This is an electronic reprint of the original article.
This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Lima, Fabio Jose Martins de; Rautsi, Jussi; Teräväinen, Helena Marja
Comparative approaches on urban planning

Published in:
JOURNAL OF ARCHITECTURE

DOI:
[10.1080/13602365.2021.1896567](https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2021.1896567)

Published: 01/01/2021

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Please cite the original version:
Lima, F. J. M. D., Rautsi, J., & Teräväinen, H. M. (2021). Comparative approaches on urban planning: Alvar Aalto's assistant from Italy — an interview with Vezio Nava. *JOURNAL OF ARCHITECTURE*, 26(2), 241-256.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2021.1896567>

This material is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of the repository collections is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or educational purposes in electronic or print form. You must obtain permission for any other use. Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone who is not an authorised user.

Comparative Approaches on Urban Planning: Alvar Aalto's

Assistant from Italy - Interview with Vezio Nava¹

Fabio Jose Martins de Lima

*Department of Project, History and Theories, Federal University of Juiz de Fora,
Juiz de Fora. Brazil*

fabio.lima@ufjf.edu.br

Fabio Jose Martins de Lima is an architect and professor at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Brazil. Since 1994 he has been working with research on the cities' history in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, based on UFJF with support of CAPES, CNPQ and FAPEMIG. <<http://lattes.cnpq.br/8637271768339853>> <<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8964-3421>> @biofabiol #urbanismomg <<https://www.facebook.com/biofabiol>>

Jussi Rautsi

Helsinki, Finland

ju.rautsi@gmail.com

MSc in sociology of urban planning in the Helsinki University, post-graduate studies in the Helsinki University of Technology (now Aalto University). He worked in Alvar Aalto's Studio 1968 – 1978 and in the Ministry of the Environment in 1982 – 2014. He has given lectures on Aalto's urban and regional planning e.g. in the Royal Institute of

---

¹ “This is an Author's Original Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in **The Journal of Architecture** available online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2021.1896567> ”.

Full acknowledgement must be included showing article title, author, full Journal title, copyright © The Journal of Architecture, reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd, <http://www.tandfonline.com> on behalf of The Journal of Architecture.”

British Architects and the University of Helsinki. Several articles on the social determinants of Aalto's works.

Helena Marja Teräväinen

Aalto University, School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Finland

helena.teravainen@aalto.fi

D.Sc.(Tech), Architect SAFA, researcher and teacher from 2006 at the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Finland. She has been working as city architect and regional planning architect before her doctoral dissertation in urban planning 2006 in Helsinki University of Technology: "Old Paukku Re-Built and Re-Spoken – Discursive Formation of Cultural Heritage in a Case Study". She is amongst other things a reviewer in several publications and conferences, and editor of "Architectural Research in Finland" and a member of the international editorial board in "Journal of Urban Research and Development". @harkkit.

Abstract

The interview with Vezio Nava was made in Helsinki on 24 June 2019. This interview is linked to a research on urban planning titled “Comparative Approaches on Urban Planning: Research and Learning on Public Spaces, Brazil and Finland” that involves the Aalto University (Finland) and the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (Brazil). The research work takes into account a continuity of previous studies with Helena Teräväinen (Aalto University) and includes a comparative analysis on cities in Brazil and Finland. From this interview, the Riola church's project in Italy and an overview on the urban proposals developed by Alvar Aalto were presented alongside the everyday life in the Aalto Studio. Vezio Nava was born in Rome, Italy, in 1936. He commenced his architectural studies in Rome but graduated from the Helsinki University of Technology in 1964. After moving to Finland in 1960 he worked in Alvar Aalto's Bureau for more than 20 years: when Aalto died in 1976 he continued with Elissa Aalto. He participated in several projects, with a leading role in the Riola Church project in Italy.

Keywords: Urban Planning, Architecture, Alvar Aalto, Vezio Nava, Finland

Introduction

Vezio Nava was born in Rome, Italy, in 1936. He started studying architecture in Rome but graduated from the Helsinki University of Technology in 1964: formerly the Polytechnic, now Aalto University. After moving to Finland in 1960 he worked in Alvar Aalto's Bureau for more than 20 years: when Aalto died in 1976, he continued with Elissa Aalto. He participated in several projects, with a leading role in the Riola Church project - Santa Maria Asunta di Riola.

