

Seaside architectures: from fortification to hotel

Portuguese interventions during the 1950s and the 1960s

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Abstract:

The existence of hotel facilities in forts, fortresses and castles in Portugal goes back to the 1940's. In the majority of cases the layouts of fortifications aren't obviously or directly adaptable to tourist lodgings. Four case studies of fortified Hotels or *Pousadas* of the 1950' and 1960's by the coastline were considered: Pousada da Berlenga, Pousada de Setúbal, Pousada de Palmela and Hotel Fortaleza do Guincho. In the same time period, landmarks of Modern Hotel Architecture were being built: the Ofir Hotel (1950), Algarve Hotel (1960), Estoril-Sol Hotel (1965) and Alvor-Praia Hotel (1967).

The similarity between these two groups lies in their precise placement on the coastline and the visual domain over the surrounding landscape. Nevertheless, modern hotels are spatial antithesis of fortified lodgings – they differ in morphology, in number of rooms, in distribution and in relationship with their surroundings. In one hand, the modern hotels show a longitudinal distribution and the typical bedroom floor plan of these coastal hotels has a single strip of bedrooms with a view over the sea; on the other hand, the fortified *Pousadas* have a polygonal, star shaped or in any case centralized layout looking inwards.

Although this type of architectural military facility might not have an obvious adaptability for luxury tourist lodgings, it is part of a legacy and has in fact housed socially prominent people over the times and increasingly attracts the public in general. Forts, fortresses and castles in Portugal are part of the collective imagery and this has proven to be a relevant factor on the success of this type of hotel.

Resumo:

Em Portugal, a fixação de instalações hoteleiras em fortes, fortalezas e castelos remonta à década de 1940. Na maior parte dos casos, a configuração dos edifícios pré-existentes não é facilmente adaptável a estrutura hoteleira. Este trabalho considera quatro exemplos de hotéis fortificados ou pousadas dos anos 1950 e 1960: Pousada da Berlenga, Pousada de Setúbal, Pousada de Palmela e Hotel Fortaleza do Guincho. No mesmo período, são construídos alguns marcos da arquitectura hoteleira moderna portuguesa – como o Hotel Ofir (1950), o Hotel Algarve (1960), o Hotel Estoril-Sol (1965) e o Hotel Alvor-Praia (1967).

A semelhança entre estes dois grupos reside na sua implantação junto à costa e no domínio visual que possuem sobre a paisagem próxima. Apesar disso, os hotéis modernos são a antítese espacial dos fortes e fortalezas, quer incluam ou não alojamentos – diferem na morfologia, no número de quartos, na distribuição e nas relações com a envolvente. Enquanto os hotéis modernos apresentam uma distribuição longitudinal e o andar-tipo de quartos destes hotéis costeiros possui uma ala apenas de quartos com vista franca para o mar, os fortes e fortalezas, pelo contrário, têm uma configuração poligonal ou estrelada e os seus alojamentos originais viram-se principalmente para dentro.

Ainda que eventualmente estes objectos de arquitectura militar não apresentem um desenho obviamente adaptável a instalações hoteleiras de luxo, a sua história conta com episódios de acolhimento de figuras proeminentes e são objecto de atracção para o público em geral. Fortes, fortalezas e castelos são parte do imaginário colectivo e este factor mostra-se relevante no sucesso da sua adaptação a instalações hoteleiras.

