

**"POPULAÇÃO ORGANIZADA**



**HABITAÇÃO CONQUISTADA"**

# Housing and Democracy: 50 years of Local Support Ambulatory Service (SAAL) interventions

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**Abstract:** This research adopts a historical, social, and cultural approach to analyze and illustrate the evolution of participatory architecture in Portugal, exploring its connections with critical theory and international practices. The study seeks to celebrate the achievements of the SAAL interventions while drawing inspiration from their strategies to actively contribute to a more inclusive and promising future for local communities. By addressing questions concerning the current state of SAAL interventions, how residents organize their lives and activities, and the potential for participatory interventions today and in the future, the research follows a chronological framework that considers past experiences, present conditions, and future possibilities. Focusing on four key aspects - social relations, the built environment, participatory policies and practices, and collective memory - the study provides a renewed perspective on SAAL interventions, on four neighborhoods in Portugal: FONSECAS and CALÇADA in Lisbon (by Hestnes Ferreira, October 1974), Lapa in Porto (by Matos Ferreira, November 1974), MACEDA in Porto (by Soutinho, October 1974), and PEGO LONGO in Sintra (by Costa Cabral, August 1975). Reflecting on the fragility of the SAAL process, which was cut short before fully realizing its potential, this research aims to reassess these neighborhoods 50 years later. By revisiting its legacy, we propose to empower local communities and advocate for a more sustainable and participatory future.

**Keywords:** housing; local support ambulatory service (SAAL); democracy; Portugal.

Received: 14/05/2025; Accepted: 09/06/2025; Available online: 27/06/2025; Published: 30/06/2025.

**Cite as:** Saraiva, A. (2025). 'Housing and Democracy: 50 years of Local Support Ambulatory Service (SAAL) interventions'. *VITRUVIO - International Journal of Architectural Technology and Sustainability*, 10(1), e23949. <https://doi.org/10.4995/vitruvio-ijats.2025.23949>

## 1. Introduction

The Portuguese democratic revolution occurred during the global economic crisis, in the aftermath of the first oil shock of 1973, which increased the difficulties and contradictions of the authoritarian regime. With the beginning of democracy in Portugal, in April 1974, the search for better living and working conditions, more specifically in the working class, the most disadvantaged and without privileges, had a huge impact.

Initially, this program - Local Support Ambulatory Service (SAAL) - aimed to establish a decentralized service, with technical teams collaborating closely with local communities to construct new housing and infrastructure, thereby enhancing existing living conditions. The directive issued on July 31, 1974, sought to protect against speculative activities and prioritized minimizing the relocation of residents to more remote areas whenever possible. Numerous SAAL initiatives were launched nationwide under the slogan “Yes to houses, no to slums!”

Two years later, on October 27, 1976, a ministerial order transferred the management of SAAL to local municipalities. At the time, 169 operations were active across the country, involving housing for 41,665 families. Data indicated that 2,259 housing units were under construction, with an additional 5,741 units planned for imminent development. According to Bandeirinha (2011), only 13% of the land needed for these interventions was available, assigned or expropriated.

However, no operation was completed during the period when SAAL operated as a central administration service (from August 1974 to October 1976). Administrative and procedural adaptation became necessary, which in some cases reversed or nullified the initial plans. Consequently, many operations changed their intervention sites, teams, or projects; some continued with the same projects but without the original teams' involvement, while others discontinued entirely.

Fifty years later, it is essential to understand the specific contributions of the architects' prior research experience in developing these neighborhoods projects. What are the SAAL interventions today? How have the residents organized their lives and activities? What resources will be needed, and how will they be used for housing 50 years later? Is it possible to promote participatory interventions today and in the future?

## 2. Method

Based on the archives of the four architects under analysis, housed at the Marques da Silva Foundation (FIMS), as well as materials preserved at LNEC and the Architects' Association, this study examines their professional trajectories and explores potential connections between their careers and the urban planning and housing projects developed within the SAAL program. Fieldwork is expected to take place as part of the research process; however, it has not yet been possible to carry it out. Direct engagement with local populations is essential to gather first-hand insights and understand the current reality of the neighborhoods studied. The delay may be due to logistical constraints, scheduling challenges, or other unforeseen factors that have temporarily made interactions difficult. This article forms part of the ongoing research project “Learning from the Past: The Importance of Former Housing Participatory Production for the Coming Years.”

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Housing in Portugal has experienced significant changes influenced by economic, political, and social factors. The most profound impact occurred after the Carnation Revolution, which brought major political shifts, including the nationalization of numerous properties and businesses. This period was particularly crucial for the most disadvantaged groups, as the Portuguese government introduced various housing programs to enhance access to housing and improve living conditions. In 1974 there was a deficit of adequate housing estimated at around 600 thousand homes (Ferreira, 1984). The housing shortage in metropolitan regions lasted for more than a decade after the democratic revolution and in the context of a serious economic crisis that lasted until the mid-1980s (Lobato, 2017).