Figure 1 . Vezio Nava at home in his library, in Helsinki. Photo: Fabio Lima.

In August 2019, Christine Candolin – an artist close to Nava – and me visited the small village of Riola de Vergato near Bologna, where the Catholic church Santa Maria Asunta de Riola was built. Arriving there by train sets up an itinerary with valleys, rivers, other villages, and forested areas. The view of the Riola church was partial but its dominance clearly expressed. The bell tower stood out with the higher horizontal glass windows framed by the forest. The church was built close to the Reno river with mountains in the background: this distinct landscape was certainly a source of inspiration for the project.

Figure 2 . the bell tower and the landscape in the background. Photo: Fabio Lima.

Candolin was overwhelmed by the church on approaching it:

it was so different from what I've seen before, the form of it so unique and unconventional, nothing like an ordinary sanctuary. The outer form is even a little confusing but having walked around it and inspected it from different perspectives, I suddenly understood; Aalto had really placed the building in this river valley of all valleys and let the outer forms of it echo the meandering rising landscape and soft forms of the hills surrounding the village. In contrast he had placed the parish centre houses higher; on the

other side of the church, on a descending slope, allowing them to resemble the more cubical small village houses which could be seen on the hillsides round the valley. Therefore, from the outside, the building feels quite down to earth, echoing the surrounding landscape also in colours, and then, while entering the building you are impressed by the simple but magnifique clean white interior that rises high. The church feels much bigger inside then seen from the outside! The curving shapes of the white bending columns and walls give an impression of heightened solemnity and peace. It is a great building. You feel at the same time at home and elevated. Every curve and angle in this space is meaningful and yet so natural. There is nothing faux here. I love this building.²

Figure 3 . external ambience with the bell tower in the church's square, the volumetric composition and the parish center on the left. Photo: Fabio Lima.

Interview with Vezio Nava

The interview with Nava was conducted on 24 June 2019 in Helsinki by Jussi Rautsi as part of a research project on urban planning titled 'Comparative Approaches on Urban Planning: Research and Learning on Public Spaces,

---

² A personal testimony made by Christine Candolin from the technical visit to Riola Church.

Figure 4 . referential books in the Vezio Nava's library. Photo: Fabio Lima.

Besides everyday life in the Studio – located at Tiilimäki 20, Helsinki, currently part of the Alvar Aalto Foundation – the goal of the interview was to understand methodologies at the Aalto Office focusing on questions of urban planning and architecture with a particular interest in the Riola Church.

Fabio Lima (FL): What were your motives to move from Italy to Finland, and how did you start to work at Alvar Aalto's Office?

Vezio Nava (VN): I met a Finnish student at the University of Rome. We became friends, and he told me about Finland in such a way that it seemed to be a dreamland. So when summer came, I had the chance to follow him to Turku in Finland. I remained there working in a Finnish architecture office. This changed my life. I also met my wife there and decided to move to Finland to continue my studies at the Helsinki Polytechnic. Then I had a chance to start to

---

³ The perspective of international cooperation involves the Aalto University (Finland) and the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (Brazil). The project takes into account a number of previous studies with Helena Teräväinen (Aalto University) that focus on urban planning thinking and practices in Brazilian and Finnish cities. This research is part of activities connected to the Urbanismo.mg research group, formed in 2005, at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora. The group developed scientific research under a historical point of view in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The work is linked to the Urbanismo.br research group in the context of a national network on urban planning and urbanism. The journeys related to these activities are available at <<http://www.ufjf.br/urbanismomg/>>

work with Aalto. I was very lucky.

Jussi Rautsi (JR): How did you hear about Alvar Aalto's Office?

