

SI6: Outdoor Spaces for Children: Playgrounds as Materiality, Urban Planning and Designed Space in a Historical Perspective

Alexandra Alegre

CERIS, ICIIST, Instituto Superior Técnico, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Title:

Care and Play in Lisbon's urban spaces: the creation of playgrounds during the Portuguese dictatorial regime (1933-1974)

Abstract:

The creation of Playgrounds by Fernanda Castro in 1937 intended to give an alternative to poor children that spent all day in the streets of Lisbon, while their mothers were working. Their purpose was the care of these children, providing comfort, meals and leisure activities (reading/playing/games). Subsequent to this mission, was the child's Christian doctrine moral formation (exempting them from street promiscuity), according to the dictatorship religious orientation.

During 40 years, Fernanda Castro was the leader of this mission. She was a remarkable woman, close to the dictatorial regime since she was married to the responsible for the regime's propaganda and cultural policy. Her influence amongst the political, social and cultural elite of the time allowed the contacts to move forward with this project financed by the state and private donations. The creation of the Playgrounds had its origin in the international connections established by Fernanda, which allowed the correlation with the "Square d'enfants" concept, developed in Paris in the 30s.

The Playgrounds were established in some of Lisbon's most attractive gardens and urban spaces. This strategic placement allowed both the proximity to children's houses, and the guarantee of a healthy environment (a major concern of the time), with hygienic and open-air spaces, contrasting with children's homes.

Starting from the interpretation of this case, the paper intends to discuss the historical significance of children's spaces as well as their current meaning, covering issues associated with urban/architectural concerns (new organization of public space for integrating playing zones, use of urban spaces by children, progressive removal of children's spaces from privileged urban locations, standardized/customized solutions), and with social/political circumstances (initiative of the elite women in the establishment of social children's care often replacing the role of the state, the broader educational and social purpose of playing activities).