

*Landscapes of Care. Public housing across multiple
geographies: crossing theories and practices*



SOPHIA
scopio EDITIONS

volume 9, issue 1 | publication year: 2024
issn: 2183-8976 [print] 2183-9468 [online]
isbn: 978-989-53640-8-4

...

homepage: <https://www.up.pt/index.php/sophia>

Spatial interventions in vulnerable territories: the “Bairros Saudáveis” case

Leonardo Ramires, Rita Ochoa

Abstract:

The “Bairros Saudáveis” (Healthy Neighborhoods) programme in Portugal emerged in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. Its aim was to improve health conditions and quality of life in vulnerable territories through small, bottom-up interventions. A key condition for these interventions was the formation of partnerships between associations, NGOs, residents, and public entities.

This article examines the relationships between the quality of spaces in vulnerable territories and participatory and/or bottom-up public policies, using “Bairros Saudáveis” (BS) as a case study. The research involves a selection of projects developed within the BS programme, combining information obtained from interviews with individuals and entities involved in these projects and analysing official project documents.

The objectives of the study are to contextualize and understand the BS programme within the social and public health crises it coincided with; examine how the themes of “space” and “architecture” were addressed by the programme and its proposed projects; verify the programme’s adherence to participatory principles; and identify good practices for future similar actions or new editions of the programme. Additionally, this study aims to contribute to a broader reflection on the state of participatory practices in architecture within the Portuguese context. It seeks to understand whether these practices are helping to mitigate socio-economic-cultural problems and improve the quality of life in marginalized contexts.

Methodologically, the paper explores the official communication channels of the BS programme; key primary and secondary sources related to the theme; interviews with actors involved in the selected case studies, as well as privileged observers; and in situ participatory observation. We acknowledge the challenge of identifying concrete outcomes from an unfinished public policy, as some projects remain incomplete. Therefore, we present this as a work in progress, aimed at promoting relevant and necessary debate both within and outside the academic sphere.

In conclusion, this study highlights numerous deficiencies in many Portuguese housing contexts, whether geographically peripheral or socially excluded in urban centres. The pandemic exacerbated social and territorial inequality in Portugal, leading to problems that directly impact the quality of life for marginalised populations. The cases analysed also underscore the potential of architecture and spatial interventions as strategies for social transformation.

Keywords: Bairros Saudáveis; participatory processes in architecture; vulnerable territories; public policies; social role of the architect.

Leonardo Ramires is an Architect, team member of the project "Pátio dos 80" (Covilhã, 2022), funded by the BS programme. His master's dissertation was integrated and an output of the pedagogical/research project "Architectures of (inter)Action", distinguished by the Lisbon Architecture Triennale 2022, published in "Emerging Voices on New Architectural Ecologies" (Circo de Ideias, 2023), and presented at The Festival of the New European Bauhaus (Fundão, 2023). Volunteer of Open House Lisboa (2021) and Porto (2022). Currently, Leonardo is collaborating as a junior architect at Ren Ito Arq, in Oporto.

Rita Ochoa is an Architect and Assistant Professor at Beira Interior University. Technical consultant of the BS' projects "Pátio dos 80" and "Pontes" (Covilhã, 2022). Scientific coordinator of CIAUD Research Center at UBI and member of the research group URBInLAB Urbanism & Territorial Dynamics. Rita participated in several international research projects and networks in the fields of urban regeneration, art and public space, port cities and waterfronts, and collaborative approaches in architecture education. Her work has emphasized interdisciplinarity, and more recently has focused on temporary uses and sharing practices as a design tool, by coordinating the FCT project "Intermittent City".

