

Unfinished matters.

SAAL, project and housing
process in the Curraleira
neighborhood, Lisbon.



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Politecnico di Torino
Master's Degree in Architecture Construction City
A.A 2025/2026

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Abstract

The thesis investigates the significance and contemporary relevance of the SAAL (*Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local*) experience developed in Portugal in the 1970s, interpreting it as a moment in which architecture emerged as a tool for social emancipation and political experimentation. The initiatives born in the climate of openness following the Carnation Revolution are read as expressions of a city built from below, based on direct participation of inhabitants and on the possibility of making housing a concretely practiced right. Through a multidisciplinary approach — combining historical, social, and urban analysis, field interviews, photographic and documentary materials — the thesis reconstructs the historical, political, and social context that gave rise to SAAL, examining the end of the Estado Novo dictatorship, popular struggles, decolonization, and the return of populations from former Portuguese colonies, during a period marked by a profound housing crisis. In the 1970s, a significant portion of the population in continental Portugal lived in severe precarity, amid degraded housing, overcrowding, and informal settlements. It was in this scenario that SAAL emerged as an open and adaptable process, which in just over two years produced around 170 social housing projects, involving architects, residents, and particularly women.

The SAAL neighborhood of Curraleira, one of the seven SAAL interventions carried out in Lisbon during the years of the Revolution, is adopted as a case study for a critical and design-oriented reading. The neighborhood, today characterized by incremental transformations, spatial and social challenges, and a partial condition of urban isolation, is analyzed through three interpretative levels — plot, field, and surface — capable of revealing the relationships between domestic space, urban structure, and everyday practices of inhabitation.

The thesis proposes a project that does not take the form of a finished intervention, but rather consists of a set of spatial devices capable of activating social and ecological processes over time, in continuity with the processual nature of SAAL. The project questions traditional boundaries of urban and architectural intervention, interpreting architecture as an open instrument, able to reactivate the traces of an unfinished experience and offer new possibilities of transformation for the Curraleira neighborhood and for contemporary debates on collective living.

Why study the SAAL
phenomenon today?

00 RE-QUESTIONING

**“As pessoas descobriram que podiam
construir a sua própria cidade.”**

**“People discovered that they could
build their own city.”**

António Cunha Telles, *As Operações SAAL*
(Portugal, 1976), documentary film.

The phenomenon today

Reflecting today on a neighborhood in Lisbon that emerged in the 1970s through the SAAL process means engaging with a moment in which architecture became a tool for social emancipation and political experimentation.

Those experiences, developed in the climate of openness and hope that followed the Carnation Revolution, embodied an idea of the city built from below, grounded in the direct participation of its inhabitants and in the belief that housing could become a concretely practiced right, not merely a proclaimed one.

The SAAL program, established in 1974, represents an

extraordinary attempt to translate the principles of an emerging democracy into urban form: groups of citizens, technicians, and architects collaborated horizontally, overcoming the traditional distance between those who design spaces and those who inhabit them.

These neighborhoods became laboratories of self-organization and co-design, but also sites of conflict, negotiation, and compromise—experiences in which the city quite literally became a field for the construction of citizenship.

As Henri Lefebvre famously argued, “*the right to the city is not simply the right to access what already exists, but to transform it*”:

reflection that finds one of its most radical and tangible expressions in the SAAL process. Within these collective practices, the transformation of space coincided with the transformation of social relations; building together also meant redefining forms of belonging, solidarity, and power.

Today, returning to these neighborhoods does not simply mean preserving an architectural heritage or documenting a utopian moment in the history of design, but rather questioning how principles of participation, solidarity, and co-design might be reactivated in response to contemporary urban challenges—housing crises, precarity, the erosion of community cohesion, and indiscriminate land consumption. As Giancarlo De Carlo emphasized, “*architecture*

is too important to be left to architects alone,” a statement that resonates strongly today, inviting us to rediscover an idea of design as a shared process rather than a finished product.

Working on a SAAL neighborhood therefore means exploring the possibility of a critical continuity between the utopia of the past and the urgencies of the present, between the memory of collective architecture and the pursuit of renewed spatial justice. It also means asking how project-based practices might reactivate the social and civic energies that once animated SAAL: trust in cooperation, the value of proximity, and the awareness that the city can still be a space of emancipation.

its most radical and tangible expressions in the SAAL process.

² Giancarlo De Carlo, “*Architecture Is Too Important to Be Left to Architects*,” *Spazio e Società*, no. 1 (Bari: Dedalo, 1978).

Figure 1. Still from the documentary *Les Operários SAAL* by João Dias.



¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Right to the City* (Milan: Marsilio, 1970).

The Production of
housing: Design Dynamics
00 RE-QUESTIONING

“Revisiting the past does not mean imitating it, but understanding its tools in order to reinvent the present.”

Álvaro Siza Vieira, *Conversas com Álvaro Siza*,

The production housing

³ The verbatim quotations are taken from M. Sequeira, *Living Lisbon*, 2023.

During the 1970s and 1980s, European urban centers were marked by processes of decay, depopulation, and abandonment. “The problems of city centers were those of abandonment, depopulation, and deterioration,”³ while large segments of the population left central areas—perceived as obsolete and overcrowded—to move toward greener and less congested suburbs, often with direct support from public policies. This model of urban development, based on functional separation and dispersed settlement patterns, gradually gave way to opposite dynamics, particularly in cities with strong symbolic, historical, and cultural value.

Today, “especially in attractive places such as Lisbon, city centers have once again become desirable places to live for affluent residents and key destinations for tourists.” This reversal has contributed to the consolidation of a process of housing financialization, in which dwellings are increasingly conceived as economic assets rather than as social rights. As highlighted in *Living Lisbon*, Lisbon represents an emblematic case of this transformation: a city in which urban beauty and the identity of historic neighborhoods become drivers of global capital attraction, while simultaneously generating profound social and territorial tensions.



Over the past decade, “housing prices and rents in Lisbon have risen dramatically, with particularly sharp increases in the city center.” Among the main drivers of this growth is the influx of foreign capital, encouraged by public policies adopted in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2007–2008. In particular, following the intervention of the so-called Troika in 2011, the Portuguese government promoted instruments such as the Golden Visa program and the Non-Habitual Residents tax regime, with the aim of attracting foreign investment into the real estate sector. “These policy changes have contributed to a strong increase in foreign demand for urban property,” removing a significant portion of the housing stock from the ordinary residential market. At the same time, the rapid spread of short-term tourist rentals, concentrated in central neighborhoods, has further reduced the supply of affordable housing for residents. Some investors have purchased and renovated properties exclusively for short-term letting, encouraged by more favorable tax treatment compared to traditional rental contracts. These dynamics are not isolated but are part of a broader global phenomenon affecting numerous cities with high tourist appeal, such as Barcelona, Vancouver, and Miami, albeit with different modalities and actors. In this context of growing pressure on the housing market, in 2023 the Portuguese govern-

ment launched the “Mais Habitação” program, in connection with the PRR (*Plano de Recuperação e Resiliência*), conceived by the European Commission as an extraordinary measure to counteract the effects of the pandemic crisis. The plan includes a set of reforms and investments aimed at strengthening the country’s economic and social resilience, including the construction of 26,000 housing units by 2026. However, “very little has been said about the concrete buildings that will give form to these policies and this plan, or about the city we want to build through such an operation.” The production of public housing, in fact, presupposes “an articulation among different social actors” and takes shape as a collective and ongoing process, in which the role of architecture is central. The *Urban Question*, the city—understood as a space for the reproduction of the labor force—must ensure, through public services including housing, the conditions necessary for community development and the fulfillment of symbolic expectations. From this perspective, housing policy cannot be separated from the organization of urban space and from the physical and social maintenance of built territories. In the Portuguese case, housing constituted “the central pillar of the debate on the city” in the period following the April 25, 1974 Revolution, catalyzing a new

generation of architects and policymakers and becoming a site of convergence for issues related to territorial scale, participation, economy, and the organization of domestic space in relation to public space. As observed in *Living Lisbon*, the gradual hollowing out of public housing policies from the early 2000s onward has produced a

rupture between architecture and the political, technical, and cultural heritage built during the first decades of democracy¹. This discontinuity helps to explain the current difficulties in guaranteeing the right to housing and in reconstructing a vision of the city grounded in access, inclusion, and citizenship.

Figure 3. Lisbon, Portugal – Report from the Lisbon Triennale, Lisbon Architecture Triennale.



“The right to the city is not merely the right to access what already exists, but to transform it.”

Henri Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 1968

Architecture and
Revolution

01 MUTATIONS

Estado Novo

Portugal, one of the oldest nation-states in Europe, separated from Spain in 1385 and, after a century of Spanish domination, definitively gained independence in 1665 under King João IV. Following the Napoleonic invasion and decades of political instability, a Royal Charter was adopted granting broad powers to the king. By the end of the nineteenth century, the monarchy had lost legitimacy due to financial difficulties and limited development, while republican ideas spread among the middle classes, intellectuals, and the armed forces. In 1908, King Carlos I and his son were assassinated, and in 1910, after an insurrection, King Manuel

II went into exile: the First Republic was thus proclaimed in a poor country with a high rate of illiteracy.

A Constituent Assembly was elected by restricted suffrage (only literate men). Universal suffrage was rejected out of fear that women and the illiterate could be manipulated by the clergy or by reactionary forces such as monarchists. The system proved to be unstable—the most unstable in Western Europe: until the coup d'état of 1926, there were 45 governments, led by 30 different prime ministers and appointed by 7 presidents. The average lifespan of a government was four months. In 1926, a coup

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In 1930, the government was entrusted to António de Oliveira Salazar. Coming from the Catholic Centre, he was a prominent figure who appeared to hold the key to resolving the country's financial problems and, at the same time, did not represent a political threat, showing no clear affiliations and even demonstrating reluctance to accept political office⁴. To accomplish this mission, Salazar based the regime on “a mythical idea of the nation and of national interest.”⁵ Furthermore, similarly to European fascist regimes, he aimed to create a new type of Portuguese citizen, regenerated by the ideology of the regime⁶, and a “new order” that would put an end to the liberal century and initiate the re-education of the Portuguese people within the framework of a regenerated nation.

In common discourse, the *Estado Novo* is often defined as fascism. This label does not always find consensus in academic circles, since, although considered an authoritarian regime, the *Estado Novo* did not display all the characteristics of an “ideal” fascism. However, Enzo Collotti⁷ argued that the restriction of freedom of expression, the repression of political opposition, violence against civilians by the political police, corporatism that eliminated the autonomy of the labor movement, and the moralizing nature of the State in its attempt to control every individual are sufficient to classify the Portuguese regime as fascist.

During the Second World War and the postwar period, increasing international pressure against authoritarian regimes also had repercussions for opposition movements in Portugal. Several attempts at military coups occurred during the regime. The political police, however, harshly repressed those who did not accept political restrictions: opponents were imprisoned, exiled, or, at times, assassinated. In 1941, the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) succeeded in creating a clandestine structure and a strategy of infiltration within official trade unions. During the 1940s and 1950s, several opposition movements emerged, such as the National Anti-Fascist Unity Movement (MUNAF) and the Movement of Democratic Unity (MUD). Nevertheless, the activities of these organizations were entirely suppressed by the regime.

The regime maintained Portugal in a state of political stability, but also of social backwardness and economic poverty. In 1968, Salazar suffered an accident that left him in a coma until his death in 1970. His successor was Marcelo Caetano, described as a man who was “more a follower than a leader.” He attempted to stimulate economic growth by partially liberalizing markets, thereby provoking discontent among small entrepreneurs who had long been protected. On the political level, he initiated modest openings that satisfied neither liberals (who considered them

⁴ José Mattoso, *História de Portugal*, 8 vols. (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1993–1994).

⁵ Fernando Rosas, “Salazarism and the ‘New Man’: An Essay on the *Estado Novo* and the Question of Totalitarianism,” *Análise Social* 35, no. 157 (2001): 1031–1054.

⁶ José Manuel Cabrera, *Todo IVA* 2014 (Madrid, 2014).

⁷ Enzo Collotti (1929–2021) was an Italian historian and full professor of Contemporary History at the Universities of Florence and Trieste. He is considered one of the leading scholars of fascism, Nazism, and the European Resistance. Among his most important works are *Nazism and German Society, 1933–1945* (Laterza, 1972), *Fascism and Anti-Fascism: Removals, Revisions, Denials* (Laterza, 2000), and *A History of the Resistance in Europe* (Laterza, 2001).

insufficient) nor hardline Salazarists (who viewed them as excessive).

After a failed attempt by Spínola to return to power (March 1975), the radicals of the MFA imposed a pact on the political parties, obliging them to commit to a transition toward socialism and to share power with two military bodies: the *General Assembly* (a kind of second chamber) and the Council of the Revolution. All parties signed, fearing the annulment of elections.

The decisive factor that ultimately eroded the regime, however, was the colonial war. These circumstances intensified political opposition in Portugal, strengthening anti-fascist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist positions and

generating a movement toward liberation from an oppressive regime. During this period, the idea of armed struggle as a possible way out of a stalemated situation began to gain ground, attracting supporters and replacing the traditional reformist discourse⁸. The war effort absorbed 30–40 percent of the state budget and created a severe shortage of officers. To fill the gap, the government introduced accelerated promotions, angering career officers⁹. From this discontent emerged the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), composed of approximately 200 mid-ranking officers. The MFA brought these currents together and organized the coup d'état of 25 April 1974, which was swift and bloodless.

⁸ José Medeiros Ferreira Leitão and Luís de Pina, *The Revolution of 25 April* (Lisbon: Moraes Editores, 1975).

⁹ Rui Bebiano, *The Power of Imagination: Youth, Rebellion, and Resistance in the 1960s* (Coimbra: Angelus Novus, 2006).



Figure 4. Popular gathering in Rua do Carmo, Lisbon. Photograph by Estúdio Mário Novais.



Figure 6. Celebrating crowd interacting with military personnel. Photograph from the archive of the Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril.

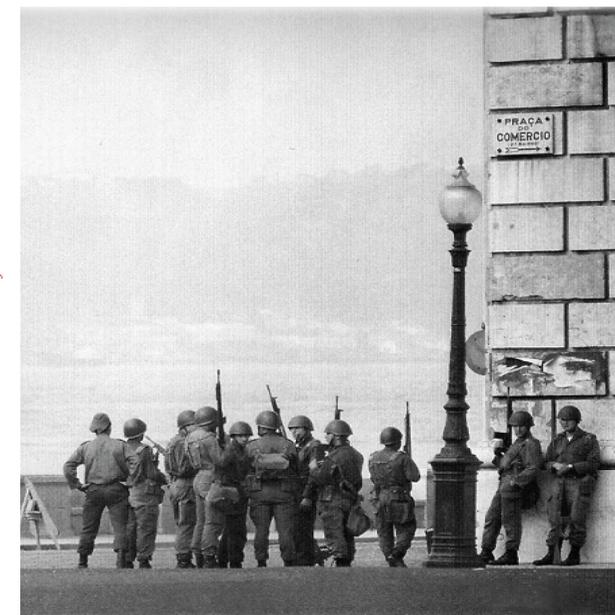


Figure 5. MFA troops in Commerce Square, Lisbon. Photograph from the archive of the Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril.

The struggle
01 MUTATIONS

“The long struggle of the Portuguese people against fascism, systematically carried out by democratic forces for half a century, was unable to defeat the dictatorship without the armed forces; yet it was the democratic ideal that inspired the armed forces to overthrow fascism in the way it was ultimately overthrown.”

Portugal, 25 April, collective volume (AAVV), Editori Riuniti, August 1975.

Carnation Revolution

On 25 April 1974, images of Portuguese soldiers displaying red carnations in the barrels of their rifles, celebrating with the people of Lisbon the success of a swift and peaceful military coup, travelled around the world. The expression Carnation Revolution emerged thanks to television footage and journalistic reports of the time and enjoyed great success outside Portugal. In Portuguese historiography, however, the events that led to the fall of the Estado Novo are more commonly referred to simply as 25 April.

The carnations, distributed on the initiative of members of the Portuguese Democratic

Movement (MDP), a semi-legal organization that brought together opponents of the regime, immediately became a symbol of unity between the military and the civilian population.

The symbol of that day was born by chance, from a simple gesture. It stemmed from the idea of a woman, Celeste Caeiro, who “*raised her voice in a country where people were slowly suffocating.*”¹⁰ A country where, before 1974, women could not obtain a passport or open a business without their husband’s authorization; where foreign books and films had to pass through censorship; where per capita income was among the lowest in Europe; where 50

¹⁰August, Bille, dir. *Night Train to Lisbon*. Switzerland–Germany–Portugal.

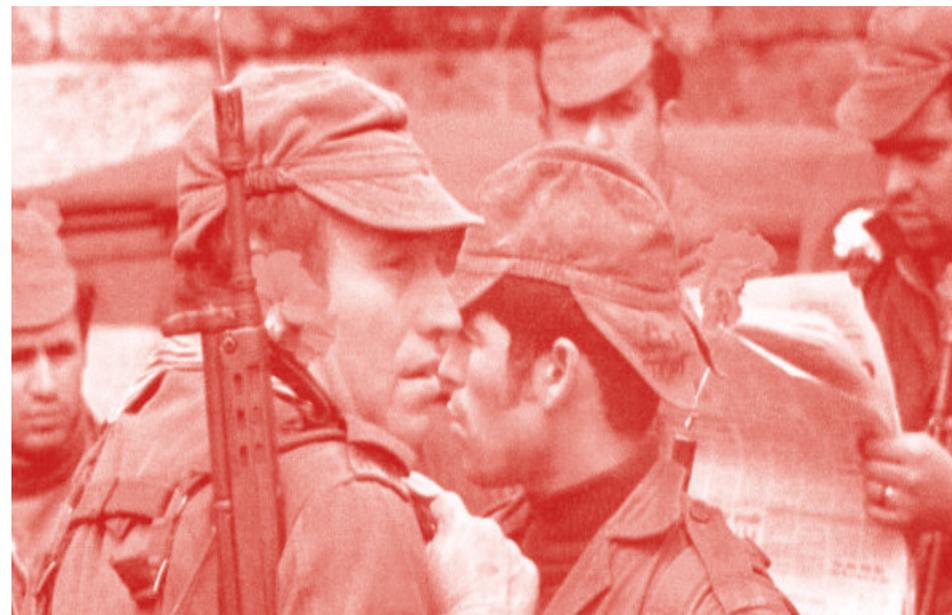


Figure 7. Lisbon, Portugal, 25 April 1974. Photograph by Jean-Claude Francolon. Courtesy of Gamma-Rapho/Getty Images.



Figure 8. Lisbon, Portugal, 25 April 1974. Photograph by Jean-Claude Francolon. Courtesy of Gamma-Rapho/Getty Images.

percent of the population was illiterate; and where prices were constantly rising.

“I was 41 years old and had a six-year-old daughter,” Celeste recalls, “and I worked as a waitress in Lisbon, in a self-service restaurant on Rua Braamcamp, the first self-service ever opened in Portugal. April 25 was the anniversary of the restaurant’s opening, and the owner bought many flowers—white and red carnations, the cheapest ones—to give to customers. It was 8:30 in the morning, I already had a bunch of white carnations under my arm and I was expecting a special day. But not as special as it turned out to be when the restaurant manager told me: ‘Go home. Today we’re not opening.’ Why?, I asked him. ‘Because there’s a coup. Take the flowers and go, don’t get into trouble,’ he murmured.”

“But how could it be,” I told him, “there’s a coup and I should go home? No way.” And so,” Celeste continues, “I went back inside, left the white carnations, and took the red ones. I reached the first metro stop and got off at Rossio (the central square of Lisbon, named after Dom Pedro IV), and I saw this enormous square full of soldiers, even tanks—the Chaimites, I remember them well—and I said to myself: so it’s true. I stopped a soldier and asked him: hey, what are you doing here, what do you want to do? And he replied: ‘We’re going to Carmo to arrest Marcelo Caetano, who has taken refuge there.’ It seemed like a dream. I had been waiting for

that day my whole life. I went up to Carmo as well. It was full of people, with many nuns running in every direction, and I found myself in front of a soldier who, with a gesture of his hand, asked me for a cigarette. I don’t smoke, I told him, but I can give you this red carnation, I don’t have anything else. He looked at me a bit surprised, then smiled, took the carnation, and put it into the barrel of his rifle. And just like him, all the other soldiers to whom I gave my carnations did the same.”

The coup had been organized by around two hundred young officers, mainly captains, gathered in the Armed Forces Movement (MFA). The operation had been carefully planned: the agreed signal for its start was the radio broadcast of *Grândola, Vila Morena*, the song by José “Zeca” Afonso that had been banned by the regime because it praised fraternity and equality. Among all the repressive mechanisms of the *Estado Novo*, censorship was undoubtedly one of the most effective. No word or image could be published or disseminated without the authorization of the censors. The development of general culture was severely hindered: journalism and cinema rapidly declined, and international cultural movements were unable to enter and spread throughout the country. When, shortly after midnight, *Rádio Renascença* broadcast those notes, the soldiers began to move. Among the protagonists of the preparation and execution of the uprising, Fernando José Salgueiro Maia¹² stands out

¹¹Lyrics and music by Zeca Afonso, *Cantigas do Maio*.

¹² Whose deeds on that day remain indelible in the collective memory, he is also commemorated in the film *Capitães de Abril*, directed by Maria de Medeiros, starring Stefano Accorsi in the leading role.

“Grândola, vila morena
Terra da fraternidade
O povo é quem mais ordena
Dentro de ti, ó cidade
Dentro de ti, ó cidade
O povo é quem mais ordena
Terra da fraternidade
Grândola, vila morena
Em cada esquina um amigo
Em cada rosto igualdade
Grândola, vila morena
Terra da fraternidade
Terra da fraternidade
Grândola, vila morena
Em cada rosto igualdade
O povo é quem mais ordena
À sombra duma azinheira
Que já não sabia a idade
Jurei ter por companheira
Grândola a tua vontade¹¹”

Figure 9. Portrait of Salgueiro Maia, 1974. Photograph by Alfredo Cunha.

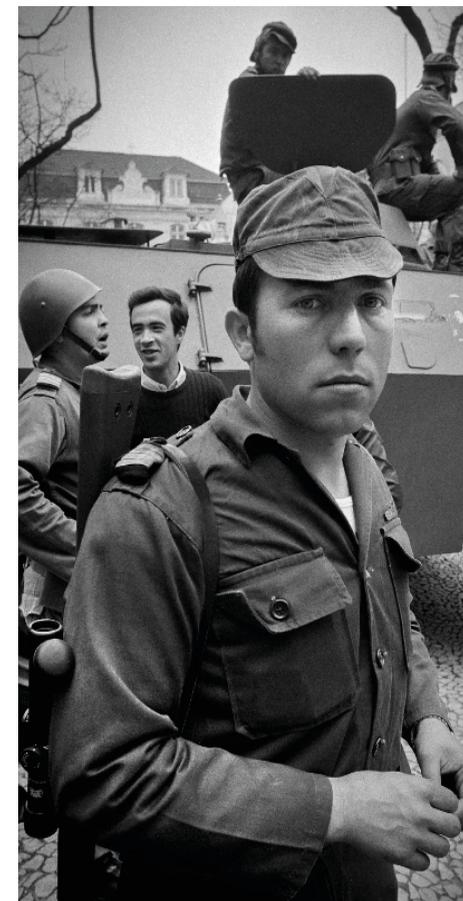


Figure 10. Houses for the People, documentary film by Catarina Alves Costa, 2010.

as a central figure of that unforgettable day. A captain of just twenty-nine years of age, Maia—like many of his fellow officers—had been deeply marked by the atrocities of the colonial wars and had developed a strong democratic and social consciousness. Having assembled his men, Maia persuaded them, through a passionate speech, of the urgency of boarding the armored vehicles and heading toward Lisbon to overthrow the dictatorship. At the head of the poorly equipped and lightly armed column, he entered the city and occupied the *Terreiro do Paço*—the square housing the ministries—without firing a single shot, where members of the government had taken refuge. Subsequently, Maia learned that Marcelo Caetano had taken refuge in the barracks of the National Republican Guard at *Largo do Carmo*, on a hill in Lisbon's historic district. He therefore moved his armored vehicles toward the barracks, only to find *Via dell'Arsenale* blocked by tanks belonging to

units still loyal to the regime. At that moment, the revolution took a decisive turn. While other MFA units occupied strategic locations such as Lisbon airport and the political prison of Peniche, arresting officers loyal to the regime, Maia's men broke through the roadblock on *Via dell'Arsenale* and surrounded the Carmo headquarters. After unsuccessfully ordering Caetano to surrender and firing only a few warning shots, Maia initiated negotiations that also involved General Spínola. In the end, Caetano surrendered and was personally escorted by Maia to the aircraft that would take him out of Portugal. The streets of Lisbon filled with a jubilant and deeply moved crowd, ready to embrace the soldiers with carnations placed in their rifles—witnesses to how, in just a few hours and without bloodshed, freedom had returned to the country. The only deaths on 25 April were three demonstrators killed by Caetano's military secret police.



Figure 11. Demonstration in Lisbon by residents' associations for the right to housing. Photograph by Albano Pereira, José Carlos Pereira, and

Figure 12. Lisbon, Portugal, 25 April 1974. Photograph by Jean-Claude Francolon. Courtesy of Gamma-Rapho/Getty Images.



Fragmented identities
01 MUTATIONS

“0 25 de Abril foi a recuperação da dignidade de um povo.”

José Saramago, writer, Nobel Prize in Literature (1999)

The decolonization

Between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Portugal had created several colonies; the most important ones that remained until the outbreak of the 1974 revolution were, in Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea, and Cape Verde. There was also a presence in China, in Macau, and in the Far East a portion of the island of Timor, surrounded by Indonesian territory. Portugal, “*the first great colonial empire of modern history*,”¹³ sought to maintain control, but this no longer aligned with the times and dynamics of the contemporary world.

Internationalist movements—both communist and, above all, Third Worldist—which gained

strength after the Bandung Conference in Indonesia¹⁴ (1955), increasingly challenged colonial states. In addition to the Cold War on a global scale between the United States and the Soviet Union, there was now also another major front: Third Worldism¹⁵.

Guerrilla movements within the Portuguese colonial world referred to both of these political dimensions, though their shared demand was independence.

A feeling of dissatisfaction emerged, held in check only tenuously by patriotic ideology, which gradually weakened as the guerrilla conflicts failed to be won and instead grew in

Part 01

intensity. In this regard, Eduardo Lourenço, the foremost contemporary Portuguese thinker, reflected on the end of the European colonial empires—particularly the Portuguese one—describing what would change after that famous 25 April and what, by contrast, would continue or be forgotten. “*It is evident*,” he wrote, “*that part of our political class and the aligned public opinion [...] behaved as if the ‘African nightmare’ had ended on the morning of 25 April*,”¹⁶ without any intention of “*reflecting on and explaining to the Portuguese people the African drama that History had asked them to resolve*.”¹⁷

After 25 April, Portugal shifted from being a country “*par excellence a colonizer*” to becoming a “*creator of new nations*,”¹⁸ avoiding, on that specific occasion, the use of familial terms (motherland, brother countries, etc.), still imbued with imperial symbolism and by then outdated. In this birth—at the time not defined as such—lay the foundation of redemption necessary for the young democracy.

The direct consequence of the revolution was a rapid process of decolonization, involving around one million residents of the former Portuguese colonies. Not all European inhabitants left; some chose to remain after independence. However, the great majority departed, either fleeing the outbreak of civil wars in the newly founded states or because they rejected the one-party regimes imposed by the new governments with Black majorities. Some moved directly to nearby territories such as Rhodesia and South Africa, governed by white minorities. Others preferred to follow established Portuguese migration routes to countries such as the United States, Canada, and Brazil. Most, however—between 500,000 and 800,000 people—relocated to Portugal. Considering that in 1975 metropolitan Portugal had a population of just over 9 million inhabitants, this colonial return represents the largest migration of its kind in relative terms.

In almost every answer there was a word we had never heard before: IARN, IARN, IARN. IARN had paid for our plane tickets, IARN would put us up in hotels, IARN would pay for transportation to the hotels, IARN would feed us, IARN would give us money, IARN would help us, IARN would advise us, IARN would give us further information. I had never heard a single word repeated so many times; IARN seemed more important and more generous than God.

Dulce Maria Cardoso, *The Return* (New York: Picador, 2017).

¹⁶ “*How Many African Policies Do We Have?*,” originally published in *Diário de Lisboa*, July 23, 1974, reprinted in Lourenço (2014), 163–177.

¹⁷ “*Religion, Ethics, and Politics, or the Returning Bishops*,” originally published in *O Jornal*, November 16, 1979, reprinted in Lourenço (2014), 232–242.

¹⁸ “*From the Fiction of Empire to the Empire of Fiction*,” originally published in *Diário de Notícias—10 Years of Democracy Supplement*, April 24, 1984; reprinted in Lourenço, 256–269.

¹³ Malyn Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion* (London: Routledge, 2005), 12.

¹⁴ The Bandung Conference, held in Bandung, Indonesia, from 18 to 24 April 1955, was the first Afro-Asian summit, with the participation of 29 countries, and is considered the founding act of the Non-Aligned Movement.

¹⁵ Marcello Flores, *The World Century: A History of the Twentieth Century* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), 241–249.

Who returned?

¹⁹ Cláudia Castelo, *Passages to Africa: The Settlement of Angola and Mozambique by Metropolitan Portuguese (1920–1974)* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2007).

²⁰ This term refers to the military campaigns conducted by Portugal between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in its African colonies, aimed at subjugating local kingdoms and populations, consolidating control over the interior of the territories, and ensuring Portuguese sovereignty as established after the Berlin Conference (1884–1885).

²¹ It was an area of free movement of people and goods established by the Portuguese government during the colonial war (1960s) to facilitate trade and the mobility of citizens between the metropole and the African colonies, especially Angola and Mozambique.

To understand who the *retornados*¹⁹ actually were, it is necessary to trace back to the colonial past. Although the Portuguese reached the African coasts in the fifteenth century, their presence was largely limited to fortified settlements along the coastline and trading posts primarily engaged in the slave trade. Until the eighteenth century, the white population was very small, consisting mainly of slave traders, administrators, merchants, and convicts. Only after Brazil's independence in 1822 did the Portuguese state show a concrete interest in Africa, creating settlements in southern Angola and transporting hundreds of settlers free of charge. In the 1920s, only after the end of the so-called "*pacification wars*,"²⁰ was the military occupation of the African colonies declared complete. The direct consequence was an expansion of the colonial administration and growth in agricultural and mineral production. In general, the settlement of families from all social backgrounds in Portuguese Africa was encouraged, making the migratory flow inevitable. On the eve of the First World War, the white population of Mozambique numbered about 11,000 people, and by 1920 Angola already had 20,700 white inhabitants. However, during the early years of the Estado Novo, strict restrictions were imposed on the entry of Portuguese migrants into Angola and Mozambique in order to prevent the arrival of poor and

unskilled settlers. During this period, migration consisted mainly of entrepreneurs and technicians, keeping the number of settlers low until the end of the Second World War. The real migratory boom toward the colonies occurred in the postwar period, driven by economic and political factors. On the one hand, rising prices of colonial products stimulated economic development and thus white immigration; on the other, the growth of anti-colonial movements led to a reversal of official policy. In 1947, overseas emigration was temporarily suspended to redirect migrants to Africa, and during the 1950s restrictions were gradually relaxed. From that point onward, immigration to Angola and Mozambique increased significantly. In 1962, following the outbreak of the colonial war in Angola, free movement of people and goods was established within the *Portuguese Economic Space*,²¹ further increasing migration flows to Africa. In 1972, legislative measures were adopted to divert migration from Europe to Portuguese Africa through job offers and propaganda campaigns. On the eve of the 1974 Revolution, the white population in Angola numbered 324,000 people (compared to 44,083 in 1940) and in Mozambique 190,000 (compared to 27,438 in 1940), for a total of approximately 500,000 individuals. However, only 35 percent had been born in the colonies; the



Figure 13. Diagram of the former Portuguese colonies. Diagram by the author.

²³ Stephen Lubkemann, "Race, Class, and Kin in the Negotiation of 'Internal Strangerhood' among Portuguese Returnees, 1975-2000," in *Europe's Invisible Migrants: The Portuguese Returnees from Africa*, ed. A. L. Smith (2004).

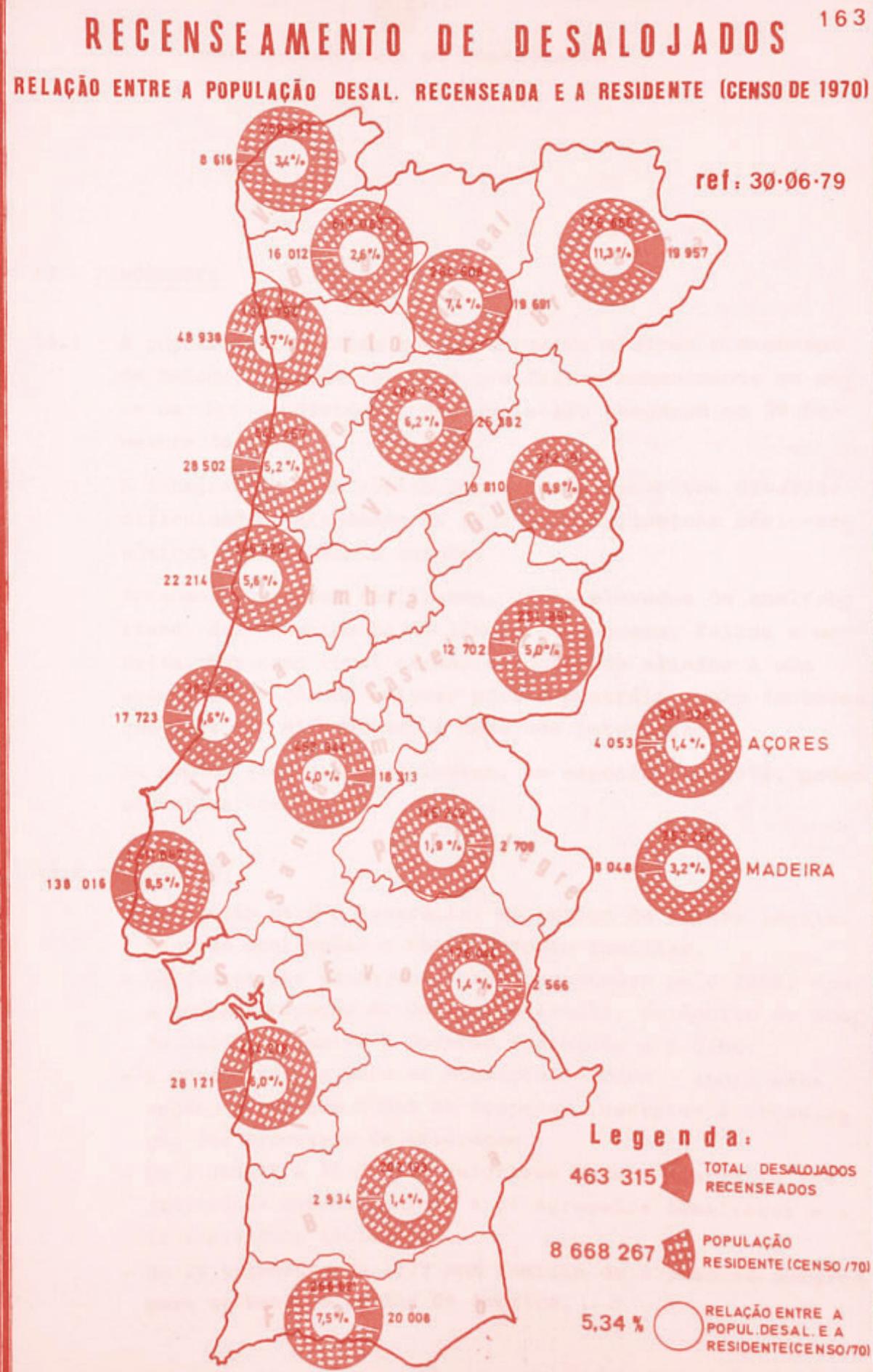
²² *Diário da República* (the Portuguese Official Gazette), Lisbon, 1975.