The Portuguese coast used to be a dangerous site, either threatened by invasions and surgical military attacks, or permanently frightened by pirate incursions. Notwithstanding, it was also highly valued by the commercial and cultural opening ensured by the maritime ports. Between defence and economy, the coast has always had an ambivalent statute in its relation with the exterior, the other, the foreigner. From mostly a border space, it slowly won a statute of support to an economy of production and exchange of goods. And in a crescendo, from the end of the nineteenth-century onwards, due to the upsurge of the beach as a place of summer promenade, it got a third vocation, hygienist and medical at first and increasingly of pleasure and leisure, afterwards. Along with the introduction of paid holidays and with the opening of the country to tourism, in the second *post-war* and mainly with the II Fomentation Plan (1959-64), the Portuguese coast presented itself as new scenery for investment and edification. By the time the first phase of private investment happened – hotels, casinos, pools and restaurants mostly targeting at a foreign and economically well-off class, the choice of sites where to implant those constructions was hardly conditioned by planning instruments. The first hotel entrepreneurs, in particular, built on strategic coastal sites and forced licenses and terrain availability to fulfil a self-defined patriotic function, said to develop the country's economy. These strategic sites had the best views and the most prominent geographical position in the sea-land division: these were the same sites which centuries before had motivated the construction of military forts. The increasing patrimonial degradation, extensive to the entire built heritage, resulting from the deprivation and the abandonment of defence functions, enhanced, in the particular case of military buildings, new opportunities for reconversion, open for touristic purposes. Below, we present a selection of case-studies in the region of Lisbon, pioneers in this reconversion process in the 50s and the 60s.

Built types and propensity for hotel use

The presence of hotels in forts, fortifications and castles is not recent: it dates back, at least, to António Ferro's campaign in SNI (National Information Secretariat), mainly to the second campaign promoted from the 50s onwards, in favour of the Historical Inns (Lobo, 2006:115). Its larger framework connects with a policy of the end of the 30s which valued the historic meaning of exceptional buildings, intending to make of them evocative objects of the national past (Tomé, 2002:243). The forms of the fortifications – curvilinear or angular, regular or irregular, simple or star polygons – do not show, in their majority, an evident propensity to be adapted to hotels. Naturally, this difficulty derives from the foundational purpose of these structures. Whereas the typologies of convents and palaces show a strong predisposition to hosting, since in their origin they allowed permanent or temporary lodging to monks and nobles, the military architectonic built structures, namely the fortified ones, rarely show this predisposition. While rooms and cells in palaces and convents frequently had an open relation with the involving landscape, in fortified structures, the openings to the exterior had to trespass the



Fig. 1 – Localization: Berlenga Fort (1), Setúbal Fort (2), Palmela's Castle (3) and High Battery of Guincho (4)

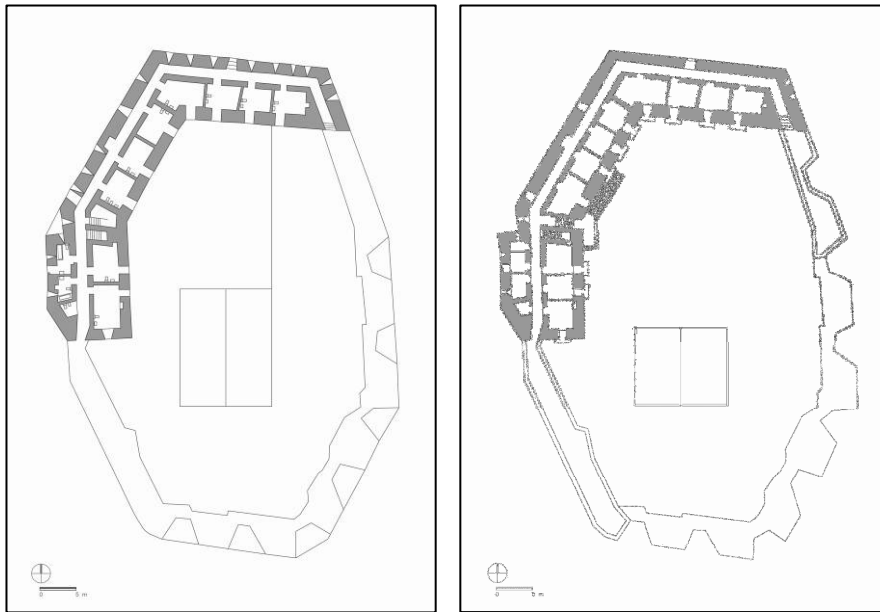
thick solid walls which limited these spaces. Whereas the spatial structure of palaces and convents corresponds, to a great extent, to the aggregation of several dwellings – cells and rooms, as well as social spaces of different dimensions – which extend in a repetitive and rather simple form, the spatial structure of forts and fortresses originates in a military geometry, fundamentally thought for defence and not for accommodation. In fact, while palaces and convents contain, above all, a strong lodging essence, the fortified sets have a defensive and representative one. However, a more thorough and accurate analysis of some examples of hotel architecture originated in fortified structures allows us to understand that some of these sets did welcome important political, military and also religious figures throughout the times and did also have a clear architectonic propensity to lodging. In some cases, these sets have given origin to a very special hotel architecture, whose singularity rises from the pre-existent morphological structure.