I. Citizen participation in urban public policies in Portugal: Main steps before Bairros Saudáveis programme

The concept of citizen participation can be understood as a continuous social process that values the influence of all the individuals in the political issues of society. In a combination of institutional and social mechanisms that overcomes the conventional dichotomy between representation and participation, each social group's specific demands are expressed and debated in community spaces, articulated with collective claims, and then implemented.¹ In general, it is about involving in decision-making all those who are impacted by the respective processes. It aims to share decisions, goals, public policy projects, the operation of State facilities and even tax definition.² However, in modern societies, citizen participation has not been consistently and uniformly applied, emerging more as a reaction than as a structural premise, as stated by Bordenave:

It is as if modern civilization, with its enormous industrial and business complexes and with its electronic means of mass communication, had first led men to a massifying and atomizing individualism and, later, as a defensive reaction to growing alienation, increasingly led them to collective participation.³

In Portugal, the experience of the Local Support Ambulatory Service (SAAL) is definitively a mark in terms of citizen participation. It consisted of a popular housing and urban intervention programme carried out between 1974 and 1976, immediately after the fall of the Portuguese dictatorship. Despite its short duration, SAAL has left a strong legacy and remains a case study all over the world.⁴

Popular participation occurred intensely in SAAL, the inhabitants having an active voice in the definition of the houses' location, the organization of the programme and spaces distribution, the building systems and materials, as well as on the future community management, or the development of financing methods.⁵

In 2002, an important instrument of civic participation, the "Participatory Budget", began to be applied, at the initiative of the Municipality of Palmela, being then profusely used in several

1 Elenaldo Celso Teixeira, *O Local e o Global: Limites e Desafios da Participação Cidadã*, 3a (São Paulo: Cortez, 2001).

2 Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," 1969, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>.

3 Juan E. Diaz Bordenave, *O que é Participação*, 6a (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1983), <https://www.ces.uc.pt/projectos/somus/docs/BORDENAVE-D.-O-que-e-participacao.pdf>.

4 Gaspar Martins Pereira, "SAAL: Um Programa de Habitação Popular No Processo Revolucionário" *Revista Da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto*, 4, 2014, <https://ojs.letras.up.pt/index.php/historia/article/view/1200>.

5 Mónica Soares, "Cidade Partilhada, Cidade Participada" (Master dissertation in Architecture, Lisbon, Universidade de Lisboa, 2017), <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.5/15399>.

other contexts.⁶ This form of governance also implies the direct involvement of citizens in government decisions, relying on consultation and/or co-decision processes to define the investment priorities of the public budget for a given territory.

In 2011, following the experience of the Participatory Budget, the Municipality of Lisbon started to implement the BIP-ZIP programme – Bairros e Zonas de Intervenção Prioritária de Lisboa (Lisbon's Priority Intervention Neighbourhoods and Zones), a public policy tool that fosters partnerships and small local interventions to improve residential area – covered by a previously diagnosis of vulnerable territories.

The success of BIP-ZIP – which is already in its 14th edition – was decisive for the development of the “Bairros Saudáveis” (BS) programme. As in BIP-ZIP, BS initiatives were driven by local communities, with a strong participatory and bottom-up component. Moving from the municipal to the national scale, the BS programme introduced participation in the identification of vulnerable territories, through a public consultation, in which citizens are the ones to signal vulnerable territories – while in BIP-ZIP the territories are previously mapped, in the “Priority Intervention Neighbourhoods” chart.⁷

II. COVID-19 pandemic crisis and creation of Bairros Saudáveis

In a country where many people still live in precarious conditions, as highlighted during the COVID pandemic, the emergence of a programme of this scale to mitigate social consequences was almost inevitable.⁸

The mandatory lockdowns resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted the importance of public space in cities, and with the restrictions and physical distancing, the dynamics of space appropriations changed. Open spaces, gardens, even the house's balconies, gained greater value and occupied more time in our daily lives.⁹ On the other hand, the diversity and multifunctionality and flexibility of urban public spaces has been a constant in the premises of contemporary urbanism. Different types of activities and leisure, greater diversity of social groups, new means of transport and various ways of using the city between genders and generations are becoming increasingly common.

Also, there seems to be a consensus that the greater the diversity in cities, the greater the success of their public spaces and even the security issues, since a greater number of

6 Abel Coentrão et al., *20 Anos de Orçamentos Participativos em Portugal*, 1st ed. (Vila Ruiva, Portugal: Europeia Books, 2022).

