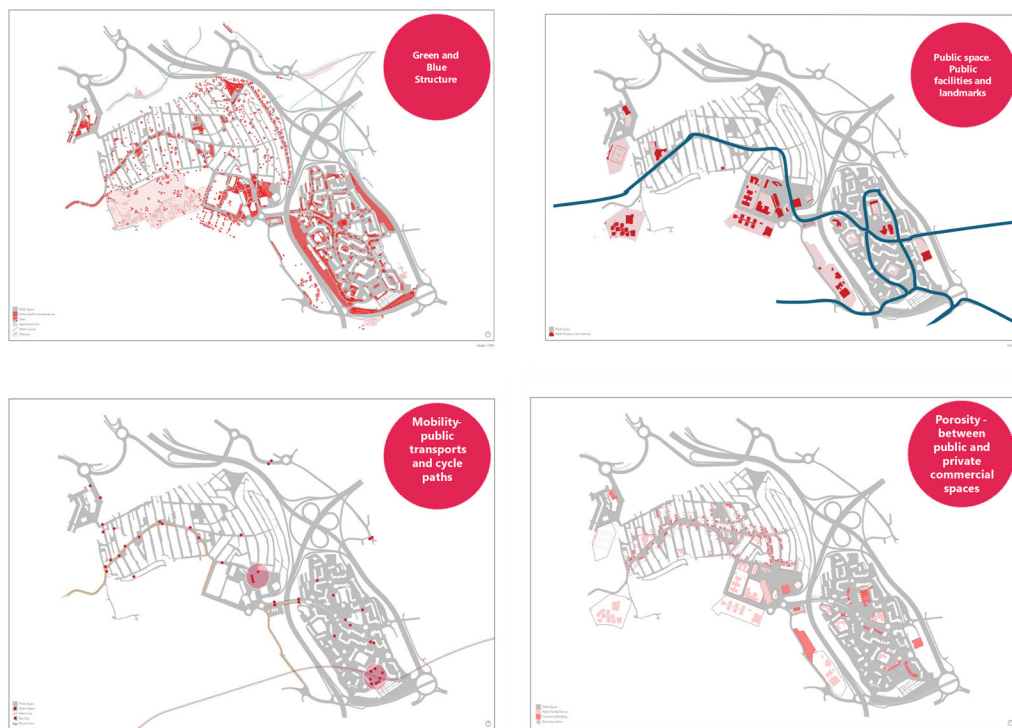


Fig. 8 – Public Spaces of Brandoa and Alformelos.

a. Green and blue structure; b. Public facilities and landmarks; c. Mobility - public transports and cycle paths; d. Porosity - between public and private commercial spaces.

Source: Research Project MetroPublic-Net, 2024

### The Structure of Public Spaces

Both neighbourhoods grew simultaneously, each fulfilling the intentions of its origin: informal settlement and real estate development, both led by private developers. They represent two forms of urban production, of which the Lisbon region is an example.

Currently, Brandoa is still classified as an “Urban Areas of Illegal Genesis” (AUGI) and enjoys a privileged position in terms of accessibility. Both Brandoa and *Alformelos* are served by various public transport options, including the metro (*Alformelos* station, since 2004) and a wide road network. There is a significant supply of amenities and qualified public spaces, as well as considerable housing availability. The social makeup of Brandoa still includes residents and descendants from the original neighbourhood, but there is great heterogeneity in the socioeconomic and cultural composition of the social fabric (Antunes, 2011). *Alformelos* today is home to many families from diverse backgrounds, with more than 70 nationalities represented in the parish<sup>2</sup>.

The redevelopment or creation of public spaces, green areas, public transports and facilities, alongside the regularisation, licensing, and improvement of buildings, were the main focuses of Brandoa’s urban transformation. It is in these new and improved public spaces that the daily life of the neighbourhood is built, between schools, forum, market, or the Parish Council (with a branch in each neighbourhood). The Largo 1º de Maio, as a fundamental urban element, along with the main roads, brings together commerce and services. In contrast, *Alformelos* has two commercial hubs of greater significance: one in Teófilo Braga Square, and on the opposite side, near the connection to Brandoa, a shopping centre “Colina do Sol”, that serves both, *Alformelos* and Brandoa. The square, as an important urban and connecting element, has a variety of daily-use shops and concentrates public transportation, including the metro. The main roads are dotted with shops and services. Educational, sports, and leisure facilities are spread throughout the neighbourhood.