Housing research in Portugal reflects a balance between tradition and innovation, with a strong emphasis on cultural and identity-specific aspects. Notable studies include those by Portas (1969, 2004, 2007) and the collaborations of Portas & Silva Dias (1972) and Coelho & Cabrita (2003). These efforts aimed to develop housing solutions that respect and enrich Portuguese cultural identity while adapting to the needs of an ever-changing global society (Ferreira, 1987).

However, with Portugal's entry into the European Community and the country's economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s, these social policies gradually gave way to homeownership, facilitated by market liberalization. This shift led to the relocation of the population

to the outskirts of major cities, increasing the distance between housing and work. During this period, fiscal incentives and financing programs also emerged to promote the restoration of degraded buildings and the revitalization of urban areas.

Since the dissolution of the SAAL programs and the transfer of responsibilities to the Housing Development Fund or local municipalities, these four neighborhoods, like all the others, have been left to fend for themselves. In this ongoing research, we can state that despite the proactive approach and respect shown by all stakeholders: technicians, residents, political decision-makers and local population - they were insufficient to fully implement the planned proposals, with equipment and all planned homes remaining unbuilt.

The rehabilitation efforts in the FONSECAS and CALÇADA and PEGO LONGO neighborhoods, initiated by the municipalities of Lisbon and Sintra in 2016 and 2017, actively involved the local population. These interventions led to the redevelopment of public spaces, improved pedestrian and road accessibility, and overall enhancement of the quality of life for the communities. In 2016, construction regularization was achieved with the legalization of all blocks through the issuance of Occupancy Licenses and the creation of Identity Cards for 355 housing units, as part of the BIP/ZIP58 process implemented by the Lisbon City Council and endorsed by Hestnes Ferreira. In 2019, the municipality of Sintra invested approximately 600 million euros in an 18,460 square meter area to rehabilitate public spaces and improve accessibility, further enhancing the quality of life for the residents.

In December 2019, Porto City Council announced the preparation of an Urban Study for the Lapa region. It envisaged the creation of new urban fronts, mainly residential areas, a green urban park of 19 thousand square meters and a second one with 16 thousand square meters, as well as the redesign of access to the Lapa metro station, the completion of the existing road network with the creation of new streets. This park is now open after five years, in this area of Porto, with a significant impact on the Lapa neighborhood, since Rua Cervantes is the main access route to this SAAL intervention.

#### 4. SAAL in Historical Context

From the late 1950s onward, participatory social architecture began to attract significant attention. International architects and theorists such as Giancarlo de Carlo (1919-2005), Colin Ward (1924-2010), John

F. C. Turner (b. 1927), and later N. John Habraken (b. 1928) explored various client-architect relationships. They aimed to develop new approaches and interpretations of architecture, emphasizing the process rather than the outcome.

The Housing Policy Colloquium, held at the National Laboratory of Civil Engineering (LNEC) from June 30 to July 5, 1969, emphasized the tangible potential of evolutionary housing and urbanism as viable alternatives to the conventional public housing block developments. The main goal was to “establish a set of measures” and outline an “integrated strategy for solving the problems” of housing shortages (Bandeirinha, 2011: 70). Consequently, the concept of integrated housing emerged from this congress, defined as “a set of goods and facilities that far exceeds the mere function of shelter” (Bandeirinha, 2011: 75). As stated in point 2 of Article 65 of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic (1976), “It is the State’s duty to: a) Plan and execute a housing policy included in general territorial reorganization plans and supported by urbanization plans that guarantee the existence of an adequate network of transportation and social facilities.”

In early July 1974, architect Nuno Portas (b. 1934), then Secretary of State for Housing and Urbanism, signed an order titled Program of Priority Actions, which was circulated among the services under the State Secretariat for Housing and Urbanism, particularly the Housing Development Fund (HDF).

Despite some setbacks, on July 24, architect Nuno Teotónio Pereira (1922-2022) submitted a document to the FFH that clearly and succinctly defined the objectives, scope of action, and functional organization of the Local Ambulatory Support Service (Teotónio Pereira, July 24, 1974). On October 24 of that same year, José Augusto Fernandes, Minister of Social Equipment and Environment, presented the programmatic text of urban policy, titled Activity Plan, which was approved the following day by the Council of Ministers. This plan outlined basic intentions regarding the distribution of equipment, transport networks, infrastructures, and technical and administrative decentralization (Bandeirinha, 2011). The architect John F. C. Turner presented in Portugal in November 1974, at the invitation of Nuno Portas, his housing experience in Peru, based on the innovative self-construction model of *barriadas*. This presentation had a significant impact on the participants of the SAAL Brigades Seminar. The resolution of land status issues, clarification and delimitation of intervention objects, forms of self-organization of residents and methods of financing construction were key topics for debate.