VN: When studying in Rome, I saw a house in a journal. It was the Villa Mairea, and I was really impressed. I could not imagine that in 1961 I would meet Aalto himself. It all started when I met an Italian colleague in Helsinki, Federico Marconi, who was working for Aalto. I told him that I would like to work there. In the spring of 1961, Federico told me that I could come to Aalto's Bureau - as it was called - because of some possible works in Sicily. So, I had an appointment. When I arrived at the Bureau, Aalto met me at the entrance and said in Italian 'Ancora 20 minuti' [twenty minutes more]. Then he disappeared. I couldn't say more than 'Buongiorno'. Aalto spoke many languages. He was very interested in designing works in Italy, but for example the Sicily job never became a reality. This is one of the reasons why Riola is so important.

Helena Teräväinen (HT): Did you ever work in another architect's office in Finland, or only in Aalto's Bureau?

VN: Before [working at Aalto's office], I worked for a while in architect Aarne Ehojoki's office in Turku, where we also made big projects, such as the luxurious home of the contractor company Onninen. And then I made contact with architects Ström and Tuomisto, who had both been assisting Aalto and

later had their own office together, and they told me about the possible free place at Aalto's Bureau.

FL: So, you started to work on the Riola Church project...

VN: Not immediately, I started in the Bureau - as it was called - in 1961. The Riola Church project started in the spring of 1966.

FL: So, you worked as a student before concluding your studies. In which projects were you involved?

VN: I worked on several buildings of the Helsinki University of Technology Campus in 1962-1973, learning the way to work at Aalto's Bureau. I worked on row houses on the Western coast of Finland. I participated in the Finlandia Hall project during 1962-1971. I was assistant to the leading architect on the Academic Bookshop during 1961-1976. I was designing for example the big skylight windows.

HT: 'Assistant for the leading architect', do you mean Aalto himself or who?

VN: Paavo Mänttari was the leading architect there first, then he left for Ethiopia. And then there was Matti Porkka, who later became an orthodox priest.

HT: Could you please tell us about the working methods in the Bureau - and how did you learn to be an architect?

VN: Aalto himself worked intuitively... or not so systematically. He was often walking around in the studio and developing ideas with many sketches. He didn't make many versions or variations. A little comparison: there was a Swiss architect who worked with Heikki Sirén, a well-known Finnish architect. He told me about their methodology in participating in an Opera House competition. They made one entry variant every day and then chose the best one for the competition. This very systematic way was not the way of Aalto. He had a single major idea and then developed that one. Can I sketch something?

Figure 5 . schematic drawings made by Vezio Nava during the interview.

Photo: Fabio Lima.

Figure 6 . schematic drawings made by Vezio Nava during the interview.

Photo: Fabio Lima.

Figure 7 . schematic drawings made by Vezio Nava during the interview.

Photo: Fabio Lima.

FL: Of course, yes, you can draw here in the sketchbook...

VN: When Aalto started the work on the Riola Church project, the first sketch that he made was a section. And then I started to develop the entire plan of the Church according to that sketch while he was making more of them, developing the project further. Step by step he developed the sections as well as the size and shapes of the arches.

FL: How did you chose to use concrete for the arches and not wood, which at first glance appears to be into one's mind from the shape?

VN: All Aalto's architecture is related to nature. The idea to use concrete like he did in Riola came from the forms of wooden furniture. But this is so also in other buildings. Aalto was an inventor; he invented forms that function very well

technically. In the Atelier – a specific part of the Bureau – there was a big window in the elliptical wall. Inside he used soft insulation covered with

industrial cardboard fixed with wood so that the cardboard remained curved.

This is aesthetically a very interesting solution because there are small cardboard curves inside and big concrete curves outside in the space below the window. The entire Atelier had the appearance of a curved shape. So, the curve theme was multiplied in many sizes, in macro and micro scale, if one can say so.

FL: The use of concrete in the Riola Church was very innovative.

VN: Aalto invented forms according to materials, in other words forms are not fantasies or pure aesthetics. They were really used as technical solutions. In the Atelier, as mentioned, he had this cardboard solution. In the National Pensions Institute, built 1952-1956, he covered the concrete with brick and copper. All his architecture was full of technical innovation.

Figure 8 . model of the Riola Church in the Alvar Aalto Foundation with the architectural composition. Photo: Fabio Lima.

FL: Aalto used brick, concrete, metal, and also a brave mix of materials. How did he choose the materials, and how did he define the structural system in each project? Of course everything depends on climate, local conditions, the building site, etc. but how else?