7 Helena Roseta, *Uma Política de Habitação para Portugal*, *Jornal dos Arquitectos* 261 (2022): 26–29.

8 Helena Roseta and Aitor Varea Oro, *Relatório Da Consulta Pública Do Projecto de Regulamento*, October 2020.

9 Rita Ochoa and Alessia Allegri, “Espaço Público e Cidade Pós-Pandemia. Para Uma Nova Geografia Do Comum,” 2021, <https://www.urbanologo.com/espa%C3%A7o-p%C3%BAblico>.

people enjoying the common space reduces the probability of unassisted crimes.¹⁰ In addition to diversity, multifunctionality and flexibility, cities have been witnessing the adoption of intermittent practices, to design public spaces, or to test programmes and uses before final construction, after the intense period of confinement of the Covid 19 Pandemic's crisis.¹¹

It was in this context that emerged, on July 1st, 2020, the "Bairros Saudáveis" (BS), a programme of participatory nature, aimed to improve health conditions, well-being, and quality of life in Portuguese vulnerable territories. As mentioned, BS was based on small interventions, supported by ideas and proposals presented by associations, resident collectives, NGOs, neighbourhood movements in coordination with local authorities or other public entities. The objective was to empower and give voice to resident communities in the processes that concerned them.

The programme was established by Resolution 52-A/2020 of the Council of Ministers and was initially scheduled to take place between July 2020 and December 2021. Nevertheless, it had to be extended to the end of 2022, due to delays in the processes of contracting with the programme's beneficiaries. It proposed to leverage resources and stimulate the potential of communities living in the most vulnerable areas, that was to say, where there is more poverty, higher number of overcrowded and/or degraded housing, unemployment and job insecurity, and lower educational attainment. It was the commitment of various sectors of society, from local power to government, and with the financing of the State, to alleviate or even solve some problems in those vulnerable territories.

It reassigned the responsibility of identifying both community needs and the respective solutions from the State to the citizens themselves, which, upon approval, provides funding for their implementation. This model highlights a shift away from the State proposing solutions to the problems it has identified or solely creating conditions to enhance the quality of life. Instead, it places the onus on citizens to advance their own well-being, without the consultative and accountability mechanisms inherent in traditional public policy systems.¹²

It is not possible to approach BS without highlighting the significant role of Architect Helena Roseta, national coordinator of the first edition of BS and responsible for the implementation and promotion of the programme with the Government, together with a group of architects and doctors.

10 Jane Jacobs, *Morte e Vida de Grandes Cidades*, 3a ed. (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1961).

11 Alessia Allegri and Rita Ochoa, "Intermittent Practices in the Contemporary City. The Case of Lisbon," in *Advances in Human Factors in Architecture, Sustainable Urban Planning and Infrastructure*, ed. Jerzy Charytonowicz, Alicja Maciejko, and Christianne S. Falcão (Cham: Springer, 2021), 249–256.

12 Paula Urbano Antunes, "O Poder da Colaboração," January 23, 2022, <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/opinia0/0000084/index.htm?o-poder-da-colaboracao>.

Her political background and her tireless work in the field of housing public policies, both at local, national and European levels, or even her contact with the profession of Architecture – she was president of the *Architects' Association* for 6 years – were decisive for the enormous success of BS. Also noteworthy is Roseta's ability to leave a legacy and inspire teams and individuals to take on this challenge. Her example is compelling for the field of architecture, her role as a coordinator and architect is an inspiration for the profession and an incentive to the social role of the architects and their engagement in projects within vulnerable communities.

III. "Space" and "Architecture" in "Bairros Saudáveis" approved proposals

In June 2021, the programme launched an official communication platform with a strong participatory component, the "Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis". In addition to the communication objectives, it promoted events to communicate the work carried out and naturally evolved into a support network, detailing the projects' progress and the global impact of the programme. In addition, an "Opinion" section was generated, opening the journal to criticism and suggestions on its developments and results.¹³

On May 14, 2021, the official BS website shared the final list of admitted projects, with access to all submitted applications, their final score or their geographical location, which provided an interesting map of the territories considered vulnerable and their proposals. This mapping also made it possible to assess the level of participation, by geographical area.¹⁴ With a total funding of 10 million euros, 246 applications were approved in a set of 774 submitted proposals. Only 32% of the submitted proposals were funded, leaving many highly ranked proposals unselected. This was considered a small number, originating several complaints of the non-accepted teams.

