City Space
Architecture

Largo da Peça in Benguela (Angola) and the Municipal Market in São Tomé (Sao Tomé and Principe).
The production of Public Spaces in Portuguese Colonial Cities

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Abstract
African cities face complex dilemmas and transformation processes, related to social, environmental, and political-economic dimensions, these affect the quality of life of their citizens. Public spaces are one important indicator of urban quality of life and an essential tool for spatial planning and land-use management. They are a symbol of collective power and the link between citizens and government, as here publicness is practised and experienced. This contribution aims to provide insights into how public spaces in Angola and Sao Tomé and Principe that have been neglected by the governments are still places of socialisation and interaction. The cities of Benguela and São Tomé share common historical paths; created during the Portuguese colonial time, they became the centre of their regions. We take a public space in each city to discuss the usability and from this to address the potential and development challenges. The two cases are the Largo da Peça (Angola), whose name was taken from a cannon placed here in 1846. The cannon is a reminder of the Portuguese defence against the attacks of the native people. The second case refers to the surroundings of the Municipal Market Hall in the city of São Tomé (Sao Tomé and Príncipe). The Market Hall is one of the first modernist projects in the art deco architectural style built in the small insular country. Backed by documentary research and field observations this study provides insights on the current use of public spaces and the challenges public space development face in post-colonial African cities. The analysis suggests that although the lack of an effective public policy for public space management and development, both spaces have become places of collective interaction.

Keywords: public space, socio-spatial practices, Angola, Sao Tomé and Principe; Largo da Peça, municipal market

1.   The Portuguese-speaking African countries

A city reflects different historical moments of societies, they are as Calvino (2015: IX–X) rightly points out "*a set of several things: memory, desires, signs of a language. Cities are places of exchange (…) they are exchanges of words, desires, memories*". This contribution intends to deliver a situational reflection on the public space development in two Portuguese-speaking countries by analysing a public space in the cities of Benguela (Angola) and São Tomé (Sao Tomé e Príncipe). These two African countries share a common historic path, both have been colonised since the sixtieth century B.C. by Portugal and became independent in 1975. The overseas expansion of Portugal in Africa resulted in five sovereign countries, Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Sao Tomé and Principe. As a result of the common colonial past, these countries share Portuguese as an official language, called in Portuguese *lusofonia* (lusophony), and are members of organizations such as the Group of Portuguese-speaking African Countries (PALOP) and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP[1]). The development in the Portuguese colonies is vastly different and resulted in different economic, political and socio-cultural development patterns, which must be taken into account in discussing the urbanisation process in these countries. The archipelago São Tomé e Príncipe, in the Gulf of Guinea, was uninhabited and first colonised by Portuguese seafarers, who arrived in 1470 and gradually settled. The islands were used as a centre for the slave trade to South America, this resulted in a population predominantly of African and *mestiço* descent (Aragão and Smaniotto, 2022a). In Angola, which has been inhabited since the Palaeolithic age, the Portuguese seafarers met in 1484 a densely populated area by different nomadic tribes and several large kingdoms. The land take in Angola and Sao Tomé e Principe initially began with coastal settlements and trading posts and remained for long periods limited to the coastal fringe, from where the slave trade where organised. Slaves were the major export and an important commodity for the African colonies (Britannica, s.d.). Slave labour was used in the coffee, cotton, and sugar plantations and processing, and later exported from Angola to the coffee and cocoa plantations in Sao Tomé and Principe and Brazil. Only in the nineteenth century, was the Angolan territory completely controlled by Portugal. This control requested investments in infrastructure and in upgrading urban settlements, whereas the coastal cities although more affected by the slave trade and loss of land to settlers, expanded and became the first administrative centres. After the independency in 1975, the two cities, São Tomé and Luanda became the two national capitals correspondingly, and Benguela (Angola) the regional capital of the province of the same name.

2.   The urban challenge – the public spaces in past colonial cities

The planning of urban development and architecture of public buildings for all overseas colonies were centralized and designed in Lisbon by the Colonial Urbanization Office (GUC, Gabinete de Urbanização Colonial), a department of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs. After the constitutional change in 1951, this office was renamed to Overseas Urbanisation Office (GUU, Gabinete de Urbanização do Ultramar), and again in 1957 to Directorate of Urbanisation and Housing Services (DSUH, Direcção de Serviços de

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[1] www.cplp.org

Urbanização e Habitação), under the also renamed Ministry of Overseas Territories (Milheiro, 2012). This Office is seen as a symbol of modernisation and homogenisation of the built landscape in the colonies, serving as a "*common organism for all colonies in Africa*" (Milheiro, 2012, p. 88).