Case-studies

Up until now and according to data collected by the Portuguese Association of the Friends of Castles there have been identified 884 fortifications in the Portuguese territory. From these, we chose four which, being near the coast, have been adapted to hotels during the 50s and the 60s. Namely, the Berlenga Fort, the Setúbal Fort, Palmela's Castle and the High Battery of Guincho (**Fig. 1**).

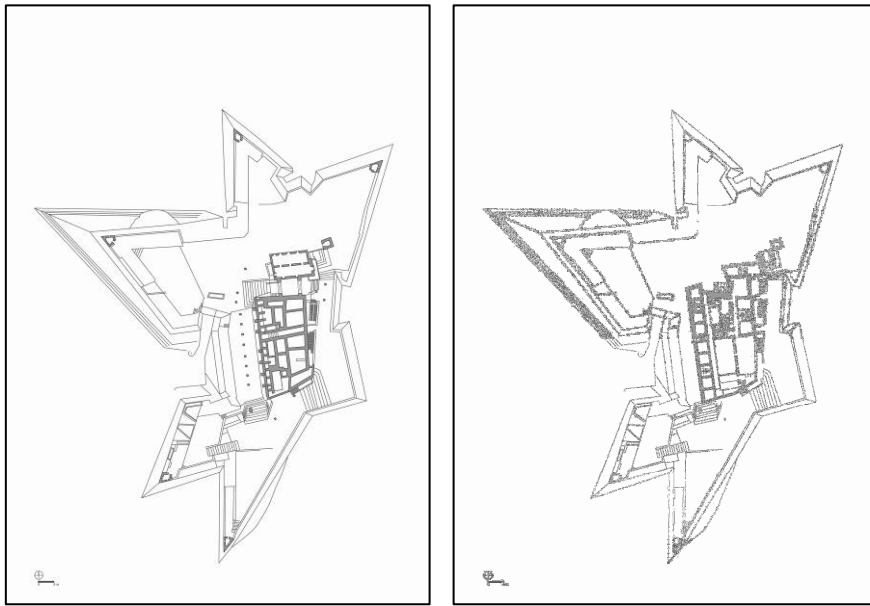
The São João Baptista Fort, also known as the Berlenga Fort, founded during the sixteenth-and-seventeenth centuries, was initially a convent fortified for St. Geronimo's eremites, and was recuperated during the Restoration period of 1640, as a military building. In 1676, it was reconstructed and given the feature which although a bit changed by three centuries of abandonment the Directorate General of National Buildings and Monuments found in the twentieth-century, (MOP, 1953: 6-13). Situated on a rocky islet near the Berlenga Grand Island – opposite the Peniche promontory –, it has an irregular octagonal plans. Next to the sides of the exterior oriented to land wall, we find the casemates and, in the central prismatic polygon, the storeroom (**Fig. 2**). In 1953, its adaptation to an Inn was concluded and it was expected to become “the most popular among the elite of the national and foreigner modern tourism – so strange and varied is the show nature offers to the eyes of those who ‘knowing how to see’ visit these unknown places for the first time” (MOP, 1953: 13). Its conversion was quite simple, done from the remains time had left. It started by the consolidation and reconstruction of the wall and proceeded to the removal of debris of the shelters and huts which the fishermen of Grand Berlenga abusively – with materials extracted from the fortress itself – had built throughout the times in the parade ground; it proceeded as well to the cleaning and waterproofing of water pipes – in order to avoid flooding and to allow the regular pumping of the cisterns. The adaptation to the new programme did not easily fit into the demands of comfort of the hotel architecture of the time, because the Inn was installed “[...] inside those walls – venerable, no doubt, but, like walls of a distant jail, hopelessly apart from the agitation and the ideas which ruled the times. The task, though easy, was not exempt from responsibilities – because the traditions of the building had to be carefully preserved from the enduring irreverence of contemporary ‘modernism’” (MOP, 1953: 20). From the primitive spatial structure only a few dividing walls have been removed and others have been incorporated, having the casemates structure itself been adapted for the rooms. The new location of the staircase allowed the circulation and

access to all spaces. The terrace after the regularization of its floor became a belvedere and a solarium, whereas the central patio, fully open and clean, became the entrance of the whole set (**Fig. 3**).



