

# Cape Verde post-independence\*

## Plans and architecture

Sheila Walbe Ornstein\*\*

It is not possible to understand the South – South global regions without a complete reading of Cape Verde in the recent, (de)colonialist period.

The editor and geographer, Carlos Nunes Silva, provides us with a complete work on Cape Verde (CV), covering the various territorial and urban plans and the evolution of urban design and architecture over the period 1970 – 2020, from a historical perspective.

*Local Governance in Cape Verde* includes 11 chapters in addition to a detailed index, in a robust content, well-illustrated and substantiated with images, photos, graphs, tables and maps besides multidisciplinary approaches to this “archipelago country” in a period of 50 recent years in which took place the real process of independence and consolidation of the Republic.

Including the editor, there are 11 Portuguese-Cape Verdean authors who manage to provide the reader with a cohesive and balanced vision of CV and its complexities, without losing sight of its long Portuguese colonization and its impacts, for better or worse, in the process of accelerated urban growth, in architecture and in the process of democratic independence still under construction.

The book is the result of well-succeed partnerships between the University of Lisbon, the University of Cape Verde, several local government agencies and a group of academic authors, planners and designers with training in geography, history and architecture. All authors have solid experience in reading and analyzing data and field experience as well about the recent urbanization process in CV, made up of ten islands, nine of which are inhabited. The largest, the island of Santiago, is where the today capital, the city of Praia, is located, with more than fifty percent of the country’s population.

Nunes Silva, in the 1st chapter, demonstrates that CV achieved its independence in the *last quartile of the 20th century (1975), after five centuries of Portuguese colonization.*

\* *Local Governance in Cape Verde 1970 – 2020*, Editor Carlos Nunes Silva, ISBN 9783031058462, colour, illustrated, with drawings and photos, size 16 X 24 cm, Cham, Springer, Switzerland, 2022, 394p. Original version in English.

The author of this book review thanks CNPq for the productivity grant - process nº 304131/2020-2.

\*\* Sheila Walbe Ornstein is Architect and Urban Planner, Professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo - USP, ORCID <<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5684-921X>>.

In the same period, other former Portuguese colonies also achieved their independence, such as Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Mozambique and Angola, in a process of (de)colonization of Portugal, whose cultural heritage marks these countries till today.

The editor shows that CV has gone through two important moments since 1970: the 1st Republic, a very centralizing period in terms of political and administrative management, and a second Republic from the 1990s onwards, when a process of decentralization began (a still ongoing process) covering the 22 municipalities. In 2015, CV had only 525 thousand inhabitants and a total of 4,033 km<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, a small country, in physical terms, although strategically located along the West African coast.

In chapter 2, geographer Aquiles Almada explains the urban development of CV in the period 1970 – 2020, through its intense population growth and urbanization (until the 1st Republic, CV was a predominantly rural country), associated with the expansion of a tertiary economy sector, including public administration, the real estate and business in general, as occurred in several other developing countries.

The author exposes the consequences of the accelerated urban growth, the housing deficit and the significant demands in terms of basic sanitation, for example. At the same time, in this period, there was an expectation of reaching around 800 thousand inhabitants in 2050 (still to be confirmed), with poverty reduction and an economic focus on tourism and on financial sector. It is interesting to note that even with a series of precarious urban conditions, characterized by overpopulation in urban centers, epidemics and floods (conditions also typical of developing countries), in the study period, 1970 – 2020, it can be said that there was a predominance of a middle class at CV.

In chapter 3, Nunes Silva resumes the discussion on the local process of decentralization of political and management decisions in the country, since independence and analyzes the transition from the 1st Republic to the 2nd Republic. The author also compares the democratization and decentralization of the country associated with the multiplication of political parties with the situation in other African countries of Portuguese-speaking origin. Nunes Silva describes the local elections and highlights that the democratization process is still occurring with regard to the functional, organizational and financial autonomy of the different Cape Verdean municipalities. According to Nunes Silva, the development of municipal urban plans and the population's participation in these actions still need to be expanded.

In chapter 4, geographer Ivete Silva Ferreira, also a member of the CV government, points out the relevance of socio-economic indicators visualized in the spatial environment and urban, regional and national planning with a view to urban and territorial governance in the post-independence period.

In chapter 5, Alex J. B. Andrade and Carlos A.R. Varela, geographers, indicate the importance of the cadastral unification and property registration process for CV governance as a very positive action for public administration. Both enabled the collection of taxes on territories, the better organization of public financial services and land use, including environmental management (sustainability), through the checking of effective owners and other occupants.

In chapter 6, historian Lourenço Conceição Gomes specifically addresses the urban evolution of the city of Praia, the country's capital. It mentions the geographical and site importance of the city of Praia as a port for long ship journeys, as the old capital (colonial period) loses its relevance. Lourenço not only points out the strategic location of the city of Praia, but also describes its urban evolution since the 19th century when it changed from town to city. It also addresses the challenges and contradictions of this city, such as the rehabilitation of the seafront in the central area, at the same time as construction and a certain informal urban design are growing on the outskirts.

In chapter 7, architect Rafael J. Rocha Fernandes analyzes the urban-spatial planning of the city of Praia in the period under study, whether in its formal aspects and in its informal aspects, starting from the context of Portuguese colonial urbanism and its reflections on 1st and 2nd Republics. This author shows the origin of current urban planning led by professionals from the former Yugoslavia (former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), some partial studies carried out by Dutch planners and another, more recent and comprehensive, carried out in cooperation with French experts.