The urban design and architecture of colonial cities was inspired by the aesthetics and conditions of the Portuguese cities and reflected their social and collective characteristics, public services and spaces (Rodrigues, 2019). The morphology and the functional, social and environmental characteristics of such a city were established in Lisbon without taking into account local or regional peculiarities and needs, and considered often only the "colonial" city sector, leaving the "native" sector developed without any co-ordination. Such a colonial rule affected the spatial structure and conditions under which the native population lived, as leaving much of urban expansion to unplanned and unregulated growth. This had implications for the citizen's daily life as much as for the countries' development, exacerbating the legacy of colonialism that spawned weak urban planning institutions (Pieterse and Parnell, 2014).

Urban growth, with functional and social differentiation of space, the expansion of suburbs, and expressive demographic development are challenges shared by the African countries. Medeiros (2006) states that the development process of Portuguese African cities has historical *landmarks* that date back to the 1950s and 1960s, and evidenced by the independence and building of new states, these had to find a place in a new global order. Understanding the reality of African cities calls for identifying the dichotomy of formal and informal cities (António, 2017; Fernandes and Nascimento, 2018), a coexistence modelled on exploitation and segregation practices (Medeiros, 2006). The African city, being rooted in particular by (micro)structures of land occupation, segregation, and by continuity or ruptures (the civil war in the Angolan case) requires "a more comprehensive, plural and flexible urbanism" (Viana, 2010, p.2). In the view of Jane Jacob, cities have "*innate abilities for understanding, communicating, contriving, and inventing what is required to combat their difficulties*". Such vital cities hold potentials and strengths, she calls them "seeds" for their own regeneration "*with energy enough to carry over for problems and needs outside themselves*" (Jacob, 1992, pp. 461-462). Public spaces can be one such seed, as they provide social, environmental and economic benefits for the whole society, contributing thus to human welfare and wellbeing (DTLR, 2002; URGE Project, 2004). Promoting quality public spaces is thus an important pillar of sustainable urban development. To fully provide such benefits, public spaces have to be responsive and meet the needs of the citizens. This in turn calls to gain knowledge on how people use spaces and what are their spatial needs. Identifying the socio-spatial practices is an essential step towards better tailored public policies.

Many of the problems faced by urban development in Benguela and São Tomé are of colonial nature, and can be used as a showcase of the long-term and multi-level processes, stressing a weak promotion of territorial cohesion, which also results in the lack of integration between the coast and the interior. Cities, and in particular capital cities, concentrate resources, and thanks to these they also become hubs of rural exodus exposing the daily struggle for social rights and spatial equity. The fight for survival and the right to the city is a driving factor in daily collective life (Fernandes and Nascimento, 2018).

The meaningful but disordered urban growth resulted, as Pinto, Remesar and Amado (2008, p.149) list, in:

a) Fragmentation of ecosystems and habitats,
b) Loss of identity and connectivity in the urban fabric,
c) Social exclusion and marginalisation,
d) Economic disparities and lack of economic diversity.

Therefore, the gap between the structural and social relationships, between design and local and regional situation, results in aggravating urban poverty and the levels of social exclusion, which shaped by fragmentation, informality and need for survival, is witnessed by the manifold and polymorphic urban mosaic of Benguela and São Tomé (Viana, 2010; Aragão 2014).

3.   Materials and methods

The paper uses an integrative case analysis and literature review to explore different aspects of public space uses and management in two different urban (and national) settings of local significance. The research is based on on-site field behaviour observations (URGE Project, 2004) and content analysis (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018), with the aim of assess and better understand the reproduction of spatial quality from the perspective of different types of users of public spaces. It takes the Largo da Peça in Benguela and the Municipal Market in São Tomé to identify the problems and challenges these spaces face and towards proposing improvements for their more effective and efficient management. The fieldwork, as part of the PHD Programme, was executed in July 2022 in both cities.