Despite its innovative approach to urban housing policy, the SAAL program had limited impact as a political instrument. Aimed at fostering social and urban equity through extensive urban reconstruction, it sought to retain communities in areas previously occupied by slums. However, its brief duration during and after the revolutionary period (1974–1976) prevented full implementation across all planned interventions, and its impact was unevenly distributed across the country. The convergence of the international political climate and Portugal's revolutionary context reinforced the idea that Theory + Planning = Democracy. Drawing on the Marxist theories of Henri Lefebvre and Manuel Castells, the program gained legitimacy by making architecture, urban planning, and technical knowledge accessible to the public, ultimately reshaping social, individual, and collective relations.

The State's role in the SAAL program can be assessed in two distinct phases. The first phase focused on laying the groundwork for sustained action, including establishing a framework of values, legislation, and military support. In the second phase, evolving social dynamics introduced bureaucracy, procedural inconsistencies, uneven local engagement, and a volatile national political climate. This underscored the paradox of a State caught between supporting and withdrawing from this unique social movement. The Armed Forces Movement (AFM) played a crucial role, mediating conflicts—particularly during the occupation of vacant houses—and acting as a regulatory force to maintain social balance between classes.

The success of SAAL's operations was largely due to the multidisciplinary expertise of its technical housing and urban planning teams, which included architects, engineers, sociologists, lawyers, geographers, and social workers. These teams were instrumental in defining strategies. Concurrently, alliances with neighborhood committees were established to tailor housing solutions without imposing economic constraints, emphasizing low-cost technical solutions. The empowerment of the people was a hallmark of the various phenomena of social participation (Ferreira, 2007).

Housing cooperatives played a crucial role by uniting residents from degraded neighborhoods, slum areas, and rented buildings. This movement significantly impacted the social role of women, who took on prominent positions in the public sphere.

The driving force behind SAAL's operations was the right to housing, and more specifically, the right to quality of life. Populations, design teams, and policy-makers expanded their focus beyond housing issues

to emphasize the importance of residential space and essential infrastructure (Ferreira, 1976). They advocated urban amenities such as sports facilities, schools, daycare centers, health units, and social spaces like community centers, leisure areas, and green spaces. Adequate public transport was also a key concern, all part of the broader focus on the right to place/city.

## 5. Case study analysis

To develop a more comprehensive understanding of the SAAL (Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local) interventions coordinated by Hestnes Ferreira (1931–2018), Matos Ferreira (1928–2015), Soutinho (1930–2013), and Costa Cabral (1929–2024), it is essential to consider the professional trajectories and academic contributions of each of these architects. Their respective roles in shaping the ideological and methodological foundations of the SAAL program were deeply informed by their prior experiences in both practice and pedagogy. Each brought a distinct architectural vision and social commitment to the initiatives they led, shaped not only by their formal education and academic affiliations but also by their engagement with contemporary debates on housing, urbanism, and participatory planning. Analyzing their individual backgrounds provides critical insight into the design approaches, community engagement strategies, and implementation challenges that characterize their interventions. Such an examination also sheds light on the broader intellectual and political context in which the SAAL program was conceived and carried out during Portugal's post-revolutionary period.

Hestnes Ferreira's career was shaped by diverse international experiences, including an internship at the Finnish Institute of Technology in Helsinki (1958–1959), research at Yale University in New Haven (1962), and a master's degree at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia (1963–1965). His work at the Technical Housing Office (GTH, 1966–1967) played a pivotal role in shaping his approach and decisions regarding this housing complex (Saraiva, 2018).

Matos Ferreira studied at ESBAP from 1948 to 1952 and, during the 1950s, was part of a group of students who shared Room 35 in a building on Praça da Liberdade, in downtown Porto. As the oldest member of this diverse collective, he collaborated with figures such as Álvaro Siza, Alberto Neves, António Menéres, Joaquim Sampaio, Luís Botelho Dias, and Vasco Macieira Mendes. The influence of Fernando Távora was particularly significant in shaping Ferreira's perspective. Távora's participation in various International

Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM, 1951–1962) and his role in the “Minho” team for the Survey on Portuguese Regional Architecture (1955–1960) (AAVV, 1961) broadened Ferreira’s understanding of housing and territorial issues. His professional and personal partnership with Távora (1972–1982) further deepened this influence.

Unlike Hestnes Ferreira, Soutinho, and Costa Cabral, Matos Ferreira never pursued studies or internships abroad, grounding his architectural approach firmly within the Portuguese context.