²⁴ IARN (Instituto de Apoio ao Retorno de Nacionais), *Report on the Integration of the Returnees in Portugal* (Lisbon, 1979). Data relating to the number of returnees accommodated and to state expenditure for their support.

Figure 14. Page from the Activity Report of the Comissariado para os Desalojados. Image from the Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Chapter I, 30 June 1979, p. 163.

been born in the colonies; the majority came from Portugal. All this explains why, in 1975, after the Portuguese revolution, the mass return of settlers represented an enormous challenge. The revolutionary government established the Institute for the Support of the Return of Nationals (IARN) and later the Commissioner for the Displaced, in order to provide immediate assistance in housing, employment, health-care, and education. Decree-Law 584-B/75 defined returnados as "Portuguese citizens returning from a former colony after 1 September 1974, who had been residing there permanently before that date and who were entitled to state assistance upon their arrival in Portugal."²² At the same time, the new nationality law of 1975 restricted Portuguese citizenship to those born in Portugal or with ancestors up to the third degree born in the motherland. In practice, this excluded the Black population and reserved citizenship for whites and mixed-race individuals who could prove Portuguese ancestry. Contrary to common belief, the majority of returnados were white, though Black people, mixed-race individuals, and people of Indian origin also arrived. Many came with nothing, often only the clothes they were wearing. The state provided subsidies, temporary housing (including, controversially, luxury hotels), and job placement programs, including low-interest loans and support for the

creation of small businesses. Despite initial difficulties and tensions with the metropolitan population, who viewed them as "internal strangers,"²³ the integration of the returnados was relatively rapid. Soon, however, the term returnado took on a pejorative connotation and became a label burdened with social stigma. The returnados themselves strongly rejected this designation, considering it inaccurate, since in many cases they had been born in the colonies and therefore could not "return" to a place where they had never lived. Above all, they rejected its political and ideological implications: calling them returnados meant portraying them as colonists returning to their homeland from territories they had occupied and exploited, benefiting from the colonial system. Rejecting this interpretation, they preferred to be called "refugees" or "displaced persons," that is, victims of decolonization. Despite these difficulties, it can be said that the integration of the returnados into Portuguese society was achieved fairly quickly. By 1979, the number of returnados housed at the expense of the Portuguese state had decreased by 77.5 percent compared to the peak of housing needs recorded in 1976, and total government spending on their support fell by 90 percent over the same period²⁴. They also created their own media outlet, the newspaper *O Returnado*, founded in 1975 to give voice to their problems



²⁵ Morgane Delaunay, "The Jornal O Retornado's Readers and the Construction of a Narrative of the Return from Africa (1975–1976)," in *The Retornados from the Portuguese Colonies in Africa: Memory, Narrative, and History*, ed. Elsa Peralta (London: Routledge, 2021).

²⁶ António Costa Pinto and Nuno Severiano Teixeira, *Modern Portugal* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004).

²⁷ William Chislett, *The Portuguese Revolution: State and Society in Transition* (London: Routledge, 1978).

²⁸ Stephen Lubkemann, "Race, Class, and Kin in the Negotiation of 'Internal Strangerhood' among Portuguese Retornados, 1975–2000," in *Europe's Invisible Migrants: The Portuguese Returnees from Africa*, ed. A. L. Smith (2004).

and demands²⁵. By the early 1980s, however, all of this had disappeared, and the retornados had virtually vanished from public discourse. Democratic stabilization and the country's social and economic development—especially after Portugal's entry into the European Community in 1986—further contributed to this growing invisibility. Decolonization was irreversible, and the entire national community was being reinterpreted, abandoning the fascist and colonial past and looking instead toward a democratic "European destiny."²⁶ In the political sphere as well, the retornados gradually dissolved into the general centrist political trends of Portuguese society, and no political parties emerged seeking to exploit retorno resentment. For all these reasons, politicians and the media—both then and now—have

spoken of the retornados as an exemplary case of integration, a success that can even be considered miraculous. Moreover, the arrival of the retornados helped to partially offset the country's demographic deficit, counteracting the high rate of male emigration, mainly toward other European countries such as France. Being younger and generally better qualified than metropolitan Portuguese citizens, they were easily absorbed into the labor market²⁷. Furthermore, the fact that these individuals enjoyed full citizenship, spoke the language, and—since the majority were white—did not differ from other Portuguese in terms of skin color, greatly facilitated their integration into the host society²⁸. The impacts of decolonization thus proved to be less destabilizing than initially feared.



Figure 15. Two women among the retornados. Source unknown.



Figure 16. Portuguese refugees from Angola and Mozambique at Lisbon Airport, October 1975. Photograph by Abreu Morais. Source: Fundação Mário Soares, Mário Soares Archive

"Many retornados arrived with nothing but the clothes they wore, facing the daunting task of rebuilding their lives in a country they barely knew"

The Retornados from the Portuguese Colonies in Africa: Memory, Narrative, and History (2021).



Figure 17. Retornados at Lisbon Airport. Author unknown.

Figure 18. Airlift transporting refugees from southern Angola, 24 February, 1976. Photograph by Fernando Baião. Source: Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, O Século.



Figure 19. Street demonstration by retornados protesting the lack of housing. Source unknown.



Figure 20. Portuguese refugees from Angola and Mozambique at Lisbon Airport, October 1975. Photograph by Abreu Morais. Source: Fundação Mário Soares, Mário Soares Archive – Photographs, Permanent Exhibition.



Figure 21. Press photograph addressing the phenomenon of the retornados. Source unknown.

Access to housing

³⁰ National Institute of Statistics (INE), Housing Statistics (10th General Population Census, 1970).

Even when analyzed from a purely technical standpoint, the housing situation in Portugal at the time of the coup of 25 April 1974 was alarming. The housing shortage amounted to approximately 600,000 dwellings and showed signs of rapid deterioration. About 25 percent of the population of mainland Portugal lived in housing lacking any indicators of safety, comfort, health, and privacy—that is, in dilapidated buildings, overcrowded spaces, “ilhas,” shanties; in short, dwellings devoid of any conditions of habitability. In rural areas, the lack of basic infrastructure was particularly evident. In urban areas, by contrast, the degradation of the existing housing stock increased in parallel with the relentless growth and spread of precarious and illegal settlements: sheet-metal neighborhoods, shacks, and makeshift constructions.

Out of an estimated total of two and a half million dwellings, around 52 percent had no water supply, 53 percent lacked electricity, 60 percent were not connected to the sewage system, and 67 percent did not even have sanitary facilities²⁹.

At the beginning of the 1970s, official data indicated a total of 31,110 precarious dwellings (“shacks and others”) in mainland Portugal alone. Out of a total of 2,164,965 dwellings, 64.3 percent had electricity, 47.1 percent had access to water supply, and 30 percent were connected to the sewage network. Of the 2,224,020 families recorded in

the same territory, 62.6 percent lived in spaces with electricity, 45.8 percent had domestic water supply, and only 29.2 percent occupied dwellings with sanitary facilities³⁰.

This situation was significantly shaped by a political context which, although it had allowed for some developments in how the housing problem was addressed—especially from the end of the Second World War onward—never truly committed to coordinating efforts to resolve it.

As early as the beginning of the 1960s, the housing deficit in mainland and island territories was estimated at 484,487 units, of which 150,000 concerned the urban and suburban areas of Lisbon and Porto. Of this number, around 66 percent were intended for people living in overcrowded spaces, approximately 27 percent for those occupying parts of dwellings, and about 7 percent for those living in shacks or makeshift constructions³¹. The same estimate indicated that, compared to 1950, the situation was characterized by a “substantial worsening,” evidenced by more than 20,000 families living in shacks and precarious constructions and by a significant increase in subletting.

In 1960, within the limited territory of the Lisbon district, municipal services had inventoried 10,900 shacks, excluding suburban ones, which were likely even more numerous. Ten years later, the figure had already risen to 14,000, still with-

³¹ Raúl da Silva Pereira, “Housing and Urban Planning in Portugal – Some Current Aspects,” offprint from the journal *Análise Social*, no. 14 (Lisbon, 1966), cited in Fernando Gonçalves, *Urbanize and Build for Whom?* (Porto: Afrontamento, 1972), 99–100.

²⁹ António Fonseca Ferreira, *For a New Housing Policy* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 1987), 66.

the same restricted area of the city³².

The increasing visibility of this reality throughout the 1960s also led to a growing awareness on the part of those in power of the impossibility of concealing it. Gone were the days when every state commitment revolved around the political meaning of typological or stylistic choices. Having previously sought to sublimate the housing problem through recommended stylistic “virtues” or ideologically imposed typol-

ogies, the regime now felt the need to avoid confrontation with those urban and peri-urban “blights.” The extensive areas of shacks and makeshift housing, illegal neighborhoods, and degraded and overcrowded constructions in urban centers not only generated dangerous internal and external criticism, but also undermined the possibility of representing the territory in a manner consistent with the official Marcelist discourse of “evolution in continuity.”³³

³² Nuno Teotónio Pereira, “The Blot on Lisbon,” *Seara Nova*, June 1970, later included in *Writings* (1947–1996), selected edition (Porto: FAUP Publicações, 1996), 119.

³³ Fernando Rosas, “The Estado Novo (1926–1974),” in *History of Portugal*, edited by José Mattoso, vol. 7 (n.p.: Círculo de Leitores, 1994), 548.



Figure 22. Houses for the People, documentary film by Catarina Alves Costa, 2010.



Figure 23. Houses for the People, documentary film by Catarina Alves Costa, 2010.

Figure 24. Portuguese refugees from Angola and Mozambique at Lisbon Airport, October 1975. Photograph by Abreu Morais. Source: Fundação Mário Soares, Mário Soares Archive



Figure 26. Portuguese refugees from Angola and Mozambique at Lisbon Airport, October 1975. Photograph by Abreu Morais. Source: Fundação Mário Soares, Mário Soares Archive



Figure 25. Grande Manifestação Nacional (National Demonstration), 16 July 1975, Lisbon. SAAL/Oeiras, Personal archive of Albano Pereira.



The SAAL Experience

02 PARTECIPATION

"I invite you to visit any of the SAAL neighborhoods—and I would have invited you to visit them even one or two months after they were first occupied—to see the amount of self-investment that has gone into those houses, at each family's own expense."

Nuno Portas, *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 1986.

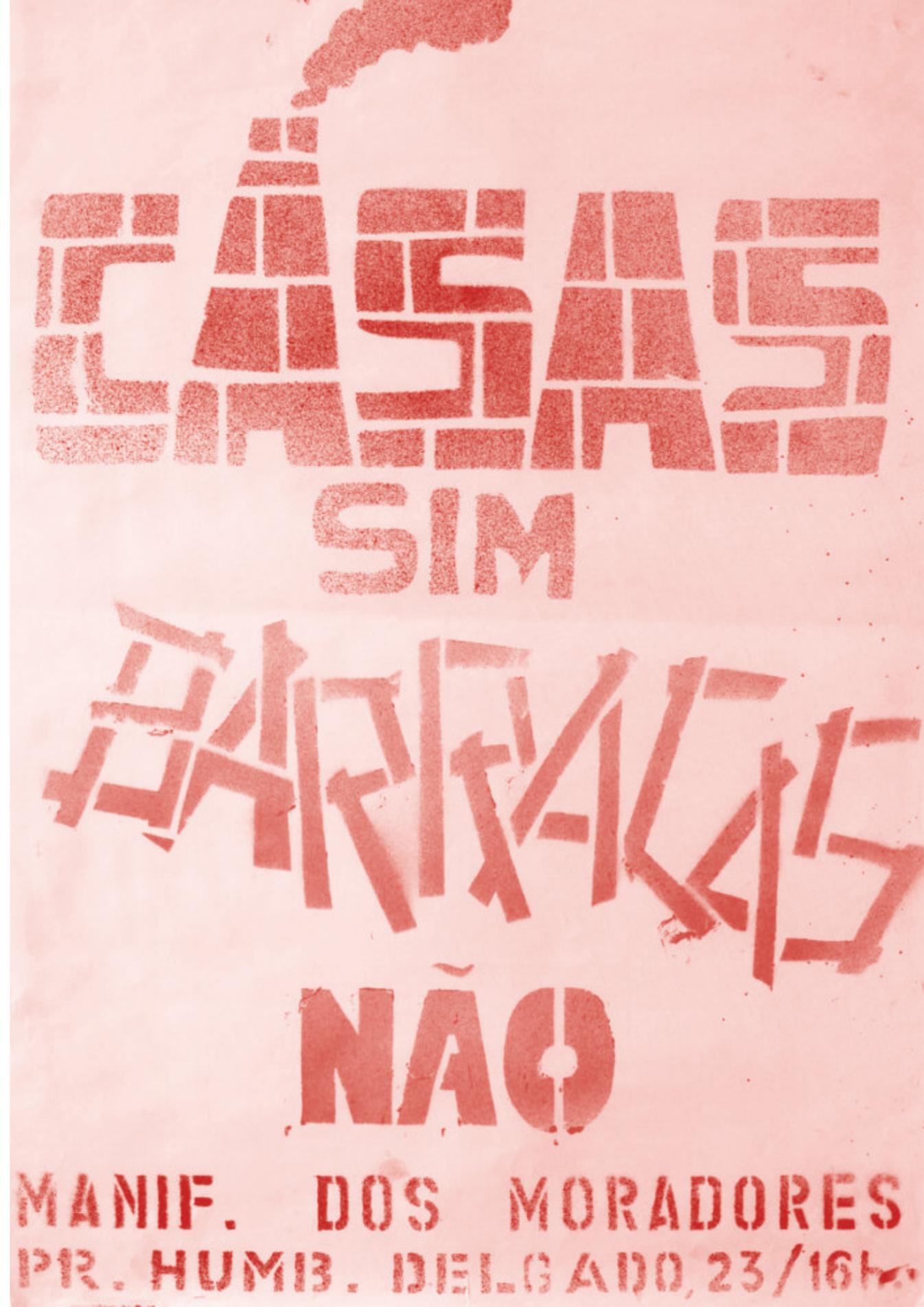
Retrospected futility

In July 1974, at the height of the Revolution, the architect Nuno Portas, then Secretary of State for Housing and Urban Planning in the Provisional Government, drawing on his knowledge of other innovative international experiences, established the SAAL by decree, giving rise to the social housing movement in Portugal. One hundred and seventy projects, carried out over a little more than two years (from 5 July 1974 to 27 October 1976), made it possible to build housing for approximately 4,000 families. Portas and his collaborators devised the so-called Brigadas de Construção (Construction Brigades) as an essential in-

strument for implementing the SAAL program. They were intended to become mediators between the population, municipalities, and the government. Moreover, they were to enjoy broad institutional autonomy, allowing them to act more as interpreters of the people vis-à-vis government agencies, rather than the other way around.

However, the ideologues of the SAAL program emphasized that the Brigades, while supporting the population, were not meant to replace it or its representative organizations. Consequently, the brigades were to limit their intervention to technical aspects.

Figure 27. Poster announcing the protests against the dismantling of SAAL, 1976. Source: Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril, Collection A. Alves Costa, University of Coimbra.



This emphasis on the technocratic role of the brigades reflects the uncertainty of the political climate Portugal was experiencing in the post-revolutionary period. In order to avoid a political contamination of the SAAL program that could jeopardize its implementation and the productive relationship among the main actors involved, it was therefore important to stress the role of the technical brigades as non-political entities.

*“The Housing Development Fund is organizing a specialized technical body, called the ‘Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local’ (SAAL), to support, through the municipalities, initiatives by poorly housed populations, with the aim of collaborating in the transformation of their own neighborhoods by mobilizing their latent—and possibly also financial—resources.”*³⁴

From the outset, the fundamental principles of the program were highlighted: *“the active and organized participation of these populations in solving their housing problems; the appropriation of urban spaces by the popular classes.”*

The SAAL initiative allowed a group of architects to become involved in a bottom-up approach to construction. Many of them volunteered, including Gonçalo Byrne, Luís Gravata Felipe, Sérgio Fernandez, Raúl Hestnes Ferreira, José António Pradela, Artur Rosa, Pedro Ramalho, and Álvaro Siza Vieira.

This approach to the program necessarily implied an opera-

tional method that took into account the specificities of each situation, identifying the most appropriate solution for each case. While it was necessary to define basic principles and available technical and financial resources, the process had to begin with joint work among properly organized residents, local authorities, and technicians from the support teams. In many—albeit commendable—analyses of SAAL, the essential coordinate of the project is often lost: although it was a housing intervention program, it was clear from the outset that it was a process to be defined and constructed in each place, embedded in the political and social reality the country was experiencing at a moment of rapid and unpredictable transformation.

The word “process”³⁵ defined the philosophy and methodology of SAAL; indeed, the expression most commonly used to refer to the service was “the SAAL process.” All participants knew what the program’s final goal was: to help resolve the housing conditions of populations living in degrading situations. But every day and every situation required inventing the path forward. It was a tension lived through the continual effort to understand how to proceed.

“I therefore find it difficult to accept analyses based on theories or ideologies that ignore the diversity and complexity of lived reality, and how it was perceived at the time.”

³⁴ Ministerial decree of 31 July 1974.

³⁵ Ricardo Santos and Ana Drago, eds., *Cidade Participada: Arquitectura e Democracia – Operações SAAL Lisboa* (Lisbon: Tinta-da-China, 2014).

*These are almost always reductive conclusions, which fail to grasp the immense richness of a process lived between hope and despair, certainties and doubts, generosity and opportunism, struggle, work, and sharing, joy and discouragement.”*³⁶

SAAL has always asserted the centrality of the residents’ role, yet their voices are absent from analyses of the paths taken. Who speaks publicly and offi-

cially about the reality lived and confronted daily in each place? Who climbs the control tower, the national and international stage, to recount this program? Where is the memory recreated by the residents?

I believe this is a story that cannot be left solely to scholars or to priests.

Historical narrative is, at times, a retrospective illusion.

³⁶ Sérgio Godinho, quoted in interview, 1974.

“The participatory process is very important for adapting the proposals. This dialogue, this deeper understanding of architectural problems, clearly has an educational function and an undeniably beneficial civic dimension. (...) Therefore, as a tool for design, the participation of future users seems to me irreplaceable.”

Álvaro Siza, quoted in Juan Antonio Zapatel, *Urban Projects: The SAAL Experience in Portugal*, 1995.



Figure 28. Architects and residents at a SAAL meeting, Algarve, 1976. Photograph by Alexandre Alves Costa.

Anti-planning

Among the various accusations leveled against it, SAAL was described as anti-planning. Up until 25 April, urban growth, as an expression of economic and social life, followed the demands of the capitalist economy. Everything moved according to the law of maximum immediate profit, in the certainty of the population's silence regarding the increasingly degrading living conditions imposed by the system. The city was emptied of the less affluent population, which gave way to tertiary activities and luxury housing, feeding dehumanized peripheries, further aggravated by the exhausting use of public transport, made increasingly slow by the expansion of private car use.

Low-quality construction and the lack of infrastructure, combined with the scarcity of supply, made it possible to control the market and impose exorbitant rents. All the mechanisms underlying this situation were sustained by an obstructive bureaucracy and by the speculative withholding of land, held in anticipation of rising values. Faced with this reality, public administration responded with plans—plans that were not respected, because the dominant forces were too strong and could easily circumvent the technocratic attempt to resolve the conflict between the needs of the population and the logic of speculative profit. Under the pretext of technical foundations, these plans sought to curb the thirst for profit, avoid-

ing only the most extreme or unsustainable situations. One example is the Lisbon General Development Plan, published in 1977 but drafted between 1963 and 1966.

Nevertheless, the structure of the plan fully followed the logic of the urban model then in force: it envisaged vast areas for tertiary activities, an increase in employment within the city, and the forced displacement of workers to the periphery; major road infrastructures for private vehicles, paid for by all but benefiting only a few, with no solution whatsoever for collective transport.

In this context, the only exceptions were central areas of shantytowns and degraded housing, whose land—difficult to valorize—had been neglected by speculation: Vale Escuro, Curraleira, Picheleira, Casal Ventoso, Sete Moinhos, or very steep slopes such as Quinta das Fonecas, Quinta Grande (a quarry), or the area north of Alto dos Moinhos.

With the April Revolution, speculative structures and enterprises rapidly disappeared from the scene, due to a lack of prospects and changes in leadership. At the same time, the population organized itself into neighborhood committees, claiming the right to housing and to the city, and seeking to improve its living conditions. With SAAL, a new agent entered the urban process: the organized population, which made its will real and effective. It was no longer necessary to

to speak of participation—participation was there, concrete. With the implementation of SAAL, the aim was to improve housing conditions in degraded neighborhoods and shantytowns, keeping residents in place as much as possible so as not to deprive them of the advantages of central locations. The new planning process promoted by SAAL came into conflict with the previous one, as it sought to meet the real needs of the population, in opposi-

tion to the logic of capitalist accumulation that had guided earlier plans. Technicians were forced to choose between two opposing models and, initially, the popular movement prevailed, making it necessary to redefine the limits of what could be changed without compromising the future structure of the city. It was thus precisely anti-planning that made it possible to create more dignified living conditions in the city for its inhabitants.

Figure 29. SAAL meeting at Palácio de Cristal, Porto, 5 April 1975. Top: women voting; bottom: representatives of local associations. Photographs by Alexandre Alves Costa.



Collective process

³⁷ Giancarlo De Carlo, Colin Ward, John F. C. Turner and, later, N. John Habraken represent central figures in the debate on postwar participatory architecture. Although they came from different backgrounds, they shared the belief that dwelling should emerge from the direct involvement of users in the processes of design and construction. De Carlo argued for the need for an “open” and democratic architecture; Ward promoted self-management and constructive freedom as forms of social emancipation; Turner, working in Latin America, theorized self-building as a right and as a means of controlling one’s domestic environment (*Freedom to Build*, 1972); Habraken, finally, systematized these principles in the “Supports” model, distinguishing between structure and infill in order to return to inhabitants the power to modify their own spaces.

³⁸ Carlos Nelson Ferreira dos Santos (1943–1989) was a Brazilian architect, urban planner, and anthropologist, known for his contribution to participatory urbanism. He promoted self-construction and community self-management projects, particularly in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, and authored theoretical works such as *Quando a Rua Vira Casa* (1981). A critic of functionalist modernism, he advocated for an architecture attentive to context and to the needs of communities, profoundly influencing subsequent generations of Brazilian architects and urban planners.

Participatory or social architecture became an integral part of the discipline from the late 1950s onward, with various architect-theorists (Giancarlo De Carlo, Colin Ward, J. F. C. Turner, and later N. J. Habraken³⁷) experimenting with different types of client–architect relationships and even with a different understanding of architecture itself, emphasizing the process rather than merely its outcomes. User participation in the design and construction process of mass housing for the working classes was soon transposed to interventions in informal settlements, particularly the *barriadas* of Peru and the Brazilian favelas. Among the latter, the influential intervention in the Brás de Pina favela by architect Carlos Nelson dos Santos³⁸ was the first to introduce the goal of “urbanizing the favelas” (in the sense of providing infrastructure and land subdivision, rather than clearance and relocation, as originally planned for the area) and to promote self-construction with financial support from a public enterprise. This approach inspired many aspects of Portas’s work, but perhaps most importantly it became a social elevator: by the mid-1970s the area was fully integrated into the adjacent lower-middle-class neighborhood. The main weakness—significant though closely related—was that, as the area gradually became more prosperous, many of the original beneficiaries sold their homes and moved to

other favelas. Unfortunately, this outcome is still repeated today in many interventions in informal settlements: significant improvements to the social and built environment of a particular community do not resolve structural poverty, a point worth keeping in mind. SAAL housing in Portugal can be considered an *ante litteram* of urban technical democracy³⁹. Portas and his collaborators devised the so-called Brigadas de Construção (Construction Brigades) as an essential instrument for implementing the SAAL program. They were intended to serve as mediators between the population, municipalities, and the government. Moreover, they were to enjoy broad institutional autonomy, enabling them to act more as interpreters of the people vis-à-vis government agencies, rather than the other way around. In keeping with the principles of participatory social architecture—resident participation, user sovereignty, and self-help/self-construction⁴⁰—the interaction and exchange of knowledge between experts and laypeople were intrinsic to the program’s methodology. This dialogue included exchanges about the future layout of dwellings (internal organization), morphology (density and street grids), and issues related to land ownership, all to be negotiated and designed collaboratively.

It was preferred that the construction of new neighborhoods take place on the same sites as

“POPULAÇÃO ORGANIZADA



HABITAÇÃO CONQUISTADA”

Figure 30. SAAL manifesto no. 954. Folder 24. A. Alves Costa archival collection. Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril, University of Coimbra.

³⁹Michel Callon, Pierre Lascoumes, and Yannick Barthe, *Acting in an Uncertain World: An Essay on Technical Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

⁴⁰Freedom to Build: Dweller Control of the Housing Process, edited by John F. C. Turner and Robert Fichter (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

⁴¹Jorge Ferreira Chaves, *Architecture and Society: The SAAL Process* (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1987).

⁴²José António Bandeira, *Architecture and Social Housing in Portugal: The SAAL Process and Other Experiences* (Coimbra: University of Coimbra, Centre for Social Studies, 2007).

⁴³Márcio Baía, *Architecture and Landscape Guide: Salvador and the Bay of All Saints* (Salvador: Gregório de Mattos Foundation/Order of Architects, 2012).

⁴⁴José António Bandeira, *Architecture and Social Housing in Portugal: The SAAL Process and Other Experiences* (Coimbra: University of Coimbra, Centre for Social Studies, 2007).

with the Portuguese concept of *direito ao lugar* (“right to place,” which prevented displacement); that residents build their own homes with the help of materials and “technical assistance” from the government housing agency Fundo de Fomento de Habitação (Housing Development Fund) or from freely elected municipal councils; and that rent payments, intended to partially cover costs, be calculated on the basis of income⁴¹. Finally, it was stipulated that the technical assistance brigades (legal, architectural design, accounting, and construction) were not to replace the population: the government would “lend a hand,” but those in need had to “take the initiative.” This amounted to an appeal to grassroots cooperative movements. To facilitate this, the program was organized at each site with a residents’ committee tasked with communicating to the brigades exactly what was needed in terms of housing⁴², land rights, or social needs such as employment. For example, in areas with high unemployment, projects sought to subcontract

construction to unemployed residents organized into cooperatives, as occurred in the SAAL Curraleira team. Residents were “assisted” in building their homes only if they wished; the idea was to be as non-prescriptive as possible. Indeed, floor plans were initially designed by the families themselves and only subsequently reviewed by architects. In some places, such as the Relvinha neighborhood on the outskirts of Coimbra, residents wanted to build their homes themselves “to feel that they were ours.”⁴³ In more politicized areas, such as Lisbon’s industrial belt—where the Portuguese Communist Party wielded considerable influence—residents complained of “double exploitation,” having to work during the day at their regular jobs and then self-build their homes in the evenings or late into the night⁴⁴. Interestingly, however, there was no single overarching model that prevailed: in each site, the population, in dialogue with the FFH and the brigades, opted for what they considered most advantageous.

"We will walk along the taut wire of improvisation, with infinite care and also with boldness, because we know that the wire is solid, that pirouettes are inevitable, and that even missteps are part of our everyday life."

Sérgio Godinho, *A Viagem*, performance by Teatro da Comuna, Lisbon, n.d.



Figure 31. Lisbon, Portugal – Report from the Lisbon Triennale. Lisbon Triennale.



Figure 32. Azinhaga de Santa Luzia, Lisbon, 1969. Photograph by Armaldo Madureira. Courtesy of Arquivo Fotográfico Lisboa.

The SAAL Operations is one of the most comprehensive and emotionally powerful documents of a critical period in Portugal's recent history. Between 1974 and 1975, a social housing programme brought architects and local communities together in an unprecedented participatory process, enabling low-income populations to build their own homes and marking a decisive moment in the national and

Figure 33. Film poster of The SAAL Operations, directed by João Dias.

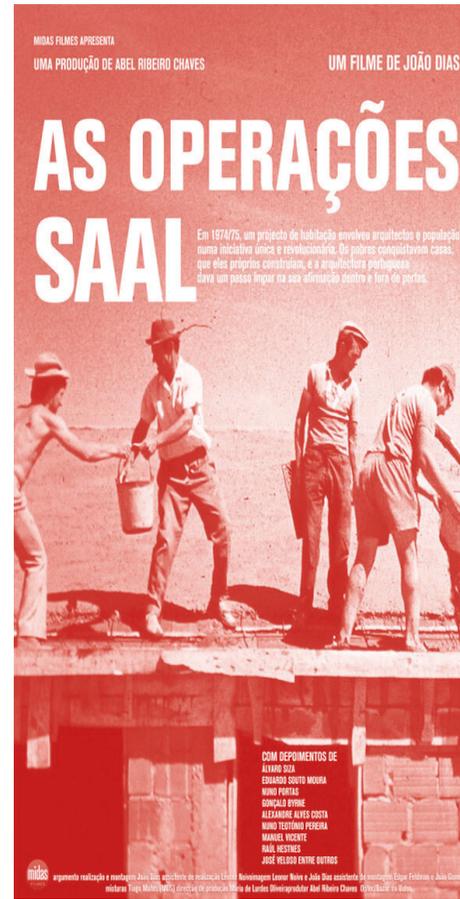


Figure 34. Film still from The SAAL Operations by João Dias.



Figure 35. Film still from The SAAL Operations by João Dias.

international affirmation of Portuguese architecture. Thirty years later, filmed testimonies of the actors involved, together with a substantial body of previously unpublished archival material, allow for a reflection on the social and cultural consequences of the SAAL operations and on the trajectories followed by architecture and urban planning since then.

Beyond its historical dimension, the film addresses broader questions of democratic and civic participation, positioning itself as a critical documentary that seeks to uncover neglected truths and preserve memories at risk of disappearance.

In this context, João Dias's *Les Operários SAAL* emerges as a fundamental work, revealing the transformative energy generated by collective action and the political potential of participatory architecture, later obscured by the abrupt termination of the SAAL process in 1976.

Through the interweaving of archival footage and interviews with architects such as Siza Vieira, Raul Hestnes Ferreira, and Eduardo Souto de Moura, the film stands as an essential document for understanding the social and architectural legacy of the SAAL operations.

A feminist issue

⁴⁹ Ana Maria Colling and Losandro António Tedeschi (eds.), *Critical Dictionary of Gender* (Dourados: Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados, 2019), 432.

⁴⁵ Manuela Tavares, *Feminisms in Portugal (1947–2007)* (Lisbon: Universidade Aberta, 2008), 261.

⁴⁶ The television programme *Nome Mulher*, produced in Portugal in the years immediately following the Carnation Revolution, highlighted the condition of women in the country during the 1970s. Through more than fifty episodes, it addressed issues such as work, the right to vote, motherhood, divorce, family planning, and abortion, and featured interviews with prominent female figures at both national and international levels.

⁴⁷ the forty-eighth episode of the series, broadcast in 1974.

⁵⁰ Teresa Pinto and Teresa Alvarez, "Introduction: History, Women's History, Gender History. The Production and Transmission of Historical Knowledge," *ex æquo*, no. 30 (2014): 18.

⁵¹ SAAL Curraleira Team, "Designing Curraleira," in *The Scope of Social Architecture*, ed. Richard Hatch (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1984), 268.

⁴⁸ these are women living in SAAL neighbourhoods, whose testimonies convey the everyday lives of ordinary women and the collective dimension of social transformations in post-revolutionary Portugal.

⁵¹ a pseudonym of Gloria Jean Watkins, deliberately written in lowercase to shift attention away from individual identities and toward ideas is one of the leading voices of intersectional feminism. In her work, she has examined the connections between gender, race, and class, criticizing the exclusionary character of white feminism and proposing an inclusive and political perspective grounded in love, solidarity, and social transformation.

The new revolutionary idea of the country also emerged thanks to women taking the floor in the public sphere, even though Portuguese society was still deeply patriarchal and conservative, inherited from the Estado Novo. There was, however, no real political space for feminisms, as explained by the Portuguese historian Manuela Tavares⁴⁵.

On the one hand, the long dictatorship had severed the memory of the feminist movements of the First Republic; on the other, these movements were regarded as bourgeois and distant from the class struggle of the time⁴⁶. It was during these revolutionary years that *Nome Mulher*⁴⁷ was created, a program that portrayed the condition of women in Portugal in the 1970s, revealing their everyday and social struggles.

The episode Right to Housing focused on housing issues and on the activities of coordinators and residents in some SAAL neighborhoods in Porto. In particular, black-and-white footage unfolds through the testimonies of Maria da Paz, Isabel, and other anonymous female residents, as well as architect Margarida Coelho⁴⁸. What emerges is a portrait of the country and of the SAAL process composed of a heterogeneous group of women: poor urban residents, students, and professionals in architecture and social intervention above all.

Through this multiple lens, it becomes possible to construct

the plans necessary to ensure remuneration, redistribution, and recognition⁴⁹.

Acknowledging that the everyday and political experiences of residents and professionals were necessarily distinct is fundamental in order to "value and understand the diversity of women's collectives, the divergences in their choices and lines of action, the plurality of their trajectories, and the heterogeneity of their living conditions and forms of integration into the societies of their time."⁵⁰

Female participation was also present in the dynamics of the capital. In a report, the SAAL team for the Curraleira neighborhood explained how women collaborated in the process: "Meetings were held with housewives in small groups of four, during which more specific problems were addressed, such as the relationships between kitchen, living room, and work space, by modifying partitions, doors, or fittings. Alternative finishes were also discussed and defined in these meetings. At this stage, guided visits were organized to other ongoing SAAL projects (...) and to some prefabrication plants producing housing components."⁵¹

The relationship between women and the home more generally was also addressed by the U.S. feminist theorist and activist bell hooks⁵², who rereads the concept of private domesticity through the efforts of her ancestors—Black women who sought to maintain the home as a place free from racism and poverty.



Figure 36. Film still from the television series *Nome Mulher*.