The usability of public spaces is explored by systematic site observations and mapping the behaviours of public spaces users, as these allow the collection of a broad set of qualitative data. The field observations were organised randomly in both spaces and included site visits, each of at least two hours and in different periods of days (morning, afternoon and evening, and both weekdays and weekends). In both cases, three locations in the spaces are defined for recording and scoring information collected. The two sets of data are recorded using a template developed by the URGE Project (2004) and widely used in similar research (Smaniotto et al., 2006, 2020, 2023). Occasionally, when users and researchers were able to interact, a short interview could be performed. Questions about the purpose and use frequency, and an opinion about the space qualities (what is good or bad) could be posed. This information was annotated as field notes and evaluated together with the mappings.

The research approach enables a simple empirical data collection and easy access to a broader population, potentially reflecting a more accurate user spectrum. The method relates the local features, facilities and equipment with the different activities that users perform in this space. This contribution also allows us to reflect on the methodological, analytical and political challenges that urban studies have to consider by analysing aspects related to urban theory, design and territorial cohesion that affect the production and dynamics of public open spaces in African cities. The public open space, with its social, collective and multifunctional character is of central importance for urban studies and is one of the main strands of research for urban planners (Smaniotto, 2019).

4. Largo da Peça in Benguela (Angola)

4.1 The context of Angola and the City of Benguela

Angola is a relatively young sovereign state (since 1975), accordingly is legislation that concerns territorial development and urban planning, as a violent civil war (1975-2002) followed the war for independence. The turbulent political history also provoked major migratory movements causing high urban growth rates and widespread poverty, since urban development was not able to keep pace with such movements. Angola is one of the most urbanised countries in sub-Saharan Africa and has high urban rates (63% of the total population lives in cities and 44% alone in Luanda, the national capital).

The Land and Town Planning Act (*Lei do Ordenamento do Território e do Urbanismo de Angola)* has been in force since 2004. It has been completed 2006 by the act *Regulamento Geral dos Planos Territoriais, Urbanísticos e Rurais*, which establishes the national planning system and the framework for division of powers between the central, provincial, municipal and local government bodies. Despite their wide scope, both make almost no reference to approach public space development. The government identified other development priorities, such as infrastructure and housing, that suffered from any effective planning response during the civil war (Viana, 2010).

The City of Benguela is the capital of the homonymous province, which is located on the central-west coast of Angola and occupies 3.19% of the national territory. The city has a population of 623,777, most female and between 25 and 64 years of age and is one of the oldest Angolan cities. It was founded in 1617 by Portuguese explorers, who had to face strong resistance from the native populations, in particular the "Mundombe". To afford a permanent settlement and further explore the south coast, a fortress was built in 1661, which became the core of the village. The village grew from a fortress to become the capital of the new Portuguese domain in the south of Angola.

Figure 1. Panoramic view of the Largo da Peça, with colonial houses in the background.
Photo by Isaac Santos (2022).

4.2 Largo da Peça

This square, located in central Benguela, is a part of the old fortress. Here a piece of artillery (cannon) was placed, which after the independence has been taken to a museum. The place as well as the neighbourhood however took the name Peça (piece).

The square is an important landmark, in a quarter with variegated architecture styles, with (rustic) brick and baroque houses (most newly renovated) side by side with newer contemporary buildings. It is a mainly residential neighbourhood with some commercial and retail activities, in the immediate vicinity only a bakery and small construction material suppliers could be mapped.

Figure 2 (top). View from the lawn towards the centre of the square.
Figre 3 (right). The cannon column in the middle of the square.
Photos by Isaac Santos (2022).

Figure 5. The game court and the kiosk/restaurant at the west end of the square.
Photo by Isaac Santos (2022).

Figure 6. The ongoing landscape maintenance, watering and mowing done by municipal workers.
Photo by Isaac Santos (2022).

The square is about 120m long and 56m wide and comprises a landscaped area with shrubs, lawn, large palm trees and radial pathways to the centre where the artillery piece was placed – today a column with a cannon. The pathways are covered with black

and white cobblestone; known as *calçada portuguesa* (Port. pavement); it is a traditional-style pavement largely used in Portugal for pedestrian areas. The square has also a multi-sports court and a kiosk/restaurant. Despite the quality that can be recognised in terms of the variety of vegetation, its maintenance is an issue that poses some challenges. Young people from the neighbourhood are significant users, especially on weekends the court is used by young men for playing football, while women use the green areas to sit and chat. This spectrum of users corresponds to widely discussed by Gehl (2011). The lighting is poor, which restricts the use and raises safety problems for users, and car traffic, especially when combined with low lighting and the absence of signs (on the pavement or vertically). This square due to its features, equipment and use patterns is a typical case of public open space in Angola.

