CRITICAL PRACTICE IN AN AGE OF COMPLEXITY - AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CRITIQUE OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

• Paper / Proposal Title:
The Sliding Puzzle Model for Scaling Up Cities - How equitable and just urban development and growth models can be made possible by State-enforced mandatory quotas of empty urban spaces.

• Format:
Written paper (with possibility of verbal presentation)

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• Abstract (300 words):
One of the biggest problems in urban development is scaling up, and how the urban fabric will generally be impervious to radical changes in the absence of events deemed to be either natural or man-made disasters or socially unjust policies. In densely populated urban environments, even incremental changes such as scaling up housing can seem an impossible task. In an age of rapid urbanization, urban development is often faced with the necessity of accommodating models that scale up, namely in providing higher density or higher quality housing, without infringing on the basic rights of those who already live in the spaces targeted by redevelopment.

This paper argues that the solution might be a counter intuitive, somewhat paradoxical one- making sure that urban areas always have an empty building space or even whole empty blocks within relative proximity, so as to allow for scaling up. Just like a Sliding
Puzzle, which can only be solved by making strategic use of the empty square, leaving no empty spaces in cities ultimately means lack of space for manoeuvring. Scaling up is made impossible without serious disruption to locals, and other solutions are preferred, such as building in empty spaces elsewhere, which enlarges cities’ perimeters and promotes urban sprawl, whilst failing to build housing where it is most needed and sought-after. In other situations, when the need for redevelopment becomes inevitable, forced evictions might take place, often entailing mistreatment of local communities and serious disruptions to the social fabric.

In the absence of policies like the Sliding Puzzle Model, developers will often either have to wait for catastrophes and “accidents”, or even resort to underhand tactics. They might force inhabitants out, or abstain from maintaining buildings so that they become vacant and derelict, enabling the demolishing of the buildings and only then, scaling up.

• **Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

My name is João Silva Jordão and I am a Phd in Urbanism candidate in the University of Lisbon’s Faculty of Architecture. I have a degree in Politics and Journalism and a Masters from the University College of London’s Development Planning Unit in Urban Development Planning. I am fascinated with all things related to philosophy and urban governance and I bring a very multi-disciplinary approach to all my pieces, with a strong acumen for applying dialectical analysis and identifying paradoxes. I also tend to write in a controversial manner, as I am only enthusiastic about any piece of writing that I undertake insofar as I deem it to be thought-provoking and innovative. Whenever I work in a group in the field of urbanism my natural tendency is to concentrate on shaping the theoretical framework, which attests to my capacity for problem identification, framing and solving.