Figure 37. Film still from the television series *Nome Mulher*.

⁵⁶ Carol Pateman, “Guaranteeing Women’s Citizenship,” *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica* (2010).

⁵⁷ Adriana Bebbiano and Maria Irene Ramalho, *Feminist Studies and Full Citizenship*, *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, no. 89 (2010).

⁵³ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, rev. ed. (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 384.

⁵⁸ Carol Pateman, *Guaranteeing Women’s Citizenship*, *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, 2010.

⁵⁹ Antónia de Sousa and Maria Antónia Palla, *Nome Mulher*, television programme, RTP – Rádio e Televisão de Portugal, 1976.

⁵⁴ Zaida Muxi Martínez (b. 1964, Buenos Aires) is an Argentine architect and urban planner. She graduated from the EADU-UBA and obtained a PhD in Architecture in 2002 from the University of Seville. Her research focuses on gender analysis in architecture and urban planning, with particular attention to housing design and urban regeneration. She has collaborated on projects in Brazil and Argentina, promoting a critical and inclusive reading of urban space.

⁵⁵ Zaida Muxi Martínez, “Reflections on Women and the Right to Housing from a Reality of Mirages,” in *The Human Right to Housing: National and International Perspectives on Adequate Housing*, ed. Plataforma Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, *Democracia y Desarrollo* (2009), 39–48.

Moreover, the home has traditionally been considered a place for women “not by ownership, but because everything necessary for life finds a place there.” She regarded women’s roles and labor as “radically subversive political gestures,”⁵³ a concept she used to reflect on the contributions rendered invisible in the SAAL process. The harsh reality of poor and precarious neighborhoods did not prevent these women from shaping an idea of home, however fragile, nor from engaging in struggles for better housing conditions for their families.

In addition to appropriating public space, they often acted against the wishes of their husbands.

The right to housing, therefore, cannot be limited to the perimeter of four walls, nor reduced to a response to a quantitative lack of dwellings. Argentine architect Zaida Muxi⁵⁴ has emphasized that, for women, “speaking about the right to housing means speaking about a broader right, which is not limited to having a roof; it is the right to be an active part of society (...) [but] reflecting on needs when we are immersed in a world of mirages is very difficult, and for women these mirages have many facets.”⁵⁵ In this historical moment, the idea of citizenship was being widely redefined in Portugal, particularly for women. Suffrage, which allowed women to become active members of society, was considered the first symbol of full citizenship: the

right to vote followed by the right to be elected—something that remained especially difficult for racialized women.⁵⁶

“To inhabit the city autonomously, to be, with full rights, part of the city and to add one’s own voice to it—this is full citizenship.”⁵⁷

The many difficulties reflect unequal relations of power and privilege, the domination of some and the subordination of others. Alongside the social and historical responsibility assigned to domestic and care work, poverty stands out as an urgent obstacle. This “constitutes a problem for the citizenship of both men and women, but women tend to be among the poorest of the poor.”⁵⁸

“The SAAL process is an achievement of the most humble classes. For this reason, it is important to stress the value of workers’ participation in solving their own problems. In this field, women—normally ignored and machistically excluded or undervalued in national issues—have a fundamental role to play. More than anyone else, women, as socially exploited beings, live and endure in a particularly intense way the poor conditions of family housing.”⁵⁹

Beyond the house itself, social and physical relations with the urban environment influence the daily life and the intellectual, social, professional, and economic development of each person. One of the central axes of the SAAL process was the right to place—that is, the right

“The right to housing is not reduced to a quantitative fact: the quality of housing—not as a luxury but as a useful good within a safe and socially mixed urban setting—is fundamental to achieving a full life in the exercise of rights.”⁶⁰

The notion of decent housing must therefore be intertwined with the right to inhabit the city and not its physical and symbolic margins. Theorized from a Marxist perspective, the “right to the city” was coined by the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre in 1968, who, in confronting the capitalist mode of production, challenged the hierarchical and segregating forms through which space is (re)produced and appropriated.

Starting from the articulation

between physical space and citizenship, participation, perceptions of safety, well-being, and a sense of belonging, the relationship between women and urban space has been problematized by feminist thought, critique, and practice. Feminists have shown, in short, that the materialization of oppression and subordination in urban spaces does not occur solely through capitalist domination, but also through patriarchal and colonial dynamics⁶¹. Urban location, internal, external, and community relations between housing and its surroundings, and networks of everyday infrastructures can either hinder or foster the development of people as full citizens.

It is the women who arrive first at meetings to discuss the agenda, who are the first to make themselves available to attend demonstrations, and who have a more active voice when discussing functional matters within the home.



Figure 38. Women participating in housing-related demonstrations. The original author of the image is unknown.

⁶⁰ Zaida Muxi Martínez, “Reflections on Women and the Right to Housing from a Reality of Mirages,” in *The Human Right to Housing: National and International Perspectives on Adequate Housing*, ed. Plataforma Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, *Democracia y Desarrollo* (2009), 42.

Architects as political actors

As a liberal profession, architects, prior to 25 April, enjoyed a relatively favourable position, thanks to the strength of land speculation encouraged by the Caetano government, which functioned as a tool of the major architectural and urban planning agencies. Under these conditions, it is understandable that the revolution of 25 April was experienced harshly by the most privileged groups (those most closely compromised with the regime), who were forced into a hasty flight to Brazil. For others, who lost their principal sources of income with the disappearance of private commissions, the situation became temporarily difficult, while awaiting the still insufficient role assumed by public patronage. Many architects retained a certain nostalgia for their traditional positions, particularly the group of technocrats who had benefited from the large design offices created for the prestigious works of the Caetano regime. This nostalgia gradually turned into active opposition to the new regime, through actions aimed at regaining privileged positions. More interesting, however, are those who participated more or less actively in events over the subsequent two years, seeking coherence between their professional practice

and the political and social meaning of the revolution. Some, such as Teotónio Pereira, who had been imprisoned prior to 25 April, committed themselves fully to political action, abandoning the profession in order to become revolutionary leaders. Others, belonging to different generations, chose to intervene within the new administration, often assuming important positions of responsibility at both governmental and municipal levels. Traditionally regarded as “irresponsible artists,” architects had not been accepted within the previous administration.

After 25 April, those who had demonstrated a critical spirit or were known for the experimental character of their work were called to sit alongside the “politicians” and were required to confront major issues of general public interest. Without seeking to assess the results of architects’ actions while in power, it can nevertheless be observed that these corresponded more to individual strategies, linked to certain left-wing forces, than to a comprehensive policy defined together with the major parties. Their role, however, was considerable, given the importance of the construction sector within the Portuguese economy.

*Filipe Lopes, Gonçalo Byrne, Manuel Vicente, Nuno
Portas, Raul Hestnes Ferreira, Teotónio Pereira
Filipe Lopes, Gonçalo Byrne, Manuel Vicente, Nuno
Portas, Raul Hestnes Ferreira, Teotónio Pereira
Filipe Lopes, Gonçalo Byrne, Manuel Vicente, Nuno
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Filipe Lopes, Gonçalo Byrne, Manuel Vicente, Nuno
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Filipe Lopes, Gonçalo Byrne, Manuel Vicente, Nuno
Portas, Raul Hestnes Ferreira, Teotónio Pereira*

Political actors INTERVIEWS

Below are the experiences recounted through an interview published in *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* (no. 185, May/June 1976), where, for the first time, the Portuguese phenomenon is addressed to an international audience. The debate is conducted by Bernard Huet with a group of Portuguese architects involved in the SAAL project. In the period immediately following the Carnation Revolution, Huet speaks not as a practising architect, but as a critic and external observer.

Filipe Lopes:

"After 25 April, there was a certain renewal within municipal bodies, but the entire structure of the civil service showed great difficulty in adapting to the new political directives. SAAL had the great advantage of not responding to a demand expressed by the population, but of having provoked it. It acted as a catalyst for popular organisation in the face of an administration inherited from fascism, which put every possible obstacle in the way in order to maintain the status quo.

The principal element of popular mobilisation was the occupation of available housing, which led marginalised populations to become aware of their right to housing. In Europe there is much talk about the 'participation' of the population. It is a recurring theme among sociologists and architects, but one must ask how this participation can actually be realised. After 25 April, it emerged spontaneously: no one even thought of calling it 'participation'. It arose simply from the needs of a population freed from the fascist yoke.

Moreover, the creation of SAAL allowed an entire-group of professionals—architects and technicians—

who had until then been excluded from the fascist administration (which recruited solely on a political basis), to come together within parallel structures and urban planning groups at the service of the municipalities.

It should be recalled that under the fascist regime there existed only a Technical Directorate of Urban Planning, a simple body intended to approve subdivision plans and issue building permits. In the Lisbon region there was (and still is) a Planning Office for the urban agglomeration. Everything was centralised, and the peripheral municipalities were required to have their plans approved by this body, without any coordination among themselves. Since then, attempts have been made to establish coordination, but it is a long process, now interrupted because many officials who remained in office from the old regime are trying to block any form of renewal.

Among the projects carried out, SAAL was given absolute priority. It was even possible to delay the project for lighting the major access roads to Lisbon (considered a priority) in order to allocate funds to lighting, water supply, and sewerage networks in poor neighbourhoods, immediately improving living conditions in those areas. This was possible as long as the leadership of the Lisbon municipality was in the hands of people who guaranteed effective support for such operations.

The most positive outcome of all this was the autonomous organisation of the population and the questioning of the administration itself.

At present, despite the political retreat following 25 November, it is important to recall a significant law drafted by Portas—Law 445—which halted the destruction of historic buildings. In Lisbon and elsewhere, 'urban renewal' served only speculation: buildings were demolished to be rebuilt more densely and luxuriously, while residents were expelled to the outskirts with negligible compensation. This law enabled the inhabitants of buildings slated for demolition to fight against destruction and to demand consolidation and improvement works.

Teotónio Pereira:

"It has already been noted that there is a difference between Lisbon and Porto. This can be explained in part by the contracts and professional relationships existing among architects, but also by a geographical factor: in Lisbon there is greater dispersion and disintegration around the old neighbourhoods, whereas in Porto experiences gradually became rooted in those same neighbourhoods, where many architects, since the 1950s, had built a strong bond with the territory. Porto is a large city, but

it has always been marginalised. The profession (of architects) was somewhat corrupt, and architects were objectively linked to the fascist regime. The SAAL project reflects this situation perfectly.

Bernard Huet:

Why did you yourself not take part in a SAAL operation?

Teotónio Pereira:

"This is a very personal case. I had already moved away from professional practice and was engaged in political activities well before 25 April. In fact, I had taken part in a SAAL project which, for contingent reasons, failed; moreover, I did not have sufficient time to carry it forward. Returning to Lisbon, I witnessed the failure of several teams in various neighbourhoods. These teams, very heterogeneous in composition, were neither professionally nor politically prepared. Perhaps I am misusing the word 'failure.' Let us say instead that in Lisbon there were stronger contradictions than elsewhere in the preparation of SAAL work, and also in the way architects were ready to confront it. I remain convinced that, despite specific geographical characteristics and the opportunities Porto architects had to discuss their experiences, there was a real economic reason, linked to the type of clientele for whom architects worked."

Raul Hestnes Ferreira:

"What proved most successful in the SAAL operations was not what had been planned, but what actually happened. When one undertakes innovative work, it is impossible to foresee all its consequences. SAAL enabled a decentralisation of decision-making, the possibility of acting locally in agreement with the population, and this led to the exercise of genuinely popular power, of which the technical teams became the true instrument."

Gonçalo Byrne:

"A short while ago Portas said that he thought SAAL had been a catalyst for popular mobilisation, which would suggest that before the creation of SAAL the population had done nothing. I believe, on the contrary, that it was also an instrument for controlling mass movements. SAAL was created immediately after the spontaneous occupations in Lisbon, when all the vacant dwellings built with public funding had already been occupied by the population. There was fear that the movement would expand and escape control. SAAL served to

'fix' populations in the places and neighbourhoods where they had lived prior to 25 April, that is, in shantytowns. I am not saying that this 'fixation' was negative: the inhabitants began to forcefully demand immediate improvements to their living conditions, compelling the State to intervene to resolve the problem of degraded neighbourhoods."

Manuel Vicente:

"Since the months of April and May we are still waiting to know what interest rate the government will apply to housing associations for the construction of new dwellings. Without knowing this rate, it is impossible to draw up a proper budget. Moreover, the government has taken no measures to define property status or the procedures for expropriating the land on which we are supposed to build. We are truly threatened by a serious danger, since none of the cooperatives owns the land intended for construction.

Some infrastructure works are being carried out (roads, sewers, etc.) that do not in any way commit the future, since these interventions can always be reused, either for speculative urbanisation or for social purposes. When we realised that we would not receive the government guarantees necessary to move the programmes forward, we handed the drawn-up projects over to the popular organisations, telling them—"

Bernard Huet:

"If I understand correctly, the 'project' became a weapon of struggle in the hands of popular organisations, resulting in a de facto departure from the original objectives set by SAAL."

Raul Hestnes Ferreira:

"One of the problems that SAAL never clearly defined concerns the type of construction to be proposed: individual or collective housing? This presupposes determining acceptable density levels, possible construction systems, and the type of contractor capable of carrying out SAAL programmes.

At the outset, these were punctual operations carried out through self-construction. Perhaps it should be stated clearly that these initial objectives were abandoned. In Lisbon, our position was taken collectively: we can say that it was the population itself that forced us into this choice. The inhabitants rejected self-construction, and we readily accepted this decision, also because the number of families to be housed was enormous and the amount of available land very limited. We preferred to fight over the choice of land, demanding that it

be well located and well connected. As for the problem of densities, we discussed it with popular organisations and proposed a very wide range of typologies, from four-storey blocks to single-family houses with courtyards. We explained what these typologies meant in terms of density, and the population consciously chose the four-storey type. Several teams, without consulting one another, arrived at the same conclusions in different neighbourhoods of the city. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that most people, of rural origin, wished to integrate into 'urban life', and for them living in the city meant living in an apartment: the rural model was perceived as a sign of exclusion. It was not up to us, as bourgeois, to preach the individual house."

Filipe Lopes:

"For central Lisbon there are around 20 SAAL teams working in collaboration with the municipality and the Public Urban Planning Agency—this involves approximately 20,000 dwellings, that is, 80,000 inhabitants. Almost all shantytowns currently have a SAAL team. Byrne said that SAAL was born as a 'response' to spontaneous occupations, but this is false; he said it was intended to 'fix' populations in order to prevent them from extending their actions. Yet even after the creation of SAAL, occupations continued. I believe it was necessary to stabilise populations in their places of residence, but for another reason: Lisbon's shantytowns are located in central areas, which allow participation in urban life, whereas public housing estates have always been relegated to increasingly distant peripheries. The intention was that these low-income populations could retain well-located land, also from a speculative point of view. The stagnation of the SAAL project has political causes, due to the hesitations of successive governments, which never had the strength to take clear decisions. Land expropriations were not carried out, and there is only one official for 20 operations—completely insufficient. Despite a recent law issued in June 1975, the land was not released. The left fought against the objectives of SAAL operations, both within popular organisations and within technical brigades; their actions paralysed some teams that were based on the principle of self-construction. It therefore became necessary to move toward a mass programme, without the possibility of reducing costs through the direct participation of the population in construction—hence the importance of determining the interest rate on state loans. Moreover, it was impossible to build 20,000 dwellings in Lisbon in one or two years, so

emergency measures were adopted. Large sums were invested in improvement and sanitation operations in shantytowns—not to be confused with the construction of new housing. Last year, unlike previous years, no cases of cholera were recorded in the shantytowns."

Bernard Huet:

"What do you see as the future of SAAL?"

Nuno Portas:

"We can expect a capitalist reappropriation of the construction sector. The State will have to support this sector, foster its expansion, and guarantee a sufficient rate of profit in order to reconstitute a process of capital accumulation, with the help of nationalised banks—since developers can no longer rely on private banks. For a year and a half now, the land market has been at a standstill: there is no demand, and therefore no reason to invest in rental housing. The rent freeze of September 1976 caused the bankruptcy of most property developers, though not of construction companies. The State committed itself to limiting unemployment and supporting the construction sector by intensifying traditional public procurement and launching a new credit formula for construction companies, on condition that they accepted prior control of sale and rental prices. Thanks to this contractual regime, the State managed to support one third of construction output. Without making rash forecasts, some signals are clear: for example, new commissions have been awarded to private urban planning firms to draw up traditional plans, without links to municipalities, while direct funding to those same municipalities is being refused. Bureaucratic interference by the central State in local administrations is resuming. In parallel, traditional technical cadres are rejecting all organisations that had been working directly, in a political way, with municipalities. What will become of all these experiences of direct work with popular organisations? At the municipal level, it is very easy to eliminate these experiences, which are neither institutionalised nor bureaucratised. SAAL operations will survive only in areas where they are sufficiently deeply rooted, as an irrational exception within the system. The construction industry may well reclaim the SAAL project at the implementation stage. With very low interest rates, some construction companies are beginning to offer to carry out SAAL operations, despite their complexity and lack of rationality. The great struggle for the rationalisation of the

and population, I would give priority to the architect as builder of the city rather than the architect as maker of objects. In our Latin tradition, the city can be assumed by the population as a collective project. It is much easier to speak with the population about a form of city than to discuss an architectural object.

In my work at the Housing Service, I had occasion to discuss with popular organisations in a small working-class village, and we realised that—unlike the municipality—these people had a very concrete vision of needs and desires regarding urban improvement. Their representatives told us exactly what they wanted: they knew what a street and a square were, and avoided any academic discussion about housing types.

I thought of what Louis Kahn said: 'A space is good for one person when it is good for everyone.' For me, the first quality of space is that it be universal, that is, usable and appropriable by anyone. The less dwellings are burdened by the ghosts of the architect's bourgeois bad conscience, the more 'beautiful' space will be, and the more it can be appropriated by inhabitants as an experience that enriches their everyday life. This is a risk that, as an architect, I am willing to take without ambiguity. Which leads me to launch a somewhat provocative slogan: 'The façade first.'

Gonçalo Byrne:

"In Portugal, when an architect works directly with the population, they are very often tempted by paternalism. I find it curious that when some architects working in SAAL teams speak about their work, they say it is the product of the group. These architects identify a little too quickly with the population.

I believe this is false, because we must not forget that these are people who studied at university in Portugal, which means they belong to the middle or upper bourgeoisie, even if they share and defend a left-wing ideology, which can in some cases serve to mystify their role in the process. They present themselves as the vanguard of the popular process. By identifying with the population, they tend to summarise their role as intellectuals and to suggest to the population what it should do, even when they pretend not to do so.

I take as an example certain cases in which the architect replaces the population in dealings with the municipality in order to obtain expropriation of the land where the operation is to take place. It is curious to see that many architects play this role and defend it; and in this case, it must be said that the balance of power is exactly the same as before 25 April, between an architect and their

client. At that time, an architect was chosen for their connections, which could help in getting a project approved.

I would like to analyse in greater detail the model of division of labour on which SAAL teams have based their relationships. It seems to me that there is a part of responsibility that, within SAAL teams, an architect will never be able to claim. They can initiate dialogue, define participatory models to determine needs and modes of action, but they cannot intervene to enable popular organisations to find greater internal coherence through struggle."

Filipe Lopes:

"It is not so much the personalisation of the client as the forms of population participation that matter. We were forced to practise a concrete urbanism, not a studio-based urbanism. All our action has rightly been described as anti-plan-anti-urbanism—but it was exactly what people needed.

In fact, we produced many plans, and now they decorate the shelves of the municipality. We were forced to confront concrete needs and their resolution with a general organisational vision. To my knowledge, this experience is unique in Europe. What has it led to so far? To very little that is visible—but it would need to last longer. The administration and the state apparatus have already hastened to destroy part of these structures.

I am convinced that this way of responding case by case to needs represents a new urban practice that could transform the city. Faced with a delegation of 2,000 or 3,000 inhabitants who come to ask for sewers, public lighting, and so on, one cannot say 'it is not foreseen in the plan'. Even after 25 November (1975), this cannot disappear except in the case of massive repression.

I do not want to overestimate the strength of popular organisations, but I believe they possess a power and a capacity for struggle that require a response. There is now a different way of making a plan, of programming actions that will leave a mark, at least for some time, on the urban fabric. It will be said that this corresponds to no rationality, to no rational plan, but in reality it corresponds much more closely to a social reality. Before 25 April, the plans we saw being produced described an orderly and well-aligned city, with entire neighbourhoods built chaotically at its margins—solid but anarchic houses along non-existent streets, without water or electricity."

Widespread construction site 02 PARTECIPATION

The model

⁶² TEAM X is an international group of architects and urban planners that emerged in the 1950s as a critical reaction against the Modern Movement and the rigidly functionalist principles of CIAM. Among its most well-known members are Alison and Peter Smithson, Giancarlo De Carlo, Jacob Bakema, and Aldo van Eyck. The group advocated a more flexible and human approach to architecture and urban planning, emphasizing the scale of the individual, social life, and the relationship between public and private spaces.

⁶³ Kenneth Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

Figure 39. Fernando Távora, Diagrammatic chart for the organization of SAAL, c. 1975. Pen on paper, Fundação Marques da Silva.

The SAAL process emerged after a period in which modernists and functionalists had focused on theories of dwelling, at a moment when attention was, for the first time, directed toward the need to rethink cities as processes of social inclusion.

A change in trajectory was already perceptible during the construction of Le Corbusier's *Unité(s) d'Habitation* and through the emergence of *Team X*⁶², which regarded decontextualised modernism, overly mechanised functionalism, and the International Style as destructive of individual identity⁶³.

In the 1970s, on the one hand, *New Brutalism*⁶⁴ gained

ground—a movement associated with the Smithsons—which continued to regard megastructures as urban reference points. Their notions of *cluster* and *stem*⁶⁵ introduced the sequence “block, village, city,” in which the “house” was no longer the origin of the city. In practice, their experience did not depart significantly from that of modernism, and their reinterpretation of the traditional street in the “sky”—as galleries where “people can stop and talk and where entrance doors, thanks to their sheltered position, create places to linger”—did not replace the relational nature of the street and deprived inhabitants of their privacy⁶⁶.

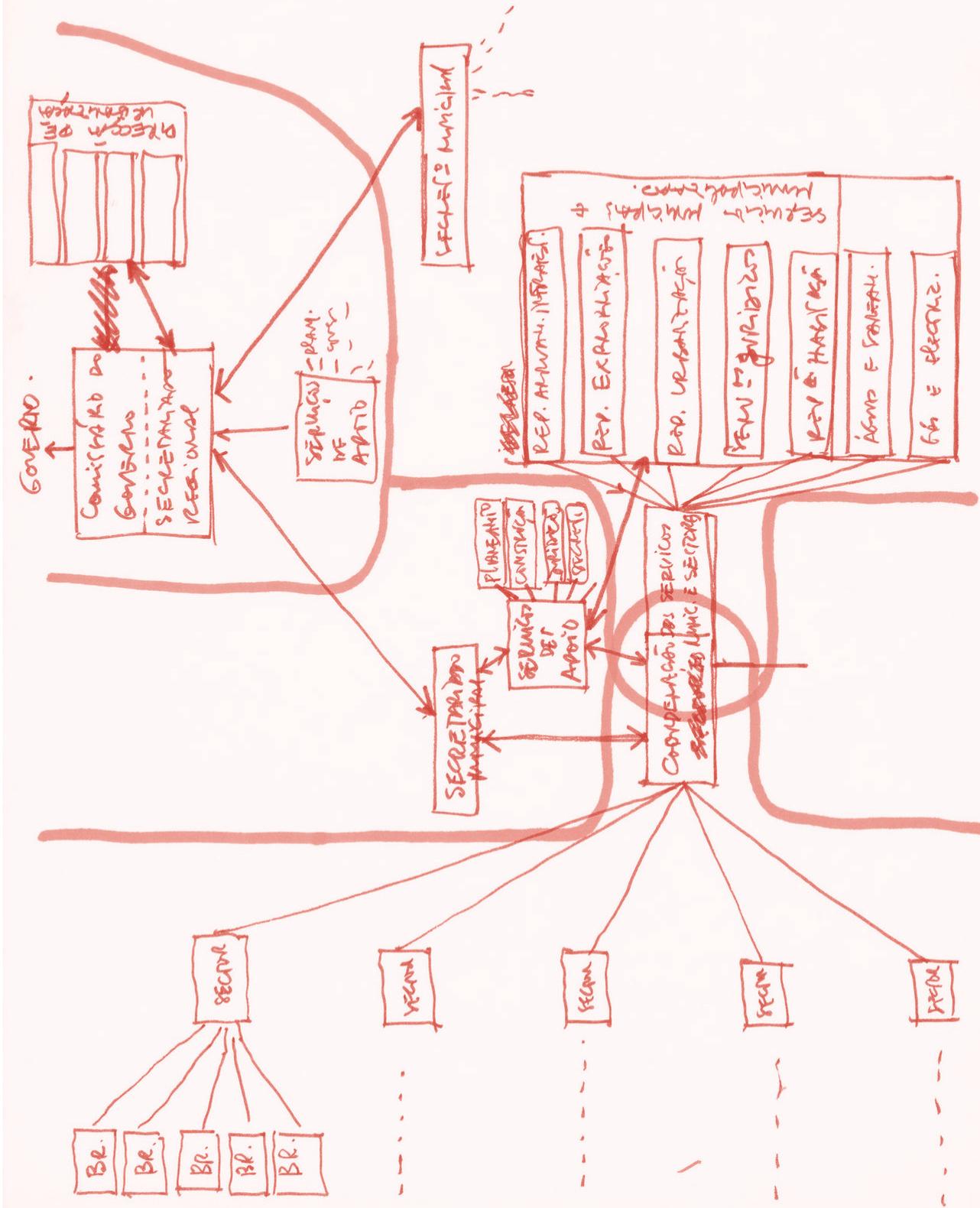




Figure 40. Le Case Alte, Tiburtino district, Rome. Mario Ridolfi, INA-Casa programme. Photograph by unknown author.



Figure 41. Le Case Alte, Tiburtino district, Rome. Mario Ridolfi, INA-Casa programme. Photograph by unknown author.

At the opposite extreme lies Italian Neorealism, with a completely different formal and ideological origin. In Italy, the destruction caused by the Second World War had been less severe, and therefore the modernist urgency was weaker⁶⁷. However, fascism had repressed the poorest sectors of the population, leading to the creation of the INA-Casa programme to address the housing shortage. A closer relationship with the individual developed—one that had been denied by both modernism and fascism in favour of the collective. The “ordinary person” became the subject of an art whose aim was to represent the real living conditions of the people, with neorealist cinema as its primary medium of expression⁶⁸. This closer relationship with the individual was also physical, prompting architects to question people about their material and psychological needs. Using funds withheld from workers’ wages (managed by a central public body⁶⁹), INA-Casa built affordable housing complexes, promoting close collaboration between architects and residents and studying people’s housing aspirations in order to translate them into design. It was precisely from this latter experience—Italian Neorealism—that the SAAL process drew inspiration. As a process, however, the similarities end there, since the Gabinete Técnico de Habitação (GTH) granted full creative freedom to the architects involved, pro-

vided they did not exceed the established budget⁷⁰. SAAL was therefore not a unified phenomenon, nor did it follow a single style. Bandeirinha⁷¹ notes that the population felt out of context with respect to urban space and housing layouts, introducing modifications that altered their use and formality (closing off kitchens, turning bedrooms into living rooms). With its almost scientific precision, Portas’s guidance could have become a reference for the SAAL process in terms of domesticity, as it was based on real experiences and direct surveys of those concerned. The SAAL process was supported by “brigades” working in close contact with the population to respond to real needs in the design of their homes. In other words, it was a matter of individual identity associated with the urban context, as opposed to the “universal man” associated with domestic space. The latter seems to have been “abandoned” by contemporary theory, yet in the SAAL process reflection on the home was not neglected: identifying users in order to reflect them had to find expression in the internal organisation of dwellings. The functionalist housing type, for example, was based on the separation of spaces according to their function, envisaging a tripartite house with common, private, and utilitarian areas. The family was placed at the centre of the project, and privacy among its members determined the use of space:

⁶⁴ New Brutalism, developed in the United Kingdom in the 1950s by Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, promotes an architecture that is honest, functional, and socially conscious. The movement values exposed concrete and structural clarity, opposing the polished aesthetics of modernism. Also inspired by Le Corbusier, it finds one of its key theoretical expressions in *Urban Structuring* (Smithson & Smithson, 1967), where architecture is understood as a reflection of human relationships and the urban context.

⁶⁵ Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, *Urban Structuring: Studies of Alison & Peter Smithson* (London: Studio Vista, 1967).

⁶⁶ Nuno Portas, Portugal: *Architecture, the Last Twenty Years* (Lisbon: Tendências da Arquitectura Contemporânea, 2005).

⁶⁷ Leonardo Benevolo, *Storia della città* (Bari: Laterza, 2006).

⁶⁸ Bruno Reichlin, Antony Shugaar, and Branden W. Joseph, “Figures of Neorealism in Italian Architecture (Part 1),” *Grey Room* 5 (2001): 79–101.

⁶⁹ Saverio Muratori, “Tipi e forme delle città italiane,” *Casabella*, no. 200 (1952).

⁷⁰ João Pedro Soares Nunes, *À Escala Humana: Planeamento Urbano e Arquitectura de Habitação em Olivais Sul* (Lisboa, 1959–1969) (Lisboa: Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2007).

⁷¹ José António Bandeirinha (1958–) is a Portuguese architect and academic, known for his studies on post-revolutionary architecture and urbanism in Portugal. A professor at the University of Coimbra and a researcher at the Centro de Estudos Sociais, he has focused in particular on the SAAL process (*Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local*), a public housing program active between 1974 and 1976 that directly involved local communities in the design of their homes. Bandeirinha has made a significant contribution to the critical understanding of the relationship between architecture, politics, and society in the Portuguese context.

⁷² Paavo Stigar, *The SAAL Process and the Interpretation of Domesticity: The Singularity and Miscegenation of Its Housing Models* (Fundação de Serralves, 2008).

⁷³ Karel Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002; originally published 1932).

leisure time in common areas, intimacy in enclosed spaces⁷². Although mechanised, this typology proposed an alternative to the bourgeois model (such as Karl Ehn's Karl-Marx-Hof), often at the cost of sacrificing essential spaces such as the bathroom⁷³. In response, a third path developed in Portugal—more flexible and better suited to inhabitants, who were considered not only as social or physiological entities, but also as geographical and cultural ones. Empiricism and neorealism inspired this approach, and the SAAL process represents one of the most significant cases in which these principles were put into practice.

Ludovico Quaroni, returning to those places after several years, recounts, in an editorial published in *Casabella* and significantly titled *The Land of the Baroques*:

“There were workers returning home, there were women doing their last shopping in the still-lit small shops, and in the darkness of the secondary streets the candles of the Stations of the Cross were burning. There was life in the neighborhood, in any case. Whether beautiful or ugly, it lived as best it could, and the experience carried out therefore seemed valid to me, despite the reservations and the disavowals, and perhaps even the hostility, that each of us harbored... Yet among the documents reacting against Rationalism, it still seems to me the most determined and the strongest in confronting error... It is a work that rightfully belongs to the history of Italian architecture.”

Figure 41. Film still from *La terra trema* (Luchino Visconti, 1948).



Figure 42. Karl-Marx-Hof, Vienna, c. 1930. Project by Karl Ehn. Photograph by unknown author.

Figure 43. Robin Hood Gardens, London, 1966–1972. Project by Alison and Peter Smithson. Photograph by unknown author.



Forms of the phenomenon

In total, 154 SAAL operations were proposed throughout the country: 54 in the North, 26 in the Centre, 47 in Lisbon and its surroundings, and 30 in the Algarve.

The process unfolded in a climate of intense political conflict, marked by recurring tensions between residents—often influenced by the Communist Party or the far left—and municipalities controlled by the PPD (today's PSD), or vice versa⁷⁴. SAAL was therefore not a unified and homogeneous programme, but rather a constellation of profoundly differentiated experiences, shaped by very different urban, social, and political contexts.

The main—and decisive—difference between SAAL in Porto and that in other regions (particularly Lisbon, Setúbal, Seixal, Olhão, or Lagos) lay in the location of the operations⁷⁵. In the North, the most significant interventions took place in the heart of the urban fabric, within the *ilhas* and degraded central neighbourhoods.

Despite their fragmentary nature, these operations implicitly outlined a radical model of the city: a city in which the working classes also have a right to the historic centre, in which different social strata and urban functions coexist, and in which new housing engages in dialogue with traditional forms rather than erasing them. The decision to insert new dwellings into the interstices of the consolidated city was certainly pragmatic, but it was a form

of “class-based” pragmatism, grounded in the real needs of inhabitants rather than in the logic of real-estate profit.

In Lisbon, by contrast, most SAAL operations were located on the urban periphery, resulting primarily in multi-storey collective housing blocks arranged around courtyards or in U-shaped configurations, with vertical access cores and longitudinal galleries⁷⁶.

These were typologies that predated the Revolution, now realised under emergency conditions. Among the best-known cases are the *Fonsecas*, south of the second ring road, designed by Hestnes Ferreira in a neo-rationalist style, and *Monte Coxo/Bacalhau* at *Olaias*, designed by Manuel Vicente. Other operations, such as *Curraleira*, adopted hybrid solutions, combining terraced single-family houses with duplex blocks connected by galleries.

In the North, relations with municipal institutions were often conflictual. SAAL neighbourhoods became the site of a contradictory form of cooperation between the State and residents, openly opposing land speculation aimed at expelling poorer populations from central areas in order to reconvert them to more profitable uses. In Porto, twelve priority operations were initially launched for approximately 12,000 inhabitants, soon expanding to involve up to 60,000 people. In December 1974, the first Plenary of Residents' Committees and SAAL/Norte Committees

⁷⁴ José António Bandeirinha, *Arquitetura e habitação social em Portugal: O processo SAAL e outras experiências* (Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, Centro de Estudos Sociais, 2007).

⁷⁵ Paavo Stigar, *The SAAL Process and the Interpretation of Domesticity* (Fundação de Serralves, 2008).

⁷⁶ SAAL Curraleira Team, “Designing Curraleira,” in *The Scope of Social Architecture*, ed. Richard Hatch (1984).