VN: Of course you have to be very sensitive to be able to do it. The use of wood was never an option for the main structure. It was used in furniture, inside walls and certain interiors.

FL: For example, in the Otaniemi campus Aalto used bricks, concrete and also wood...

VN: Yes, he used them all there. Using wood in the sports hall was probably a technical choice because concrete would have been too heavy. He had to choose between metal or wood. He preferred wood. In the use of concrete, Aalto was not a pure 'structuralist' in the architectural sense; he used concrete in a non-systematic way. His intent was to serve the architectural solution.

FL: Please, let's continue about connections with the Bauhaus ideology or philosophy. Aalto followed some of its principles after participating in two meetings in the Congrs International d'Architecture Moderne - CIAM, in Frankfurt in 1929 and in Athens in 1933 (during the cruise from Marseille to

Athens). Immediately after that he began to write about the need for a human scale to adapt better architecture as well as urban planning. This was so different from proto-functionalism in Bauhaus thought.

VN: Aalto learned the benefits of 'living and warm' – as he said – materials...

HT: There is anyway something very similar in the material thinking in Bauhaus and in Aalto's architecture: even though the Bauhaus School was using steel and Aalto more wood, both were very honest in using the different materials. Of course, I believe if Aalto wrote about choosing wood because it was warmer, but also in Finland at the time wood was more available than in Germany where the steel industry was already very strong. And what I remember about the Bauhaus: the reason for using steel was more about withdrawing from the rustic ornamental style in furniture...

JR: When he saw that steel dominated in Bauhaus furniture, he took his own path. He understood that a wider palette of materials was needed in Modern architecture. He was very pragmatic. Houses look very different, but somehow you can identify an Aalto house anywhere because there is life. He started using 'human materials', as he said, like wood and rough brick. However, he connected all building materials innovatively and bravely.

JR: One should remember that Aalto came from the region of Ostrobothnia, from the middle of Finland where the tradition of using wood is long and alive -

he was a citizen of a wood country. You can see this, for example, in his Riihitie home with comfortable rooms and open fire places and an interior balcony used by the architects during very cold winter days. All his buildings, especially his own, are pretty low budget ones. Steven Groak, one of the best understanders of Aalto, said that he was a master in changing cheap materials into gold.

FL: He even had special bricks done for his projects?

JR: When the Baker House, in the United States of America, was built in the end of the 1940s, Aalto spent a lot of time finding a brick maker that produced irregular bricks. They found a very small company in Canada.

VN: Yes, he used traditional materials because people are used to them - like he said. These belong in the history of building: marble, bricks, wood, brass and so on. People feel comfortable with these materials. I spoke with an artist, Christine Candolin, about this. She said that there is an ongoing interconnection between matter and mind. This has a profound psychological influence on human culture and on architecture as an essential part of it. Aalto used wood instead of Bauhaus style steel tubes. Aalto found cold metal uncomfortable.

Wood was natural, with a great sense of nature. Like human beings.

FL: About the Piazza in the project of the Riola Church, how did the process go with Alvar Aalto? And can you tell us about the local context with the river?

VN: I put some walls at the riverside but Aalto did not make any comments.

Probably he knew that they would never be built. I can tell you an example of Aalto's method. In the choir space of the church, where they sing, there is a wall limiting the area. I had to decide how to finish it. A colleague in the office suggested a round form, so I did it. Aalto came and saw my proposal. He said, 'under no circumstances like that'. And then he went away. Well, we finally found a good solution.

FL: And in such situations, he drew some sketches?

VN: Well, to give an example, in the ceiling window prisms in the Academic Bookstore, he came to my table and gave me a sketch with two sections of the window. It was the solution.

FL: And about the work process in the office? Was it easy to talk with the Professor and also with Elissa Aalto?

VN: Usually yes, but not always. Often, we discussed with Elissa Aalto and she then talked with him like in the case of the Riola Church. In the beginning the parish centre was close to the church, and I thought it would be better to detach it from the church and create an outside corridor that also leads to the priest's house. Aalto was not in the office, so I told the problem to Elissa Aalto. The next day he came to my table and suggested the same solution. Maybe he had spoken with Elissa Aalto.