Soutinho obtained his architecture diploma from ESBAP in 1959. In 1961, as a Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation scholar, he conducted research on museology in Italy, where he was notably influenced by his Italian counterparts. At the same time, he worked at the Welfare Funds Foundation, designing numerous social housing projects across northern Portugal until 1971. From early in his career, he combined architectural practice with teaching (1972–1999). Beyond his design and academic work, Soutinho actively contributed to architectural discourse through conferences, debates, publications, and articles. He also held prominent public roles in institutions such as the Portuguese Design Centre (1998–2001), the Árvore Artistic Activities Cooperative (2003–2006), and the Order of Architects (1999–2002).

Costa Cabral’s professional development was shaped by key internships at the *Centre Scientifique et Technique du Bâtiment* in Paris (1962), London County Council (1965), and LNEC in Lisbon (1967), which greatly influenced his research and approach to housing design (d’Almeida et al., 2022). Under the mentorship of Nuno Teotónio Pereira (1922–2022), he became involved in Portugal’s cooperative movement, collaborating with the Federation of Welfare Funds (FWF) and the Technical Housing Office (THO) on the Olivais social housing project. Two decades later, as part of the SAAL program, he was responsible for developing the Pego Longo neighborhood in Sintra (1975–1977) (d’Almeida and Marat-Mendes, 2022).

The professional experience of Soutinho and Costa Cabral at the Federation of Welfare Funds, along with Hestnes Ferreira’s tenure at the Technical Housing Office of the Lisbon City Council, played a crucial role in shaping new housing proposals. Meanwhile, Matos Ferreira made a significant academic contribution by introducing graphic documentation and the characterization of interior living spaces in his design courses.

For Ferreira (1995), architecture should adhere to three fundamental principles: formal simplicity, economic efficiency, and clarity in spatial organization.

Analyzing the geographical context of each intervention, the Fonseca and Calçada neighborhood, coordinated by Hestnes Ferreira, was situated on the outskirts of Lisbon in an expanding area with relatively flat topography at the time. In contrast, Matos Ferreira’s proposal for the Lapa neighborhood was in a central area of Porto (Zone 3 – the 18th- and 19th-century expansion ring), a highly degraded zone with steep terrain, further constrained by the railway line (now repurposed for the subway), presenting significant implementation challenges. The Maceda neighborhood was initially called the Acácio neighborhood, was developed in the eastern part of Porto, near its boundary in Campanhã (Zone 8 – the eastern suburban sector). The project’s implementation prioritized the creation of collective spaces while respecting the historical, social, and cultural significance of the existing urban fabric. Costa Cabral’s Pego Longo neighborhood in Sintra was designed for a peripheral area with minimal infrastructure and steep topography, factors that significantly influenced the architectural proposal.

Each neighborhood features a distinct typology: 1) Foncecas e Calçada is a large development of four-story multifamily buildings, with mostly left/right vertical access, and small access galleries for three housing units at building intersections; 2) Lapa is a medium-sized development of two-story terraced houses with backyards, forming blocks; 3) Maceda is a small development consisting of eight terraced housing units, of which only five were initially built; 4) Pego Longo is a large development of terraced single-story and two-story houses, with front and rear yards, forming blocks. The unique characteristics of each SAAL intervention respond to different urban needs and lifestyles: Foncecas e Calçada excels in density and efficiency but may compromise privacy (Figure 1); Lapa balances suburban tranquility with practical living spaces (Figure 2); Maceda offers a small-scale, quiet community but may lack scalability (Figure 3); Pego Longo’s diverse housing typologies and integration of yards create a well-rounded living environment (Figure 4).

Table 1 summarizes the key data concerning the four SAAL interventions. It indicates that the number of families - and more specifically, the number of individuals - expected to benefit from these programs was ultimately lower than initially projected. Consequently, a substantial shortfall emerged between the number of housing units proposed and those that were constructed.