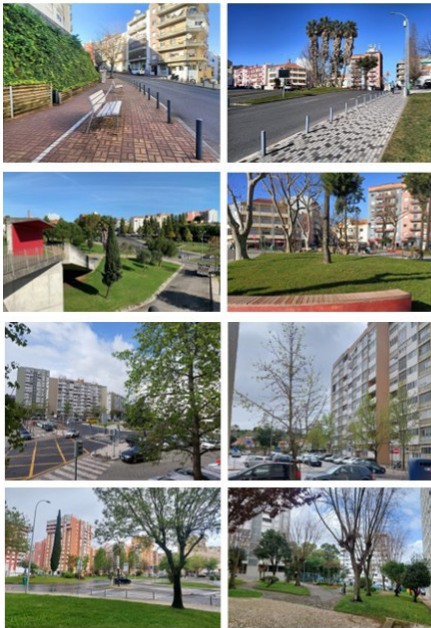


Fig. 9 – Alfoanelos and Brandoa - continuity of public space/urban continuity: 2023/24

Fonte: Projeto de Investigação Metro-PublicNet

### Contribution to a Metropolitan Network of Public Spaces

Brandoa, along with the surrounding urban area, has undergone profound transformations, requiring an evaluation of its role in shaping a renewed sense of urbanity over the past decades. On the other hand, Alfoanelos, following the large-scale subdivision and housing construction, has consolidated as a neighbourhood and developed its own sense of community. Through the interpretation of historical cartography, the assessment of (re)design, and cartographic analysis from the 1940s to the present, this study identifies the processes of urban growth and development, encompassing the expansion and consolidation of the residential areas of Brandoa and Alfoanelos, the transformation of public realm.

The development or creation of public spaces and green areas has transformed the living conditions of the neighbourhoods, enhancing the quality of life for its residents and extending its perspective beyond the neighbourhood boundaries. The system of interventions for structuring and development of public spaces in Brandoa, in conjunction with those in Alfoanelos, has been crucial and marked a turning point in the shift of paradigm in its relationship with the surroundings.

This analysis helps to understand the evolution of public space design and revitalization in the peripheral urban development of Lisbon. It moves from the absence of everything—infrastructure, roads, and public spaces—to the existence of a public realm, characterized by pedestrianization, green spaces, and soft connectivity networks, resulting in a greater sense of proximity, integration, and territorial and social cohesion. The concept of urbanity, which encompasses the material, moral, and aesthetic qualities of urban spaces, is closely linked to high levels of accessibility, density, functional diversity, and spatial continuity (Oliveira and Silva 2013, Serpa 2015).

### ENDNOTES

1 Opinion of LNEC/Legalization Criteria for the Works in Brandoa, an integral part of the Brandoa Recovery Plan, in (Casaca & Eufrásia, 1988).

2 Interview with the President of the Parish Council of Encosta do Sol, Dr. Armando Domingos, July 19, 2023.

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### **Maria Manuela da Fonte**

*CIAUD\_ Research Centre for Architecture, Urbanism and Design*  
mmfonte@fa.ulisboa.pt

Architect (FA-UTL,1987) with a PhD in Urban Planning (FA-UTL ,2008) addressing the urbanism and architecture in Angola. Lectures at the Lisbon School of Architecture, Universidade de Lisboa since 2000, where is Assistant Professor in the Urbanism Project Department, researcher at CIAUD and URBinLAB research group. She founded her own office (1987) practising in urbanism and architecture until 2012.

### **Filipa Serpa**

*CIAUD\_ Research Centre for Architecture, Urbanism and Design*  
edu.ulisboa.pt

Architect, with an Architecture and Urban Planning Degree (FA-UTL, 2000), specialization in Urban and Environmental Regeneration (FA-UTL, 2002) and PhD in Urbanism (FA-UL, 2015) addressing the public promoted housing projects in Lisbon. Lectures at the Lisbon School of Architecture, Universidade de Lisboa since 2000, where is Associate Professor in the Urbanism Project Department, researcher at CIAUD and URBinLAB research group. Between Jun. 2023 and Sep. 2024 served as Vice-President of IHRU – Institute of Housing and Urban Rehabilitation.

### **Ariana Marques da Silva**

*arianamarquesdasilva@gmail.com*

She holds a Master’s in Architecture (FA-UP, 2013) and a Master’s in Sustainable Urbanism and Territorial Planning (FSCH-UNL, 2023). She practices architecture, while engaging in interdisciplinary collaborations, such as co-editing Dédalo Magazine #10, co-producing Dédalo RE-ACT Urban Festival, or co-developing Building 101 project for Lisbon Triennale 2019. She served as a Research Fellow in the MetroPublicNet project at the School of Architecture (2022-2023).