Figs. 2 and 3 – First floor plans of São João Baptista Fort, before and after its transformation into an Inn (1953)

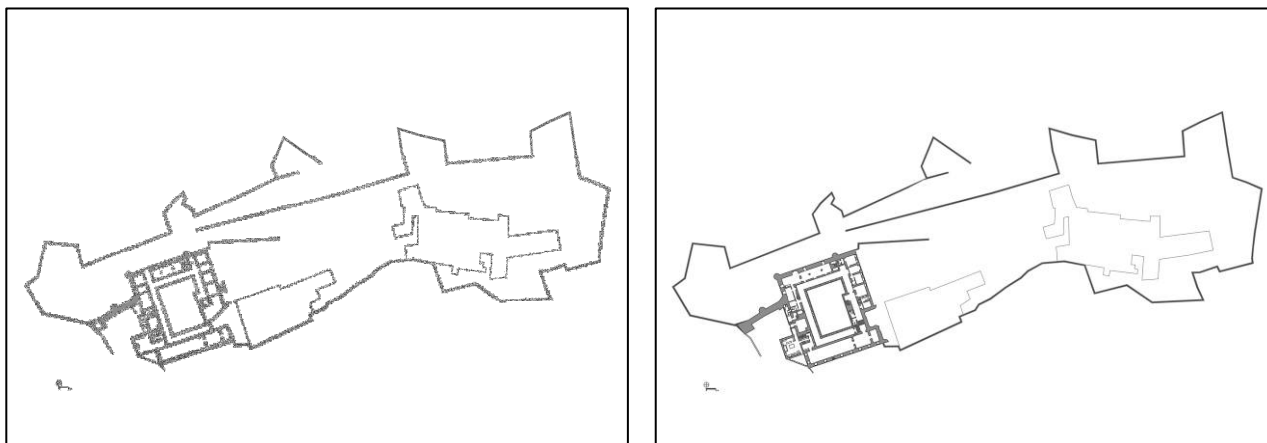
The São Filipe Fort in Setúbal – today also known as the São Filipe Castle – founded in the end of the sixteenth-century after an original design of Filippo Terzi and then of Leonardo Torriani, is located in a dominant position in relation to the landscape, with a star, irregular polygonal plan, with six ramparts and prismatic sentries, surrounded by a ditch and a counter-scarp. Inside, a first atrium led to a tunnel with a monumental gentle stepped ramp which, in turn, led to the casemates. At the end of the tunnel, there were two buildings – The House of Command and the Chapel (**Fig. 4**). From 1940 onwards, the Directorate General of National Buildings and Monuments intervened and restored the fort, and in 1965 a partially new edification was built to serve as Inn (**Fig. 5**). It has a modest dimension, with few rooms. It is constituted by the parallel duplication of a set of rooms, intertwined by yard spaces and ventilation, where we find the main staircase. The social spaces are on the ground and on the first floors. The limited free spaces together with access difficulties reduce the fort's hotel capacity – where the inadequate conditions for the handicapped and the lack of solution for food and luggage transportation are notorious. Its language is an anachronism – it presents itself as a construction of the 'soft Portuguese' style, one of the Estado Novo's preferred architectural expressions, in spite of having been built in the 60s – and it shows certain *rusticity* in its volume, in the architectonic details and even in the interior decoration and furniture. All afore said turn it into a family house rather than into institutional equipment. The Inn's singularity is only achieved by its access through the primitive tunnel and by its outstanding position with a unique view over Setúbal, the Sado estuary and the Peninsula of Tróia.