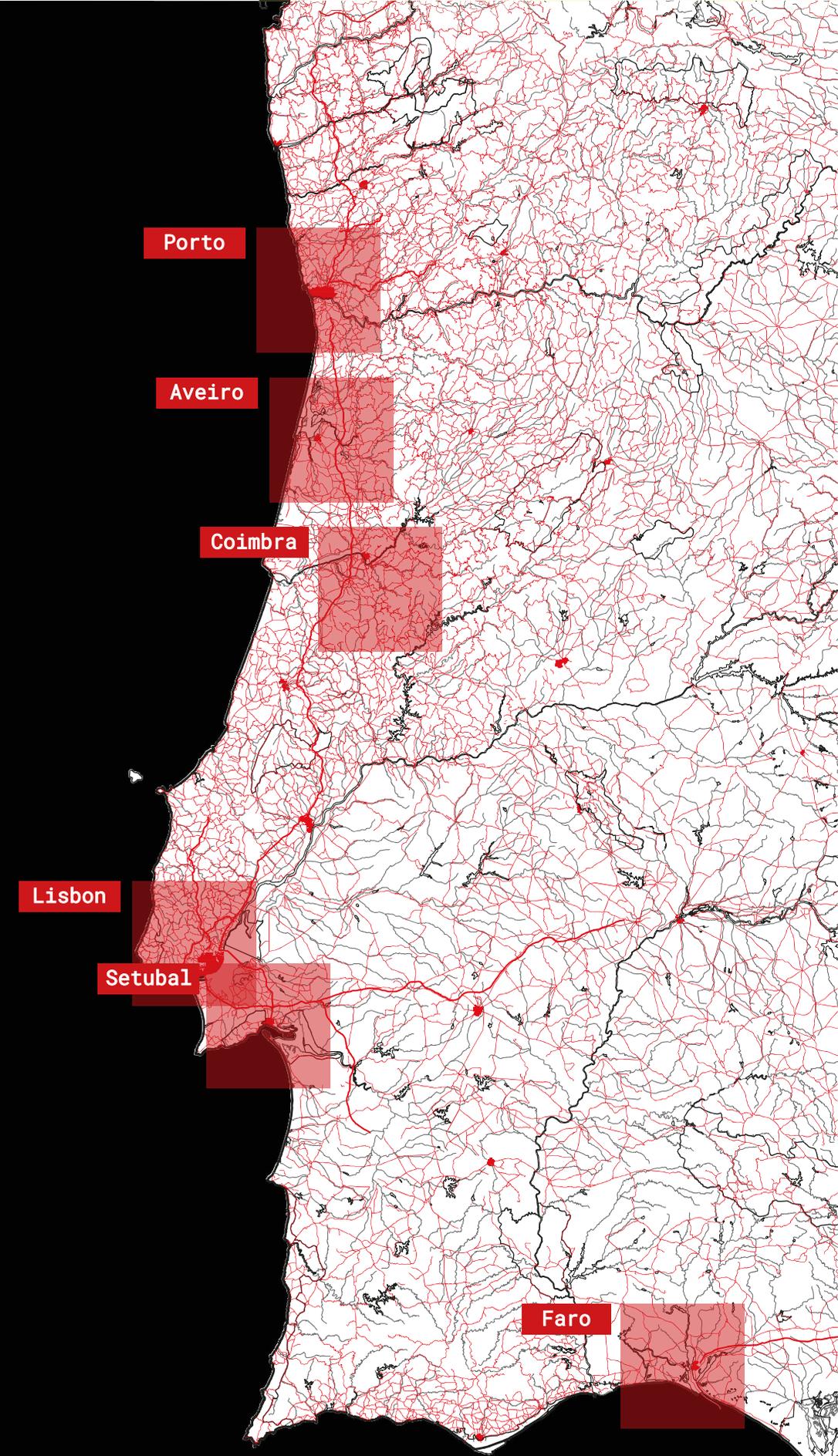


Figure 44. Malagueira housing neighbourhood, Évora, c. 1977–1997. Álvaro Siza. Source: Fundação Marques da Silva.



Figure 45. Malagueira housing neighbourhood, Évora, c. 1977–1997. Álvaro Siza. Source: Fundação Marques da Silva.



Figure 46. View of the Antas neighbourhood, Porto, 2014. Photograph by André Cepeda. Courtesy of the artist. André Cepeda.



Figure 47. Malagueira housing neighbourhood, Évora, c. 1977–1997. Álvaro Siza. Source: Fundação Marques da Silva.

was held, followed the next summer by the creation of the Revolutionary Council of Porto's Residents.

The most prominent operations were those directed by Álvaro Siza Vieira (Bouça and São Vítor), Alcino Soutinho (Maceda), Pedro Ramalho (Antas), Sérgio Fernandez (Leal), and Matos Ferreira (Loja). All of these projects were characterised by low-rise buildings—terraced houses or duplexes—in direct contact with the street: a typology dear to the Modern Movement yet deeply rooted in Porto's traditional urban morphology.

However, neither at Bouça nor at São Vítor were truly flexible or adaptable solutions achieved; the doctrinal rigidity of avant-garde architects remained present even within a participatory process such as SAAL.

The case of the ilhas is central to understanding the SAAL/Norte approach. These proletarian enclaves, built within urban blocks in the courtyards of middle-class housing, while excluded from formal public space, fostered cohesive social networks grounded in strong communal values.

After 25 April 1974, residents asserted their “right to place,” opposing the peripheral relocation schemes promoted by the municipality as early as the 1960s. The SAAL technical brigades embraced this position, recognising in the ilhas a model of community life to be valued

and reinterpreted.

Despite the stated intention to rehabilitate vernacular spatial practices, the brigades largely rejected self-construction as an initial method, considering it a risk to overall architectural quality.

As Álvaro Siza remarked, quoting Che Guevara, “quality is respect for people.” Nevertheless, many projects—including possibility of incremental transformation over time.

Over the following decades, SAAL neighbourhoods underwent highly divergent trajectories.

Where the adopted typologies drew on vernacular models, such as terraced housing, a high degree of appropriation and transformation by residents was observed. Conversely, in Lisbon's multi-storey complexes, integrated into ordinary public housing systems, the degradation of shared spaces exposed the contradictions of SAAL's hybrid property system, in which residents owned the buildings but not the land.

There was never a single SAAL⁷⁷: its forms and outcomes varied profoundly according to urban, social, and political conditions. What remains, however, is the exceptional nature of a historical moment in which dwelling became a political act and the city a terrain of collective emancipation, revealing at once the potential and the fragility of popular participation when translated into practice.

⁷⁷ Michel Callon, Pierre Lascoumes, and Yannick Barthe, *Acting in an Uncertain World* (MIT Press, 2011).



Figure 48. View of the Casal das Figueiras neighbourhood, Serúbal, 2014. Photograph by Daniel Malhão. Courtesy of the artist. Daniel Malhão.



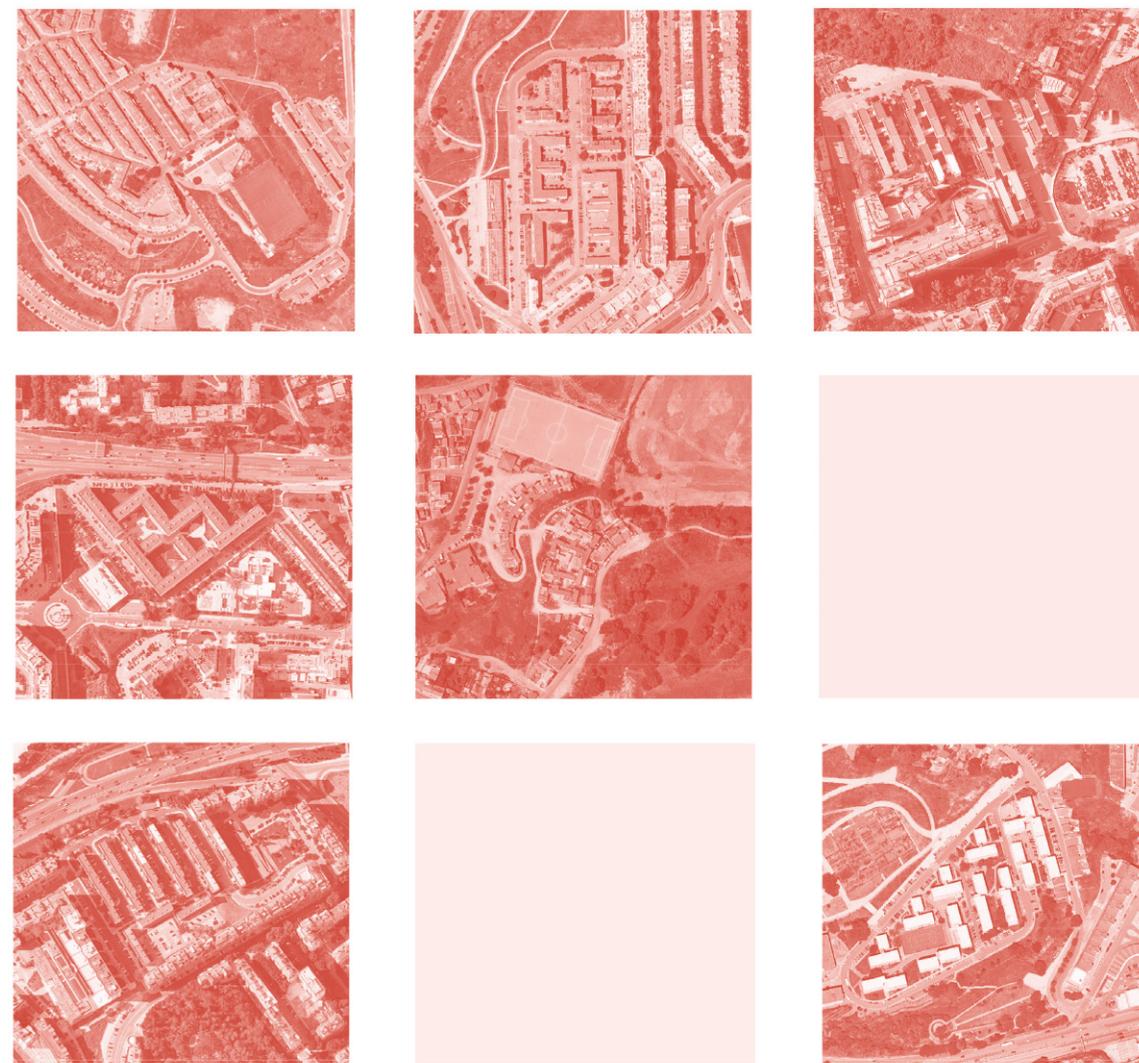
Figure 49. View of the Casal das Figueiras neighbourhood, Serúbal, 2014. Photograph by Daniel Malhão. Courtesy of the artist. Daniel Malhão.

**Calvanas, Picadeiro, Patio do Galego,
 Malpique, Quinta do Nerigao.
 Fonecas II
 Alto de Eira-Vale Escuro
 S.cornelio
 Casal Machados, Quinta do Leal, Estrada da Circunvalação
 Quinta do Grande, Bairro J.Alvalade
 Alto de Moinhos
 Palma de Baixo
 Tarujo, Casal do Sola
 Casal Ventoso, Sete Moinhos
 Patio Vila Fernandes
 Produções Bom Sucesso**

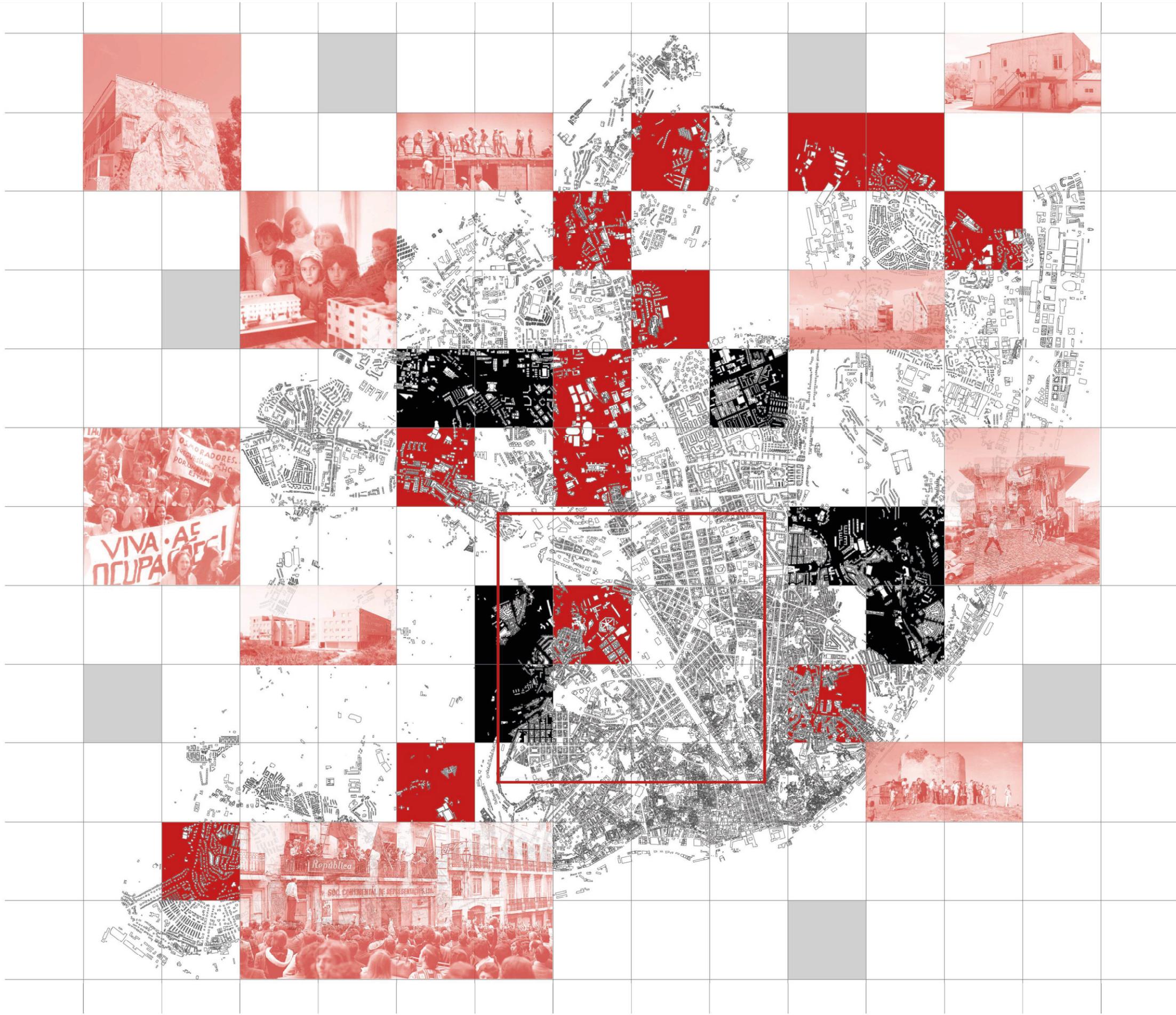
Urban case studies

As previously mentioned, in Lisbon SAAL neighborhoods were composed of multi-story, multi-family buildings, often located on the urban periphery, in contrast to the more vernacular solutions of earlier informal settlements. These interventions employed local materials and simple construction techniques, reflecting both economic constraints and a desire for constructive rationality. While some projects were conceived to integrate into the existing urban fabric, others were developed in more peripheral areas of the city, which in many cases resulted in limited access to services. The interpretation of the diagram provides a reading of

the city's built footprint, within which all the neighborhoods and areas affected by SAAL interventions are highlighted. This representation allows for a comprehensive understanding of the spatial distribution of the program across Lisbon. The areas marked in red correspond to the ten SAAL programs that were planned but never completed, while those marked in black indicate the seven neighborhoods that were realized. These completed interventions are listed below and include the Curraleira neighborhood, which constitutes the case study examined in the following chapters.



Quinta do Bacalhau (sett.74-gen.77')
Quinta da Bela Flor (set.74-dic.76')
Quinta do Alto (oct.74-oct.76')
Fonecas - Calcada (set.74-set.76')
Bairro da Liberdade (oct.74-dic.76')
Curraleira - Embrechados (nov.74'-dic.76')
Bairro D.Leonor (gen.75-dic.76')



SAAL PROGRAM IN LISBON



Figure 51. Quinta do Alto neighbourhood, Lisbon. Photograph by unknown author.

Figure 52. Fonseca e Calçada neighbourhood, Lisbon. Photograph by unknown author.



Figure 53. Bairro da Liberdade neighbourhood, Lisbon. Photograph by unknown author.



Figure 54. D. Leonor neighbourhood, Lisbon. Photograph by unknown author.



Figure 55. Curraleira neighbourhood, Lisbon. Photograph by unknown author.



*Curraleira Curraleira Curraleira Curraleira
Curraleira Curraleira Curraleira Curraleira*

The struggle of the residents of the Curraleira-Embrechados neighbourhood is an example of community mobilization to improve living conditions through self-management and collaboration.

With the 25th of April and the outbreak of urban struggles, the residents of the Curraleira-Embrechados neighbourhood organized themselves to carry out works to improve their neighbourhood by installing sewers, fountains and electricity and paving some roads. From November 1974, they were able to count on the collaboration of a SAAL technical team coordinated by architects José Paradela and Gravata Filipe. The discussion of the projects with the residents resulted in two housing models, developed to better respond to the different needs identified. The 224 homes built solved the problems of a small part of the population involved in the operation, around 900 families. Many challenges remain in the area. The work carried out by local organizations and the commitment of many residents continue to be the best response to a long process of abandonment and neglect by different public authorities.

Remembering what remains
03 CURRALEIRA

From a historical perspective

⁷⁸ Voz do Operário is a cultural and recreational association founded in Lisbon in 1899, established to provide education, training, and artistic and sporting activities for the city's working population. It has played an important historical role in promoting education, culture, and social solidarity among Lisbon's working classes, serving as a centre for cultural and civic engagement up to the present day.

Figure 56. Artur Rosa, Photo-montage: Bairro Quinta da Bela Flor, Lisbon, SAAL III no. 1: "Desenhos Adiados" (Postponed Designs), 1978. Gelatin silver print with collage of pen and ink drawings on translucent paper. Artur Rosa Collection. Artur Rosa.

In the Curraleira neighbourhood, the political activity of poor residents began in the very first days following the April 1974 coup. By the end of April, Curraleira had already elected a residents' committee and organised a rally at *Voz do Operário*⁷⁸, with over one thousand participants coming from the "hill of shacks" inhabited by "five thousand people"—which included, in addition to Curraleira, the deprived areas of Quinta do Pinheiro, Corte Longa and Cova. It is therefore no coincidence that Curraleira was the example cited by Nuno Portas, Secretary of State for Housing and Urbanism of the First Provisional

Government, in an interview with *O Século* in June 1974, as a shantytown where redevelopment measures were already underway and which should inspire the ambitions of the SAAL programme. Despite the harsh living conditions, some interventions had already been carried out in Curraleira: the installation of sewers and public fountains, electrification, and the paving of some access roads. The challenge now was to go beyond mere "improvements" and to design, together with the residents, a dignified neighbourhood.



Figure 57. SAAL operation at Curraleira. Photograph, Nuno Portas Collection. Centro de Documentação⁷⁹ de Abril, University of Coimbra.



The population

In the Curraleira neighbourhoods of Curraleira and Embrechados had grown on the “hill of shacks” over the preceding decades. In 1972, on the initiative of CASU, the Institute of Overseas Studies conducted a survey on literacy and school attendance in several Lisbon shantytowns, including 637 families from Curraleira. The data revealed a very young population: 43% of residents were under 20 years old and 47% between 21 and 55. Educational levels, however, were extremely low: nearly one third of the population was illiterate; among women over 40, illiteracy reached 60%; a further 20% had not completed more than the 3rd or 4th grade. Housing conditions were overcrowded: 22% of families lived in a single room, and 39% in two rooms.

With the start of the SAAL operation in 1974, EAL carried out a new survey involving 936 families and 3,564 residents, confirming low levels of education and predominantly low-paid employment. Most men worked as labourers in construction or industry, while women were employed as factory workers, cleaners, or street vendors. The data revealed a strong presence of both young people and the elderly, making it necessary for the urban plan to include social facilities for these groups. Contrary to common assumptions, both Curraleira and Embrechados were inhabited mainly by Lisbon residents: only 15% of Curraleira’s population and 12% of Embrechados’ came from outside the city⁷⁹. Around half of the population had moved from other Lisbon shantytowns.

⁷⁹ Ricardo Santos, *Participatory City: Architecture and Democracy. SAAL Operations* (Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2016).



Figure 58. Bairro da Curraleira – Embrechados (SAAL), Lisbon. Archival photograph, Nuno Portas Collection, Box 3, Registration no. 5321.

Beyond the general limitations, the problem lies in the fact that we still do not have access to the land in the part of the city that rightfully belongs to those who live there, but which is in the hands of speculators. There is already money to begin construction, the necessary projects are already in place, but the machines [...] cannot enter the land, which remains unexpropriated [...]. This is the moment when the future of the operations is at stake, and the final success depends on overcoming this obstacle. The Municipality is not committed to this struggle; it has not stood by our side, but the fulfilment of promises must be demanded.

Casas pró Povo, “Interview with the Brigade,” cooperative newsletter, Curraleira/Embrechados, 1975.

Figure 61. Presentation panels of the SAAL project for the Curraleira and Embrechados neighbourhoods, presented to residents, 1976. Source: published in a volume on SAAL by Ricardo Santos.

Figure 59. Presentation panels of the SAAL project for the Curraleira and Embrechados neighbourhoods, presented to residents, 1976. Source: published in a volume on SAAL by Ricardo Santos.

COOPERATIVA BAIRO HORIZONTE

Finalmente a nossa Cooperativa tem nome já oficializado. Ao fim de tanto tempo de luta, conseguimos que fosse aprovado o nome de "BAIRO HORIZONTE". Por motivo das burocracias ainda existentes, não podemos ficar com o nome que tinha sido aprovado em assembleia da população, e que era "NOVO HORIZONTE". Mudou-se uma palavra, mas o que importa é que nesta altura já trabalhamos oficialmente. Ainda há muito trabalho para fazer.

AINDA TEMOS MUITO QUE LUTAR, MAS SABEMOS VENCER COM O APOIO DA POPULAÇÃO TODOS OS OBSTÁCULOS QUE NOS SURTIREMOS PARA A FRENTE COM O VOSSO APOIO.

A ESCOLA DA CAPELA

Este ano houve aulas da 4ª classe na capela. O curso funcionou de Novembro a Junho das 9h 30m às 11h da noite, quatro vezes por semana. Embora tenha havido algumas pessoas que desistiram, no fim foram quatro a examinar e todos passaram.

Falámos com eles e pedimos-lhe para fazerem uma redacção sobre a escola. Como não podemos transcrever os textos completos, deixamos aqui aquilo que nos parece mais importante.

"A escola é um edifício onde se vai aprender a ler e a escrever. Este edifício devia ser frequentado por toda a gente, nova ou de idade, que não sabe ler nem escrever, pois no meu entender é muito preciso.

Em primeiro lugar, para nos empregarmos em qualquer lado, para podermos ler o jornal, um livro. Há muita coisa para que nos faz falta saber ler; se vamos a qualquer lado, su-

- 2 -



Figure 60. Presentation panels of the SAAL project for the Curraleira and Embrechados neighbourhoods, presented to residents, 1976. Source: published in a volume on SAAL by Ricardo Santos.



The start of the operation

The first contacts with the Curraleira population within the SAAL framework were led by architect João Paciência, a collaborator of the office of Nuno Teotónio Pereira and Nuno Portas, who faced the difficult task of initiating the project. Despite his training, his political profile did not meet the requirements of the process. After this brief experience, Teotónio Pereira invited architect José Paradela to continue the project in Curraleira, assisted by Gravata Filipe. In November 1974, the contract with the new SAAL brigade was signed. On 14 January 1975, the team presented the proposed intervention area to the Lisbon City Council, and in March Curraleira was one of eight approved areas. In June, the team committed to presenting a study of the infrastructure layout by the end of the month. In February 1975, residents published the first issue of their newspaper under the name of the Novo Horizonte Cooperativa: "At a time when everyone is committed to building a new Portugal, we are committed to creating new and dignified homes in our neighbourhood [...] according to the needs of those who will live in them, not those who design or build them." On 22 February, an informational assembly on SAAL was held, organised by the Armed Forces General Staff. Residents expressed impatience with delays, demanded the start of expropriations, and called for greater autonomy for the brigade.

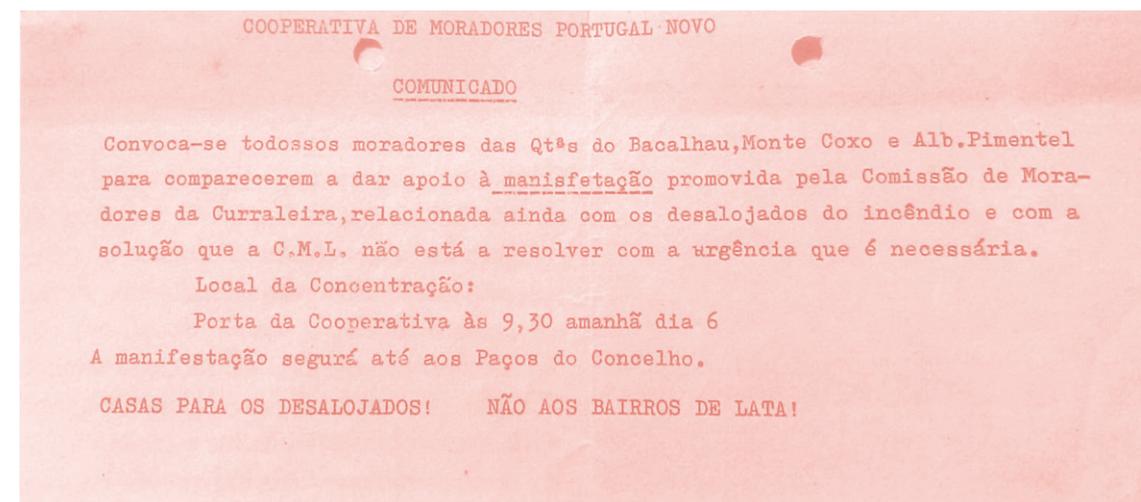
In this context, tragedy struck: in March 1975, a fire devastated Curraleira, leaving nearly 300 families homeless, 70 of whom were left with only the clothes they were wearing. Lisbon City Council promised temporary housing, but the fire intensified political tensions among different groups: UDP blamed the system, while the PCP newspaper (*Avante!*⁸⁰) accused the MRPP of inciting residents to occupy homes against the wishes of the residents' commission. A few days later, around 30 families occupied houses on Rua de Entrecampos. In the following months, the municipality began requisitioning housing for the homeless.

In April 1975, the Embrechados neighbourhood also formed its own residents' committee, determined to fight for decent housing. In the first issue of their newspaper *Casas pró Povo*, they described the intervention of BAL/EPUL in addressing emergencies such as the lack of fountains, waste containers, and sanitation problems. In December 1975, the Lisboa Nova Residents' Association was legalised and applied for a subsidy from the FFH. On 31 December, a decree was published allocating 2,880 contos for the construction of 48 dwellings. In 1976, the operation progressed slowly. In March, residents complained about the failure to expropriate land: "There is money and there are projects, but machines cannot enter because the land has not

been expropriated [...] The municipality is not on our side." By mid-year, the project was presented, envisaging relocation in three phases, with the aim of keeping residents in the area and avoiding displacement to the periphery. A participatory methodology was applied us-

ing 1:20 scale models, through which residents discussed, learned to organise themselves, and addressed housing problems. The houses were designed for families originating from rural areas, offering a gradual transition.

Figure 62. Call for a demonstration in support of the residents of the Curraleira neighbourhood following the fire of 31 January 1975, c. 6 February 1975.



The team also noted that the residents chose to remain in the area, even preferring to divide the existing settlement rather than be relocated to the peripheral zones of the city. Finally, they pointed to a working methodology that went far beyond the functions of the project itself: the direct participation of the population in the conception of housing and in the translation of patterns of social life and interaction.

Mutual aid took place through collective and individual discussions based on drawings and 1:20 scale models... the abstract client was thus replaced by a dialectical process whose outcome would certainly be reflected in the group's future, through learning processes of organisation, discussion, and self-resolution in the field of housing. [...] These dwellings are intended to accommodate families living in shacks, originating from rural areas, who will therefore begin a slow process of adaptation to the new homes. For this reason, an effort was made to give them the possibility to adapt the dwellings to their needs, while simultaneously enabling a gradual improvement in the conditions of use of the house.

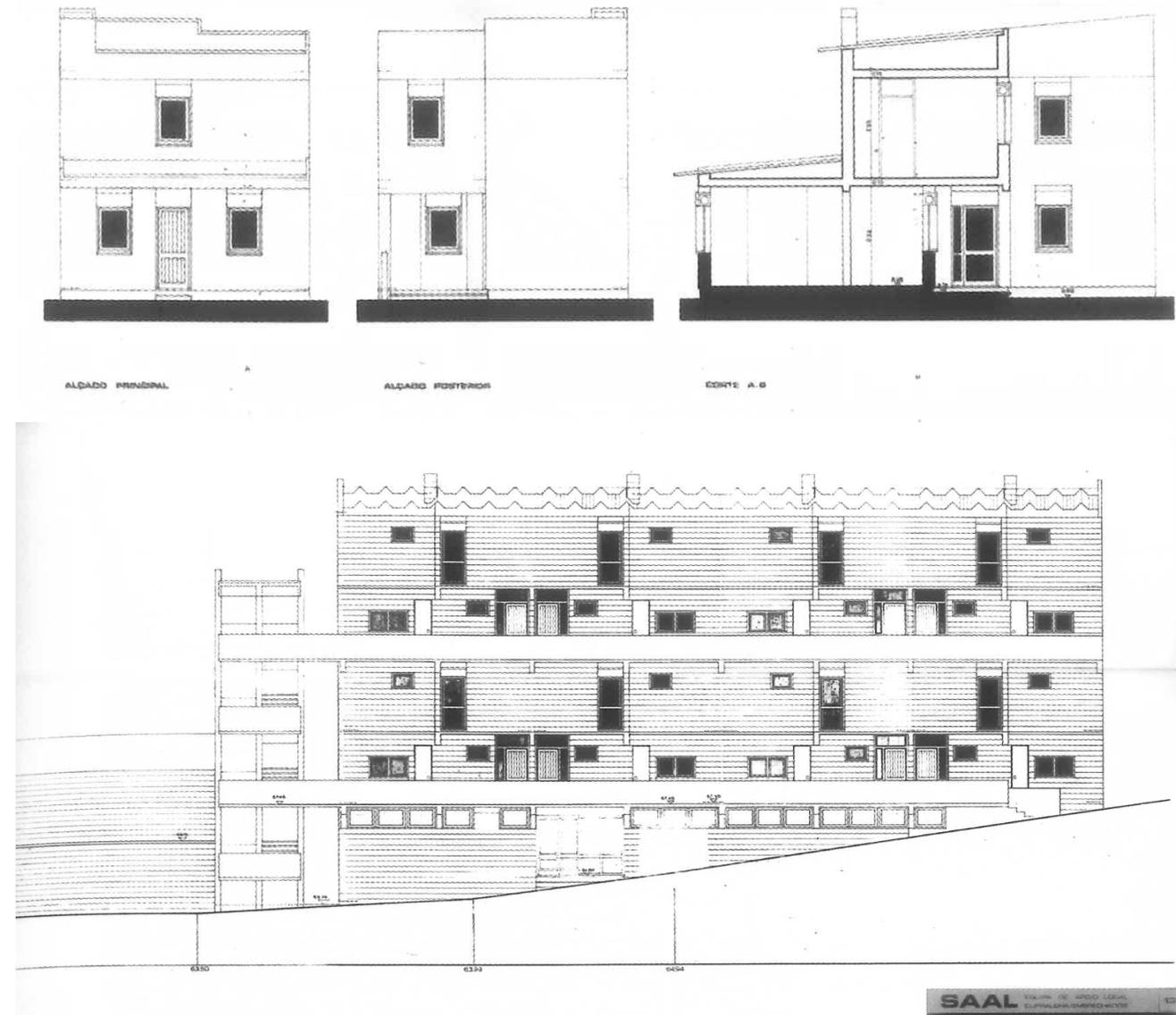
⁸⁰ *Avante!* is the official publication of the Partido Comunista Português (PCP), founded in 1931. Published clandestinely during the Salazarist dictatorship, it became one of the main instruments for the dissemination of communist ideas and opposition to the regime. After the Carnation Revolution of 1974, *Avante!* was legalised and continues to be the party's principal means of communication, conveying political positions as well as social and cultural analyses linked to the Portuguese workers' movement.

The architectural project

Drawing on the architects' experience, two housing types were defined: duplex terraced houses with internal patios for growing families, and four-storey collective blocks accessed via galleries. This combination made it possible to address the site's complex topography. The architecture stood out for its use of colour, elements in exposed or white concrete, and red window frames. In September 1976, construction began on 30 dwellings of the first phase, despite the lack of approved expropriations. In November, the Ministry allocated a subsidy for a further 252 dwellings. By the end of the year, construction also began in Embrechados: 54 dwellings in the first phase, with a total of 92 planned. In subsequent years,

the cooperatives reported difficulties in collecting payments due to low incomes: 30% of families lived on less than 1,000 escudos per capita per month. In 1978, the Lisboa Nova Cooperative completed 52 dwellings. In 1981, construction began on a block with 8 apartments and a nursery school, completed in 1983. Between 1982 and 1984, another 64 dwellings were built on Rua João Nascimento Costa. On Rua Carlos Botelho, the CHE Bairro Horizonte completed 172 dwellings. Overall, the two cooperatives completed 224 of the approximately 900 units initially planned. By 1995, the cooperative's activity continued with difficulty, after 80% of the original members had withdrawn.

Figure 63. Architectural plans and elevations of zones T1 and T3, April 1976.



José António Paradelo, Luís Gravata Filipe
SELF-NARRATION

The following interviews collect first-hand testimonies from architects directly involved in the SAAL intervention, offering an insider perspective on the design process, its political and social context, and the everyday challenges of working within a participatory framework. The interviews are included here as primary sources, not only to document design intentions and technical decisions, but also to capture the lived dimension of the SAAL process—where architecture

emerged through dialogue with residents, institutional constraints, and shifting political conditions. The interviews reproduced below are drawn from SAAL: entrevistas a José António Paradelo, Luís Gravata Filipe e Paulo Jorge, a collection of audio interviews with José António Paradelo and Luís Gravata Filipe—architects directly involved in the SAAL process, including the intervention in Curraleira—together with Paulo Jorge.

José Antonio Paradelo

Curraleira was a traditional bairro de lata, one of the oldest in Lisbon. It had nearly a century of history, with several generations overlapping. It was a neighbourhood profoundly different from others, also because for decades it had been used as a kind of laboratory for social, political, and religious experimentation. From a social point of view, it was highly heterogeneous: former residents who had achieved some degree of social mobility lived alongside clerks, precarious workers, long-established families, and newcomers.

Interviewer

What kind of political climate did you encounter in the neighbourhood?

Luis Garvata Filipe

All political forces were present in the neighbourhood, from the far left to the right. This made the work extremely difficult.

There were moments of intense conflict, including internal conflicts within the neighbourhood, and constant surveillance of the technicians' work: whether we were present every day, whether we were

actually working. The pressure was enormous.

Interviewer

How was your team organised?

José Antonio Paradelo

It was a very large and interdisciplinary team. In addition to architects, there were civil engineers, who were essential in defining construction technologies, costs, and structural solutions.

We also had a permanent base in the neighbourhood: a prefabricated shack that functioned as the cooperative's headquarters, with daily on-site presence.

