



LA CASA

ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS
MODOS DE HABITAR

ABADA EDITORES

LA CASA

ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS MODOS DE HABITAR

II CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL CULTURA Y CIUDAD
GRANADA, 23-25 ENERO 2019



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Con los pies en el agua: espacios habitados en edificios de apartamentos frente al mar en Maceió, Brasil

Feet on the Sand: Living Spaces in Apartment Buildings by the Sea in Maceió, Brazil

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Resumen

Los edificios verticales surgen en Maceió en la segunda mitad del siglo XX, como la forma más moderna de vivir, concentrándose principalmente en la orla marítima y albergando la parcela más privilegiada de la sociedad. En las décadas de 1950 y 1960, aquellos barrios, ocupados por plantaciones de coqueos, pocas casas de arquitectura tradicional y viviendas vernaculares de pescadores, fueron transformadas. Han sido reemplazados por una nueva disposición espacial corbusiana de edificios de gran altura. De la vivienda se observa privilegiadamente el mar, alterando definitivamente las relaciones entre las dimensiones del paisaje natural y edificado, del público y del privado. Este artículo delinea esta transformación en los modos de vivir, mapeando sus significados arquitectónicos, basado en una Investigación de los proyectos originales de los edificios. Se recurrió a inúmeras visitas a los apartamentos, bien como a la realización de entrevistas, que incluyeron el intercambio de álbumes de fotografías.

Palabras clave: edificios multifamiliares verticales, arquitectura moderna, hábitos de vivir

Bloque temático: El proyecto doméstico como núcleo de la modernidad: casa singular y vivienda colectiva, del Movimiento Moderno al siglo XXI

Abstract

High-rise buildings emerged in Maceió in the second half of the 20th Century as the most modern way of living. They were mainly concentrated by the sea and inhabited by the most wealthy social classes. During the 1950s and 1960s, the area, which was previously occupied by dense coconut trees, and rustic dwellings for fishermen, was transformed. They have been replaced with a new spatial Corbusian arrangement of high-rise buildings. The dwellings hold a fine view of the sea and this definitively alters the relationship between the scale of the natural and constructed landscape, in both public and private terms. This article delineates the changes in these patterns of living by mapping their architectural significance. It is based on an Investigation of the original designs of the buildings. Several visits were made to the buildings themselves and as well as this, interviews were conducted which included sharing the photograph albums.

Keywords: high-rise multifamily buildings, modern architecture, residential lifestyle

Topic: The domestic project as the heart of modernity: the single, one-off house and collective housing, from the Modern Movement to the 21st century

Introduction

On the second half of the 20th century, the first high-rise buildings started to emerge in Maceió, state capital of Alagoas and one of the most sought tourist destinations in Northeastern Brazil. Those buildings provided housing to the most privileged local inhabitants along with a new living experience. The goal was to achieve the coveted “progress” advertised by contemporary newspapers, magazines and documents which saw on high-rise buildings one of the greatest symbols of modernity. This typology has become a synonym of a “good living” for the city citizens and it impacts the skyline of the city to this day.

Taking Rio de Janeiro – the outstanding tourist attraction of Brazil; and Copacabana – its famous neighborhood by the sea as a reference we can establish some parameters for analyzing Maceió. Copacabana was inaugurated in 1892. Further than the unique natural beauty of its long shore woven in between boulders such as the Corcovado and Pão de Açúcar, by the end of the 20's the neighborhood translated the meaning of a “modern” lifestyle to the whole country. Synonym of sea bathing and *bossa nova*, Copacabana was the residential neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil that adopted apartment buildings as the main housing type.¹

Regarding the state capital of Alagoas, we move to the opposite side of the country. We follow its steps into becoming a touristic reference focusing on the neighborhoods Pajuçara, Ponta Verde and Jatiúca. Their urban construction, as well as in Copacabana, is developed associating touristic appealing attributes to vertical skyline development.



Figure 1.1: View of Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro

Source: *Copacabana (website)*, consulted on November 10, 2018, <http://copacabana.com>

Figure 1.2: View of Pajuçara, Maceió

Source: *Praias de Maceio (website)*, consulted on November 10, 2018, <https://www.praiasdemaceio.com>

The first apartment building in Maceió was erected in the 60's. According to Velho, by that time Copacabana had reached 98% of soil occupation with high-rise buildings.² The scenario in Maceió started to change in the 70's when an increase in the number of this kind of buildings was observed. However, there was no actual densification as to justify the construction of new buildings. Their emergence was essentially connected to a reasoning that supposed urban verticalization as a basic requirement for national modernization.