Within the scope of the applications, each promoting entity must select a thematic axis, within 5 possibilities: Health, Social, Economic, Environmental and Urban. In a more specific approach, social exclusion, problematic behaviours, vandalism, domestic violence, substance abuse and lack of life projects were the problems most frequently identified by the approved applications. Economic needs related to food support, thermal comfort and house improvements were also very frequent. Overall, there was also a notable concern for mental health, possibly demonstrating an awareness of how damaging the pandemic crisis was in this regard.¹⁵

13 Bairros Saudáveis, "Jornal Dos Bairros Saudáveis Já Está On-Line", June 8, 2021, <https://www.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/noticias/384,08062021/index.htm>.

14 Programa Bairros Saudáveis, *Candidaturas aprovadas para financiamento, por freguesia*, June 8, 2021 (updated August 19, 2024), <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/6298976/>.

15 Isabel Loureiro, "Uma Política Nacional Para a Mobilização Local" May 10, 2021, <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/opiniao/00000022/index.htm?uma-politica-nacional-para-a-mobilizacao-local>.

Through the analysis of the 246 funded proposals in terms of their "keywords", "objectives", "description" and intervention methods ("activities"), it was possible to observe that, although the BS programme was not mainly focused on architectural or urban issues, the proportion of projects involving Spatial Interventions – 42%, 103 out of 246 – was very significant, considering that it was an inaugural edition.

This engagement with spatial considerations (aiming modifying or enhancing spaces) may potentially be influenced by the involvement and the popularity of Helena Roseta, known for her social advocacy through architectural and urban interventions. Although – as we will see below in a finer analysis – not all of them propose directly architectural interventions, this could also translate an awareness of the crucial role that urban social identity and the quality of our living environments play in our health, well-being and quality of life in general.¹⁶

IV. Participatory assumptions in "Bairros Saudáveis"

(...) I know that, sometimes, with little money, we can make that improvement that can make a difference, and that's what the Programme aims to do. (...) It is a very participatory programme, so we will invite neighbourhoods to present proposals. (...) It's the people who will discuss in the neighbourhoods what is most important; it's not us who will say: Do this, do that!¹⁷

To know the city is to respect it and be part of it¹⁸

BS assumed a co-decision approach, privileging bottom-up actions. There was an evident will for some other transversal results to occur organically and gradually, such as the elimination of architectonic barriers, discrimination factors contributing to the negative images of peripheral neighbourhoods, or the combating of fake and stigmatizing information.

The participatory nature of the programme was applauded by all. However, it has been proven that the will to make public policies effectively participatory can diminish when it comes to involving disadvantaged minorities. In fact, actions to include citizens in public processes can even contribute to gentrification processes, to an unequal distribution of benefits or to the segregation of the political class. When not effectively planned and, above all, executed, supposedly participatory interventions can become empty and frustrating processes for

¹⁶ Jaime Lerner, *Acupuntura Urbana*, 2a ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2005), 65.

¹⁷ Helena Roseta, *Bairros Saudáveis - Helena Roseta explica na RTP 1*, Youtube Video, June 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_4k0cUeXms.

¹⁸ Jaime Lerner, *Acupuntura Urbana*, 2a (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2005), 65.

Pol, Enric. *Symbolism a Priori. Symbolism a Posteriori, Urban regeneration. A challenge for public art*, 2^aed. (Barcelona: UB, 2005), 71.

the most vulnerable layers of the population, who may feel disillusioned in a utopia of active democracy.¹⁹ Participatory work can work best when it turns into active collaboration – and this can only exist with the creation of platforms for thought and action, with a unity of mutual understanding and respect for both actors and beneficiaries. In short, a culture of the commons is needed, or at least common cultural foundations that act in favour of the same needs and interests.²⁰

It is on this fragile ground that BS is implemented. It will always be subject to criticism, the programme tried to include the participatory character in all its stages and processes, calling the citizens to: define which were the vulnerable territories to intervene; discuss and select its main needs with local promoters; outline stages and modes of operation; suggest methods of execution and budget, the State entering only with the funding.