Additionally, it recalls the partnerships with the Portuguese government, in an effort to preserve the city's historic center, the construction of the main public buildings, the street grid system, the airport system and the basic sanitation and drainage networks. Fernandes also reports on the development of urban legislation and emphasizes the need - despite great advances in the period 1970 – 2020 - to expand technical training for urban and socio-economic planners to meet the current demands of professionals in this field.

In chapter 8, historian Lourenço Conceição Gomes highlights local and international efforts to preserve the urban and building heritage of Ribeira Grande de Santiago, from its colonial heritage in the 15th century, through the transition from a certain medieval urbanism to modern urbanism. In the first case, covering the traditional religious, military and economic daily life, especially until the 18th century, when the Marquis of Pombal ordered that the military government be moved to the city of Praia. The author also highlights the concept of "organic" urbanism, developed around religious, civil and justice-oriented buildings to meet social and economic demands and with building adaptation to the site topography. Since 2009, the historic center of the city of Praia has been protected by local and world heritage agencies (UNESCO).

In chapter 9, architect Ana Mafalda Rodrigues explains, in detail, the "Casa para Todos" [House for All] program. The author explores advances in the period of study, in housing policies to mitigate the housing deficit and presents the several international partnerships, especially with Portuguese technical-academic agencies. Ana Mafalda describes, in depth, the first social housing with autochthonous and vernacular characteristics built in CV.<sup>2</sup> It highlights the cooperation with the National Civil Engineering Laboratory (LNEC), Lisbon, Portugal in the 1980s and the most recent experiences in the field of social housing since the 2nd Republic (1990 – 2020) with Portuguese and UN – Habitat investments.

It is very pertinent to note the close approach of the House for All program with "Minha Casa Minha Vida" (Brazil) [My House, My Life] and the incorporation of the significant Portuguese experience when the European Union was created, towards the eradication in Portuguese territory of the so-called "barracas"<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Estela Rocha Ramos (2023). Por uma casa cabo-verdiana. Do abrigo ao lar. *Resenhas Online*, São Paulo, ano 22, n. 259.02, Vitruvius, jul. <<https://vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/resenhasonline/22.259/8855>>

<sup>3</sup> Rodrigues, A. M. F. T. de C., Walbe Ornstein, S., & Allegretti, G. (2022). Habitação social contemporânea na cidade da Praia Cabo Verde. : O "Casa para todos" sob a ótica da percepção e da satisfação dos moradores. *Oculum Ensaios*, 19. <<https://doi.org/10.24220/2318-0919v19e2022a4901>>.

**Figure 1:** House for All (from left to right): Praia 01, Praia 02, Praia 03, Santiago Island. Source: Ana Mafalda Rodrigues, 2017.

In this sense, the same architectural and urban quality is observed in the housing complexes designed and built in CV (with diverse apartments with 1 to 4 bedrooms, respecting family diversity and size). Examples of this type of implementation in Cape Verdean territory and its different typologies can be seen in some photos in this review.





**Figure 2:** House for All (from left to right): Tarrafal, Santa Cruz, Santiago Island. Source: Ana Mafalda Rodrigues, 2017.

In chapter 10, geographer Silvia Lopes Monteiro describes the problem of flooding in the city of Praia and the challenges of this issue for urban governance. Silvia points out the geomorphological, topographic and physical reasons for the City of Praia and why it is subject to these conditions. It also describes the technical challenges in terms of monitoring and mitigating the impacts of these problems on the city and the lives of its residents. In this sense, the author remembers the informal outskirts of the City of Praia as one of the reasons why flooding occurs with intensity.

In chapter 11, the last of the book and very integrated with the previous one, geographer Romualdo Barros Correia points out in detail the natural risks (floods) that impact the city of Praia and the relevance of spatial planning, territorial management and risks from diagnoses and environmental monitoring of local geomorphological and topographical conditions, knowledge of floodable areas, truly access to land and housing and meticulous work by local civil defense.

In summary, Local Governance in Cape Verde is an essential reading for those studying urban transformations in cities whose modernity was the result of recent and rapid processes in a short post-independence period. The CV small scale, despite the high urban population density, especially in the city of Praia, facilitates a comprehensive and, to a certain extent, a deep look at the positive aspects of the systemic use of urban planning instruments. Despite the country's numerous challenges in terms of quality of urban life.

The amount of data and efforts focused on urban planning, the challenges of preserving buildings and urban and historic centers and the significant public policies for social housing are impressive in CV and in this book. Especially chapters 10 and 11, but also several others, point to the need that goes beyond the limit of the study (2020) and refers CV to the future with regard to climate change, the UN 2030 Agenda and its sustainable development goals.

Local Governance in Cape Verde would deserve a 12th chapter, as conclusion, contemplating possible future scenarios for the sustainable urban growth of CV based on data and precious cross-information contained in the different chapters. After all, what would be the future of the archipelago and particularly the city of Santiago? The answers to this question are yet to be presented, perhaps in a future edition.

The present and future of CV depend and will continue to depend on good practices in terms of urban and regional planning, urban policies and architecture compatible with local topographic and climatic conditions, without forgetting the preservation of its historical urban and built heritage. CV, surely, follows this path, despite the numerous barriers still to be overcome.

**Recebido** [Mai. 17, 2024]

**Aprovado** [Jul. 30, 2024]