¹ Viviane da Cunha Paula, “Espaço e sociedade: apartamentos no Rio de Janeiro do século XX” (tesis doctoral, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, 2007).

² Gilberto Velho, coord., *Antropologia Urbana: cultura e sociedade no Brasil e em Portugal* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 1999).

The question then arises as to the reasons that led to the city verticalization and the consequent changes on local living habits brought by transitioning from single-story to multistory dwelling units. Issues such as the reasons why people opted to live by the sea especially on modern high-rise buildings are also investigated.

Verticalization is an architecturally justifiable solution to support high activity concentration and density of people into a certain area of the city perhaps inspired by dreams of another urban life totally requalified by technology brought to us by the mechanistic poetics of Le Corbusier. However it has grown for a number of complex and subjective reasons far beyond what could possibly be imagined by their creators.

For instance, it is believed that a high-rise building bears in itself the enchantment of providing an overview of the city bringing an idea of domain over the territory at sight due to the viewer's high position. Such belief holds the eco of iconic buildings in human history like the Babel Tower.

Which is the case observed for Gabriel Mascaró, in a documentary composed by a series of interviews with dwellers of penthouse apartments. The interviews available on the documentary living in a high floor provides a feeling of power and safety as if the observer had any sort of acting power over what is on ground level, e.g. the city or nature, solely because of their position. Living at penthouses would virtually be living a private world where everything is possible at an imaginary level.³

Along with the yearning for an overview, there is the segregative social privilege of enjoying wide-ranging landscapes. This is what can be concluded from one of the regions that certainly influenced the verticalization process on the shore of a number of cities around the world, including Brazil, how explain Julia O'Donnell: «No caso de Copacabana temos um arrabalde que, sob o signo da modernidade e da salubridade, foi rapidamente concebido como um 'futuroso' bairro pronto a abrigar as famílias chiques dos tempos republicanos».⁴ The value of a high-rise building is rapidly added to the sanitized and modern neighborhood, combining modernity and economical power.

The wealthiest class in Copacabana saw on high-rise buildings an ideal of housing and modernity. Such feeling was noticeably spread through different state capitals of Brazil where even in places with plenty of space to build regular houses high-rise buildings emerged confirming the adhesion to a model alien to local reality but paradigmatic since it sanctified an allegedly connection to places with higher prestige. Hence, we argue if Maceió – being a coastal city like Rio de Janeiro - followed the same steps into this so called modernity.

It is important to point out the role Copacabana plays on the national and international scenario, as well as the strength of the USA and their movie production advertising skyscrapers as symbols of the future. In reality, nationally speaking, verticalization followed the very concretization of the Modern Movement in Brazil which, as we know, reached international success during the first decades of the last century through the photographic exhibition of

³ Gabriel Mascaró, "Um lugar ao Sol", documentary filmed in 2009, video on You Tube, 1:05:12, consulted on April 25, 2018, <https://youtu.be/pOH5SWK6Mcc>.

⁴ [Author's translation: When it comes to Copacabana we have a surrounding that, under a flag of modernity and salubrity, was fastly conceived as a "futuristic" neighborhood ready to shelter the fancy families from republican times]. Julia O'Donnell, *A invenção de Copacabana: culturas urbanas e estilos de vida no Rio de Janeiro (1890-1940)* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2013), 38.

R.Kidder-Smith at the Modern Art Museum of New York and by the publishing of “Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old”.⁵

Generally speaking, one can deduce the link between verticalization and higher economic dynamics within the country, as could be seen in São Paulo where, in 1940, according to Yves Bruand «os arranha-céus começaram a brotar como cogumelos». ⁶ And, according to Lilian Fessler Vaz, in Rio de Janeiro «onde a esse processo se iniciou principalmente no âmbito residencial e afastado do centro da cidade», later expanding to other Brazilian state capitals and inner country cities.⁷ It is important to remember the arrival of new technology in Brazil such as steel structures and reinforced concrete, as well as mechanical devices like lifts and cranes made available by industries recently settled in the country, especially in Southeastern Brazil.

Would those also be the reasons for Maceió to embrace verticalization? That is one of the questions this article aims to explore. Here, we consider a high-rise building those presenting more than five storeys, an elevator and a tower aspect (height greater than width) where, regardless the number of floors, its volume contributes vertically to the local skyline. Those buildings share a similar style and follow, to a certain extent, principles of international modern architecture.