FL: Certainly, Elissa Aalto helped you...

JR: My experience was that the Professor didn't intervene too much if things were rolling well. You have to remember that he had a very small office and a lot of work at the time of Riola, big projects such as the Academic Bookstore and the Finlandia House. Even a big office today would have to push hard to do all this. Aalto's office performed incredibly well because he trusted his own people.

FL: And you mentioned Sergio Teperman from Brazil and others in the office. The office was small but designed hundreds of projects in Finland and elsewhere.

VN: When I came to the Bureau, there were about fifteen or sixteen architects. But in two years it doubled because of new projects and work caused by for example the invitation to hold a big exhibition in Palazzo Strozzi in Florence in 1965. That was a big effort because it covered Aalto's entire career.

JR: My sister Mariikka Rimaaja, an architecture student at that time, was making the Palazzo Strozzi exhibition. There could be six students working in the garage - or the model room as it was called. I started there immediately after my student exam, at nineteen. We students made models of everything, each building: sections, details - you name it. Models were used like computer images today. They were a natural part of the design project. When there was a

lot of work, there were a lot of people, when there was less work there were fewer people. But the point is that if you look at the Aalto list of projects there are hundreds of buildings: big ones, small ones, factories, urban and regional plans, hospitals, furniture. Aalto could make an entire housing area using only his own products, even lamps and furniture. That's the difference between him and other great architects.

VN: He made an incredible amount of work with a small office. Now it's different. Foster has two hundred people, as does Renzo Piano.

JR: Everything was done with pencil. No Computers. There was one small mechanical calculator. Of course, Aalto had his trusted construction engineers. Aalto's expert network covered very many people from different professions. This is one of the reasons why he was so successful.

FL: When you were working with Alvar Aalto himself present in the Bureau, how did the process of discussing and developing ideas go?

VN: He was well dressed in a double breasted suit with a vest⁴, having 6B Koh-I-Noor pencils in the pocket. He made corrections if needed and continued to the next table.

---

⁴ The sense of vest here is similar in the UK as an undergarment worn under the shirt for warmth like 'waistcoat' in American English.

HT: This note about 6B is very nice - and reminds me how other leading architects in their bureaus and teachers at architecture schools were experiencing the same method - and sometimes it was very irritating: your whole drawing could be ruined with that!

JR: If you have several big projects at the same time you have to work like that. You can compare it with Balzac who wrote eight or so novels at the same time with a large gallery of people. Balzac was walking from writer to writer telling them how the story goes and how events and people are interlinked. Aalto had the same system in architecture when working on several buildings.

FL: Let's return to Riola, can we? Can you tell us about the role of Mario Tamburini and about the prefabricated elements to the Riola Church?

VN: Mr. Tamburini chose to make the church from prefabricated elements because it was easier and could get a better result. He did not interfere in the architecture of the church in any way.

Figure 09 . interior view from the entrance hall, the nave, the pulpit and on the right, the choir. Photo: Fabio Lima.

FL: The production of the prefabricated elements was very advanced and progressive at that time?

VN: The tolerance of the elements was incredibly small for concrete, maybe a millimeter. Slightly different dimensions had to be made with the same basic

form in order to produce a perfect conic space. So, the precision of the prefabricated elements was like in a metal structure. They could also be made in the time slots of less work at the factory and thus save money.

FL: The bell tower of the church was built later. Can you tell us about the project and also about its construction?

VN: Aalto died in 1976 and the church was finished in 1978. Elissa Aalto was leading the office and secured the continuity of the project. I did all the drawings.

Figure 10 . model with the structural system in concrete with arcs in the Alvar Aalto Foundation. Photo: Fabio Lima.

FL: Did you have references or examples of other church projects, such as the ones by Le Corbusier, Oscar Niemeyer and others?

VN: There were none.

FL: I studied some examples, like in the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte the church of São Francisco made by Oscar Niemeyer. It had been closed for a long time because the archbishop didn't like it. Had you been familiar with Modern architecture in Brazil? And also had you heard about the new capital Brasilia made by Lucio Costa?