V. Case Studies

Although 103 funded proposals self-identified as space-related, we assume that this association could be directly related to it. In fact, of those 103 proposals, only 69 had a direct relationship with the space, proposing concrete physical actions. Within those 69, we decided to analyse a small set, combining two crucial factors, diversity and relevance.

Diversity was assessed considering the architectural scope of the project, the geographic area of the vulnerable territory, the target audience of the proposal, its actors, objectives, and forms of implementation – thus seeking proposals that could bring as diverse stories as possible among themselves.

The relevance was evaluated considering aspects of tactical urbanism (relationship between how many people will benefit from the proposal – agility of construction – cost), replicability of the proposals and its ability to be inspiring for other actions, and even the usefulness of the research, in academic terms. The final selection covered 4 of the 5 Portuguese “geographical zones” and all the “architectural areas”.²¹

19 Sherry R. Arnstein, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35, no. 4 (1969): 216–224.

20 Fernando Távora, *Da organização do espaço*, 9^a ed., Argumentos 2 (Porto: Rainho & Neves, 1962).

21 Initially, we planned to include all 5 zones in our case studies; however, one did not respond to the invitation within the given timeframe. Consequently, the study proceeded with the inclusion of 4 zones.

1 – “Mulheres em Construção”

Score	90.50 points
Ranking	18th place
Entity	Mulheres na Arquitetura (MA)
Region	Central
Project type	Small Investment or Integrated Action
Budget	50,000€
Axes	Health, Social, Economic, Environmental and Urbanistic
Relation with Architecture	Direct (Housing, Action in Built Environment and Debate)

“Mulheres em Construção” (Woman in Construction) is a project composed of the following stages: i. certified training in civil construction for women at risk of unemployment; ii. rehabilitation of a property for community use; iii. creation of a construction materials bank; iv. training in Gender Equality. The project was born from a group of local entities, which invited participants, identified the property to be rehabilitated, and assisted in the training.²²

Regarding the participation of the participating residents, there was a weakness in the moment of ideation of the “Mulheres em Construção” project. However, “Mulheres na Arquitetura” made sure to apply intense participation and cooperation with the local neighbourhood associations to launch the proposal through meetings, visits to the site, and presentation of previews of the application.²³

The progress and implementation of the project were strongly participated. There were even changes in content to adapt to the needs and desires of the participants according to their interests in certain subjects. The discussion and distribution of who and how would participate in the works were other aspects widely discussed with the trainees – essentially, the establishment between the workers and the assistants. However, the attendance of all in the works, even if they did not have physical conditions for manual labour, fulfilled a social function and the feeling of inclusion and monitoring of group work are fulfilled.²⁴

22 Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis, “Mulheres Em Construção!” *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, 2020, <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/projetos/00000075/index.htm>.

23 Isabella Rusconi, Interview, Zoom, May 20, 2022.

24 Isabella Rusconi, Interview, Zoom, May 20, 2022.



2 - "910 fogos — espaços mentais, espaços reais"

Score	82.50 points
Ranking	92nd place
Entity	Efabula
Region	Lisbon and Tejo Valley
Project type	Small Investment or Integrated Action
Budget	50,000€
Axes	Health, Economic, Environmental and Urbanistic
Relation with Architecture	Direct (Debate)

"910 Fogos — Espaços Mentais, Espaços Reais" (910 Houses — Mental Spaces, Real Spaces) is defined as a project composed of awareness actions related to mental health and quality of life for various age groups. It integrates multidisciplinary actions that have as their starting point the relationship of the body in space and the questioning of what it means to inhabit a "social neighbourhood" and how to design the transformation of its public space, turning it into a space that promotes the mental health of residents.²⁵

Overall, the issue of population participation in the project was present, as mentioned, from its inception, as the idea of its creation came from a neighbourhood resident. Some residents immersed in the experience and assisted the executing entities, being more present in the day-to-day of the project, as well as in the strategic decisions that were being made.²⁶

There was no direct participation of the population in choosing the topics for the weekly debates, as these arose and were shaped according to the visits that the architect had the opportunity to make in the neighbourhood, with the follow-up of other actions of the project that were already taking place in the neighbourhood.²⁷

25 Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis, "910 Fogos — Espaços Mentais, Espaços Reais" *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, 2020, <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/projetos/00000179/index.htm>.