The research was centered on the living experience of the dwellers trying to analyze its meaning of each building for their occupants. The personnel involved on the buildings construction were heard and also the professionals responsible for their design and execution were asked about the context in which vertical buildings started to emerge in the city. Graphic material from the city hall public archives was obtained from where it was possible to identify licensed projects following the typology of interest during the beginning of the residential verticalization. Newspaper and magazines of that time were also a significant source of information and were accessed either physically or digitally.

Thus this study comprehends both objective and subjective issues of “living” with the support of information from those sources on an attempt to understand how multi-story housing was occupied, experienced or apprehended, considering also its interface with the city.

1. Living by the sea and up above: the transformations on the coastal landscape.

Maceió was named after its waters. The word comes from native language giving name to a location that benefit from the sea shore and borders a broad lagoon besides being full of small water streams and flooded areas.

Before the 1920's the city grew near the water although fighting against it: always seeking to overcome floods and developing itself away from the sea. The houses faced the land apparently on an attempt to create a civilized place apart from nature.

⁵ Philip L. Goodwin, *Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old, 1652-1942* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943).

⁶ [Author's translation: the skyscrapers started to sprout like mushrooms]. Yves Bruand, *Arquitetura Contemporânea no Brasil* (São Paulo: Ed Perspectiva, 1981), 328.

⁷ [Author's translation: where it mostly started as a residential process, far from the city center]. Fessler Vaz, *Modernidade e moradia: habitação coletiva no Rio de Janeiro nos séculos XIX e XX* (Rio de Janeiro: 7 Letras, 2002), 179.



Figure 2: Satellite image of Maceió
Source: Google Earth (2018)

During the 30's the sea is “discovered” as a place of enjoyment. The habit of sea bathing becomes regular. Consequently, on the following decades, the search for vacation houses by the sea in the neighborhood called Pajuçara increases. The fishermen houses placed amid a vast area covered by coconut trees were gradually replaced for those houses, driving the original occupants away from the shore.

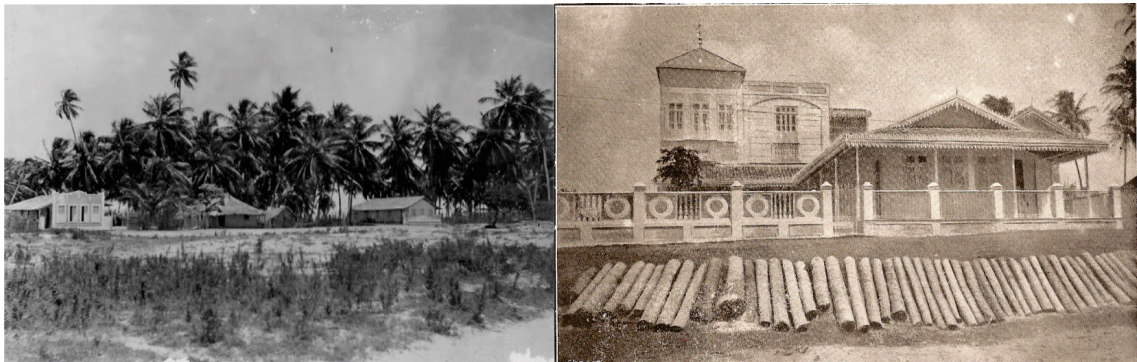


Figure 3.1: Fishermen houses, Ponta Verde
Sources: *Blog Alagoas!*, consulted on February 7, 2017, <http://alagoasbytonicavalcante.blogspot.com/>

Figure 3.2: An elite residence, Pajuçara
Source: Public Archive of Alagoas

The architects Manoel Messias de Gusmão and Jofre Saint'Yves Simon, who started working in Maceió in 1936 and 1944, respectively, are directly connected to such scenario transformation by adopting the bungalow as a formal language that would be vastly used. As a matter of fact, an An imported trend is then established: «o Rio começou a ser grande cidade internacional com Copacabana e com Leblon, construídos à americana, feitos de bungalows e de jardinetes

simétricos e asfaltados».⁸ That way the Copacabana bungalows emerged as a modern reinterpretation of aristocratic distinction.

In Rio de Janeiro, such residence typology was mainly inserted on neighborhoods by the sea as a mention to the bucolic spirit present as reason for the occupation of those neighborhoods at the beginning. Presenting a higher number of windows than the previous local housing typology, the bungalows offered a taste for sunlight and the benefits of cleanness along with gardens and balconies. In Maceió, it is possible to notice the adoption of that style across different neighborhoods, both by the sea and inland. By doing so, garden areas attached to residences, an unheard practice before the arrival of bungalows, represented another local impulse in the direction of harmonizing nature and civilization.

