

# An Afterword (by Carles Muro)

\* The Lordelo Cooperative is featured prominently in the first major publication of Álvaro Siza's work outside Portugal: n. 68 of the magazine "Hogar y Arquitectura" (Madrid, 1967). The publication of a significant and extensive selection of his work in the magazine directed by Carlos Flores was, as Siza himself has stated on several occasions, a great stimulus and an important aid to the international projection of his career. In this issue, five pages are devoted to the Lordelo Cooperative compared to the six pages devoted, for example, to the Boa Nova Tea House or the only four pages devoted to the Leça swimming pools. We do not know how much of this distribution of pages is due to Siza himself or to Carlos Flores, but it is clear that, at this time, the Lordelo Cooperative was among his most significant works.

Subsequently, the Lordelo Cooperative practically disappeared from the publications dedicated to Siza's work, with the exception of the monographic issue that the Japanese magazine "A+U" dedicated to his work in 1989.

And, unless there is an error or omission, it does not reappear until fifty years after the first publication mentioned above when, on the occasion of the donation of part of Álvaro Siza's archive to the Serralves Foundation, an exhibition is organised at the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art. Drawings, photographs and correspondence relating to the project are published in the exhibition

## Master pieces

1. Few architects have produced such an extraordinary number of truly significant works during the course of their professional careers as Álvaro Siza: the swimming pools in Leça de Palmeira, the Malagueira district in Évora, the "Bonjour Tristesse" building in Berlin, the Borges & Irmão Bank in Vila do Conde, the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto, the reconstruction of the Chiado in Lisbon, the church in Marco de Canaveses or the Iberê Camargo Foundation in Porto Alegre, to name but a few. Any one of these works would be enough to guarantee him a place in the history of architecture.

However, if Siza had never built the Lordelo Cooperative, the overall assessment of his work and his contribution to the architectural culture of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early years of the present century would probably be exactly the same.

Precisely for this very reason, I find this meticulous work carried out by a group of students from the Universidade do Minho, led by Professor Vincenzo Riso, very timely and interesting. It seems to me that focusing on a lesser-known – and apparently less significant – work among those that make up Álvaro Siza's already long professional career is, from a pedagogical point of view, a particularly strategic choice. And it seems so to me, for at least two reasons.

On the one hand because, as it has not played a central role for criticism and has not hitherto been the subject of detailed studies and monographs, students have been able to approach this work free of the prejudices that usually accompany any interpretation, and to confront the physical and spatial conditions of the Cooperative building directly, without intermediaries.

On the other hand, because, as microhistory has taught us, the study of events or characters from the past that do not form part of the "grand narratives", and which have hitherto gone virtually unnoticed, allows us to discover unexpected aspects and enrich our understanding of certain moments, places and historical figures. In this context, the in-depth study of lesser-known works by an architect can shed new light on them which, in turn, can help us to better understand his/her entire oeuvre. Undoubtedly, until now, little attention has been paid to the Lordelo Cooperative in Álvaro Siza's oeuvre as a whole.\*

2. To these two reasons we should add a third, no less important, which tells us about Siza's way of working, about the relationship he maintains with his work. I would dare say that for Siza all projects have the same importance, regardless of the scale, the programme, the type of client, the geographical location or its position in the city.

catalogue (see: Tavares, André, *Matéria-Prima: Um olhar sobre o arquivo de Álvaro Siza / Raw Material: A View of Álvaro Siza's Architecture*, Porto, Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves, 2017). Shortly afterwards, in 2019, it occupies a central space in what was to be the first of a series of exhibitions and publications designed to bring Siza's work into dialogue with the work of a new generation of architects. Tom Emerson, the first architect invited to take part in this dialogue, discovered the Lordelo Cooperative and developed a large part of his reflections on openings based on this work (see: Muro, Carles, *Conversas com o Arquivo Álvaro Siza. Aberturas: Tom Emerson, Álvaro Siza / Conversations with the Álvaro Siza Archive. Openings: Tom Emerson, Álvaro Siza*, Porto, Fundação de Serralves, 2019).

Álvaro Siza devotes the same attention and care to a modest single-family house as to a large social housing complex, to a warehouse or a factory as to a contemporary art museum, to a small chapel in the south of Portugal as to a skyscraper in the heart of Manhattan. Regardless of the final result and the potential critical assessment, Siza's gaze and creative intelligence approach each and every project he tackles with the same intensity. And he has done so tirelessly, from the beginning of his professional activity in the fifties to the present day.

It is precisely in this sense that the Lordelo Cooperative can be particularly valuable as it reveals the enormous amount of work that Siza has put into each and every one of his works, as well as the commitment with which he has carried them out and the tenacity with which he has defended them when necessary.

It is well known – at least since André Tavares published, in 2017, part of the correspondence between the architect and the new management of the Cooperative – the vehemence and conviction with which Álvaro Siza advocated the initial design decisions and proposed alternatives to respond to the simplistic proposals of the management to address some of the construction problems that arose a few years after the completion of the works.

A great deal of attention has recently and rightly been paid to the large hardwood plank joinery, which follows the geometry of the ground floor and defines the relationship with the courtyard. This is one of the most characteristic elements of the project and was undoubtedly at the centre of the disputes between the architect and the client. As in the swimming pool at Quinta de Conceição or in the Rocha Ribeiro house, the joinery does not simply occupy the openings in the walls, but is superimposed on them, reaching down to the ground, and creating a new form of conversation between inside and outside. Dozens of sketches and beautiful scale drawings bear witness to Siza's commitment to defining these elements.

But no less effort is devoted, for example, to the magnificent three-storey high entrance atrium – now also, unfortunately, considerably altered. The Siza archive contains dozens of sketches in which he studies different alternatives for the atrium, with vertical walls that accompany the entrance and are transformed into a series of ribbons, through the play of skilful tangents, on the upper floors. We could also talk about the geometry of the sophisticated staircase that connects the different floors, the numerous pieces of furniture designed for the building, or so many other themes present in this work. All of them tirelessly explored by Siza.

3. The Lordelo Cooperative is not a minor work because there are no minor works in Álvaro Siza's gaze. But it is probably not, as Vincenzo Riso states in the subtitle of this publication, a masterpiece either. However, the Lordelo Cooperative is, without any doubt, the work of a master from whom we will always be able to continue learning.

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