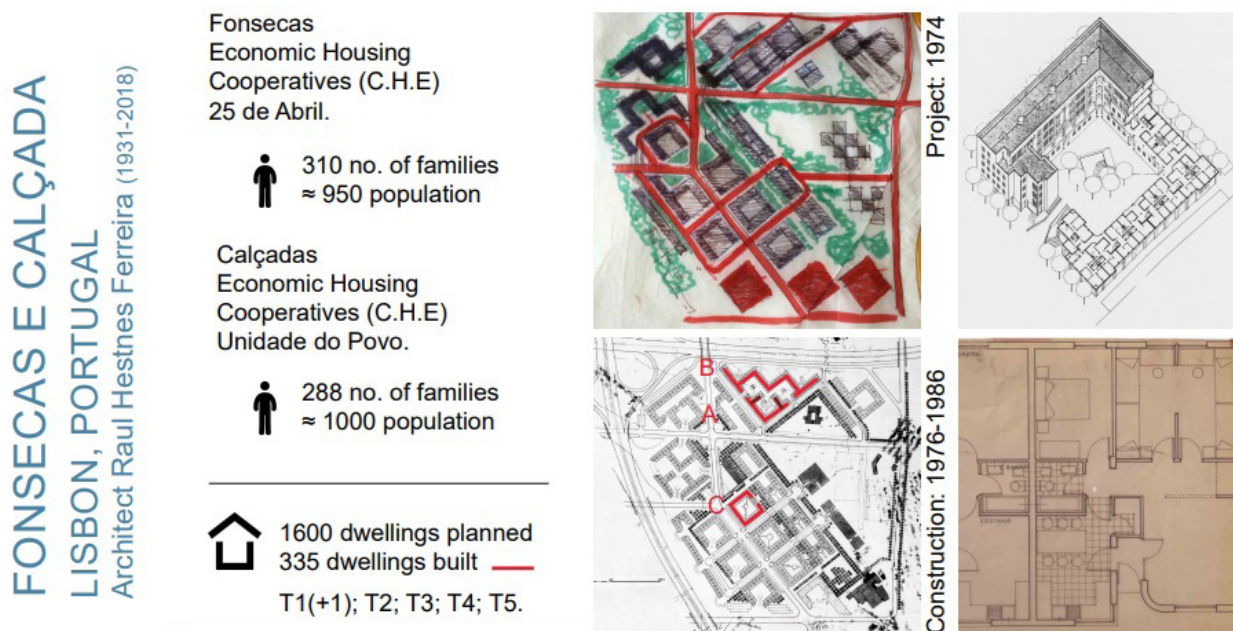


Figure 1 | Characterization of the Fonseca and Calçada Neighborhood. credit: Sara Silva Lopes.

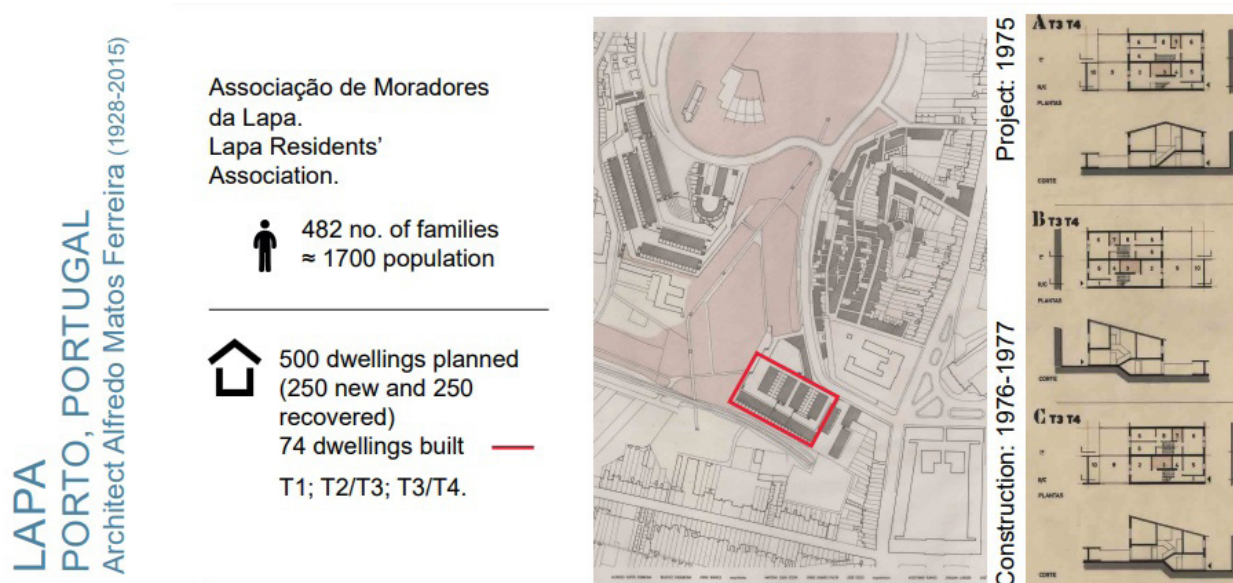


Figure 2 | Characterization of the Lapa neighborhood. credit: Sara Silva Lopes.

## 6. Results

The SAAL program, launched in Portugal in the 1970s, gave priority to the participatory production of housing. The interventions were implemented using three key principles: community engagement; flexibility in design, and collaborative leadership.