Figs. 4 and 5 - First floor plans of São Filipe Fort before and after its transformation into an Inn (1965)

Palmela's Castle has got inside the Santiago Convent and the Santiago and Santa Maria churches. The implantation of this set, in a singular relation of vast dominion over the landscape is, in Alexandre Herculano's words, "the key of the territory between Sado's and Tagus' hollow". Its strategic value – as part of the defensive triangle of Lisbon, southwards – and derived from the deep contrast between its altitude, 238 metres above the sea level in the Louro Mountain and the entire territory it dominates is a hallmark and acknowledges human fixation since the Roman period. For more than five centuries the set suffered systematic interventions of re-edification and amplification. From the original monastic edification, born according to D. João I wish, apparently nothing stands, as the reform undertaken in the seventeenth-century seems to have had destroyed it completely. After the extinction of the religious orders, in 1834, the monastery was abandoned and fell into a significant state of ruin (Freitas, 2004). In 1969, an important restoration was started by the Directorate General of the National Buildings and Monuments, which would allow its adaptation to an Inn (**Figs. 6 and 7**). An adaptation which fits into a context when all the buildings were wanted to be fully recuperated and, through accurate choice of furniture and decoration, past epochs revived (Lobo, 2006:115-116). The set has an irregular plan, oblong in the east-west direction; inside, the convent, together with the churches, stands as one of its regular and singular elements. It has a cloister, common spaces and multiplying cells along the galleries. In the context of this kind of fortification, it is, thus, the most adequate building to be turned into an Inn. The great effort undertaken in this transition is mainly connected with the recuperation of the ruined building. In the intervention of the end of the 60s the cloister was completed, allowing an open circulation around the whole building, and the galleries were glassed in order to obtain the greatest needed comfort in accordance to the statute of the new space. Small changes of spatial organization finish the adaptation. The old cells have become rooms, having all the needed amenities and the big common spaces have changed into common areas of support to the hosts' life and have been dedicated to activities as close as possible to the primitive ones, as lodging and feeding. Out of the case-studies presented, this is the one which more easily and naturally allows the adaptation to an Inn. In fact,

inside the irregularity of the fortification we find the orderly form and structure of the convent; without great alterations and without colliding with the pre-existing structure, the latter allows the right adaptation.

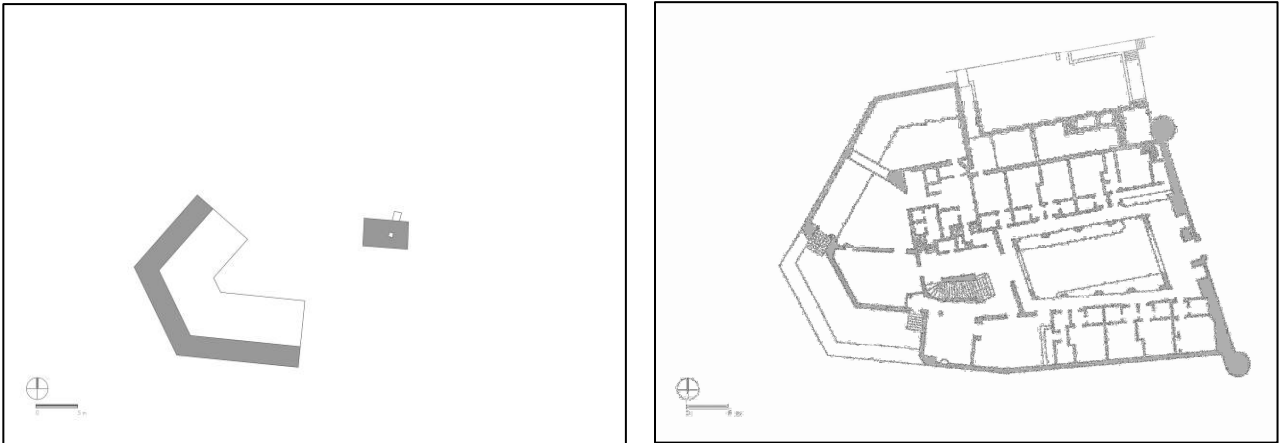


Figs. 6 and 7 – Ground floor plans of Palmela Convent, before and after its transformation into an Inn (1969)