On a book called *Arquitetura Moderna – a atitude alagoana 1950-1964*, it is said that the architect Messias de Gusmão was a colleague of Oscar Niemeyer at university in Rio de Janeiro. However, upon arrival in Maceió, he adopted a variant of the bungalow named *Neocolonial Espanhol* which, according to some authors, was nothing but «ecletismo exótico, de interesse limitado», but presenting good acceptance in Brazil.⁹

However, «estar em consonância com as novas tendências nacionais e internacionais bate às portas da cidade».¹⁰ For example, that is when the building code is revised and natural lighting and ventilation become requirements for all rooms, which left all the semi-detached houses prior to the bungalows out of the city-required standards.



Figure 4.1: Residence designed by Manuel Messias de Gusmão in the 1930's in Farol (neighborhood)

Figure 4.2: Residence designed by Jofre Saint'Yves Simon in the 1950's downtown

Source: Da Silva, *Arquitetura Moderna...*, 47 and 77

Along with the raise on appreciating the coastal landscape during the 40's and 50's significant changes occurred on city residences. At the same time the bungalows are being built, the first modern houses of Maceió also emerge. Generally speaking the adoption of the new stylistic is shy. That would be the case of the work of architect Jofre Saint'Yves Simon who managed to be

⁸ [Author's translation: Rio de Janeiro started to be a big international city with Copacabana and Leblon built on an American style composed by bungalows and symmetrical gardens]. O'Donnell, *A invenção...*, 169.

⁹ [Author's translation: an exotic eclecticism with limited interest]. Bruand, *Arquitetura Contemporânea...*, 57.

¹⁰ [Author's translation: the desire to be consonant with the new national and international trends knocks on the city's door]. Maria Angélica da Silva, *Arquitetura Moderna – a atitude alagoana 1950-1964* (Maceió: SERGASA, 1991), 36.

less traditional than Manoel Messias de Gusmão using modern language on straight lines, cubic volumes and new building material.

During the 50's the modern architectural production in the city grows and, looking for places by the sea, an even greater number of people settle in Pajuçara. Urban improvements in the area is then encouraged and in the 60's its street is paved and an urban design for the beach area is executed.

This movement is contemporary to the verticalization in Maceió, since in the 50's there is the beginning of high-rise buildings implementation followed by the residential buildings, which is the topic of the next section.



Figure 5.1: Pajuçara in the 1950's

Source: Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics

Figure 5.2: Pajuçara, in the 1960's.

Source: Public Archive of Alagoas

Figure 5.3: Pajuçara in the 1970's/1980's

Source: Private collection

2. The house up above: the first apartment buildings by the sea

During the 1960's the first two apartment buildings are constructed in Maceió: São Carlos, downtown, and Lagoa Mar, in the neighborhood of Farol. The first one was designed by the same person who was responsible for the project of the first multistory building in Maceió: Walter de Azevedo Cunha. An advertisement of the building before it had been finished said:

Na mais bela praia do nordeste já se levanta, desafiando as alturas, o magnífico Edifício São Carlos [...] Apartamentos luxuosos, com garagens individuais e um toque de distinção e conforto para os seus proprietários [...] A verdade é que a fisionomia da Cidade Sorriso está se modificando...¹¹

After the 1970's, two more buildings are built: Edifício Núbia and Edifício Jangada, now by the Pajuçara beach. By that time, its horizontal skyline, so far only interrupted by tall coconut trees, acquires a new dynamics with the presence of high-rise buildings being erected in the middle of such a picturesque scenario. From 1964 and 1974 only six apartment building were registered and only from the year 1975 that number increases, coinciding with the foundation of the Faculty of Architecture of the Federal University of Alagoas, which occurred in 1973.

It is observed, therefore, a completely new residential pattern exposed to great heights leaving the soil and freeing the ground level for traffic and parking. Instead of the door, the exterior is welcomed by the windows.

All three pioneering apartment buildings have no gates and no gatekeepers. That absence, also observed in some of the next residential buildings yet to come, point out to a quiet city without the need of building "fortresses" up to the limit of the property as we see nowadays.