A key feature of the SAAL program was its emphasis on community engagement, wherein residents played an active role in decision-making processes, thereby ensuring that the resulting housing projects genuinely reflected their needs, preferences, and aspirations. This participatory approach marked a significant departure from conventional top-down planning models, fostering a sense of ownership and collective responsibility

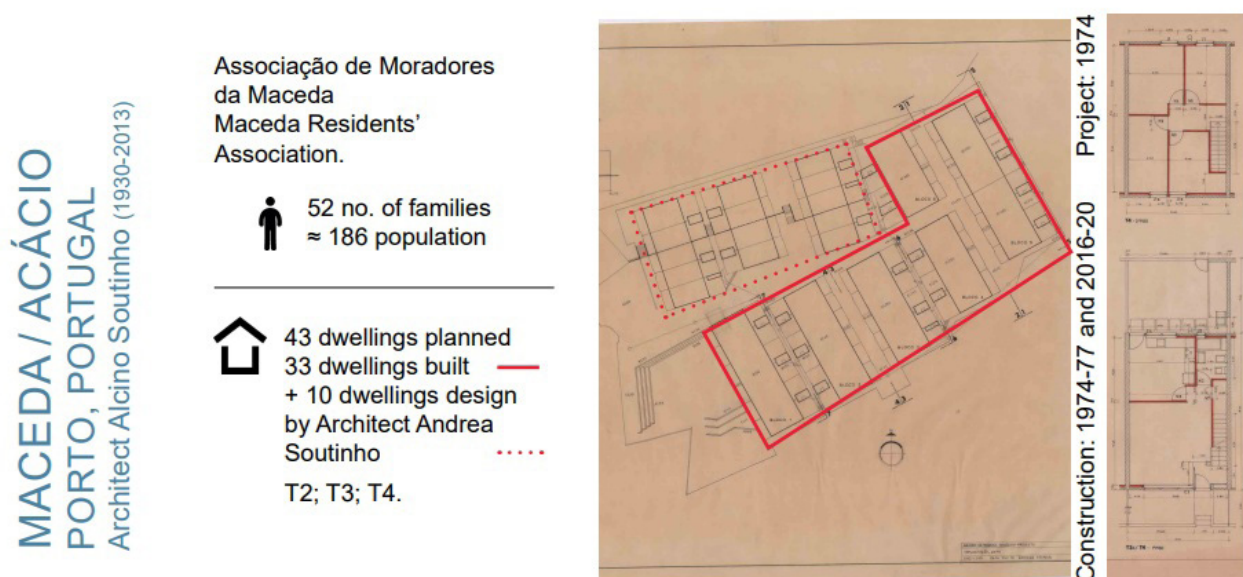


Figure 3 | Characterization of the Maceda/Acácio neighborhood. credit: Sara Silva Lopes.

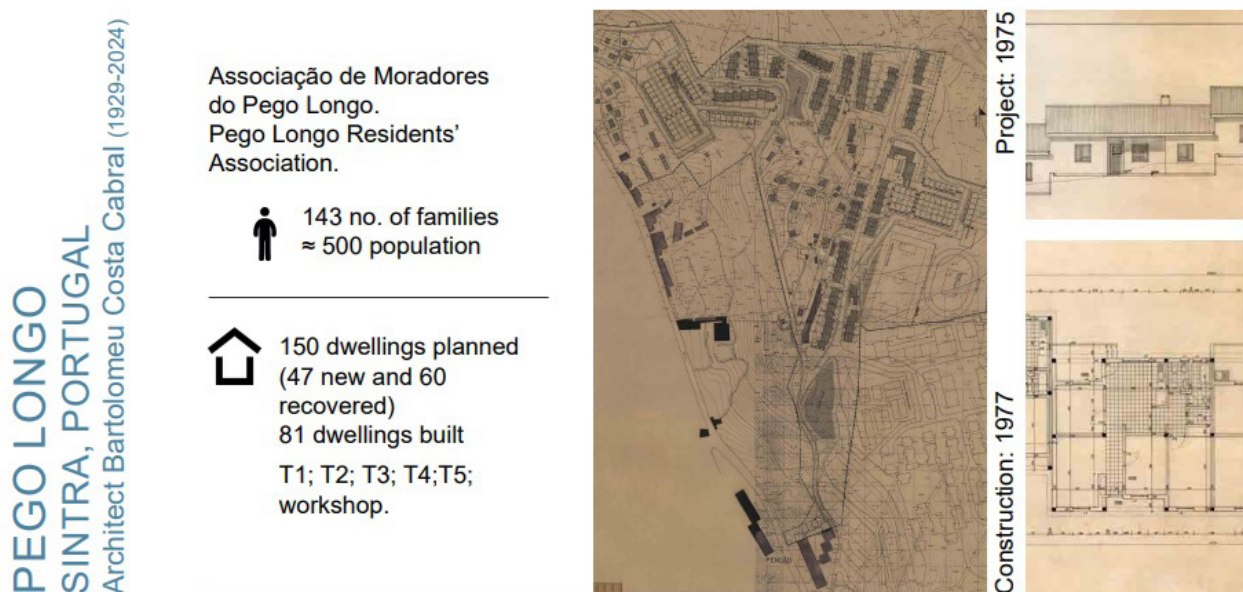


Figure 4 | Characterization of the Pego Longo neighborhood. credit: Sara Silva Lopes.