VN: I had heard about Lucio Costa. I was very interested in what was built there.

FL: Had you been participating in other projects in Italy? And had you visited Finland's Pavilion in Venice by Aalto?

VN: Of course I knew the Biennale pavilion very well. And about references I have to say that in Aalto's office nobody taught you anything. When you walked to work there, you had to look and find out yourself. You had to study the architecture that Aalto had made before. He never mentioned anybody else whose work he would have studied.

JR: He had books about Eliel Saarinen and by Nils Erik Wickberg and some others but these may have been gifts. And many of and by Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright signed one of his books with very warm greetings. I think it is very

strange to say that Alvar Aalto saw this-and-that somewhere and used the idea.

Researchers don't usually understand that it was normal practice to have a plan of a Japanese house in Aalto's archive. It doesn't mean that Aalto made it. He

studied a Japanese house like he did everything interesting, like the EUR district in Rome on which he had a report made. Some researchers write that Aalto got everything from Italy. He did the Venice Pavilion and Riola Church. Of course he enjoyed being in Italy. Elissa Aalto told me that Aalto was just sitting in the Piazza San Marco drinking wine when she was buying shoes. Of course he was seeing all the time, just as you do here in Helsinki. Researchers are

looking for references and mysteries like who copied whom. That's ridiculous with a spatial genius like Aalto.

HT: I have to say something about these influences – if an architect sees something, I mean if he really is looking at and also experiencing somewhere, he (or she) of course will be influenced – but it doesn't mean copying ... and when researchers try to follow who influenced whom and what – it is more or less about timing and finding out about the travels and excursions. When I first visited Villa Mairea over 20 years ago, I tried heavily to find out if Aalto was ever in Japan, so Japanese was the house was in my eyes (not so much Finnish and vernacular). And many years later I heard that Aalto had very close relationships with the Japanese Embassy in Stockholm - and only Japanese books, no visit to Japan ever.

VN: I never heard Aalto speaking about architects. Of course in the office we saw many architects as guests, such as Louis Kahn, Richard Neutra etc. But the only person of whom he spoke was Frank Lloyd Wright. Once Elissa Aalto told me that when they were in New York, Frank Lloyd Wright called Aalto to invite them to dinner. She said: 'I never saw my husband dress up so fast.'

JR: Aalto wrote the obituary of Frank Lloyd Wright. It is very short. He said that Frank Lloyd Wright was his role model in the tough battle for good architecture. Of course, he respected a lot of people working on construction sites, engineers, architects, as well as others professionals. I consider the Professor a

very pragmatic professional with an enormous lifelong career. He felt his social responsibility very strongly and had a high professional moral.

FL: And he worked on different scales...

JR: What scales? Maybe you mean levels of a spatial conception? He made big regional plans, some of the first in the world. He started environmental impact assessment in Finland. Being the son of a surveyor, he was well situated in the territory. Topography was one of his guidelines in all his work. He aimed at saving and protecting the soil and land in general.

FL: To finish this interview I asked you, Architect Vezio Nava, to say some words to my colleagues and also to my students at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism.

VN: I'm not a professor...

FL: I consider you to be more than a professor with all your experience. You are an important professional linked directly to the work of Alvar Aalto.

VN: What I can just say is that the most important thing for architects is to work with their hands; hands are essential. This was what Aalto was doing, working with his hands. He made prototypes to improve everything in the man-made environment. When he and Mr. Korhonen, the manufacturer of Aalto's furniture, got the prototype of the Aalto stool ready, they threw it around the room. It didn't break.

JR: This was the Aalto stool with three legs. He knew the wood industry very well. He knew the wood technology of aeroplanes in the Second World War. He knew that wood could be used for everything. It is light and flexible, very strong.

VN: This is the way to work when you make real the things that you imagine.

Aalto's architecture is experimental. This is very important. It's all about experimentation.

FL: The word 'experimental' is essential in the work of Alvar Aalto: the experimental house, the experimental town, experimentation on structures and so on.