Interviewer

What methodology did you adopt to involve the population?

José Antonio Paradelo

The process began with in-depth surveys of the residents.

We discovered very different aspirations:

- some wanted to live in apartments on upper floors, “like the city's respectable citizens”;
- others wanted to maintain a direct relationship with the ground, a small courtyard, an animal, or a vegetable garden.

From this emerged the idea of differentiated housing types and, above all, of evolutionary typologies—capable of growing and adapting over time.

Interviewer

Did residents' participation really function as it is often described?

Luis Garvata Filipe

Here we must be honest: participation was mainly our ideological intention.

The residents' cultural and political preparation was very limited, and there was mistrust. Their primary concern was that the process would not be halted once again and that funding would actually arrive.

Discussions about typologies, urban forms, and architectural models were more driven by us than by a genuine demand from the population.

Interviewer

Which design solutions were actually realised?

José Antonio Paradelo

We built:

- single-family evolutionary houses, with the

possibility of later expansion;
 – collective housing blocks of three to four storeys without lifts, including duplex units and gallery-access layouts;
 – several access systems (stairs, galleries, patios) to adapt to a very difficult site, composed of urban leftovers and infrastructural residues.
 All solutions were discussed with the residents, and each family chose, as far as possible.

Interviewer

How many dwellings were built?

José Antonio Paradela

Around 400–600 dwellings were planned, but only about 260–300 were actually built—essentially the first phase.
 The project foresaw three phases, but the subsequent ones were never realised.

Interviewer

Why was the process interrupted?

Luis Garvata Filipe

The SAAL process was politically strangled in 1976. It had become a “snowball”: expectations kept growing, the country was in economic crisis, and it was impossible to respond to everything at once.
 When the first dwellings were occupied, the process was already effectively over. There was no possibility to evaluate, correct, or learn from the experience.

Question

Looking back today, how do you assess that experience?

José Antonio Paradela

It was a highly innovative experience, unique in the history of Portuguese architecture.
 But precisely because it was interrupted, it failed to produce transferable knowledge: it was not possible to verify whether the housing types truly responded to needs over time.
 It remains a major missed opportunity, even though what was built still bears witness to a different way of practising architecture.

Interviewer

Who were the sócios and what role did they play in the project?

Paulo Jorge

The sócios were the members of the residents’ association, those who had the right to be rehoused within the project.
 In the case of Curraleira, the neighbourhood was composed of four main clusters of barracas, classified as degraded housing. The survey carried out by our team indicated the need for approximately 450 dwellings in order to solve the housing problem.

Interviewer

How many dwellings were actually built during the SAAL process?

Paulo Jorge

During the official SAAL phase, 44 dwellings were built, but they remained incomplete and unused for a long time, deteriorating even before being inhabited.
 The main cause was the abolition of the Fundo de Fomento da Habitação, which interrupted funding and halted many ongoing operations.

Interviewer

How did you attempt to continue the project after the end of SAAL?

Paulo Jorge

After the end of SAAL, we managed to complete those first 44 dwellings and, through a combination of voluntary labour, reuse of materials, and new municipal loans, we launched a second phase that led to the construction of more than 50 new dwellings.
 In total, we reached 94 completed homes, all within the same original design framework.

Interviewer

What role did self-construction and voluntary labour play?

Paulo Jorge

Voluntary labour was decisive.
 The sócios contributed 32 hours per month, mainly on weekends, carrying out non-specialised tasks such as cleaning, earthworks, and secondary installations.

This made it possible to reduce construction costs per square metre, making the project financially viable and strengthening a sense of collective responsibility.

Interviewer

How were dwellings allocated?

Paulo Jorge

Allocation was one of the most controversial issues. I personally strongly supported the lottery criterion, because I believed it was unfair that only those able to participate actively in the association should be rewarded. Elderly residents, or those physically unable to "militate," also had a right to housing.

In hindsight, I acknowledge that the lottery produced problematic results: many long-term residents were not allocated dwellings, while individuals with little involvement in the process entered the scheme. This remains an important self-criticism.

Interviewer

Who physically built the houses?

Paulo Jorge

The main contractor was a workers' cooperative, chosen because it submitted a much lower bid than large construction companies.

Initially, work progressed well, but when public payments began to be delayed, the cooperative encountered difficulties. Lacking sufficient banking guarantees, the process came to a definitive halt.

Interviewer

How did residents participate in the architectural project?

Paulo Jorge

Participation took place through plenary meetings and general assemblies. Residents discussed the projects, pointed out concrete problems—such as room sizes, furnishings, and possibilities for future growth—and often forced the team to completely redesign the housing typologies. I remember a carpenter from the neighbourhood who explained with millimetric precision the space required for a bed, a wardrobe, and a bedside table: from this emerged dwellings with more generous spac-

es than initially planned.

Interviewer

Can you explain the concept of "evolutionary typology"?

Paulo Jorge

The dwellings were designed to adapt over time to the growth of families. Plot sizes were similar for all, but those who needed it could expand their homes over the years, always with technical support from the association and the municipality.

It was not a "closed" architecture, but an open process, recognising the right to the progressive appropriation of space.

Interviewer

What conflicts did you face with institutions?

Paulo Jorge

Many projects developed within the municipality often did not respond to residents' real needs, and on several occasions we rejected solutions that would have produced uninhabitable spaces.

We defended the interests of the association members even against other technicians, convinced that professional status alone did not automatically guarantee project quality.

Interviewer

Looking back today, how do you evaluate that experience?

Paulo Jorge

It was a deeply formative experience, but also one marked by major structural limitations: unstable funding, political conflict, and premature interruption. Despite everything, it remains one of the few experiences in which architecture truly functioned as a tool for collective emancipation, even if unfinished.

Reality in Lisbon
03 CURRALEIRA

In motion

⁸¹ Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE). *Population and Housing Census. Lisbon*: Instituto Nacional de Estatística.

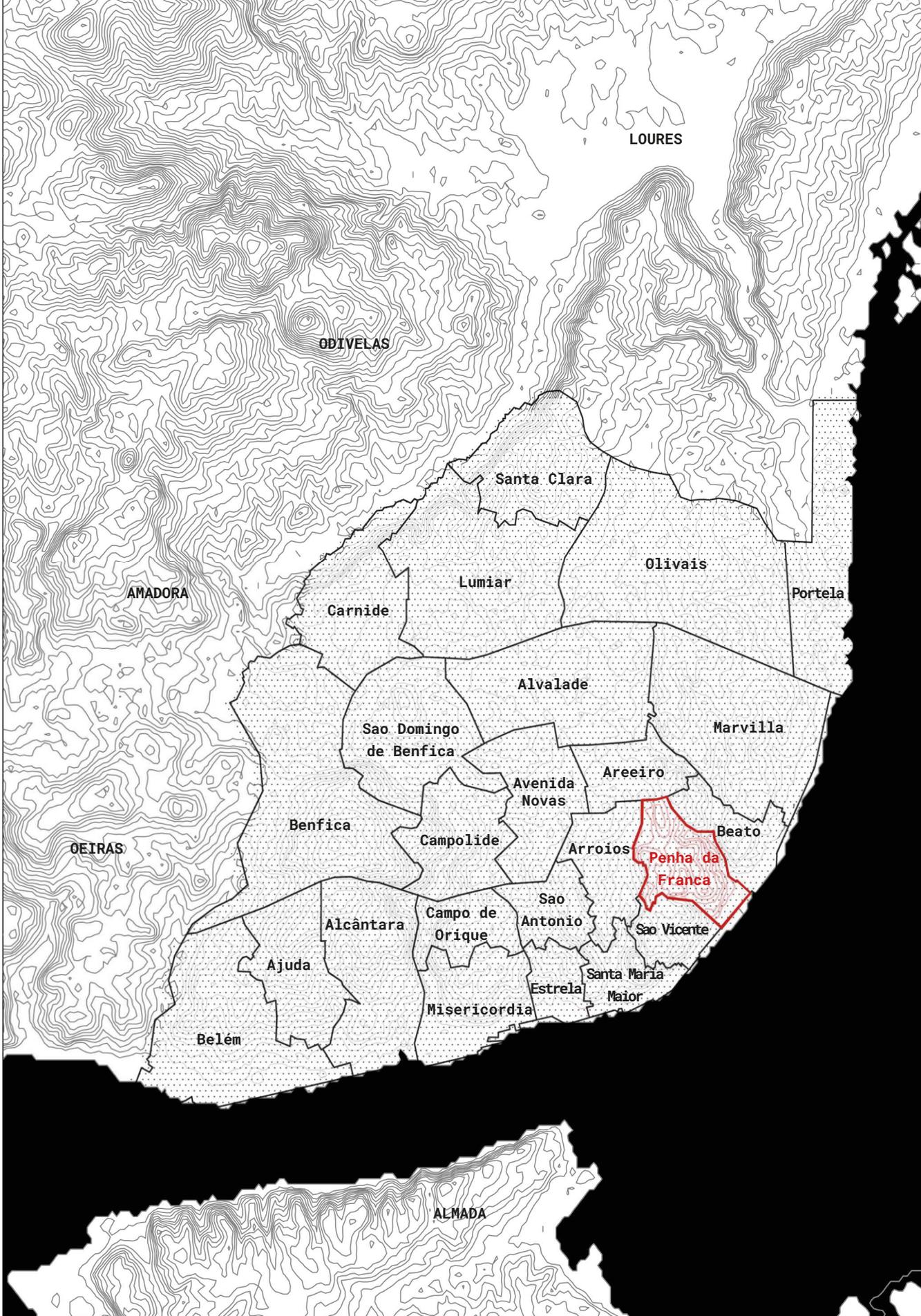
⁸² Lisbon City Council. *Reports on Urban Dynamics and Housing. Lisbon*: Câmara Municipal de Lisboa.

⁸³ Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (SEF); Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE). *Foreign Resident Population in Portugal*. Lisbon.

Today, Lisbon appears as a European capital undergoing profound transformation, shaped by processes of urban growth, demographic change, and persistent social inequalities. The municipality has approximately 545,000 inhabitants, while the metropolitan area exceeds 2.8 million, concentrating a significant share of Portugal's population⁸¹. In recent years, the city has experienced renewed attractiveness and expansion, driven by tourism development, real-estate investment, and the arrival of new residents, including a growing number of immigrants⁸². These groups now constitute a structural component of Lisbon's

population, with communities originating mainly from Brazil, Portuguese-speaking African countries, and, more recently, other European contexts⁸³.

From an administrative perspective, Lisbon is divided into 24 freguesias, which reflect strong socio-spatial heterogeneity. Alongside historic and highly valued central districts, there are densely populated areas that developed primarily during the twentieth century and were historically associated with the settlement of working-class populations and migrant communities. Among these is the freguesia of Penha de França, which today is in-



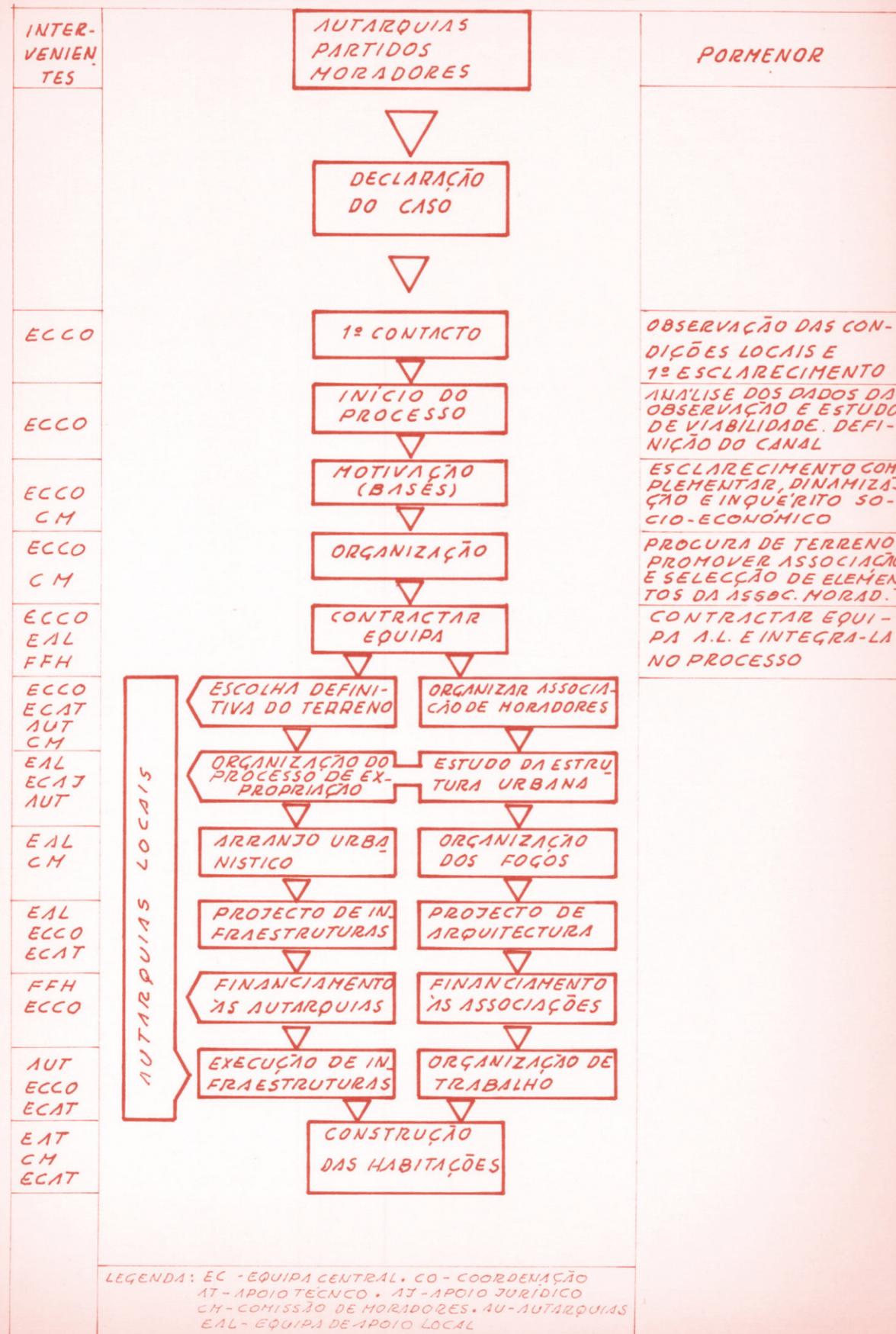
habited by a socially diverse population. Alongside long-established residents belonging largely to the urban working classes, there is a significant presence of immigrants—particularly of Brazilian and Portuguese-speaking African origin—as well as, in recent years, young adults and students attracted by the area's relative proximity to the city centre and housing costs that have tra-

ditionally been more affordable than in other parts of Lisbon⁸⁴. Within this urban context, marked by the coexistence of historical continuities and recent transformations, lies the former Curraleira, an emblematic case for understanding housing policies, marginality, and processes of urban change in Lisbon over the course of the twentieth century.

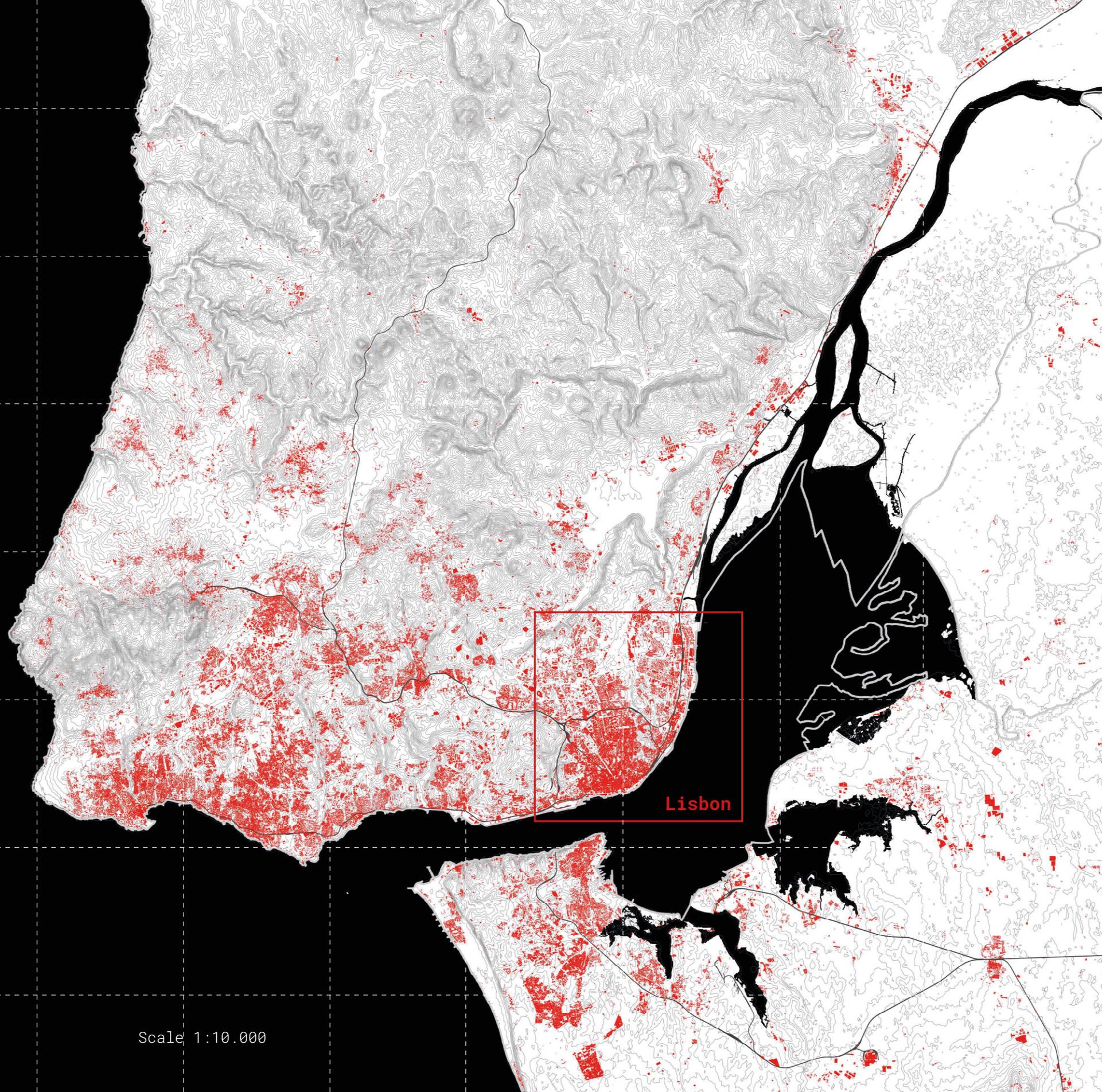
⁸³ Penha de França Parish Council; Malheiros, Jorge. Migration and Social Diversity in Lisbon. Lisbon.

Figure 64. Process flowchart of the SAAL programme. Source: Batista Alves Archive.

FLUXOGRAMA DO PROCESSO SAAL

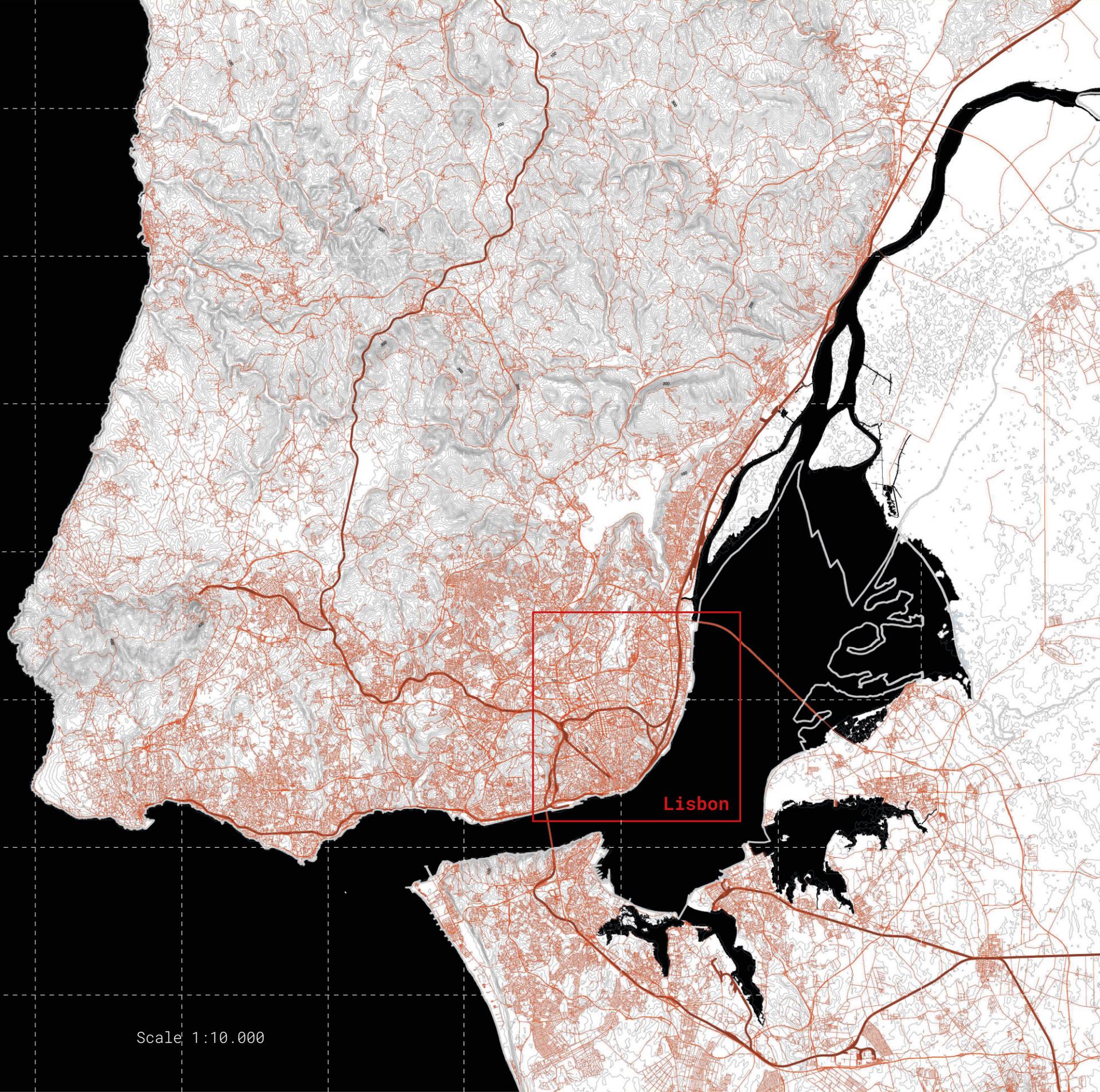


BUILT ENVIRONMENT



Scale 1:10.000

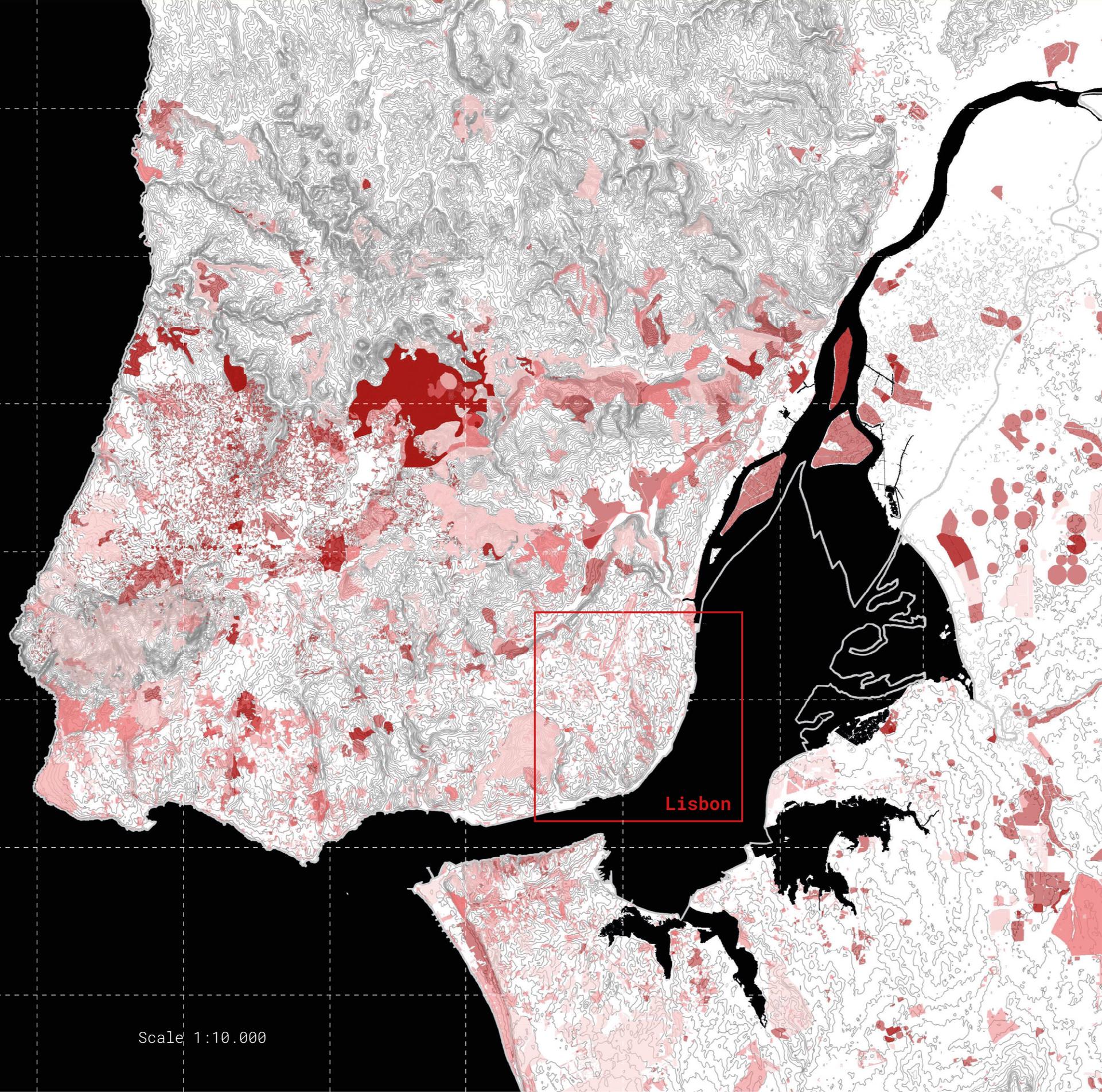
MOBILITY INFRASTRUCTURE



Scale 1:10.000

Lisbon

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE



Scale 1:10.000

Reality in Lisbon

03 CURRALEIRA

Curraleira today

Born at the end of the twentieth century, the former Curraleira was known in Lisbon as an area of metal-sheet shacks. In 1975, the neighbourhood—partly inhabited by the Cale/Rom community—was struck by a fire; residents were filmed demolishing their own homes in an attempt to stop the spread of the flames, which destroyed sixty-nine dwellings and caused two fatalities. This event brought renewed attention to the area and created a sense of urgency for action on the part of the Lisbon municipality. It is important to underline the strong presence of the Romani community and culture, which deeply influenced—and continues to influence—the life of the former Curraleira. Shantytown areas were considered problematic because they were seen as sources of urban and social decay, a “social ill” that, according to Lisbon City Council, had to be eradicated. In 1993, under the Social Democratic government of Aníbal Cavaco Silva⁸¹, Portugal launched the national programme PER – Programa Especial de Realojamento (Special Relhousing Programme), based on a census of residents living in shantytowns. Hundreds of neighbourhoods were earmarked for demolition and replacement by purpose-built housing complexes to which all

⁸¹ He is a Portuguese politician and a member of the Social Democratic Party. He served as Prime Minister from 6 November 1985 to 28 October 1995, and in early 2006 he was elected President of the Republic, being re-elected in 2011.

residents would be relocated. Implementation of the programme began in 1994, but it was in 2001 that the city council initiated the demolition of the shacks and the subsequent rehousing of residents in surrounding neighbourhoods⁸². The demolition of the dwellings and the subsequent relocation of residents were considered a success according to the programme’s standards. However, the perception of the shack residents themselves differed from that presented by public media. The experienced demolition was painful, complex, and multidimensional—not merely structural, but intertwined with life histories and long-established social relationships. “In practice, the process of demolition and rehousing was—and continues to be—a traumatic experience for many of those subjected to it.”⁸³ PER was controversial even before its implementation, yet

it was accepted as a means of beautifying and modernising the cities of Porto and Lisbon. The year 1994 was also marked by “Lisbon: European Capital of Culture,” and shortly thereafter Expo 1998 accelerated aspirations to eliminate all shantytowns from the capital. In some ways, PER legitimised a legal expulsion of the poor and migrants to distant urban areas, thereby promoting their ghettoisation in neighbourhoods relegated to the margins:⁸⁴ “PER contributed to legislating and reshaping the concept of the periphery, in which ethnic minorities and immigrants are once again removed from the sharing of public space and pushed towards developments far from the main flows, with infrastructures created specifically for the neighbourhood that confine these people to particular spaces within the social fabric.”⁸⁵

⁸³ D. S. Guterres, “Pushed to the Periphery: Lisbon’s Rehousing Policies Lose the Life of the Neighbourhoods They Demolish,” *The Architectural Review* (2021).

⁸⁴ Alves, *Para uma compreensão da segregação residencial: O Plano Especial de Realojamento e o (anti-)racismo* (PhD thesis, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2013).

⁸⁵ Krebber, *A Strategic Approach to the Implementation of a Tour in the Marginalized Neighbourhoods of Antiga Curraleira and Picheleira* (Lisboa: Universidade de Lisboa, 2017).



Figure 65. Children in the Curraleira neighbourhood today, supported by local associations. Author unknown.



Chiado-Bairro

Baixa

Mouraria

Alfama

Curraleira

Tago River

RELATION WITH THE CITY CENTRE

Housing

⁸⁶ Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE), Censos 2021 (2021).

With regard to housing, the main critical issues concern the lack of adequate living conditions and difficulties in accessing housing. According to the provisional results of the 2021 Census, in the freguesia of Beato—within which the former Curraleira area is located—there are 1,730 buildings, corresponding to 7,525 dwellings⁸⁶. Compared to 2011, there was a negative variation of 7.1% in the number of buildings and 3.4% in the number of dwellings. According to the same provisional results, most buildings in the freguesia of Beato were constructed between 1961 and 1980 (27.86%), followed by those built between 1946 and 1960 (26.3%). In 2011, the average age of buildings in Lisbon was 61.7 years, while in Beato it was higher, at 65.8 years. Data from 2011 indicate a low percentage of buildings in a very degraded state of conservation (4.9%), although 57.8% of buildings were identified as requiring repair interventions. According to the 2011 census, 0.23% of main dwellings lacked access to water, 0.23% did not have flushing sanitary facilities, 0.12% were not connected to the sewerage network, and 1.6% lacked a dedicated bathroom space. Although these percentages are very low, they reflect the existence of shortcomings in terms of habitability, hygiene, and safety in some dwellings within the freguesia. It should also be noted that the proportion of dwellings without water supply or bathrooms is higher than that recorded for the municipality of Lisbon as a whole. Other housing indicators reveal worrying signs regarding living conditions: in 2011, 18.5% of dwellings were overcrowded and 13% of buildings were considered degraded.



The population

⁸⁶ Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE), Censos 2021 (2021).

⁸⁸ CPCJ Lisboa Oriental (Comissão de Proteção de Crianças e Jovens) is an extended commission responsible for developing actions aimed at promoting rights and preventing situations of risk affecting children and young people. It operates within the territory of four freguesias in eastern Lisbon, including the freguesia of Beato.

⁸⁷ Junta de Freguesia do Beato, Diagnóstico Social da Freguesia do Beato (2021).

According to the provisional results of the 2021 Census, the youth population in Beato is declining, with a more marked decrease in the 0–14 age group. In 2011, children up to 14 years old represented 12% of the total resident population, and young people aged 14 to 25 accounted for 9.5%. Ten years later, the first group had decreased by one percentage point (11.09%) and the second by 0.11 percentage points. Regarding the distribution by age subgroups, data are available only for the 2011 census, which showed a higher prevalence of children up to four years old (36%). Compared with other freguesias in the municipality of Lisbon, Beato was among the five with the highest proportion of children under four years of age.⁸⁷ Among the main issues affecting this population segment in Beato are a perceived lack of childcare services, such as nurseries and leisure facilities; a generally low level of education among young people; and the need for a greater number of non-formal educational and recreational activities within

the freguesia (particularly in the areas of Quinta dos Ourives and the Xabregas–Beato axis).⁸⁸ The CPCJ Lisboa Oriental – Comissão de Proteção de Crianças e Jovens reported that in 2018 there were 101 active cases in the freguesia (10.9% of total cases), rising to 103 in 2019. The main situations of risk identified included domestic violence, neglect, truancy and school dropout, physical and psychological bullying, and the commission of acts classified by law as criminal offences. The Junta de Freguesia do Beato highlights the need to invest in better coordination among partner networks and in a deeper understanding of real needs, problems, and existing potentials in the territory, in order to obtain concrete information on the actual needs of the target population. To address this gap, it could be crucial to carry out a diagnostic study that identifies not only problems and needs, but also opportunities and potentialities perceived by children and young people across different dimensions: education, leisure, and health.



Figure 64. Individuals involved in social projects, including Mariana Duarte Santos, Natália, André, and Cristine. Photograph by Inês Leote.

Figure 67. Portrait of Armando, 72, resident of the Horizonte neighbourhood. Photograph by Inês Leote.



Immigration as a persistent phenomenon

⁸⁹ Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE), Censos 2011 (2011).