among community members. Equally important was the flexibility embedded in the architectural design strategies. Rather than imposing rigid, standardized solutions, the SAAL interventions prioritized adaptable frameworks capable of accommodating the evolving needs of families and communities over time. This adaptability not only addressed immediate housing shortages but also anticipated future demographic,

economic, and spatial transformations. Central to the success of both participatory processes and flexible design was the model of collaborative leadership adopted by the architects involved. Far from acting as distant experts, these professionals assumed the role of facilitators, building trust and promoting dialogue among a diverse range of stakeholders — from residents and local authorities to builders and planners. This inclusive



Table 1 | The main data about the four SAAL interventions. credit: author.

| SAAL INTERVENTION  | ARCHITECT               | LOCAL  | ASSOCIATION   | POPULATION   |      | DWELLINGS                        |       | TYPOLOGY               | PROJECT   | CONSTRUCTION |
|--------------------|-------------------------|--------|---|--------------|------|----------------------------------|-------|------------------------|-----------|--------------|
|                    |                         |        |   | no. Families | no.  | PLANNED                          | BUILT |                        |           |              |
| Fonsecas e Calçada | Raúl Hestnes Ferreira   | Lisboa | Economic Housing Cooperatives (C.H.E) 25 de Abril.              | 310          | 950  | 1600                             | 335   | T1(+1); T2; T3; T4; T5 | 1974-1976 | 1976-1986    |
|                    |                         |        | Calçadas Economic Housing Cooperatives (C.H.E) Unidade do Povo. | 288          | 1000 |                                  |       |                        |           |              |
| Lapa               | Alfredo Matos Ferreira  | Porto  | Lapa Residents' Association                                     | 482          | 1700 | 500<br>(250 new + 250 recovered) | 74    | T1; T2/T3; T3/T4       | 1975      | 1976-1977    |
| Maceda             | Alcino Soutinho         | Porto  | Maceda Residents' Association                                   | 52           | 186  | 43                               | 33    | T2; T3; T4             | 1974      | 1974-1977    |
|                    | Andrea Soutinho         |        |   |              |      |                                  | 10    |                        |           | 2016-2020    |
| Pego Longo         | Bartolomeu Costa Cabral | Sintra | Pego Longo Residents' Association                               | 143          | 500  | 150<br>(47 new + 60 recovered)   | 81    | T1; T2; T3; T4; T5     | 1975      | 1977         |

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|                    |                         |        |   | no. Families | no.  | PLANNED                          | BUILT |                        |           |              |
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|                    | Andrea Soutinho         |        |   |              |      |                                  | 10    |                        |           | 2016-2020    |
| Pego Longo         | Bartolomeu Costa Cabral | Sintra | Pego Longo Residents' Association                               | 143          | 500  | 150<br>(47 new + 60 recovered)   | 81    | T1; T2; T3; T4; T5     | 1975      | 1977         |

and cooperative model was instrumental in translating social ideals into tangible, sustainable architectural outcomes.

Lessons learned from this program are reported at three levels of influence: community empowerment, balancing stakeholder interests, and institutional support. At the first level, we define the success of SAAL interventions as based on the empowerment of communities through knowledge sharing and active engagement. At a second level, the aim is to balance stakeholder interests, as effective participatory processes require balancing the interests of different stakeholders, including residents, policy makers and professionals. Finally, the necessary support for implementation was provided by institutional support (State) by guaranteeing the resources and legitimacy necessary for the implementation of these interventions.

Authors such as Medeiros (2021) show how the results of qualitative analysis on urban governance and the participatory process spanning a period of two years (2010-2012), on the urban development plan for Lisbon,

translated into a highly participatory urban planning process, involving not only individual citizens, but also schools, NGOs, companies, academia, neighboring municipalities and various other types of stakeholders.

## 7. Contemporary Relevance

In terms of Challenges and opportunities for contemporary participatory interventions and considering Adapting Historical Lessons, although the SAAL interventions provide valuable insights, contemporary participatory interventions must address new challenges such as technological advances, diverse urban issues, and legal and policy frameworks.

As for technological advances, the use of digital tools such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), virtual collaboration platforms and participatory mapping can increase community involvement. Regarding urban issues, we must understand that modern cities face challenges such as climate change, gentrification, and social inequality, which require personalized

participatory approaches. In terms of legal and policy frameworks, it is crucial to establish mechanisms that guarantee meaningful community participation in urban planning, as this is fundamental to achieving long-term success. When proposing the construction or transformation of existing structures, it is imperative to consider three interrelated dimensions: policy integration, capacity building, and inclusive approaches. Regarding policy integration, governments and local authorities should institutionalize participatory planning by embedding it within the broader framework of urban development policies and regulations. This ensures that community involvement is not treated as an isolated initiative, but rather as a foundational element of sustainable urban governance. Capacity building must be addressed through the implementation of comprehensive training programs aimed at architects, urban planners, and community leaders, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to facilitate effective and equitable participation processes. These strategies, taken together, contribute to the creation of more resilient, inclusive, and democratically planned urban environments.