JR: In his last effort as urban planner in the 1960s, in the Stensvik Plan West of Helsinki, he pushed experimentation between man-made construction and nature to the extreme. He located housing, services and traffic networks for 40,000 people on the slopes and left the bottom of the valleys free for recreation. The destiny of this plan was a tragedy for Aalto: they sent a rather young architect to tell that the plan was impossible.

VN: Even in his summer house on the island of Muuratsalo, experimentation made it possible to get financing for different solutions such as the use of different types of bricks; in Finland you can get financing for research and development. In his office in Munkkiniemi, the amphitheatre is also experimental for a space meant for lectures. It became a beautiful garden.

FL: Was the amphitheatre used for lectures?

JR: Yes. The Aalto Academy, part of the Alvar Aalto Foundation, uses it. But Alvar Aalto really didn't care so much about money. Considering construction costs, his architecture is not expensive at all. Experimental materials and solutions can cause problems for restoration. Another thing is that he could have stayed in the United States as a professor in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and become wealthy. He and Aino Aalto returned to Finland in the middle of the Second World War. This was very patriotic.

FL: What would be your message for young students, to the next generations of architects?

VN: When starting projects, don't get lost in forms and shapes of things in the beginning. They will come later.

JR: Aalto's office was important to my career in the Ministry of the Environment because it taught me to be open for ideas and change: all that is too rigid and closed will break. Aalto's working process was open for change until the very end.

VN: A good example is that Aalto just moved the entire Riola Church because the original building site blocked the river view of the pharmacy store owner. I designed a piazza in the original now open space. One basic characteristic of Aalto is that he was very flexible. If something was not good in the project, he

said 'let's change it, let's put something funny inside the house or in the façade'.

Maybe it comes from Japanese architecture that small imperfection is better than pursuit of total perfection. This is the elementary lesson of Alvar Aalto.

FL: Finally, I have to say that we are so thankful for these talks. Grazie Mille Sgr. Architetto Vezio Nava. And also to you, Counsellor Jussi Rautsi, and architect Helena Teräväinen for assisting in this interview.

Conclusions

The interview reveals a particular experience at the Aalto's Office in the same way that other researchers, such as Harry Charrington, have previously tried to explain everyday life in the Atelier.⁵ These conversations with Vezio Nava and Jussi Rautsi considering their experiences in the office with the maestro provides distinct knowledge about everyday life in the Studio Aalto. In accordance with Vezio Nava talking about Alvar Aalto's approach, he wrote that 'when Aalto began a project he did not try to find the idea of the project by developing and comparing alternative schemes. He once said that the world is full of ideas and you don't always need to look for new ones; you may develop existing ones. The "professor" in fact often created his architectural visions inspired by the models of history; the classical amphitheatre, the Italian piazza, the medieval town. [...] But it is difficult to define his method of work: the project

---

⁵ Harry Charrington and Vezio Nava, *Alvar Aalto: The Mark of the Hand*, (Rakennustieto Publishing: Helsinki).

could be born from his sketch on paper, or even from a few words explained to his collaborator.’⁶ Some aspects of this process work were revisited here in this interview. As such, this contribution considers the chapters of this history linked to urban planning and architectural thinking and practice that remain open.

The visit to Riola Church showed us an architectural reference as a case study of an urban project and the interview allowed to deepen details about this project, in addition to allowing understanding about other references of the Aalto Studio. In this sense, with the words of Vezio Nava, Aalto “always had a practical approach to problems; he worked with his hands, sometimes leaving a mark on the drawing with his fingernail to indicate the changing of a line. He did not worry if those mistakes are human, and need to be faced as a challenge to solve the problem for our own benefit.”⁷

Finally, the references of the Aalto Studio in this interview reveal principles of urban planning and architecture in different levels, singularity and human scale. At the same time, the public spaces composed with a sense of continuity and transparency integrated with nature are present. Adding to this the relevance to the direct connection between public spaces and water. Certainly, much more can be said of what we do in other opportunities.

---

⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

Acknowledgements:

Acknowledgements to Alvar Aalto Foundation, Aalto University, CAPES, CNPq and FAPEMIG.

References:

ARAUJO, Miguel B. de. The Work of the Studio Aalto Collaborators: Practice, Craft and Theory. Tampere: School of Architecture, Tampere University of Technology, 2018.