The foreign population with legal resident status is increasing in the municipality of Lisbon. In 2019, 98,841 migrants resided in the municipality (37.9% of all migrants living in the district), 53,215 more than in 2011 (SEF-stat – SEF Statistics Portal). In 2011, 854 foreign nationals lived in the freguesia of Beato (425 more than in 2001), corresponding to 1.9% of the foreign population residing in the municipality and 6.9% of the total population of the freguesia. The foreign resident population in Beato comprised 425 men and 429 women, predominantly aged between 25 and 39 (42.6%). Among the foreign population living in Beato, 42% came from the Americas, 29% from Europe, 20% from Africa, 9% from Asia, and 1% from Oceania⁸⁹. Overall, 95% of residents are of Portuguese nationality (with a significant presence of the Romani community) (Junta de Freguesia do Beato, 2019). In these four BIP areas, 900 families and 2,468 people reside. According to the SCML – Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa, by the end of 2018 there were 243 active social assistance cases (689 people, corresponding to 28% of residents), and 220 people were receiving RSI benefits (451 individuals, representing 18%)⁸⁹. The Quinta do Lavrado neighbourhood accounted for 47% of cases and beneficiaries, despite representing only 23% of residents across the four BIP/ZIP areas. Overall, 20% of Beato residents in these neighbourhoods were involved

in social assistance processes and 12% received RSI benefits (38% in Quinta do Lavrado). In 2011, the unemployment rate in Lisbon was 12%, while in these four BIP areas it exceeded 20%. The proportion of residents aged 20–29 classified as NEET was higher than in Lisbon (18%) and in Beato overall (26%). These four BIP areas had only 16% elderly residents compared with 24% in Lisbon, and a higher proportion of children aged 0–14 than the city average: 19% versus 13% (22% in Quinta do Lavrado). By the end of 2018, the CPCJ in Lisbon had 16 active cases in Lavrado (mainly related to domestic violence), compared to 60 cases handled by CPCJ Lisboa Oriental in Beato. In this territory, the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa was following twelve minors, five of whom were involved in proceedings before the Family and Juvenile Court through the CPCJ. The data reveal a strong concentration of families experiencing social exclusion across the four BIP areas. Most children and young people in these neighbourhoods attend local schools within the Agrupamento Escolar de Olaias. The cultural diversity and variety that characterise the school environment pose significant challenges to educational, personal, and social development. With a child and youth exclusion risk of 21% in Lisbon and given its status as a TEIP territory (Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária), low interest and engage-

ment in learning are observed, alongside low school attendance, absenteeism, indiscipline, and frequent grade repetition. Most families have a low socio-economic status, precarious employment, receive RSI benefits, and experience deficiencies in nutrition, hygiene, and health. Many are dysfunctional, partly due to low levels of

engagement in the educational process, the devaluation of schooling, and the lack of work habits and study methods. Only half of pupils have completed the first cycle of education (compared to 2% at national level), and 22% the second cycle (6% nationally), with a positive trend observed since 2014.

“If, for example, we go to Olaias or Curraleira–SAAL projects that remained unfinished—or to Casal Ventoso, where the works were never completed, or to Boavista or Casal do Pinto, where requests for intervention went unanswered, the difference becomes evident. The city speaks to us: the houses are not in good condition, the neighbourhood is not in good condition, there are things that never arrived there. We know that we are leaving one city and entering another, and there is something that, as an architect, I find strange: the nostalgia that many residents of these neighbourhoods feel for the time of the shantytowns.”

Fernando Bagulho, quoted in Riccardo Santos, *Participatory City: Architecture and Democracy. SAAL Operations – Oeiras* (Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2016).

Strolling through
VISUAL ASSEY

It was both necessary and deeply meaningful to visit the site and experience firsthand the reality of the Curraleira neighbourhood. Walking through its streets, coming into contact with its residents, with traffic and with moments of silence, made it possible to understand the relationships between the built environment and everyday practices. This direct experience allowed the conflicts and internal dualisms that shape the neighbourhood to be grasped more clearly. Rooted in a strong historical legacy and at the same time marked by the challenges that continue to shape its process of transformation, Curraleira

emerges as a complex urban condition: urban voids, degradation, abandonment and forms of incremental transformation coexist with a heterogeneous population, composed both of the original residents of the SAAL housing and of newer inhabitants, often of migrant origin.

Figure 68. Current aerial view of the neighbourhood. Image retrieved from Google Maps.





Figure 69. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of a space used for agricultural activities.

Figure 70. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of a portion of land informally used as a waste disposal area.

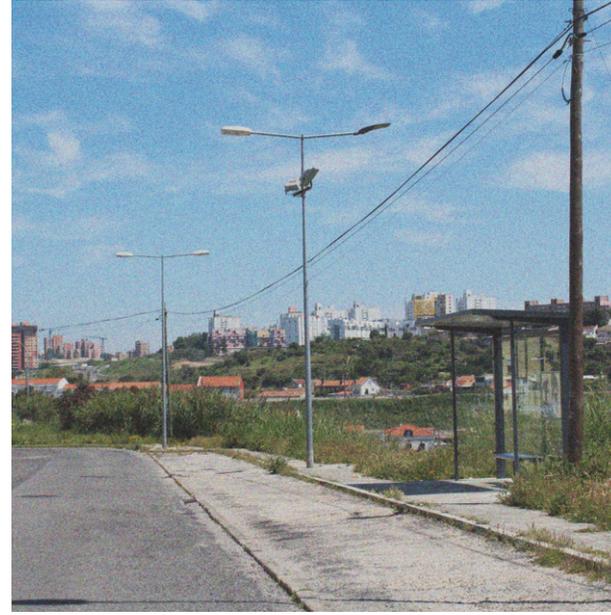
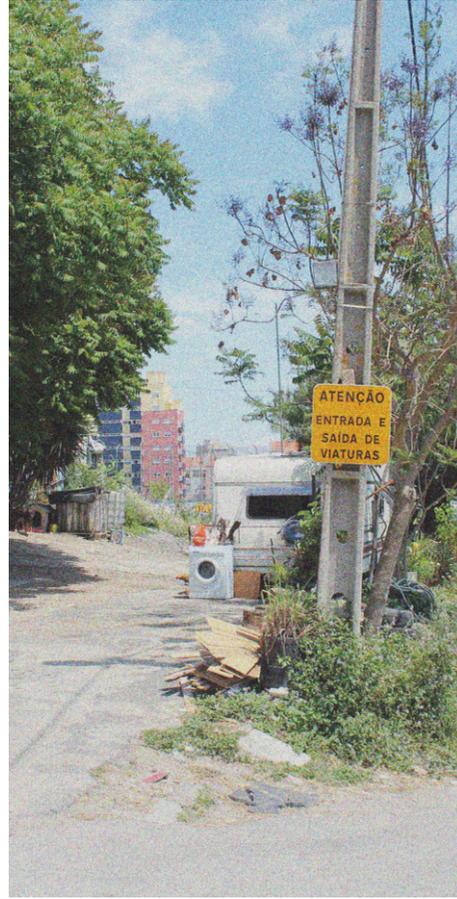


Figure 71. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of Rua Carlos Borelho, Lisbon.



Figure 72. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of the Tagus River.





Figure 74. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of balconies altered over time in the Horizonte housing complex.

Figure 73. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of the internal courtyard of the duplex dwellings.

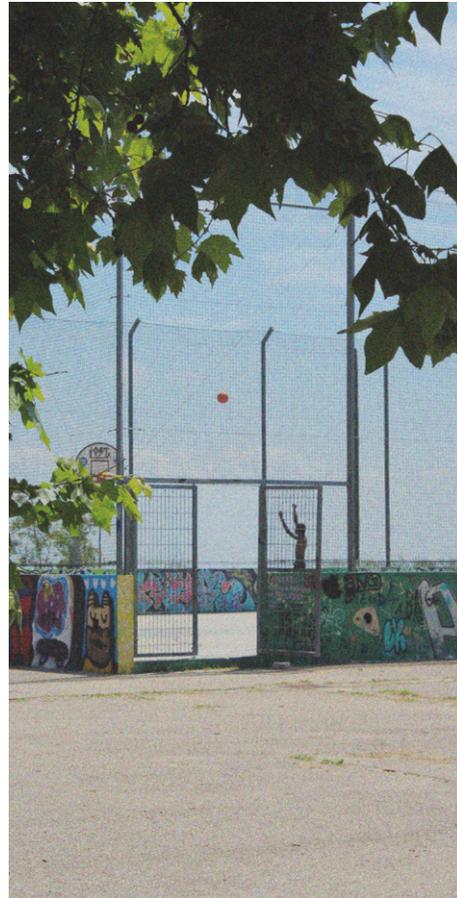


Figure 75. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of the basketball court on Rua Santos Simões, Lisbon.

Figure 76. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of murals painted on the block housing buildings along Rua Carlos Botelho.



Figure 78. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of a block building on Rua Carlos Botelho.



Figure 77. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. Detail of the stairwell of a block housing building on Rua Carlos Botelho.



Figure 79. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of the block buildings of the Horizonte housing complex.

Figure 80. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. Rear view of the block buildings of the Horizonte housing complex.

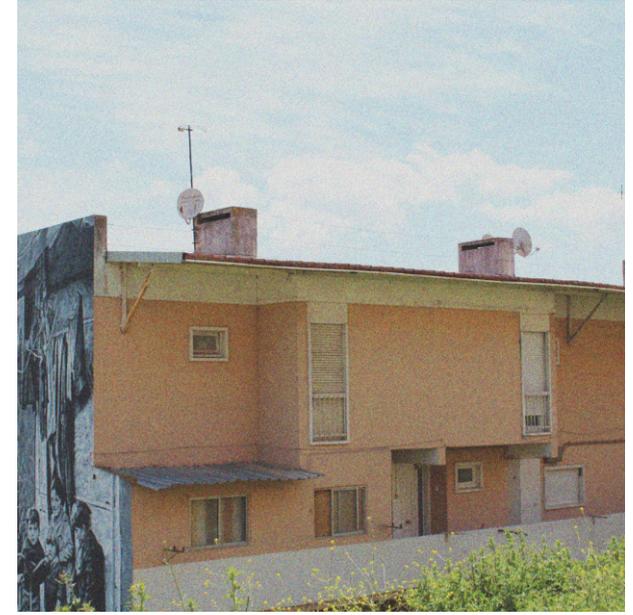




Figure 81. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of the duplex housing units on Rua Carlos Botelho.



Figure 83. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of the duplex housing units on Rua Carlos Botelho.

Figure 82. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of the duplex housing units on Rua Carlos Botelho.





Figure 84. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025.
Rear view of the Horizonte housing block.

Figure 85. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025.
Public space informally used for drying laundry.



Figure 86. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025.
View of the duplex housing units on Rua Carlos Botelho.



Figure 87. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025.
View of the duplex housing units on Rua Carlos Botelho.



Figure 89. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of the duplex housing units on Rua Carlos Borelho.



Figure 90. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. Public space informally used for everyday activities.

Figure 88. Author's photograph, site survey, Antiga Curraleira area, Lisbon, June 2025. View of murals painted along Rua Sarmiento Rodrigues.

Remaining voices

CONVERSATIONS

“Oral sources tell us not only what happened, but what people believe happened, what they remember, and the meaning they assign to what they have lived through.”

Alessandro Portelli, *L'ordine è già stato eseguito: Roma, le Fosse Ardeatine, la memoria* (Roma: Donzelli, 1999).

“Precariously built houses and shacks were devoured by the flames: people tried to save their belongings, firefighters struggled with their hoses, while the lack of water made the intervention difficult.”

The pages that follow bring together first-person accounts and dialogues. They are different voices—young people, elders, women, and those who have lived here all their lives—speaking from their own lived experience and personal memory. Listening to these voices is essential in order to gain an internal perspective on the events: not an external or distant gaze, but one that emerges from inhabiting these places, from sharing their daily rhythms, and from being shaped by them over time. These testimonies do not sim-

ply recount facts; they convey emotions, relationships, and ways of understanding the world. Through fragments of everyday life, moments of crisis, and memories passed down across generations, they reveal how the neighborhood has been lived, transformed, and remembered. It is through these voices that history takes shape, restoring the complexity of social ties, events, and meanings that have traversed the Curraleira neighborhood and continue to resonate in the present.

**BOCAS DA
COSTAS DA
CIDADE
INCÊNDIO, CRUZ E OCUPAÇÕES**



Nininho

"I remember Romário, Chico... the kids who were always playing together. We tell the story of the neighborhood—me and my sister, who's four years older than me. We played a lot, sometimes a bit rough, but that was all part of growing up. We ran around, we joked, we lived out in the street [...]. I have friends here, you know. I've always had this connection to other places. Here, in the São João and Quinta Nova area, there was a lot of communication between people. Everyone knew everyone."



Paula

"I stayed at the entrance of the neighborhood, a place that had already existed for a long time. I remember that, years ago, I used to talk a lot with my grandmother. People were filming, there were many shacks, and right in front there was also a small workshop [...]. Over time, the neighborhood grew. That's how Brasília came into being: when you entered from here, you could see the market stalls, the people, the families. Everyone did what they could—it was the same for everyone. What kept us together was hope [...]. This was one of the main gathering places. There was always this sense of community, of people crossing paths. Even though no one could imagine what would happen later."



Mario

"On this side we managed to get by because there was a small minimarket. People bought bread, fruit, just the basics. We washed there, we lived there. My son stayed close to the wall. There wasn't much—just one room, a television, nothing else [...].

The families were close. There was a workshop, and we were like one big family—grandparents, aunts, cousins, all together. Even though I didn't live through that whole period, I loved listening and imagining what those times were like. My grandmother would call everyone, my aunt would come back, we all lived together, like a real family [...]. That is the true meaning of the cross:unity, mutual support, helping each other when things go wrong. Quinta do Pinheiro was an isolated neighborhood, but still connected to the others. On the other side of the paved road there was another world. Salvador was divided into many parts, but this was the only area that truly had a 'street' [...].

At first we had no electricity and no water. They only came later. But despite everything, that was our world. A world of our own. And sometimes I think... I wish I could live there again."





Francisco

"I had wanted to speak about this place for a long time, because for me it has always carried a deep meaning. When we tell this story, we're not just talking about numbers or lists—it's a story written in blood, in sacrifice. Some houses, some families, had to leave. Water, fire... everything became entangled in that moment [...]."

Even the history of the neighborhood became a victim of the fire."



Fátima

"I remember the river that flowed right next to it. Back then, no one was thinking about promoting anything—not even the gate or the street. We were just looking for customers, just trying to get by. We were struck by the simplicity of it all. The children belonged to the neighborhood, we played together—without much effort, without technology, without consoles. At that time, at least for us, living meant being out in the street, inhabiting the space of the neighborhood [...]."

This was one of the main gathering places."

"There was always this sense of community, of a crossroads where people met. Even though no one could imagine what would happen later [...]."

Before our generation, there had already been a fire. And that fire stayed in everyone's memory. Even today, when people talk about it, they think about going back—to that moment. It was a time of great confusion and fear.

When the flames broke out, black smoke covered everything. It felt like a huge fogueira, an enormous fire. The headman's house was hit, time seemed to stop. Some thought there was no hope, others said they had called for help before it was too late [...]."



Manuel

"But it was precisely at that moment that something important happened: the neighborhood came together.

Whenever a tragedy struck, people would draw closer to one another. It wasn't something temporary—it's a way of thinking that still exists today. We don't spend the year arguing or fighting among ourselves; when things get difficult, we know how to stop, look at each other, and help [...]."

That is the true meaning of the cross: unity, mutual support, helping each other when things go wrong.

For those who lived through that fire, it was a moment of great anguish. There was one victim. The pain marked the neighborhood forever. I was inside the house, others were outside. Smoke was everywhere—people were running, trying to save whatever they could."



Pedro

"Many people thought she wouldn't make it. You could see it on television, on pirate channels, and you understood that there had been a serious fire. Everything changed from that day on [...].

That's when the idea of organizing ourselves was born. Associations, movements, collectives began to emerge. In November 2008, a group was formed with the purpose of preserving memory and defending the people of the neighborhood.

It wasn't easy. There were arguments, disappointments, government interventions that never came. Some families were relocated, others were harmed. There were injustices—open wounds that still hurt today [...].

But despite everything, the neighborhood endured.

Many houses were destroyed here, many things happened. This place became a marker of memory. For those who did not live through those events, it is important to know: it is one of the few things that remain, and it is our responsibility to preserve it.

It fully justifies the title of this story. The war—or rather, the struggle—has been an indelible mark on our neighborhood. We do not live only in the present; we carry the past with us.

And that is why it is important to mobilize, to understand, to interpret. Even without words."

The Maia family was established in Lisbon in the eighteenth century, originating from the family of António Maia of Seville and Manuel Botas. Their oral tradition concerning Lisbon challenges theories of Roma nomadism; in this case, it is more accurate to speak of urban exile. From Largo de Santa Bárbara—near the former Praça de Touros in Lisbon, through which they maintained economic relations linked to the horse trade—to their settlement in Curraleira, behind the São João cemetery, after being denied access to the formal city.



The maia Family

"My grandmother, on my mother's side... that photo was taken at my grandmother's baptism. Yes, look, Soraia. This whole family comes from Curraleira. We had a good life.

We were the only Roma in Curraleira at the time. Later, other Roma arrived, but my mother never liked that. Never. Sometimes they would come here to sell things to the women, but she never wanted any of it."





"My Avelino was really handsome.
Let me see.
Even more handsome than Nininho.
He doesn't even come close to him.

I see his blue eyes, and I understand what you saw in him.
He really was magnificent.

Look at my aunt here, she was bald.
Let me see.
Look at this one too.

This was my father's wedding.
What was that?
It was a wedding.
They talk about it in the book as well.
Whose wedding was it?
Mario's?
No, he wasn't there.
Then it must have been Filanda's...
Yes, you're right.

This is Carocha, my great-grandmother.
And this is Sareco, right?
Yes, Sareco, my grandmother's brother. The one who died by hanging in Curraleira.
The one who took his own life?
Yes.

All these photographs come from Francelina.
They also called her by another name, Chata—that was her nickname.
Later she became my Chata's godmother and passed the name on to her."



"'Ana Botas married one of the Gavinos, creating the Botas and Gavinos families.'
They are still part of our family, even if they don't carry the Maia surname.

And who was Grandma Preta?
Grandma Preta was Lídia's mother.

In this part it must be Zezica speaking.
She was my grandmother.
What was her name?
Maria Botas.
And whose daughter was she?
She was the daughter of António Botas.

And this is Zé da Chata, the one they talk about in the book.
And who was this, grandma?
That was my father.

Tell me more.

My father came to Curraleira, but my grandmother didn't.
My grandmother passed away before that.

And that uncle, António Maia?
He lived here, on this side.
He was a very distinguished person.
Elegant in everything.
He went everywhere, did things we can hardly imagine.

He was very serious. Then he went to war.
When he came back, he had a problem with his throat, and that's what he died from.

Despite everything, he lived a long life. After returning, he went on to live many years.
Grandfather is the one there, with the curly hair.
'To aunts Francelina and Zezica, for their collaboration, clarity, understanding, and critical distance.'



Isabel

"The neighborhood was very compact, a real cluster of houses, with narrow alleys and winding little streets.

To find your way around, people would say, 'Necas's house is down there, at the end of that street,' but first you had to figure out which street, because there were no house numbers. The houses had no addresses.

I used to go there alone, always alone.

I did this work on Sundays. During the week I worked here, but on Saturdays and Sundays I went into the neighborhood to do what I used to call, a bit ironically, my 'apostolic recipes' [...].

When you entered the neighborhood, the feeling was very particular.

What did I encounter first? The children. I was very afraid... not of the children themselves, but of the idea that they might be dangerous. In reality, I was never threatened. Never.

It was all about welcoming—arms, kisses, dirty children, runny noses... everything. My dress was white, and when I came back it wasn't white anymore, it had turned yellow. But that didn't matter.

It was mostly the children who went back and forth.

I would say, 'I'd like to speak to your mother,' and they would lead me through some little alley.

You had to be careful, because the houses seemed stacked on top of one another. There was one here, another above or behind, and to enter one you had to go around the other side. It was a bit of a maze.

There were no numbers on the doors.

Only later did some houses get a number so they could be identified, but many never did, because they were built illegally. Whenever there was a small empty space, someone would build there.

There were Roma people, and everyone was afraid of the Roma.

I wasn't. I was never afraid of them. They never harmed me.

All the houses were more or less the same.

There was always a pot on the stove. It's funny, but I remember it clearly—always a pot on the fire. Either they were cooking, or they had just eaten, or who knows. What mattered was that there was always a pot there."

"You opened the door and stepped straight into the kitchen, where there was the stove, and then the bedroom. I remember that very often there were no doors—just net curtains, or simple cloths separating the spaces [...].

I also remember the women of the neighborhood very clearly.

We were talking about it just the other day—every single one of them had a padiola.

They were street vendors, mostly fish sellers, but also women selling fruit and vegetables.

I remember myself going out to do the shopping and buying directly on the street, from the first woman I met. Even in the Curraleira neighborhood. When the police arrived, they all ran away—them with our things, us with theirs [...].

'Maria Lena, what is a padiola?'

A padiola was a kind of handcart, like the ones used by construction workers. It wasn't a car. It had two wheels and two supports at the back, and they pushed it like that, loaded with goods.

So most of those women were street vendors, yes.

And then there was one fundamental thing: solidarity.

If someone had a problem, fifty people would immediately show up to help.

If someone was going through a hard moment in life, others would step in.

If someone died, people would all chip in to pay for the funeral.

There was a very strong sense of community.

Even if they didn't call it that, it truly existed.

People shared what they had, their joys, their sorrows... and also their swear words, because at that they were real specialists [...].

That is the reason they didn't want to leave the neighborhood, as happened in other similar places too.

They were being sent somewhere where they didn't know anyone, where their emotional ties no longer existed.

They had grown up there.

They had known each other forever, since birth. It was like a small village—a real community."

Unfinished matters
04 THE PROJECT

Direction

As emerged from the spatial and social analyses, the historic neighborhood of Curraleira currently appears as an urban void, despite being located within the living heart of the city. Its history remains deeply tangible: the fire, the advent of the SAAL housing process, and the presence of long-term residents coexist with a strong desire for change and redemption. The project intervenes in this area through a delicate and reversible approach, questioning the notion of the project boundary as a rigid and long-defined entity, and seeking to reopen this context to the community, from which it has long been disconnected.

The project concept is based on the interaction of three different language, which can operate both independently and in overlap, intertwining with one another and suggesting possible developments for both the buildings constructed during the SAAL process and the spaces surrounding them. Through the creation of starting points and reference elements, the project aims to stage social and ecological processes unfolding over time. This approach stems from the awareness that human beings, by nature, tend to seek stability; however, within architectural practice, this need must be addressed as a negotiated tension between the desire

to settle and the inevitability of change. In this sense, Curraleira represents an emblematic context: a neighborhood that has repeatedly changed its appearance over the past fifty years. The project therefore does not present itself as a finished intervention, but rather as an open input capable of adapting over time and to changing conditions. Unfinished matters thus becomes the key interpretative

concept of the entire project, raising unresolved questions related to the SAAL process: how are the issues left open by that process being addressed today? Can the housing problem truly be considered solved? How is it possible to intervene in these places without compromising their history? And what if it were precisely its intrinsic incompleteness and mutability that define its very nature?

How are the issues left open by that process being addressed today?

Can the housing problem truly be considered solved?

How is it possible to intervene in these places without compromising their history?

And what if it were precisely its intrinsic incompleteness and mutability that define its very nature?

Unfinished matters

04 THE PROJECT**Models of action**

The project adopts three models of action conceived as analytical tools capable of reading the neighborhood in its current condition and allowing it to be re-read in the future. These three layers — Plot, Field, and Surface — are not intended as rigid categories, but rather as open devices, able to operate both independently and in relation to one another. Plot represents the narrative thread of the neighborhood, identified in a segment of the disused railway that crosses the area and strongly characterizes it, both physically and symbolically. Field instead refers to the ensemble of inhabited and uninhabited spaces, encompassing

not only the built environment but also open, residual, and interstitial spaces, considered as an integral part of the urban and social system. Finally, Surface focuses on the ground as an active infrastructure: the surface on which one walks, analyzed in its present condition and designed according to the behaviors and transformations it may undergo over time. Through these three languages, the project constructs a layered and dynamic reading of Curraleira, capable of embracing the complexity of the context and evolving together with it.

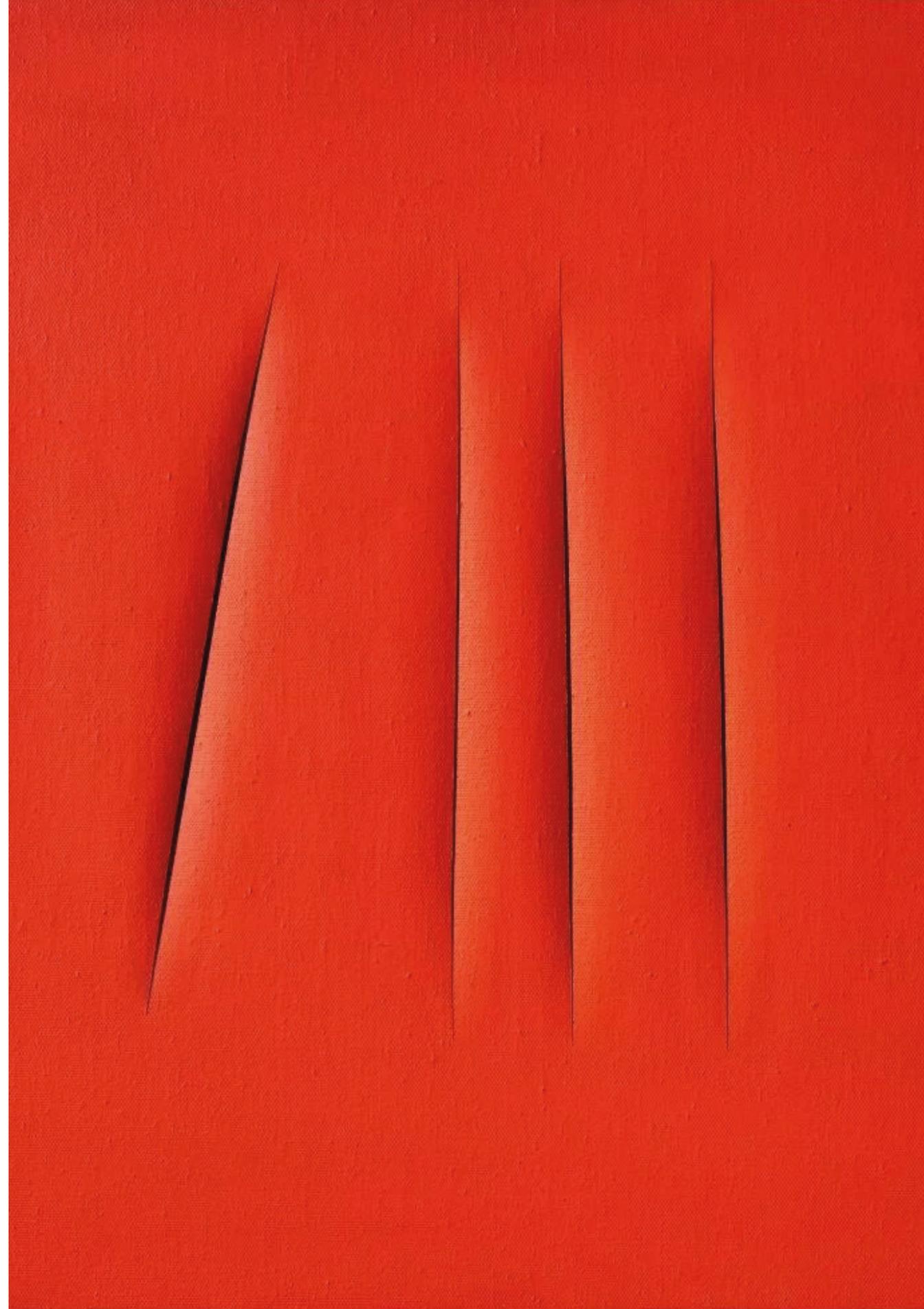
Part 04**PLOT****FIELD****SURFACE**

THE PLOT

The railway section that crosses the Curraleira neighborhood is reinterpreted in the project as an activatable urban device, capable of transforming throughout the year and assuming a central role especially during the summer period, on the occasion of the Santos festivities. The railway is no longer merely a technical infrastructure, but

is configured as an open, reversible, and temporary structure, capable of hosting events and, more generally, of activating forms of spontaneous and informal social interaction. It becomes the backbone of the project, a line that organizes urban space and guides its uses over time.

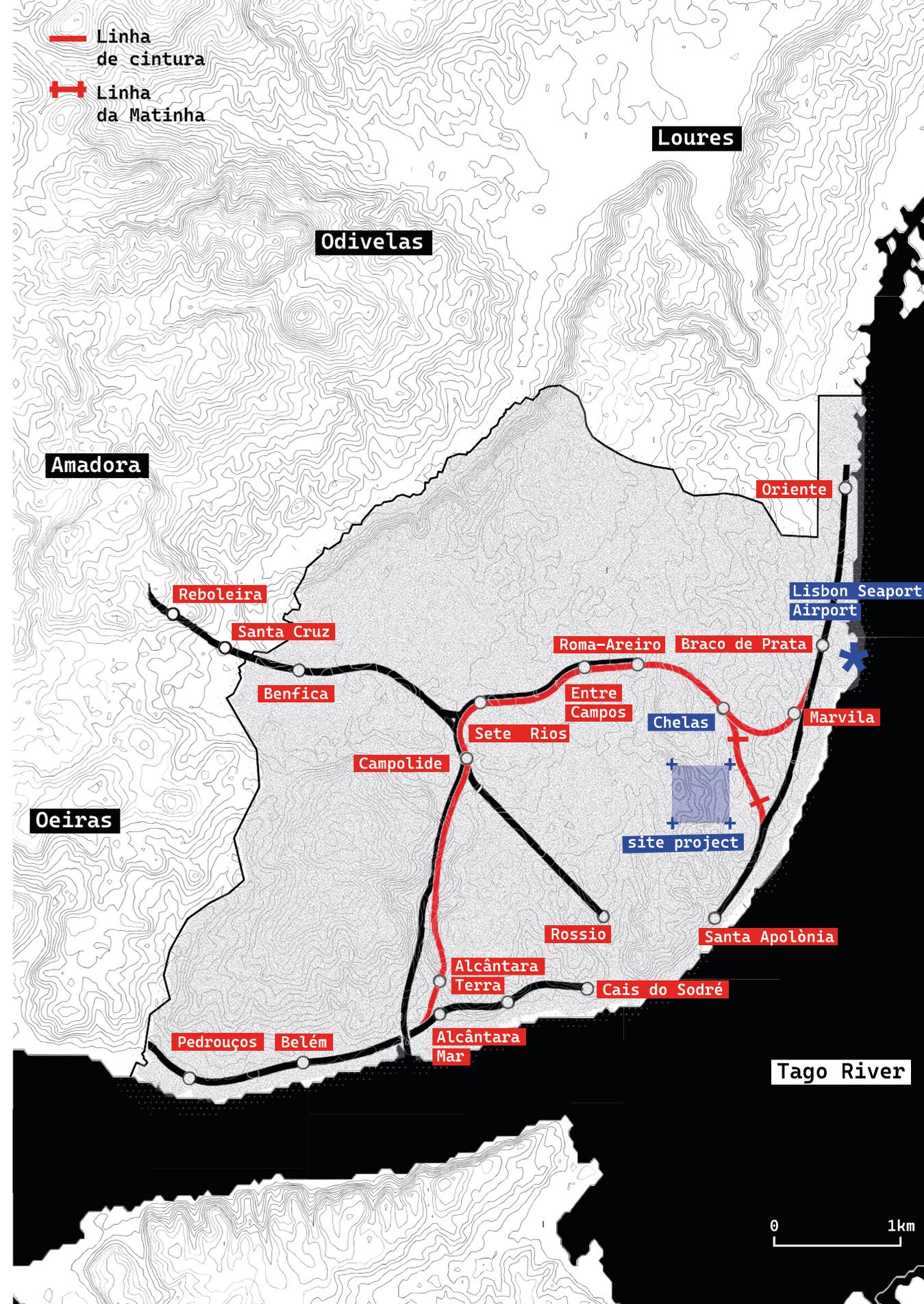
Figure 91. Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale. Attese* (1967). The cut as a linear gesture that opens space and introduces a temporal dimension.



History of the railway 04 THE PROJECT

The railway section, in its original configuration, was conceived as a more extensive infrastructure intended to connect Santa Apollonia to Sacavém, integrating with the Linha do Norte. In the 1940s, the railway played a strategic role in linking the national rail network with the maritime airport, enabling the transit of transatlantic goods. Throughout the twentieth century, this eastern area of Lisbon gradually established itself as an industrial corridor, favored by its proximity to the Tagus River. The decline of the longer route occurred in 1998, when a portion of the line

between Matinha and Sacavém was dismantled, reducing the overall length to approximately 2.8 km. Today, the section between Matinha and Santa Apollonia is used exclusively for freight shunting operations connecting to the railway network. Within this context, one of the key objectives of the project is to refunctionalize this residual infrastructure, preventing it from remaining a mere relic within the urban landscape of Curraleira and instead reactivating it as a spatial and social catalyst for the neighborhood.