Finally, the adoption of inclusive approaches is essential to ensure the meaningful representation of marginalized and underrepresented groups within participatory processes. Such inclusion is critical for achieving equitable outcomes, as it helps to address systemic imbalances and ensures that diverse voices are reflected in urban planning and decision-making.

Looking ahead, possible future directions must include the identification of research priorities and the practical implementation of their findings. Research priorities should encompass the evaluation of participatory tools, the integration of climate resilience, and the exploration of new governance models. In terms of evaluating participatory tools, further research is needed to assess the effectiveness of both digital and non-digital tools in participatory planning (Brown & Kyttä, 2018). When addressing climate resilience, participatory housing production must incorporate climate-resilient design strategies to address environmental challenges (Peker, 2020). Moreover, to explore new governance models, collaborative frameworks that prioritize community involvement must be tested and refined (Healey, 2003; Healey, 2006).

Sherry Arnstein's seminal 1969 article emphasizes both the practical benefits and moral imperatives of involving citizens in public decision-making. She defines citizen participation as "the redistribution of power [...] the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set,

tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216). This concept underscores the importance of empowering marginalized groups by redistributing decision-making authority to achieve greater social equity.

Traditional methods of citizen participation include public hearings, surveys, consensus conferences, advisory committees, and focus groups (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). These approaches often require participants' physical presence at specific times and locations. While such methods uphold democratic principles of citizen involvement (Goodin, 1993), they continue to face persistent challenges such as time and cost constraints, citizen apathy, lack of expertise among participants, and difficulties in engaging disadvantaged or less articulate groups (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Roberts, 2004). Furthermore, Innes and Booher (2004) argue that these methods are often misapplied by planners and public agencies tasked with promoting engagement.

Despite criticism, traditional participation methods continue to be fundamental to contemporary citizen engagement efforts (Baker et al., 2007). In response to its limitations, communicative planning emerged in the 1990s as an alternative to expert-dominated rationalist planning (Nuojua, 2010). This approach emphasizes dialogue between citizens and planners and has inspired the development of innovative participatory methods that aim to foster meaningful interaction (Innes, 2005).

As Friedmann (1987) argues in *Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action*, effective planning must bridge the gap between technical knowledge and collective social action, positioning citizens as active agents in shaping their urban environments.

Tonkiss (2013) highlights how urban design can either reinforce or challenge social inequalities, emphasizing that participatory approaches to city-making are essential for creating more equitable urban environments where marginalized voices are meaningfully included in shaping the built form.

## 8 Conclusion

The four SAAL interventions reveal diverse trajectories and outcomes, reflecting the inherent complexity of participatory housing projects. While the Lapa neighborhood remained incomplete - likely due to bureaucratic, financial, or political challenges- others, like Fonsecas and Calçada, Pego Longo, and Maceda,

evolved both physically and conceptually. In these cases, sustained collaboration between architects and residents fostered participatory models in which communities co-created their living environments, exemplifying SAAL's core values of inclusion and social responsibility.

Although SAAL initially aimed to address urgent housing needs for low-income populations, its ethos remains relevant. Contemporary approaches such as *Baugruppen* in Germany or Portugal's own *co-housing* initiatives reflect a shift toward collective, sustainable, and adaptable housing solutions that emphasize participation, affordability, and long-term resilience (Tummers, 2016; Cabré & Andrés, 2018). This development signifies a significant shift in housing discussions, moving away from solely focusing on ownership models and embracing more inclusive, community-oriented frameworks.

Looking ahead, meaningful participatory interventions require a careful balance between historical lessons and present-day innovation. SAAL offers a powerful precedent for reimagining housing as a democratic, community-led process. The ongoing research project

*Learning from the Past* reinforces the importance of this legacy, affirming participatory planning as a vital tool in confronting today's urban challenges.

SAAL's legacy demonstrates that truly democratic urbanism must be rooted in both shared memory and adaptive innovation.

## Acknowledgments

The author thanks Marques da Silva Foundation Institute (FIMS) for providing materials from the archives of architects Raúl Hestnes Ferreira, Alcino Soutinho, Alfredo Matos Ferreira, and Bartolomeu Costa Cabral. And, also thanks to researcher Sara Silva Lopes for the graphic design.

## Funding

This article is part of the ongoing research "Learning from the past: the importance of former housing participatory production for the coming years." <https://doi.org/10.54499/2021.02417.CEECIND/CP1694/CT0013>

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