Figure 6. View from the eastern end of the square, where equipment for small children's play is placed.
Photo by Isaac Santos (2022).

5. Municipal Market in São Tomé (Sao Tomé and Príncipe)

5.1 The context of the Republic of Sao Tomé and Príncipe and the City of São Tomé
The Democratic Republic of Sao Tomé and Principe consists of two main islands: São Tome, and Principe. The capital, São Tome, has 74 000 inhabitants but is part of an agglomeration of 135,000 - 68% of the country's population. The city was developed around the harbour in Ana-Chaves Bay, in the northern part of the island. The harbour became a major maritime hub in Portuguese Africa. In 1951, an Urban Development Plan brought important infrastructure for the city's development. It also foresaw the rehabilitation of the historic centre and the identification of new urban expansion zones. The urban growth shifted between large-scale residential quarters and single-family houses neighbourhoods, between low-density and monumental road axes, in a typical manner also used in Portugal during the so-called Estado-Novo (1933-1974) (António, 2017).
Sao Tomé and Príncipe became after five centuries of colonial domination independent in 1975. For the first time, an African identity could be established, and the principles of universality and the indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms be respected. The last 30 years have been marked in Sao Tomé and Principe by significant urbanisation levels, although in a disorganised and unstructured manner. The urbanisation level of over 80% (Africapolis, s.d.), one of the highest in Africa, puts pressure on the government to adopt more integrated policies and promote quality urban spaces. The country counts on a comprehensive planning framework. The most relevant is the National Spatial Planning Plan, which leads to the conceptual discussion around "collective spaces", "public spaces" and "spaces for collective use". The plan,

however, being of strategic nature does not provide guidance for formulating urban agendas; this is delegated in turn through the Territorial Planning Instruments Act to the district level, which shall define parameters for the development and use of public goods, including public spaces.

Figure 7 (left). The market hall and taxis waiting for passengers.
Figure 8 (right). A typical busy streetscape around the market surrounded by colonial houses.
Photos by Diderot Carvalho (2022).

5.2 The open spaces around the Mercado Municipal

The Municipal Market Hall and the open spaces around it were built in 1951 when a swamp was drained. This market hall was designed in Lisbon, as design sketches from 1946 displayed in the Historical Archives of São Tomé and Príncipe show (Milheiro, 2012, p.94). Market halls were built mainly for the supply of Europeans living in the colonies, but as places for trade, they also became a central landmark and a "traditional" place for socialising, contributing to the identity building of the community (Pintaudi, 2006). Due to the strategic location, the public spaces around the market hall are also used as the main transport hub in the city, with the traditional yellow cabs (*Maximbombos* and *candongueiros)* dominating the scenery [Fig. 7 and 10].

Figure 9 (left). Old warehouses in the harbour with advertisements to help protect and prevent COVID-19 disease
Figure 10 (right). The market hall and the waiting taxis are a recurring motif in São Tomé.
Photos by Diderot Carvalho (2022).

Once there are no publicly run transport modes in São Tomé, a vast network of taxis covers the entire island. These taxis are privately run and receive no subsidies. They rely entirely on passenger fares that vary by distance (Aragão, 2014). These features make the public spaces around the market hall an important gathering point, with bystanders, informal traders, buyers and sellers sharing the narrow street spaces - telling us interesting stories about the tussle between tradition and modernity.
The market hall and its surroundings serve thus as spots to gather, linger and mingle around a public building. The broad spectrum of uses reflects the country's population structure. The presence of shops, bars, and restaurants is here a major factor in creating spaces for interaction. This confirms the fact that social eating and drinking together has always been a community-building activity in the Portuguese society, which has been adopted in the colonies.

Figure 11. The crowd sharing with cars and street vendors the pedestrian areas around the market hall.
Photo by Diderot Carvalho (2022).