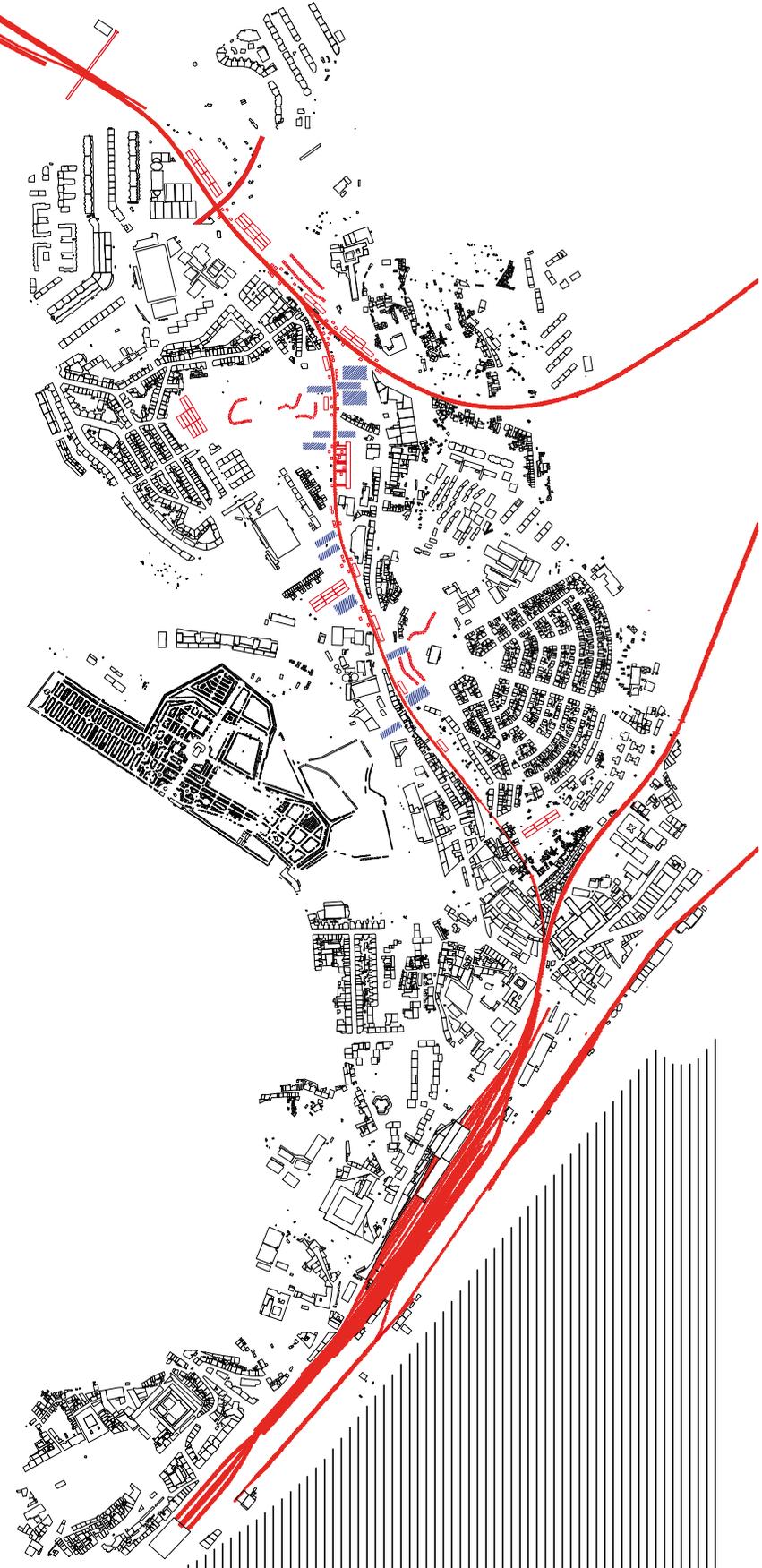


Around the railway line, a series of non-permanent and flexible devices is arranged, built using easily assembled modules and recycled materials. Each device performs a specific function and can adapt to different configurations and needs. The event modules, mobile and reconfigurable, move along the tracks or can be placed along the edges of the railway. They can combine with one another, stop at strategic nodes, or travel along the line, giving rise to a dynamic and ever-changing system. Alongside these, lightweight structures are provided in close proximity to the tracks—canopies, walkways, scaffolding—conceived as removable elements that can also

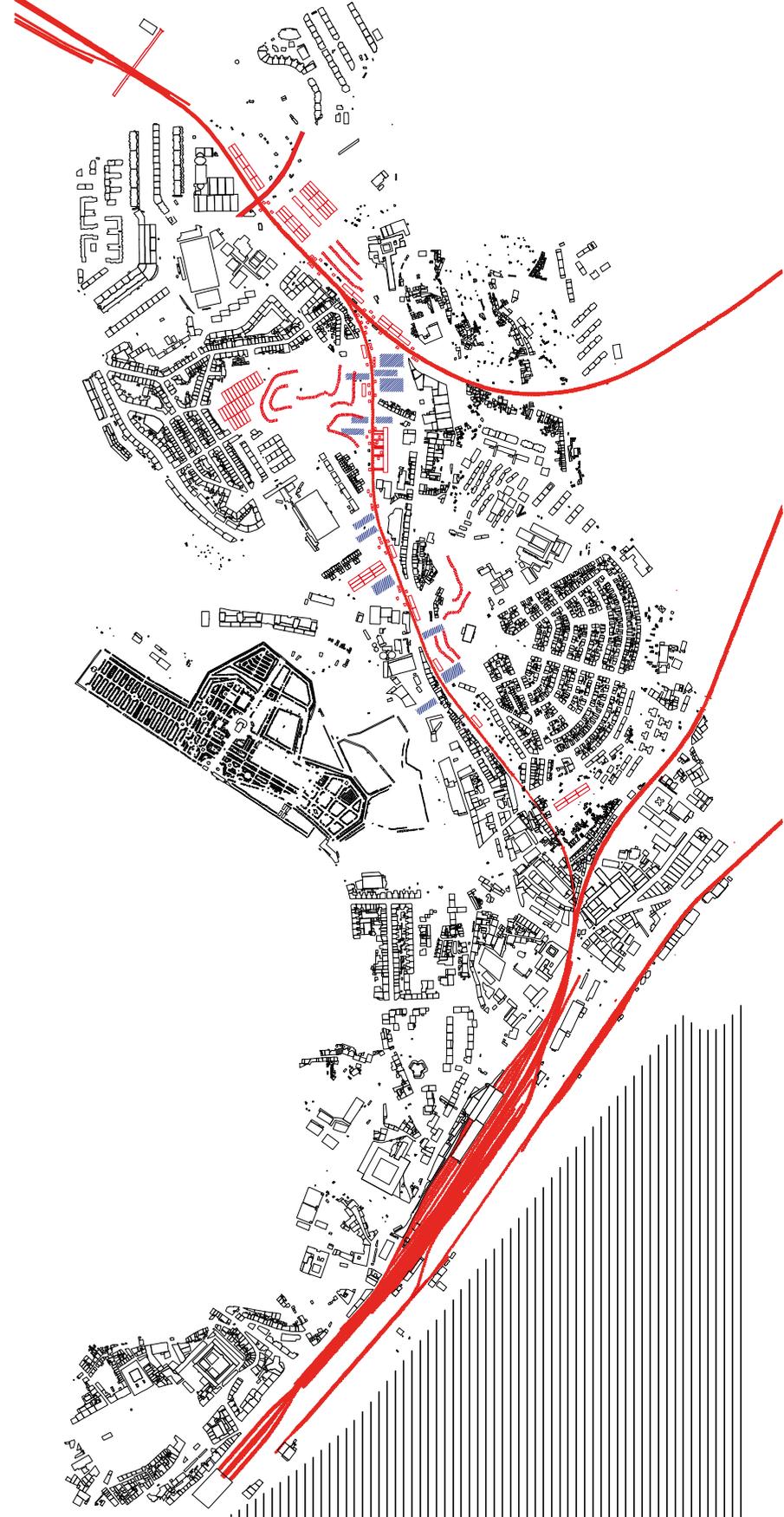
be used at other times of the year, such as for markets, ensuring continuity of use beyond the festive dimension. The project includes a series of programmable spaces, for which no specific use is defined, but rather the possibility of accommodating multiple activities. These take the form of linear plazas, platforms, and places dedicated to gathering, capable of adapting to different scenarios of collective use. Finally, the system is completed by service infrastructures, conceived as a true urban backstage: interchange hubs, temporary warehouses, storage facilities, and support spaces that enable the overall functioning of the railway-urban device.

today

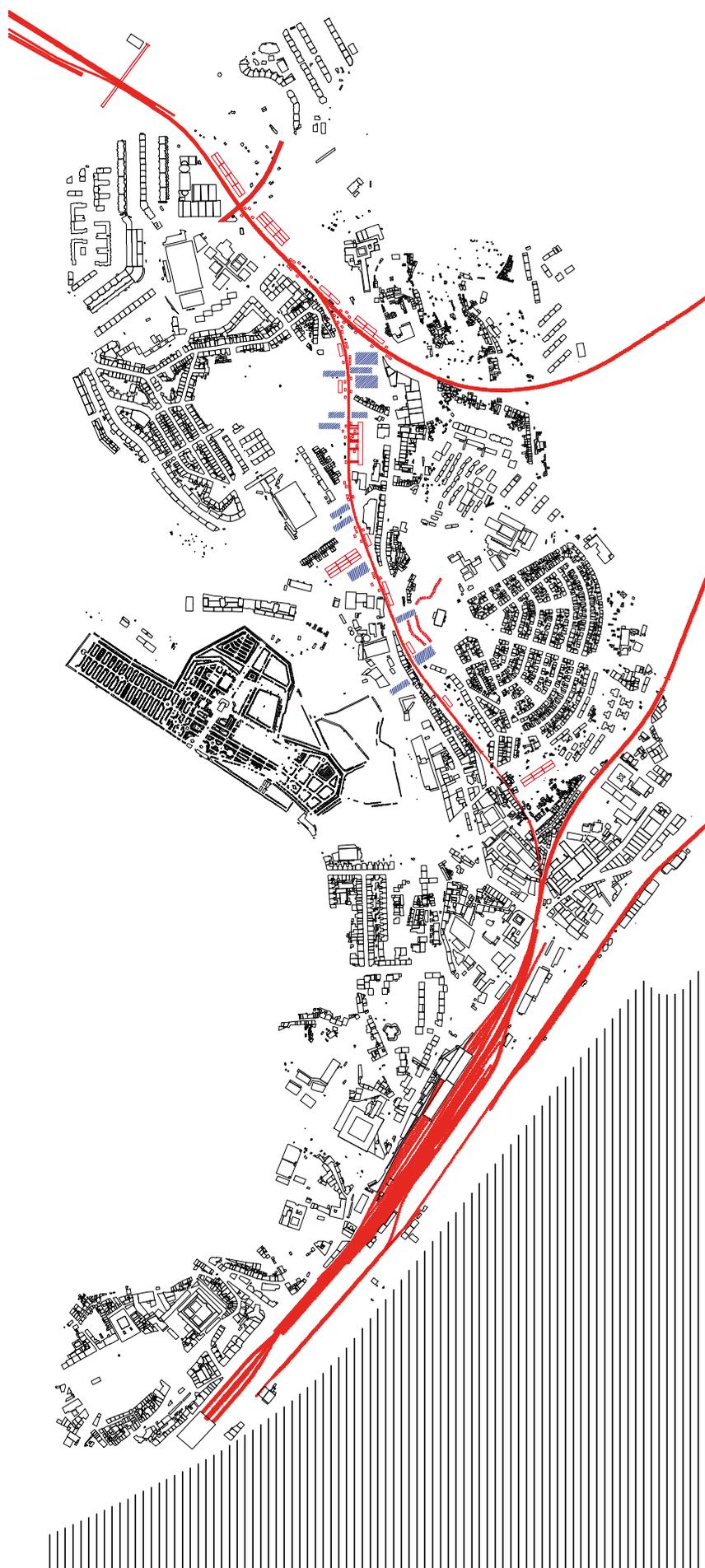




During special events and festivals



An intensification



During ordinary periods

-  Event modules
-  Lightweight structures
-  Programmable spaces
-  Service infrastructures



"Quando começa a música, junta-se logo toda a gente."

"Quando se acenderem as luzes vai ficar ainda melhor."

"Já viste quantas pessoas pararam só para ouvir?"

"Isto hoje está completamente diferente do costume, nunca vi tanta gente aqui."



"Já comeste? Eu ainda não parei um minuto."

"O que é que vais comer? Ainda estou a decidir."

"Pode ser mais um pão?"



"Quanto custa este aqui?"

"Está fresco, não está?"

"Com este tempo vende-se mais."

"Com este sol, tudo seca num instante."

THE FIELD

The FIELD can be defined as a relational, non-neutral space in which forces and tensions interact, generating dynamics that structure and transform the context.

Within this space, margins, lines, and condensers operate as interface devices: not mere formal elements, but thresholds, trajectories, and points of intensification that mediate the relations among the forces at play, making the tensions that traverse the field visible, orientable, and negotiable. Referring to them as interface devices underscores that they do not represent the field, but rather make it function by bringing heterogeneous elements into relation. Fields constitute the horizontal extension of the pro-

ject: not neutral surfaces, but relational spaces within which forces, flows, and everyday practices are distributed. Inscribed within these fields are lines, understood not as paths designed a priori, but as emerging and non-voluntary trajectories generated by the movement of flows and the informal use of space. Lines make the latent dynamics of the field visible, operating as indicators of crossings, connections, and intensities.

Within the existing condition, condensers correspond to those points where, even in the absence of a formal structure, something happens: places of spontaneous aggregation, exchange, and convergence of informal social practices.

Figure 92. Jackson Pollock, Number 1 (Lavender Mist) (1950). An all-over field of gestures in which lines emerge from action rather than from a predefined structure.

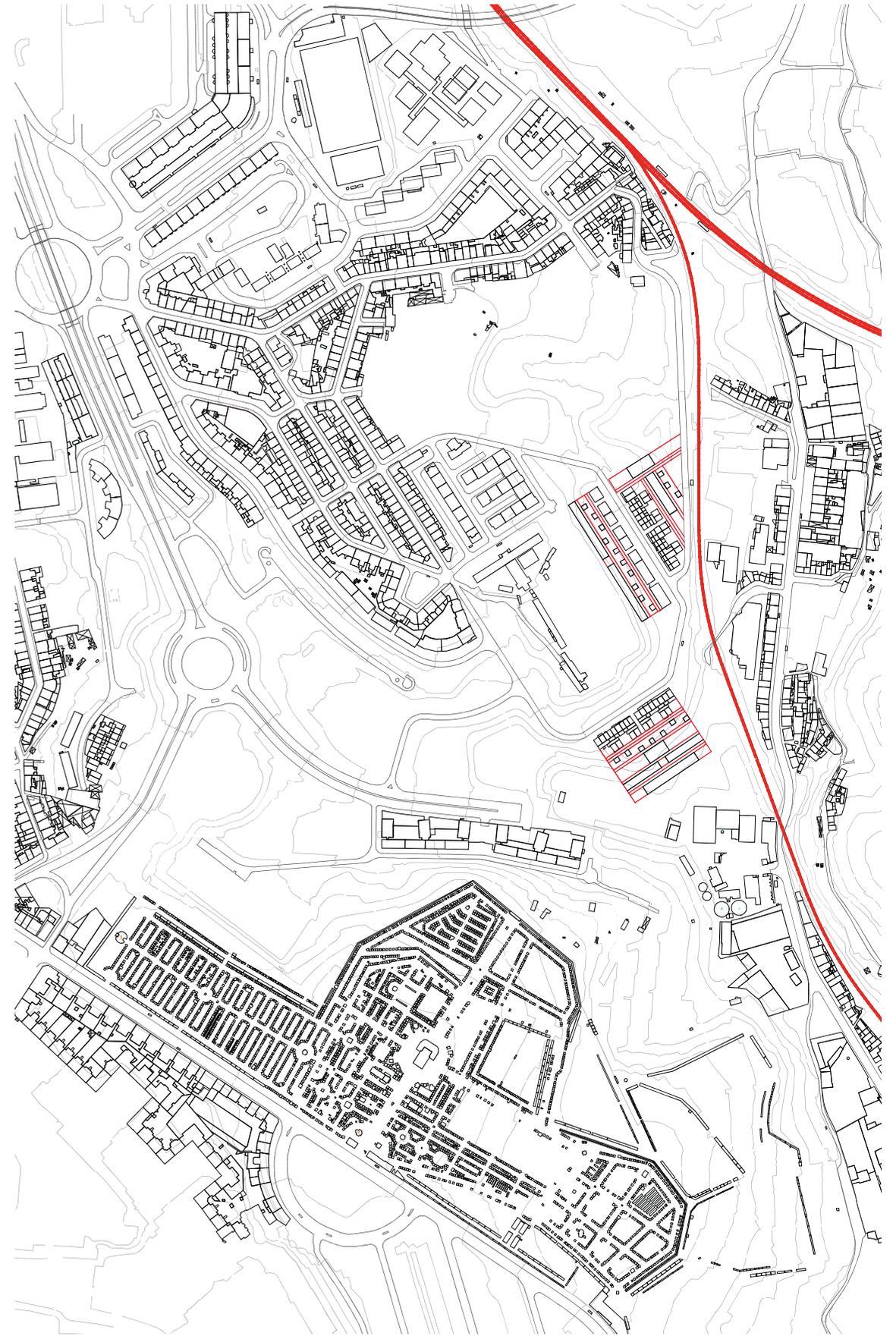


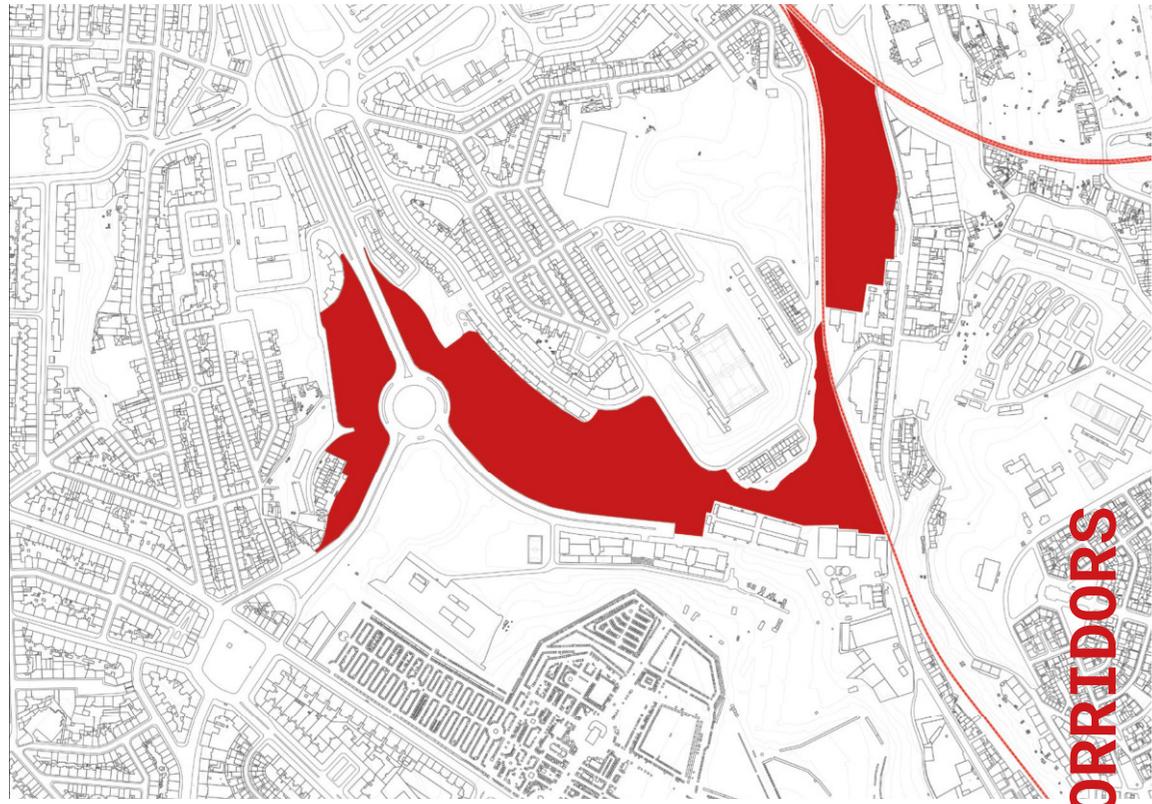
Horizontal densification **THE FIELD**

The social condenser is a spatial and programmatic device designed to concentrate, intensify, and reorient social relations, operating not only as a container of activities but as an active instrument for transforming behaviors, habits, and forms of collective life. Its operation unfolds through a dual function: on the one hand, a prefigurative one, insofar as it anticipates future modes of inhabitation and living, gradually familiarizing users with new social configurations; on the other hand, a performative one, as it direct-

ly influences behavior through the use of space, introducing and consolidating new social practices.

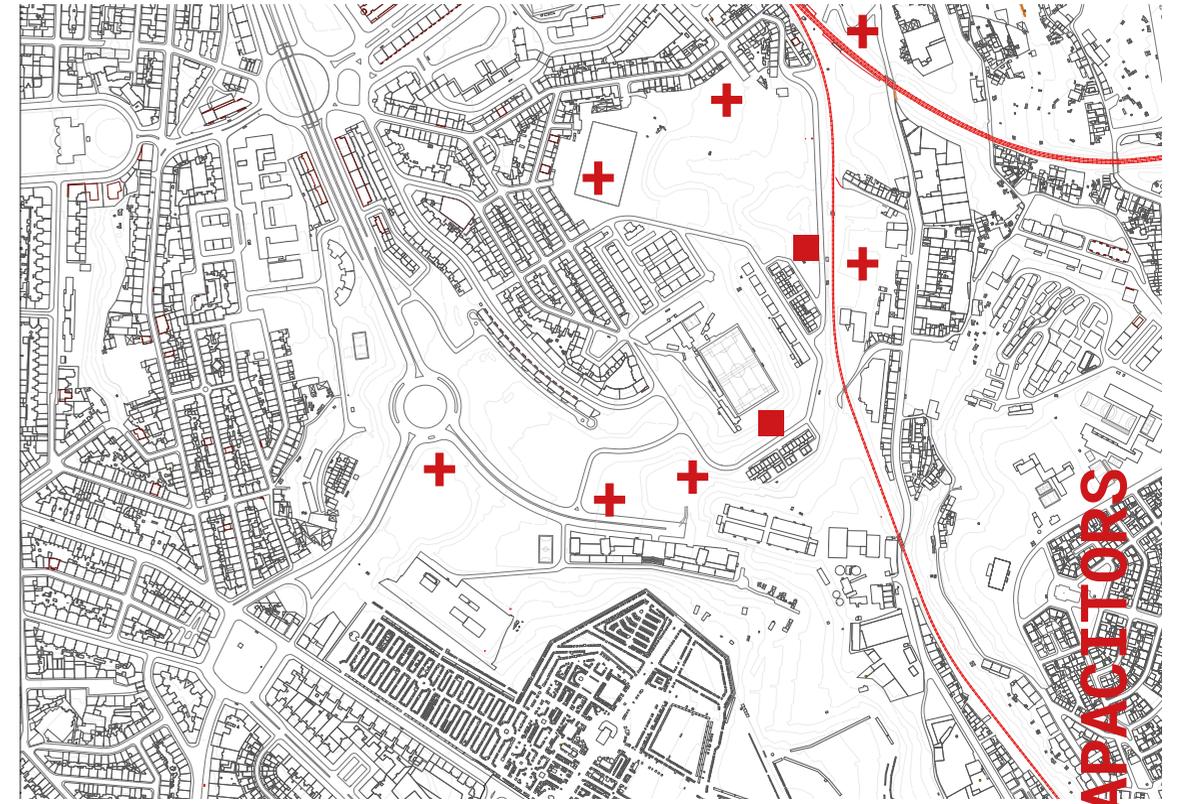
The parallel with the electrical capacitor further clarifies this operation: just as a capacitor accumulates energy, maintains it in a state of tension, and releases it when connected to a circuit, so the social condenser accumulates relational intensities and potentials, keeping them active and releasing them in the form of social transformations when activated through use.



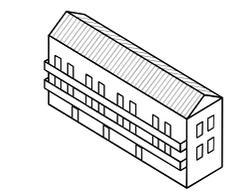


CORRIDORS

TRACES

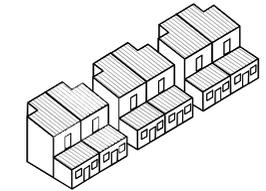


CAPACITORS



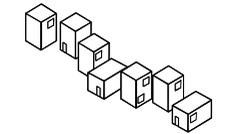
SAAL blocks

+

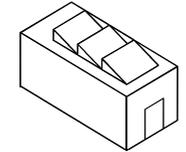


SAAL duplex

+

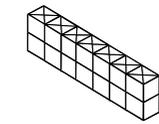


Social service accessory buildings



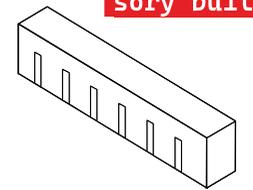
Community theater

+



Open air classroom

+

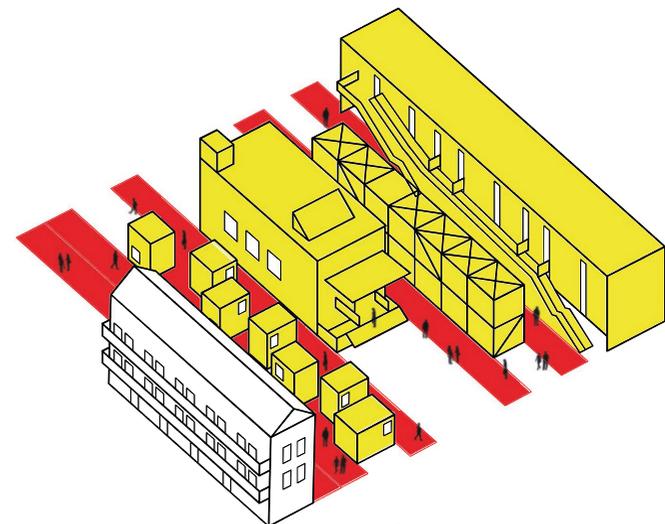


Small flexible units

Experimental education
Social services
Public mentorship

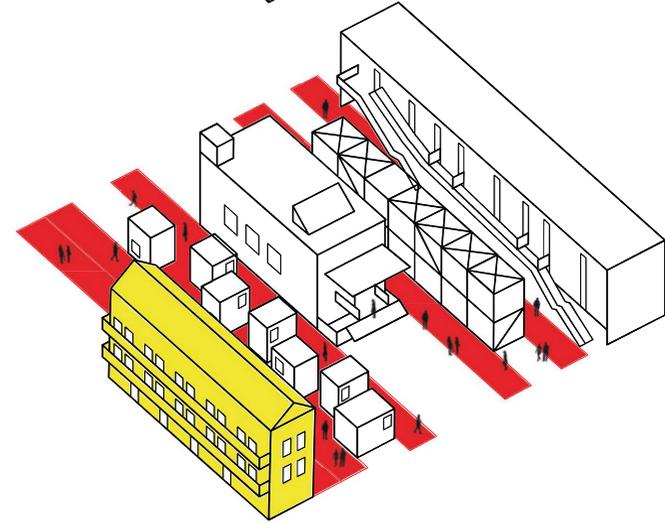
Single mothers
Families with gradmas
Playground

Neighborhood youth
Youth recording studio
Arts-culture programming



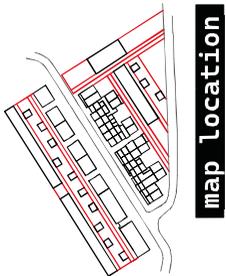
Social service infrastructure

Service walk



Existing houses

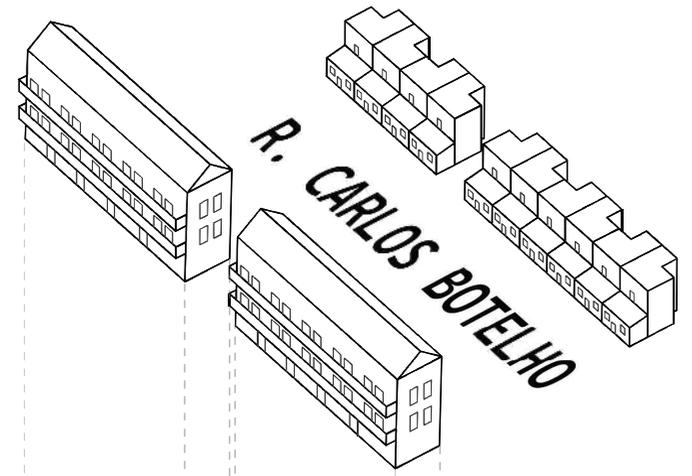
Service walk



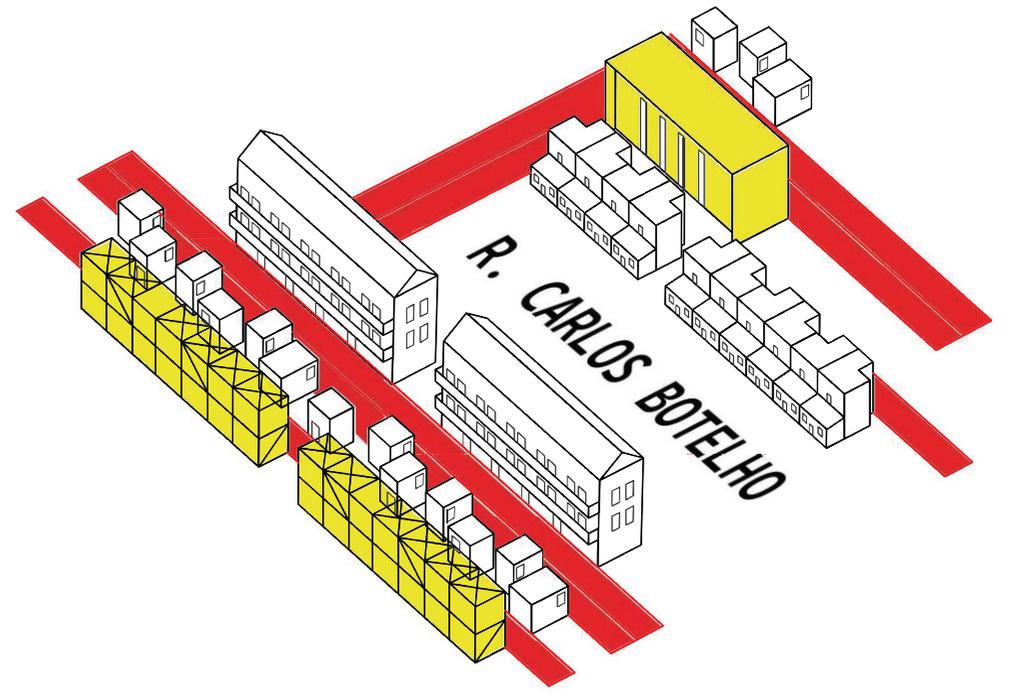
map location

SAAL duplex
SAAL blocks

Small flexible units
Open air classroom



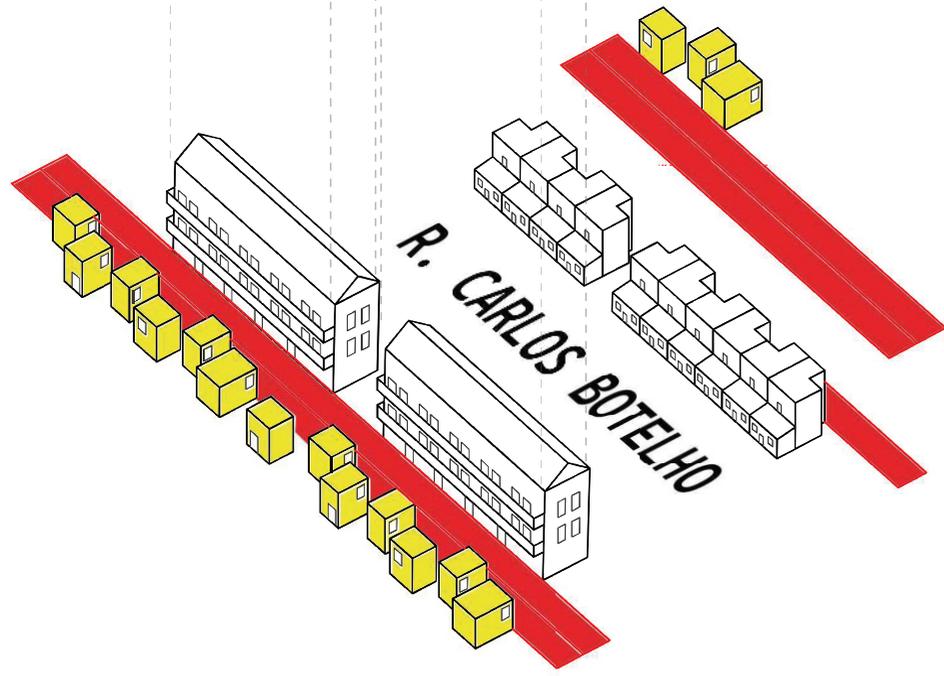
R. CARLOS BOTELHO



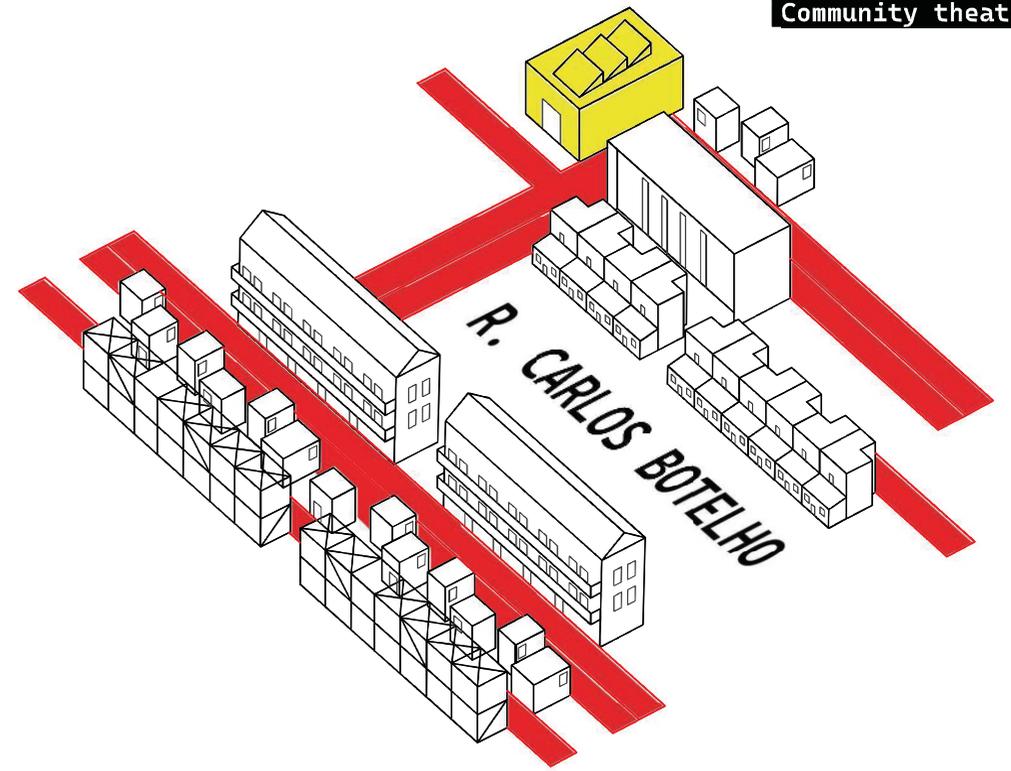
R. CARLOS BOTELHO

Social service access-
sory buildings

Community theater



R. CARLOS BOTELHO

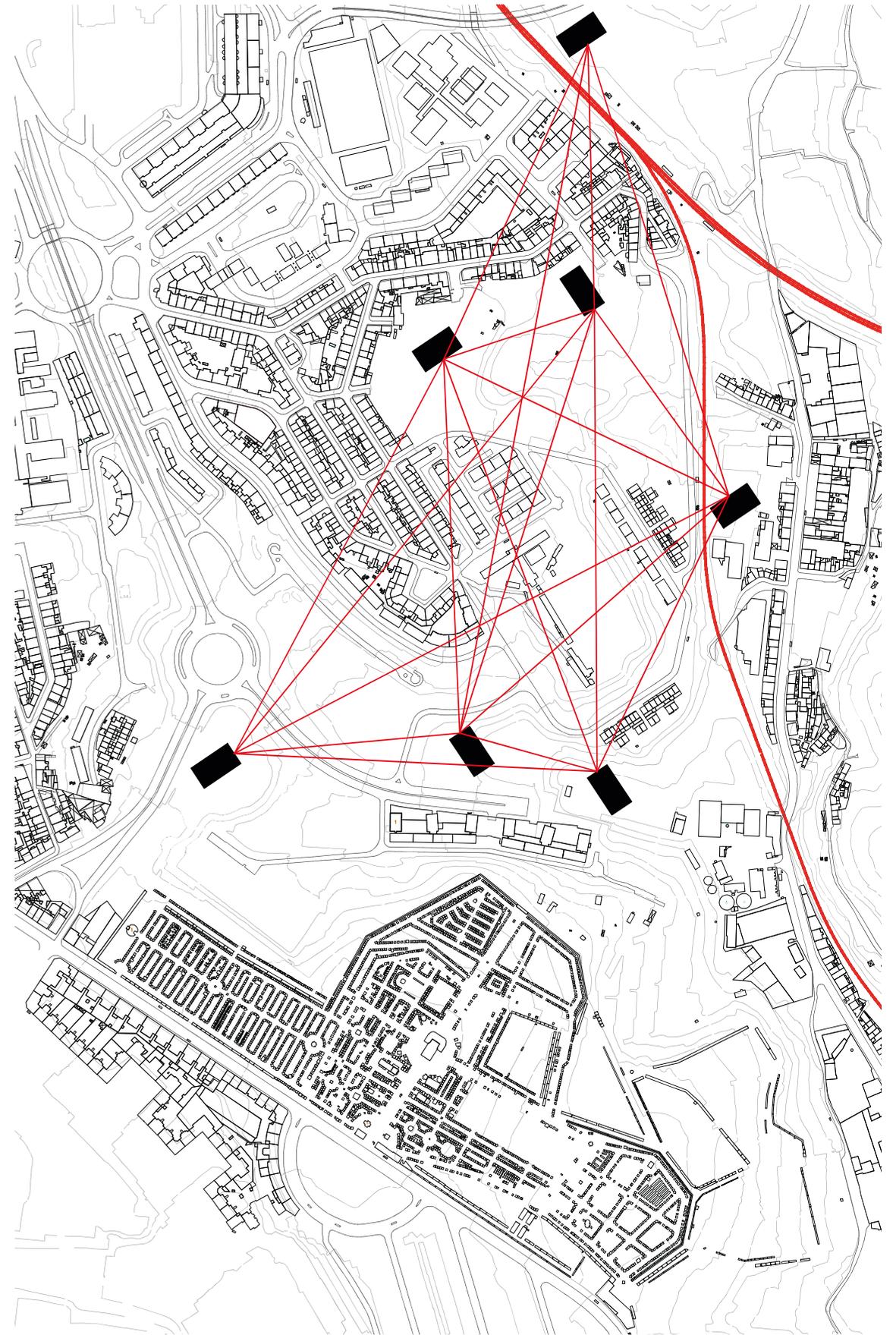


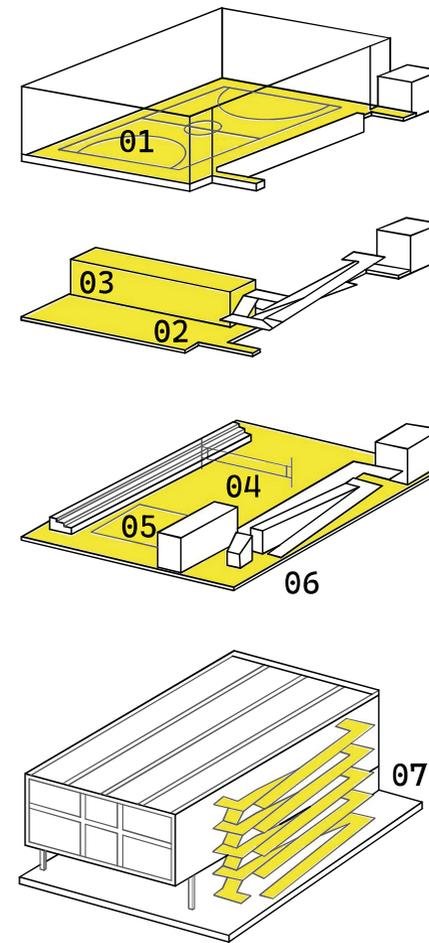
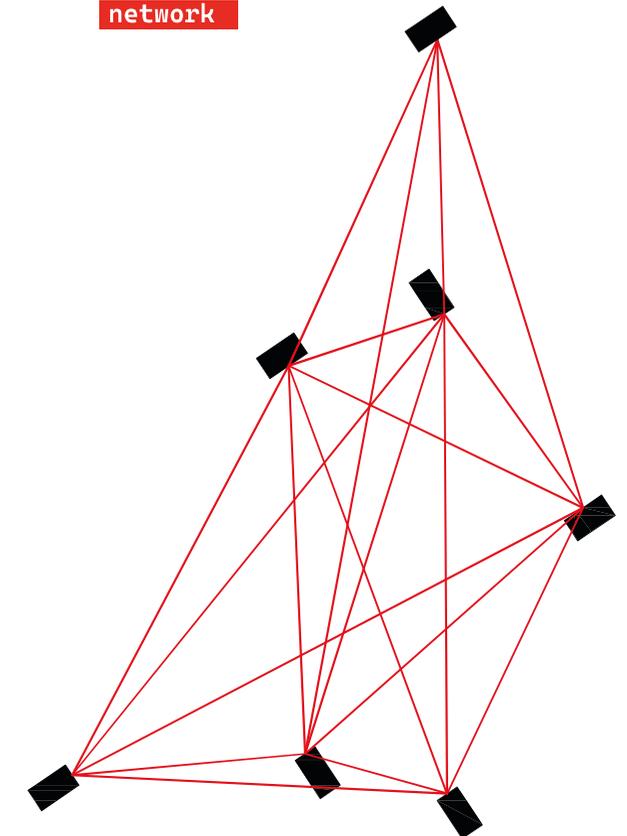
R. CARLOS BOTELHO