The **High Battery of Guincho** built, like its twin, the Galé Battery, in 1762, was initially constituted by a three-sided wall to support artillery (**Fig. 8**). In the eighteenth-century, setback in relation to the railing there had been built an extension to lodge the garrison and a small storeroom. Later, the whole set might have been closed by the construction of edge walls. In 1889, its classification as military fortification was withdrawn and it was sold in public auction. Bought ten years later, together with Galé Battery, the High Battery remained abandoned until 1956, when it changed hands. This last acquisition was already part of an idea to build a hotel on what remained of the fortification. Built on the project of the architect Jorge Santos Costa, it was inaugurated in 1959, under the initial name of Estalagem do Guincho, and nowadays known as Hotel Fortaleza do Guincho (Callixto, 1980:53-67). When we compare the plans of its former existence with the project of the 1950s we find coincidence, of geometry and implantation, of the old wall with the western limit of the new building (**Figs. 8 and 9**). Beyond this incorporation, the whole historic density of the building is fictional. It shows all *antique* signs, gathering heterogeneous elements of diverse epochs and diverse building systems. It is organized around a closed patio, protected on the top by a movable acrylic glass. This reproduction of a cloister is emphasized by the connection of most of the rooms, keeping the front part for reception and meals room. We find in this building a willing wish for alleged authenticity –making use of medieval armours, cannons, etc. – which makes of it, in fact, an interesting case-study in the field of semiotic architecture. It stands as if it were a showcase of domesticated ancient traces, in which are included the thermo, visual, hygienic comforts, to which the hosts are accustomed; but, the short distance from Lisbon turns it into a very accessible place. Apparently authenticity exquisiteness is not a question, as it is perfectly replaced by the welcoming, warm and true value of the proposed appearance.

In 1977, the absurd and ridiculous classification of the “High Battery north of the Água Doce beach” as Public Interest Real Estate (Diário da República, 1977: 2391) corroborates the already referred confusion and mistake. What truly had remained of the High Battery was a railing partially transformed into a wall of the small terrace of the new hotel, since the rest of the wall had been absorbed by the foundations of the hotel. The referred classification ended up by being applied only to the twentieth-century building and not to the

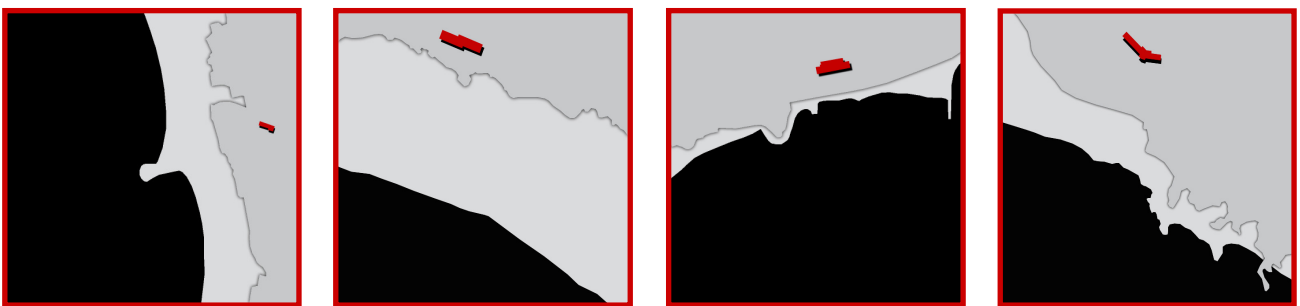
remnant railing underneath. Once again, the adopted stylistic confusions might have been connived with the speculation of a fortified past, highly extrapolating the humble battery which had founded the site as a military one.