CHARRINGTON, Harry & NAVA, Vezio. Alvar Aalto: The Mark of the Hand. Helsinki: Rakennustieto Publishing, 2011.

LIMA, Fabio J. M. de. Por uma cidade moderna: Ideários de urbanismo em jogo no concurso para Monlevade e nos projetos destacados da trajetória dos técnicos concorrentes (1931-1943). São Paulo: 2003, Tese de Doutorado – FAUUSP.

_____. Reports From Helsinki : COMPARATIVE APPROACHES ON URBAN PLANNING: Research and Learning on Public Spaces, BRAZIL and FINLAND. Helsinki: Urbanismo.mg/UFJF, 2019.

_____. Thinking and Practices on Urban Planning in Minas Gerais State, Brazil: A Necessary Review. In: International Conference on Future of Urban Public Spaces (first:2018:Tehran)/ Proceedings of the First International Conference on Future of Urban Public Spaces (FUPS2018)[Book]/Mohammadreza Pourjafar, Ehsan Ranjbar. Teheran: 2018, p. 479-492. ISBN 978-600-7589-94-6. <<http://www.fups2018.com/en/?id=83&p=0>>

_____. O pensamento e as práticas do Urbanismo em Minas Gerais. In: LEME, Maria Cristina da Silva. (org.) Urbanismo e Política no Brasil dos anos 1960. São Paulo: Annablume, 2019, p. 359-395.

RAUTSI, Jussi. The Alternative Plans: Alvar Aalto's Urban Plans, 1940-1970. HABITAT INTL. Vol. 12, n. 1, pp. 5-21, 1988.

RAUTSI, Jussi et al. Alvar Aalto connecting Northern Potentials, The Lapland Plan. Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation.

RAUTSI, Jussi et al. Alvar Aalto Healing a War Split Region, The Imatra Plan. Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation.

RAUTSI, Jussi & ELLILÄ, S. Planning Urban and Rural Areas in Finland. Helsinki: Government Printing Centre, 1983.

TERÄVÄINEN, Helena. Lapuan Vanha Paukku – uudeksi rakennettu ja puhuttu : Kulttuuriympäristön diskursiivinen muodostuminen tapaustutkimuksessa. Helsinki/Espoo: Helsinki University of Technology, 2006.

_____. "Old Paukku Re-Built and Re-Spoken, Discursive Formation of Cultural Heritage". Artikkele julkaistu 2010 OPEN HOUSE Journalissa.

Konferenssiesitelmän (IAPS Istanbul) pohjalta kirjoitettu vertaisarvioitu artikkeli, perustui väitöskirja-aineistooni (2006).

Figures:

Figure 1 . Vezio Nava at home in his library, in Helsinki. Photo: Fabio Lima.

Figure 2 . the bell tower and the landscape in the background. Photo: Fabio Lima.

Figure 3 . external ambience with the bell tower in the church's square, the volumetric composition and the parish center on the left. Photo: Fabio Lima.

Figure 4 . referential books in the Vezio Nava's library. Photo: Fabio Lima.

Figure 5 . schematic drawings made by Vezio Nava during the interview. Photo: Fabio Lima.

Figure 6 . schematic drawings made by Vezio Nava during the interview. Photo: Fabio Lima.

Figure 7 . schematic drawings made by Vezio Nava during the interview. Photo: Fabio Lima.

Figure 8 . model of the Riola Church in the Alvar Aalto Foundation with the architectural composition. Photo: Fabio Lima.

Figure 09 . interior view from the entrance hall, the nave, the pulpit and on the right, the choir. Photo: Fabio Lima.

Figure 10 . model with the structural system in concrete with arcs in the Alvar Aalto Foundation. Photo: Fabio Lima.

Figure 11 . sketch from the entrance hall by Fabio Lima during a technical visit with Chrissi Candolin on August, 22 2019.

"This is an Author's Original Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in **The Journal of Architecture** available online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2021.1896567> ".

Full acknowledgement must be included showing article title, author, full Journal title, copyright © The Journal of Architecture, reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd, <http://www.tandfonline.com> on behalf of The Journal of Architecture."