Vertical desification
THE FIELD

The project intervenes in this condition not by erasing it, but by amplifying it, through the creation of new social condensers and the reactivation of existing ones. A central component of the design strategy consists in working with the existing fabric, particularly the SAAL housing blocks, understood as open infrastructures rather than finished objects. In this

context, the project introduces a form of horizontal densification, positioning alongside the housing a series of social service accessory buildings, small-scale flexible units, open-air classrooms, and spaces for theater and cinema. These insertions do not aim merely to increase the built volume, but to condense relations, extending the collective dimension of dwelling.



01 **Playing field**02 **Running track**03 **Changing rooms**04 **Playground**05 **Tatami**06 **Access**07 **Ramp**vertical capacitor
network

At other strategic points identified within the field, the project instead proposes the construction of vertically developed condensers. These take the form of replicable prototypes, conceived as a family of assemblable elements capable of adapting to different contexts and of being modified according to specific ecological, social, and economic programs. Verticality, in this case, is not understood as an iconic gesture, but

as a tool for the concentration and intensification of activities. The project's lines do not remain fixed, but are redefined in relation to the new poles generated by the condensers. Paths bend, multiply, or intensify in response to these new concentrations, transforming the field into a dynamic system in which space, flows, and social practices continuously co-produce one another.

THE SURFACE

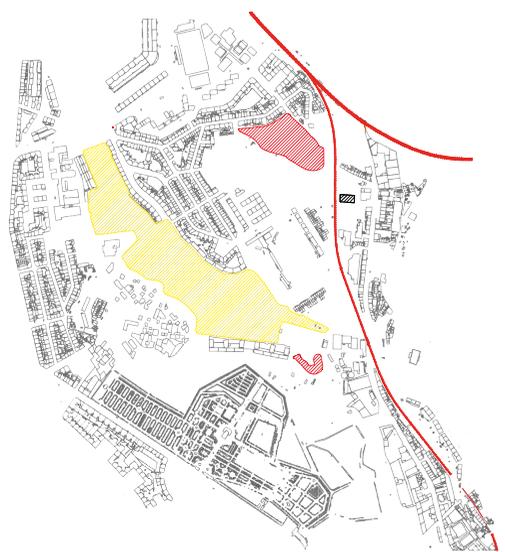
The SURFACE is not merely the physical plane of the ground, but a dynamic interface where ecological, political, temporal, and social processes intersect. The surface presents itself as an unstable and layered element, subject to continuous transformations.

In Curraleira, over the past twenty years, the surface has changed its appearance sev-

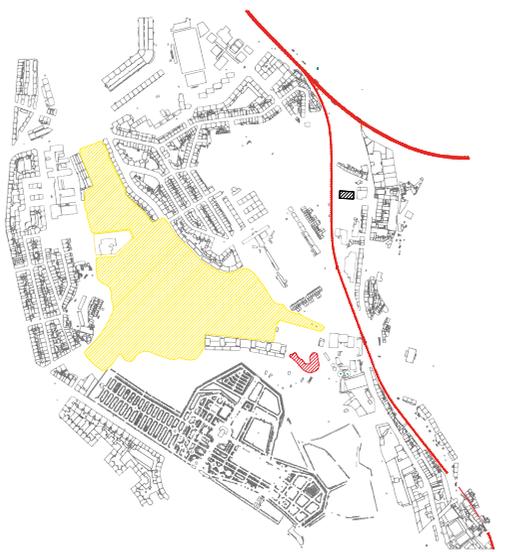
eral times: in the early 2000s, the last remaining shacks were demolished, Av. Francisco da Costa Gomes Street was constructed, and new residential blocks were built, also designed to serve as a “screen” during the 1998 Expo. At the same time, the process of impermeabilizing many surrounding areas gradually intensified.



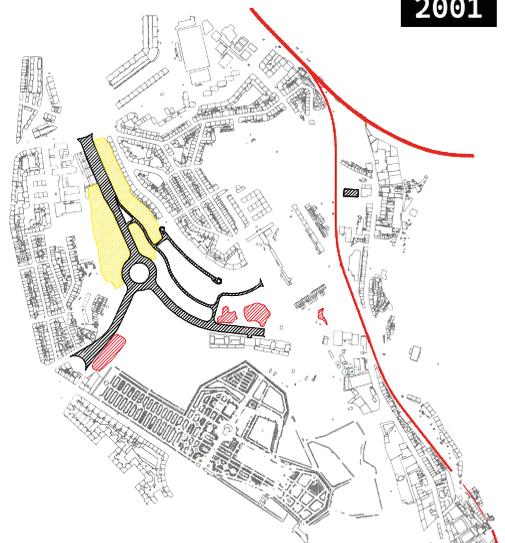
Figure 93. Gerhard Richter, Abstract Painting (series, 1980s–2000s). A stratified surface produced through successive layers, where each intervention modifies and partially conceals the previous one.



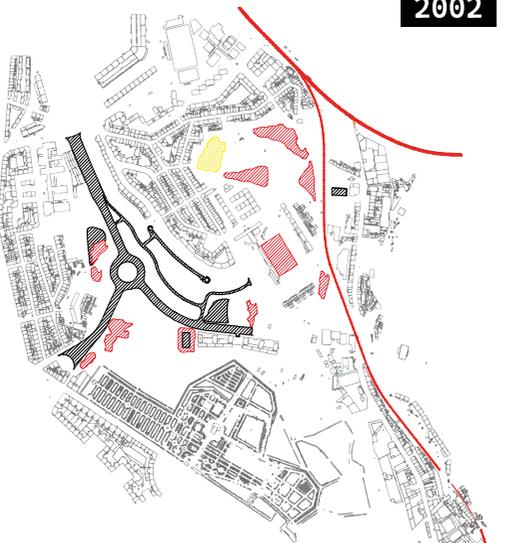
2001



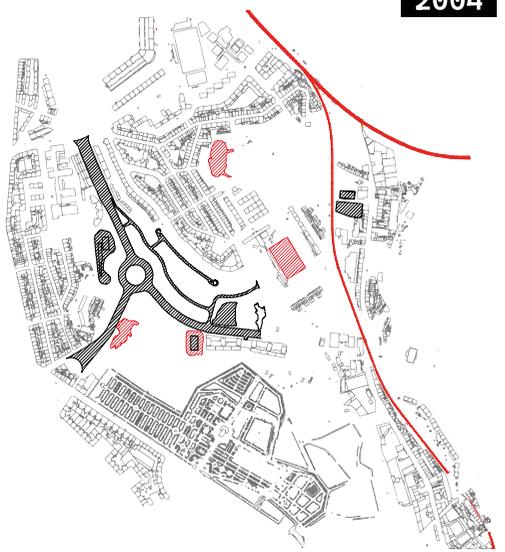
2002



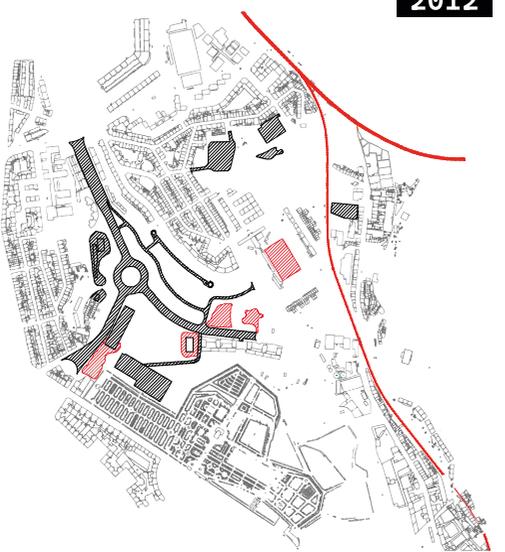
2004



2012



2014

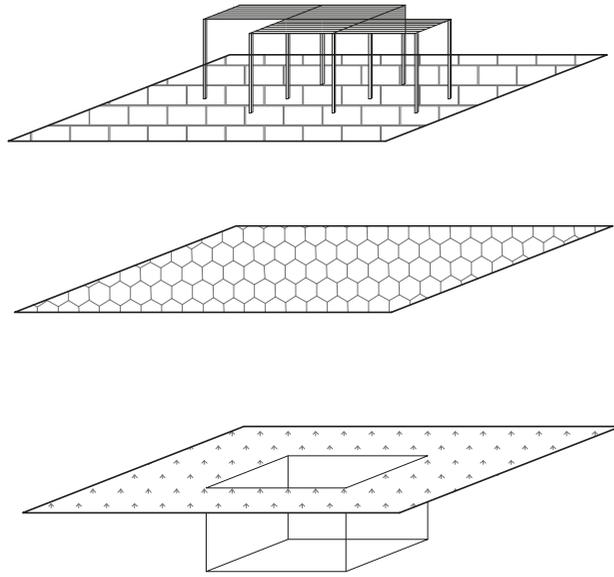


2025

Unstable surfaces						
Permeable surfaces						
Impermeable surfaces						
	2001	2002	2004	2012	2014	2025

waterproofing procedure

Negotiable surface
THE SURFACE

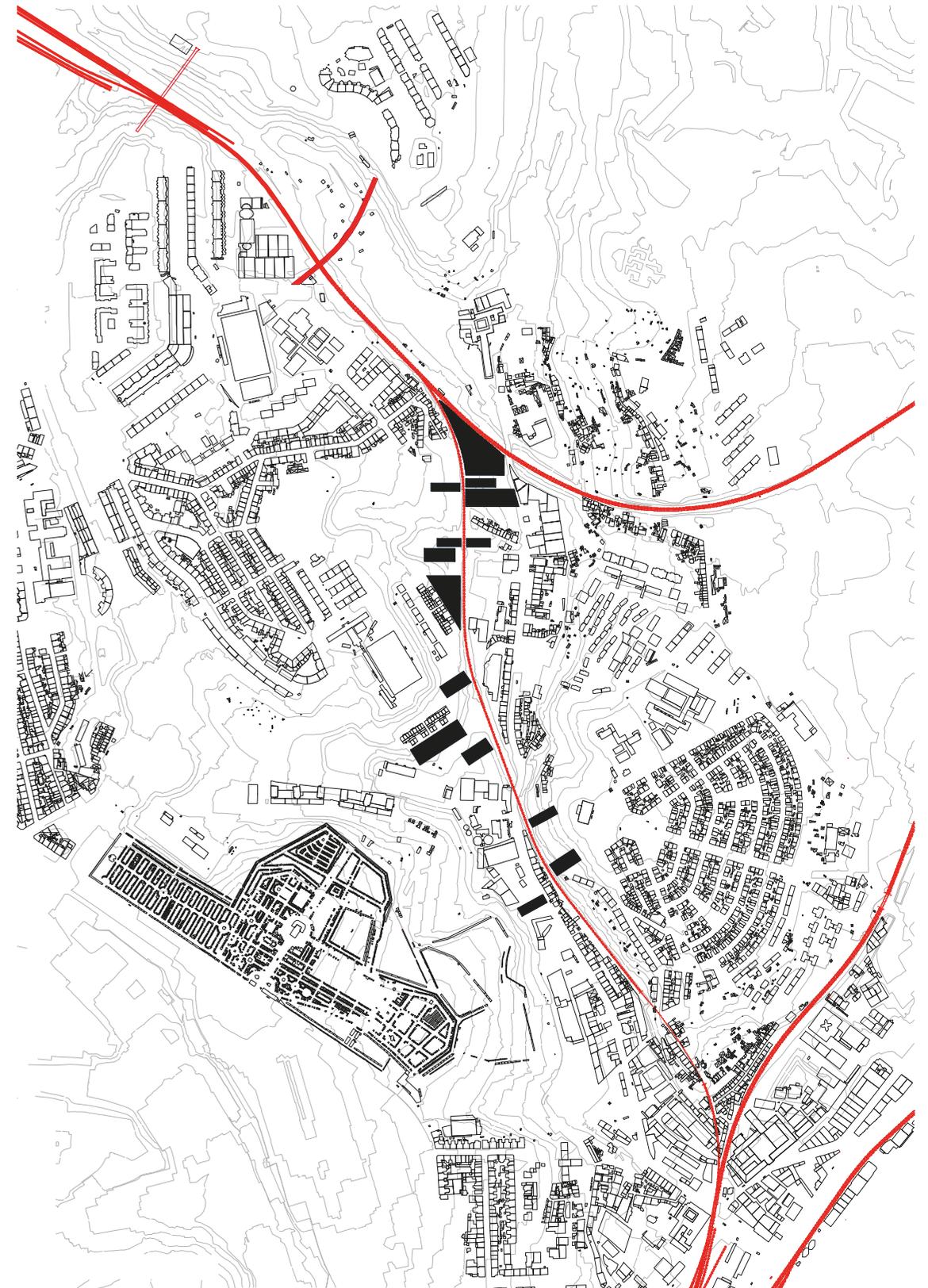


The project aims to define three different types of surfaces, investigating the relationship between the intensification of the plot and the accumulation of the field. In particular, the work explores which types of surfaces are admissible where the plot intensifies, and what degree of instability is tolerable in areas where the field concentrates through condensation devices.

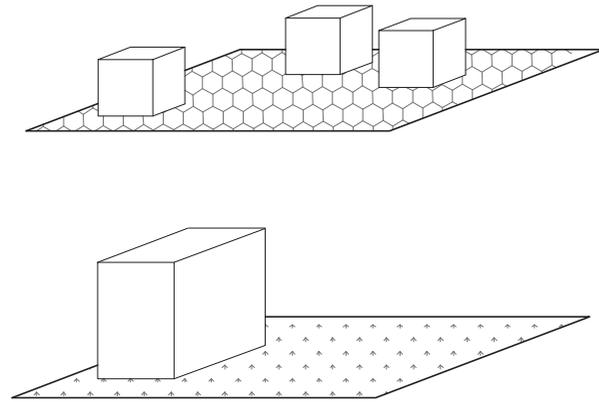
To address these questions, sacrificial surfaces, negotiable sur-

faces, and unavailable surfaces are identified.

Negotiable surfaces represent an intermediate condition. They can change their state—such as shifting from permeable to impermeable surfaces and vice versa—but only when activated by a specific plot device or by a field condenser. These surfaces require technical reversibility, enabling a return to previous conditions without permanent effects on the ground.

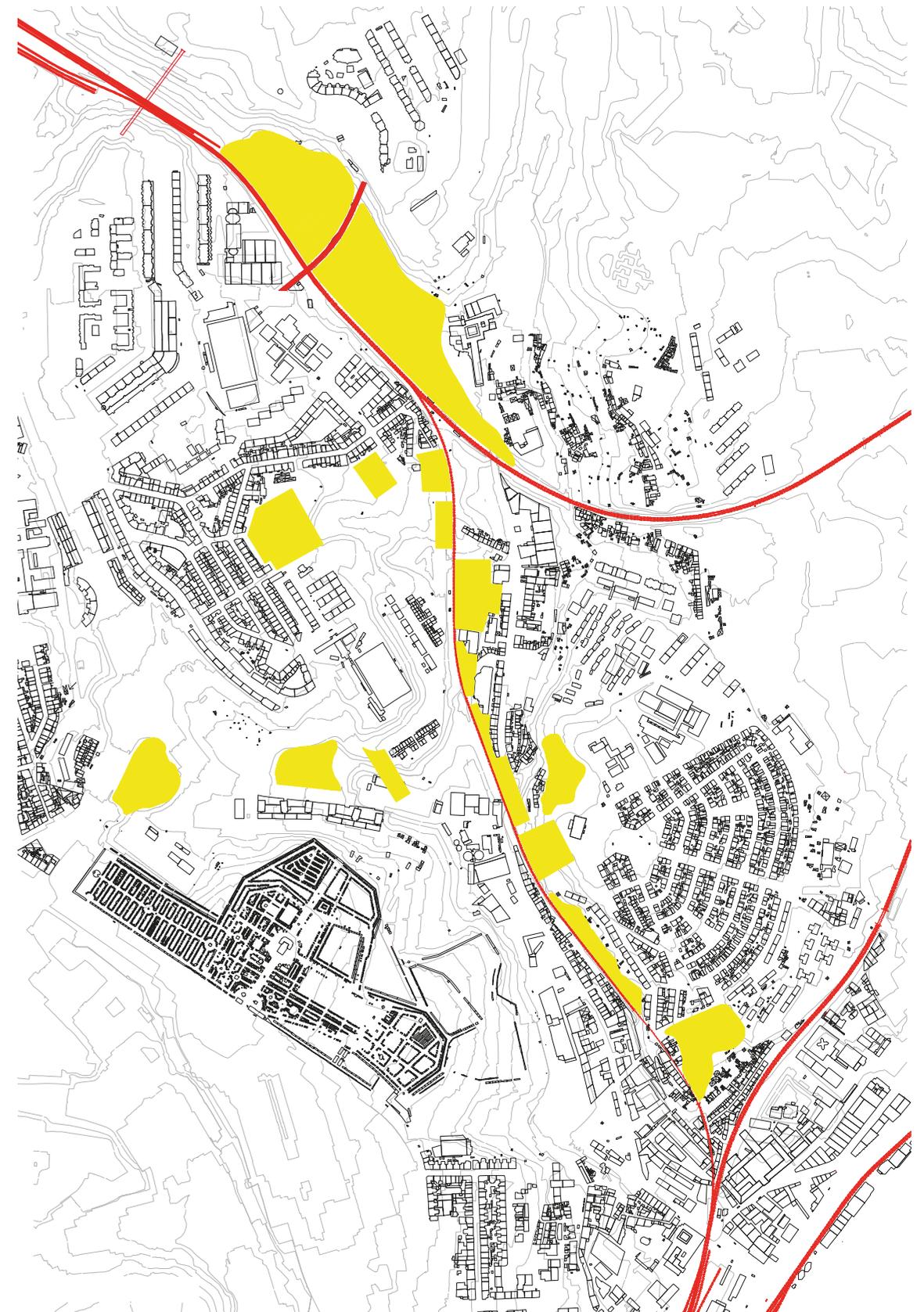


Sacrificial surface
THE SURFACE

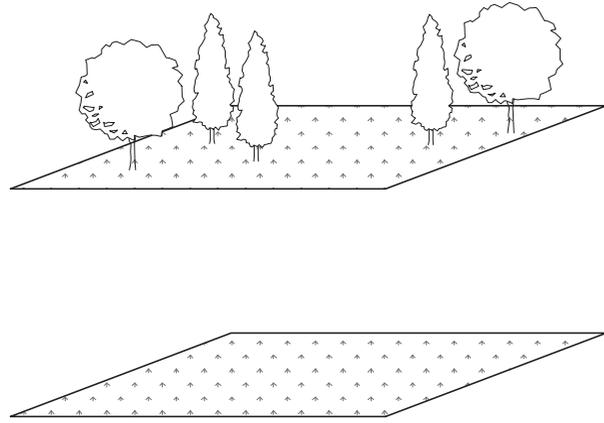


Sacrificial surfaces are those that can be perforated, occupied, and temporarily impermeabilized. They allow only lightweight structures, events, and temporary activities, and they do not generate development rights. They are conceived

as flexible surfaces, capable of absorbing the instability produced by the intensification of the plot without compromising the overall balance of the system.

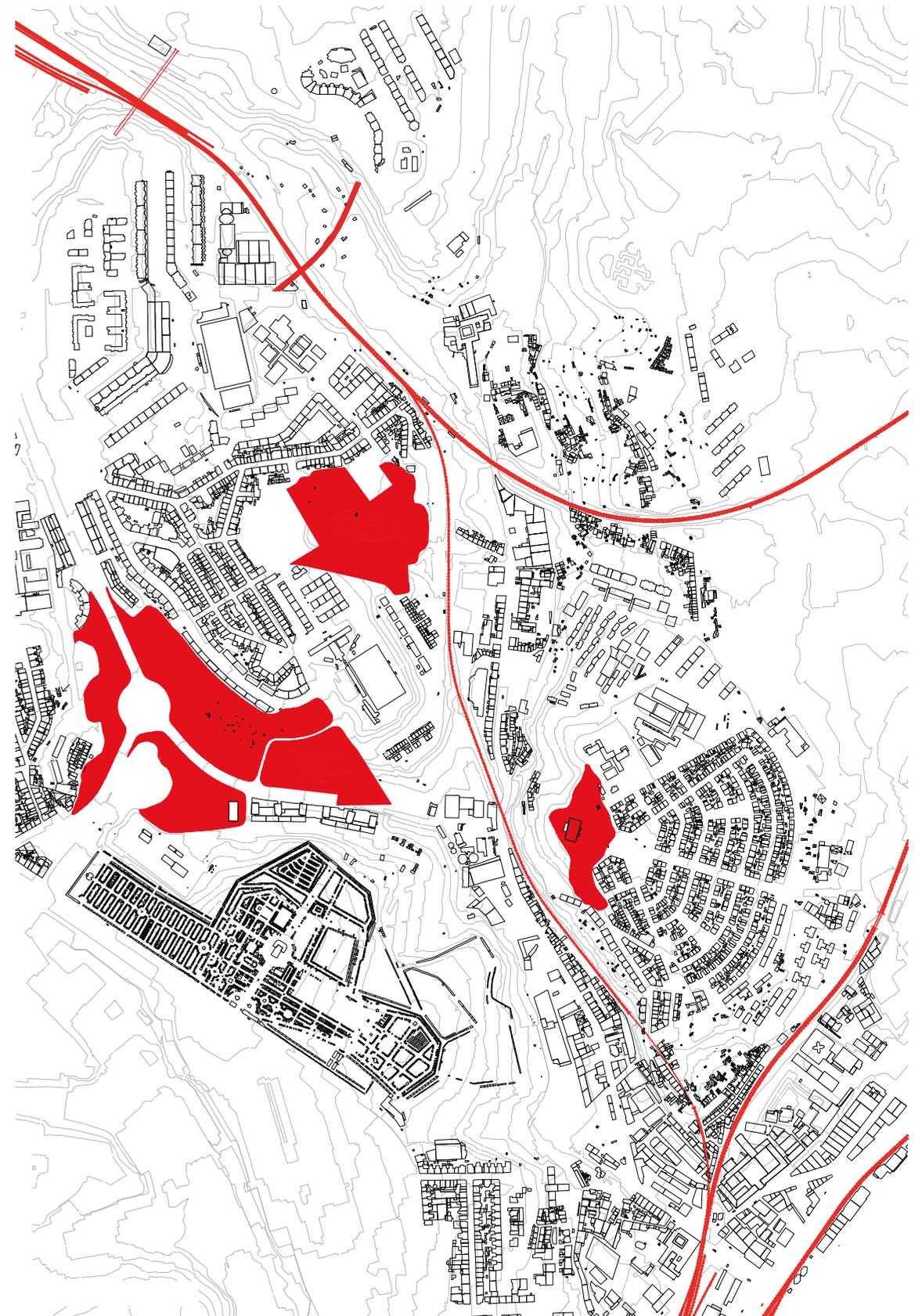


Unavailable surface
THE SURFACE



Finally, unavailable surfaces cannot be occupied or stabilized. They function as ecological and infrastructural thresholds, essential for maintaining environmental continuities and

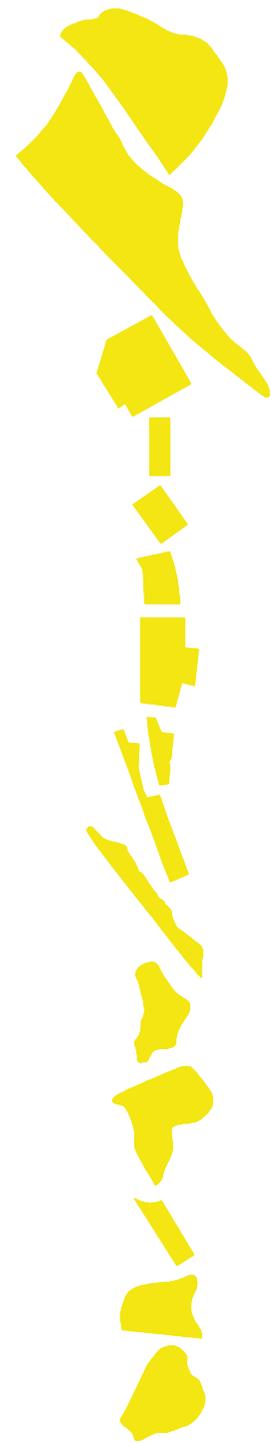
systemic flows. For this reason, the project selects surfaces that already perform this function, intensifying their role through an increase in arboreal vegetation



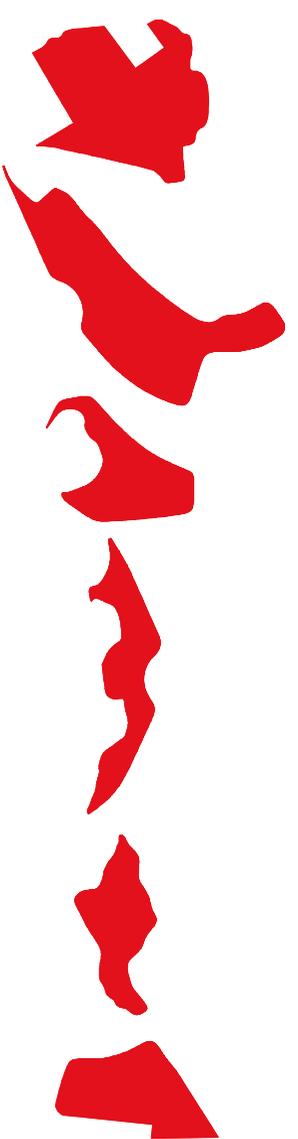
Negotiable



Sacrificable



Unavailable



FINAL REMARKS

The historical, social, and spatial analysis of the neighbourhood has highlighted how the SAAL process represented not only a public housing programme, but a political and spatial device capable of activating forms of participation, appropriation, and collective production of space. It is from this critical legacy that the project is positioned, conceiving the neighbourhood as a living matter rather than as an object to be completed or normalized. The project arises from the awareness that the conditions which made SAAL possible—the housing crisis, the centrality of the right to housing, and the public role of architecture—have changed but have not been overcome. On the contrary, in the contemporary context of Lisbon, marked by

the financialization of housing and the pressure of global capital, these issues reappear in new forms and with renewed urgency. Within this framework, the design intervention does not present itself as a definitive solution, but as a tool for reactivation, capable of working on existing conditions and making them once again negotiable. The reinterpretation of the disused railway infrastructure constitutes the project's first critical act. From a residual element and marginalized fragment of the urban landscape, it is reimagined as a relational field—a latent structure capable of connecting practices, flows, and different temporalities. The project does not erase this infrastructure, but amplifies its potential, transforming it into a spatial device able to

activate new social and urban relationships within Curraleira. Within this field, the project introduces an operational grammar based on fields, lines, and condensers, understood not as formal figures but as relational devices. Fields become horizontal spaces of possibility, where everyday practices and informal flows can find expression. Lines emerge as non-predefined trajectories generated through use, capable of making the neighbourhood's latent dynamics visible. Social condensers, finally, operate as points of intensification, concentrating relationships, activities, and meanings, and producing transformations that are not only spatial but also behavioral. From this perspective, the concept of the social condenser assumes a central role—not as an iconic building, but as a device capable of accumulating and releasing relational energy. Through the insertion of horizontal and vertical condensers—service spaces, flexible structures, and places for education, culture, and encounter—the project seeks to extend the collective dimension of dwelling, strengthening the social fabric without replacing it. The SAAL housing blocks are thus interpreted as open infrastructures, susceptible to integration, densification, and reactivation, rather than as closed and definitively completed objects. At the same time, the project addresses the theme of the surface as an unstable and layered element, where ecological, po-

litical, and social processes intersect. The distinction between sacrificial, negotiable, and unavailable surfaces becomes a tool for governing the intensification of the ground without negating its complexity. In this sense, the project does not aim to definitively stabilize the territory, but to construct conditions of reversibility, accepting instability as an integral component of a living urban system. As a whole, the project takes shape as a critical response to the questions raised by the study of the SAAL process—not through the replication of a historical model, but through the construction of a contemporary device capable of reactivating principles of participation, proximity, and spatial justice. Architecture is understood as a processual and relational practice, more concerned with the construction of conditions than with the definition of finished forms. Finally, to study the SAAL today and to design within Curraleira means to assume a political position in the deepest sense of the term: recognizing that space is always the result of power relations, but also that it can become a tool for emancipation. In a context marked by new inequalities and a renewed housing crisis, the project seeks to reopen the field of architectural action, reaffirming the possibility of a city conceived as a collective project—open, shared, and in continuous transformation.

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The thesis investigates the significance and contemporary relevance of the SAAL (*Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local*) experience developed in Portugal in the 1970s, interpreting it as a moment in which architecture emerged as a tool for social emancipation and political experimentation. The initiatives born in the climate of openness following the Carnation Revolution are read as expressions of a city built from below, based on direct participation of inhabitants and on the possibility of making housing a concretely practiced right.

Through a multidisciplinary approach — combining historical, social, and urban analysis, field interviews, photographic and documentary materials — the thesis reconstructs the historical, political, and social context that gave rise to SAAL, examining the end of the *Estado Novo* dictatorship, popular struggles, decolonization, and the return of populations from former Portuguese colonies, during a period marked by a profound housing crisis. In the 1970s, a significant portion of the population in continental Portugal lived in severe precarity, amid degraded housing, overcrowding, and informal settlements. It was in this scenario that SAAL emerged as an open and adaptable process, which in just over two years produced around 170 social housing projects, involving architects, residents, and particularly women.

The SAAL neighborhood of Currealeira, one of the seven SAAL interventions carried out in Lisbon during the years of the Revolution, is adopted as a case study for a critical and design-oriented reading. The neighborhood, today characterized by incremental transformations, spatial and social challenges, and a partial condition of urban isolation, is analyzed through three interpretative levels — plot, field, and surface — capable of revealing the relationships between domestic space, urban structure, and everyday practices of inhabitation.

The thesis proposes a project that does not take the form of a finished intervention, but rather consists of a set of spatial devices capable of activating social and ecological processes over time, in continuity with the processual nature of SAAL. The project questions traditional boundaries of urban and architectural intervention, interpreting architecture as an open instrument, able to reactivate the traces of an unfinished experience and offer new possibilities of transformation for the Currealeira neighborhood and for contemporary debates on collective living.