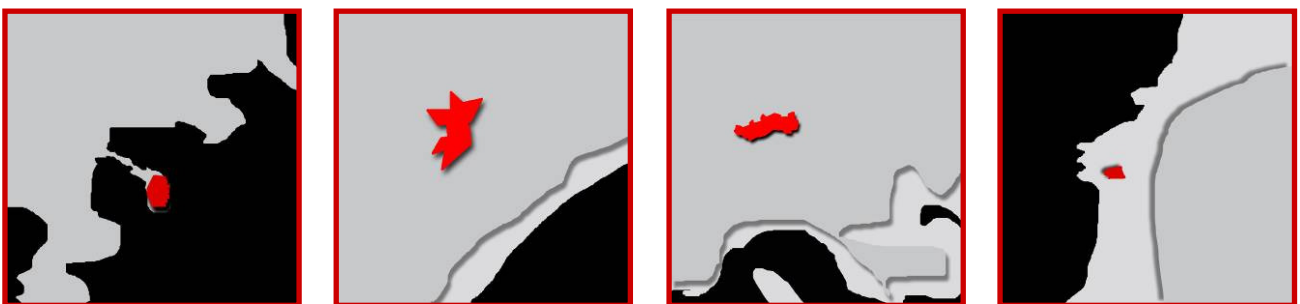
Figs. 8 and 9 – Ground floor plans of High Battery of Guincho, before and after the transformation into a hotel (1956)

Fortifications within the coeval context of hotel structures

The adaptation of some of these fortified structures to hotels and inns was simultaneous with the moment when several original true hotel structures started to appear as valuable examples of the modern hotel architecture in Portugal. Like Ritz Hotel, these meant not only a new understanding of the hotel architecture but they also complied with the new uses which contemporary life demanded both in terms of comfort parameters, and in terms of the new image of tourism (Matos, 2003). We are referring to a set of isolated parallelepiped hotels, namely the Ofir Hotel (1950), the Algarve Hotel (1960), the Estoril-Sol Hotel (1965) and the Alvor-Praia Hotel (1967). A panoramic vision over their implantations allows us to verify their proximity to the coast, as well (Fig. 10-13).



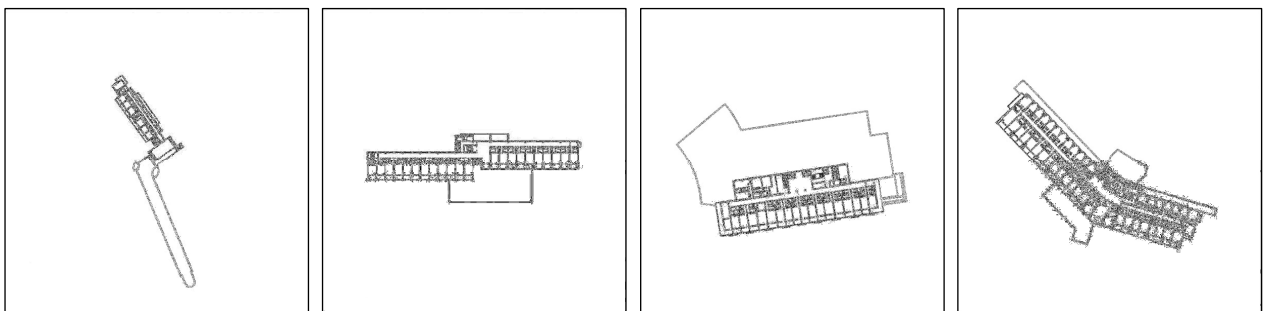
Figs. 10-13 – Implantation: Ofir Hotel, Algarve Hotel, Estoril-Sol Hotel and Alvor-Praia Hotel (Source: Matos, 2009)



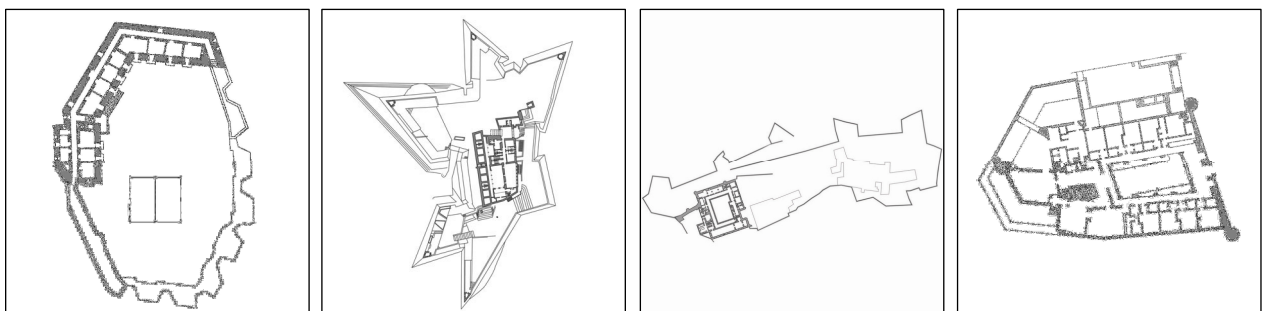
Figs. 14-17 –Implantation: Berlenga Fort, Setúbal Fort, Palmela's Castle and High Battery of Guincho