By observing the facades and the floor plans it is possible to notice how weak is still the influence of modern architecture principles clearly encouraged in Brazil by Le Corbusier who visited the country in 1929 and 1936. The facades are composed by bricks and windows without adopting large glass panels. The pilotis are present but are not aesthetically developed.

The floor plans reveal a certain level of zoning but nothing far from the list of rooms observed in the traditional single-story houses. None of the contemporary apartment buildings experimented a roof garden. In the future, that roof will certainly be substituted by the a penthouse experience, as mentioned before.

3. High-rise buildings by the sea: between modern and traditional living

In the seashore of Maceió, the coexistence between the life in single beach houses and the apartment buildings persisted for years. In the middle of the process of modern urbanization of the seafront of the neighborhood of Pajuçara and the later urbanization of the beaches of Ponta Verde and Jatiúca, large coconut crops, non paved roads and traditional houses shared the same scenario.

Therefore, even if they represent a modern appeal, apartment buildings have not meant a complete update of the city living habits. Even though there were elevators to access neighboring units and a standardize floor plan for several apartments, some features demonstrate the limit on living habits changes.

¹¹ [Author's translation: At the most beautiful beach in Northeastern Brazil, challenging Heights, the magnificente São Carlos [...] Luxury apartments with private parking and a touch of distinction and comfort for its owners [...] Truth is the face of the Smile City is changing...]. *Feira Literária*, ano I, n.º 8, (1962): 17.



Figure 6: The first residential high-rise buildings in Maceió and their floor plans

Sources: Da Silva, *Arquitetura Moderna...*

Municipal Superintendence of Control and Urban Conviviality of Maceió

Private collection

C. Antunes de Carvalho Casado (2018)

The demands for two halls is an example. Regarding private access to apartment units, all of them had a social and service entrances as well as different elevators dedicated to each one of them. That doubled access is justified by the middle and elite classes habit of counting on housekeepers for domestic work and treating them with certain distance. This variable also justified the low number of families that responded to the technological offers that the modernity brought up for the inhabitants to do their domestic tasks themselves, also with a hint of glamour.

That is the reason why the floor plan of those buildings will present a room for domestic employees, something that persist even today. Previously occupying the last portion of the properties, with the arrival of the bungalows, the service facilities were attached to the houses, a trend inaugurated in the beginning of the 50's which includes a bathroom and a bedroom, according to Denise Lages Vieira da Silva.¹² However in multi-story buildings, they are attached to what we call service area, occupying, with the passage of time, a increasingly smaller space.

As to the furniture, we can observe that many items kept the traditional pattern of old residences without concern to smaller dimension of the new rooms and the innovative appeal brought by the updates on furniture design. A few other factors indicate the limits of habit changing, such as the fusion of two apartments to shelter a numerous family. Positive features are the child play and games performed within the building collective spaces. The same games that, previously, were played on the streets and backyards.

Going back to inside an apartment, the zoning that slightly delimited the division among social, intimate and service areas becomes well defined. As for the cladding patterns, places like the kitchen and the bathroom receive better quality updated materials providing improved hygiene conditions. Regarding materials and stylistic language *cobogós* (hollow bricks) were used along with round columns, chamfered volumes etc. The balcony, is one of the most usual elements in single-story houses, that was incorporated on apartment buildings.

As for the shy changings in volumetry of such buildings, it was probably due to lack of technology by the time they were built allied to a virtual absence of architects on the conception of the projects, mostly designed and executed by engineers and contractors. However, within modern standards, the *pilotis* (slender columns) are guaranteed, there is a geometric facade, an absence of ornaments and the vast application of materials valued by the modernizing principles already adapted in Brazil such as tiles.

And so, apartment buildings in Maceió grow facing one of the most outstanding seafront that of the country. Externally, the city changes. However the verticalization has not meant complete modernization considering that, despite the effort for updating the architectural standard, habits deeply rooted on local tradition have been changing in a much softer pace.

The adoption of high-rise buildings might really have demonstrated a local response to strong yearnings of modernity coming especially from great metropolis; however, Maceió largely kept itself as a traditional city deep inside.

Notwithstanding, this scenario will change after a while and the pioneer apartment buildings will stand out in the history of the city for actively participating on the construction of its identity icons that, together with an ever growing appreciation for the beach, have built the present Maceió: a city symbolically attached to a national image as the beautiful "water paradise".

¹² Denise Lages Vieira da Silva, "Do arquivo técnico aos álbuns de família: o morar no bairro do Farol na Maceió doa anos 1940 e 1950" (master's thesis, Federal University of Alagoas, 2017).

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