6.   Discussion
The Largo da Peça and the Market Hall are public spaces of social [inter]relationship in their communities, located in historic surroundings and close to very busy main exit roads. These amenities confer to the places an important permeability. Serdoura (2006)

argues that the permeability and size of the blocks represent greater accessibility, in both cases, the once colonial and regular layout has been absorbed by the irregular and organic features of African cities. Both cases share further common features – both are gathering places for their communities and thus important hubs for social interaction where people meet naturally. Although their design and equipment do not permit an interaction comfortably, and often because of the lack of opportunities and attractions in the neighbourhoods they are overused. From the field notes in both cases, the following shortcomings could be detected:

- Poor lighting provokes feelings of unsafety and consequently little use of spaces during   nighttime. The importance of public spaces at nighttime in contemporary cities and the potential conflicts are highlighted by Giordano et al. (2019).
- Poor facilities for people with reduced mobility, in particular elderly people
- Lack of urban furniture and amenities (benches and group sitting opportunities, contrary to the general recommendations to make public spaces more attractive (PPS, n.d.; Smaniotto et al. 2023)
- Lack of new facilities and equipment, which could turn these spaces into a more dynamic spot for economic activities and promote social inclusion, as advocated by different research, such as Schmidt & Németh, 2010; Giordano et al. 2019; Smaniotto et al., 2023.
- Lack of thermoregulation amenities and shelters and shaded areas, sparse use of greenery, as reported as part of sustainable solutions by different institutions, research, policies, etc., i.e. URGE Project (2004).

These shortcomings show how investment in public spaces for recreation and leisure is neglected, although both countries, Angola and Sao Tomé and Príncipe, have a comprehensive set of legislation to provide guidance for transforming the cities into more people-friendly environments. Indeed, the existence of legislation does not necessarily mean an automatic answer to the challenges that public space development demands. In Angola, for example, strategies for promoting and creating public spaces are proposed in the framework of territorial planning (República de Angola, 2006, 2007), which guides the government practices (and other interested parties). The same legislation also emphasises the citizen's right to participate in the production of the city. However, in Angola (and in Sao Tomé and Príncipe), public participation is still quite limited (Isaksen et al., 2007).

7.   Conclusion

Understanding and addressing the urbanisation phenomena in African cities forces us to look at poor data and weak statistical information if they exist at all. Such poor data diminishes the ability of countries also to make good policy decisions (Bédécarrats et al., 2016; Aragão & Smaniotto 2022a).
The multiple results of inertia and expansion in both Benguela and São Tomé created a complex mosaic of "empty" and "full" places at different scales, as if they are an adjustment to colonial patterns and irregularities, creating both formal and informal public spaces. Squares, markets and streets are the traditional types of public spaces in both cities, and as shown in the cases; these are important for the perception of the city and the urban life. The search for solutions requires also studying the forces that are

driving the development of urban infrastructure and thus the quality of life. Research is absolutely a prerequisite for this, as we need to know more about how public spaces are being used and the role they play for the local communities. Incipient studies are vital, in particular for countries with weak planning tools and urban management (Aragão and Smaniotto, 2022).

This study offers insights into two African cases, which although different in their morphology, features and uses, converge and illustrate the dichotomy of African cities. Both cases expose the relationships between the colonial and post-colonial, the formal and the informal city, and between regular and irregular patterns of urban growth, as acknowledged by Viana (2010). Such dichotomies and development bottlenecks are supposed to persist and are reinforced by inappropriate *reactions* by the government of both Angola and Sao Tomé and Principe. This calls for experimenting with community-based and government-fed informal planning actions, where the traditional ecological/local knowledge is acknowledged and finds an appropriate arena. Contemporary design and management, regardless of the city, do not invite users to new activities, which could increase interest in urban issues, as highlighted by (Smaniotto et al, 2023). The analysed places although popular among the citizens, translated by a high number of users, could be better valued if different aspects of the local communities were taken into consideration.

A more sustainable and community-based environment should reflect the multifunctionality (and vitality) of urban centres of African cities, as they provide the "space" for coexistence and interaction between people and their territory. The city, as a living organism, in which various actors and entities congregate, is the great challenge of contemporary society, and currently, we live in the duality between the call for more multifunctionality and the existence of monofunctional public spaces on the flip side.

The local governments in Benguela and São Tomé, as in any other cities must look at public spaces as an asset with crucial social, economic and cultural dimensions. Looking for these fragile structures is also a way to increase territorial cohesion - with different scales of action. The path for more inclusive and people-sensitive public spaces includes oriented and integrated urban planning as a tool to boost territorial development and competitiveness.

The analysis in both cases shows, how urban life in public spaces requires a careful reflection on social dynamics in emerging societies, which are still searching for their own identity. Public participation is therefore the key in defining and sharing objectives and strategies, in the development of measures and interventions at different scales of action. Meeting the challenges of modernity requires "acting locally, thinking globally", through a collective reflection where all actors have a space and place.

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