If we observe the previously mentioned implantations of the coastal fortifications, we will verify that they also show a proximity to the coast which reveals their touristic value. And when, as in Palmela, the buildings do not directly face down beaches or ports, they do have such an ample and effective relation with the territory that they have, indeed, a permanent and important relation with the sea (Figs. 14-17). But, if on the one hand, aim and particular relation with the sea constitute the similitude among coastal fortifications and modern hotels, on the other hand and from a morphological point of view, they are clearly distinct.

The modern hotels have developed with a clear and longitudinal volume, and their isolation in relation to the other buildings underlines the tendency to establish a parallel with the coast line (Figs. 18-21). All but Alvor-Praia Hotel floor-typology of these modern hotels has only one line of rooms facing the sea, therefore facing south. In modern hotels, the bathrooms are always near the corridor, in order to allow the whole frontline facing the sea to be tapped by glass wide opening into the balcony. The rooms' dimension might be even changed, throughout the times, so as to maximize the number of rooms with a sea view. Balconies are obligatory and they are big enough for one host or for a small family group to enjoy the view and the sun. Sometimes they are as big as the room, emphasizing the interest in that stay and allowing hosts to spend a significant part of their sojourn there (Matos et al, 2009). Though coeval with the modern hotels which started to pinpoint our coast, hotels on fortified structures, departing from distinct presuppositions and project attitudes of the 50s and 60s, are nowadays a different architectonic and hotel universe (Figs. 22-25). They differ in morphology – curvilinear or angular, regular or irregular, simple or star polygonal and non-linear –, in number of rooms – always less than the modern hotels –, in the distribution – generally from a central space and not from the corridor –, and in the relation with the environment – always contained and not open.



Figs. 18-21 – Main floor plan: Ofir Hotel, Algarve Hotel, Estoril-Sol Hotel, Alvor-Praia Hotel (Source: Matos, 2009)



Figs. 22-25 – Main floor plan: Berlenga Fort, Setúbal Fort, Palmela's Castle and Fortaleza do Guincho Hotel

Final Remarks

The use and the statute of the coast have radically changed during the twentieth-century. In Portugal it started by being a leisure space, enjoyable all year long, and the only holiday destination for the majority of the Portuguese during summer. Along with this mass occupation, the fruition of that same space has happened more recently due to national and foreigner wealthier classes who have been buying a second home and, in the earlier times of the touristic boom, due to hotel occupation. This occupation took place with the construction of hotels from anew, shown in the hotels of the international volumetric patterns of the Modern Movement of the 50s and the 60s, and, increasingly, with the reconversion of the pre-existing edifications. Of these stand out the fortifications due to the magnificent position they occupy on the coast brink. However, this coincidence in terms of geographical preference does not repeat between the morphology of the architectonic object of support and the optimized morphology of the typical hotel of the 50s and 60s. The difficulties either in the adaptation or in the enlargement of the defensive structures are clearly shown in the case-studies analysed. Moreover, besides the inconvenience caused by the given geometry (reduced dimension and difficult angles) and the given construction (resistance walls and scarps, thickness, and solid faceplate perimeters) we have the question of authenticity, considered to be basilar in patrimonial intervention according to the Nara Document (1994). In fact, the analysed buildings attempted at recreating 'folk' buildings or at building new 'genuine' spaces, always aiming at satisfying the client put before the alleged still living presence of a centenary legacy. As in many other spatial issues, where the logic of the thematic park rules, in the reconverted forts several 'thematic recreational' processes of great programmatic, semiotic and construction interest were rehearsed. The chosen examples showed the diversity of given situations and the different actions and point to the need of an assessment and to a vaster knowledge about these complex ventures.

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