26 Luisa Sol, Interview by the author, Zoom, June 3, 2022.

27 Luisa Sol, Interview by the author, Zoom, June 3, 2022.

[Fig. 1]

Mulheres em Construção. Photo: Mulheres na Arquitetura, 2022.
Courtesy of Mulheres na Arquitetura.



3 - “Balneários Comunitários”

Score	83 points
Ranking	86th place
Entity	Instituição Particular de Solidariedade Social Os Pioneiros
Region	Central
Project type	Small Investment or Integrated Action
Budget	49,000€
Axes	Health, Social, Economic, Environmental and Urbanistic
Relation with Architecture	Direct (Space to be built and Public space)

“Balneários Comunitários” (Community Bathhouses) involved the construction of two portable bathhouses in communities where there are precarious conditions of sanitation, habitability, and hygiene. In addition to the installation of the facilities, there was close monitoring through awareness sessions, workshops, and capacity-building moments for the community. Due to technical and logistics constraints, only one of the planned bathhouses could be implemented.²⁸

Population participation was significantly active in the project from its inception. The close relationship that the entity “Os Pioneiros” has with the Carvalhosa community facilitated a quick diagnosis of what was most needed for the residents: some equipment related to hygiene and health. After the project outline, the community could participate in the sizing of the bathhouse and the equipment it would offer.²⁹

According to Mano, social worker and project manager, participation continued during the implementation of the bathhouse – residents participated in choosing the best location for the bathhouse, helped prepare the ground, and dug the hole for the septic tank.³⁰

28 Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis, “Balneários/WC Comunitários” *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, 2020, <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/projetos/00000247/index.htm>.

29 Ana Mano, Interview by the author, Zoom, June 29, 2022.

30 Ana Mano, Interview by the author, Zoom, June 29, 2022.

[Fig. 2]

910 fogos — espaços mentais, espaços reais. Photo: Leonardo Ramires, 2022.

Introducing self-construction, even if not in the entirety of the project, may have contributed to the sense of belonging and ownership of the equipment. Naturally, a relationship of care and stewardship for the new facility emerged. Ana Mano reports:³¹

The feedback from residents is extremely positive. They decorated the bathhouse in their own way and always keep it very clean and hygienic. Simply installing a bathhouse has significantly improved the quality of life for several families.

This was the first time the entity intervened in the common space of communities, but it already works with architecture in some actions to improve social housing residences to which they belong. However, the success of the project has already led “Os Pioneiros” to consider and work on other projects related to public space in some communities in Águeda and to desire new editions of “Bairros Saudáveis”.



4 - “Desenvolvimento comunitário participado através de obra de dois fogos para renda acessível”

Score	80 points
Ranking	146th place
Entity	Pele
Region	North
Project type	Small Investment or Integrated Action
Budget	49,947€
Axes	Health, Economic and Urbanistic
Relation with Architecture	Direct (Housing)

³¹ Ana Mano, Interview by the author, Zoom, June 29, 2022.

[Fig. 3]
 Balneários Comunitários. Photo: Os Pioneiros, 2022.
 Courtesy of Os Pioneiros.

"Desenvolvimento Comunitário Participado através de Obra de Dois Fogos para Renda Acessível" (Participatory Community Development through the Two Affordable Rental Units Rehabilitation) project focuses on the renovation of a vacant property for housing a family in urgent need of relocation due to the indignity and unsanitary conditions of their current residence. Due to financial constraints, exacerbated by the rising costs of construction and labour during the pandemic, it was only possible to implement one of the initially planned renovations.³²

The project's main action involves the rehabilitation of a property for a family living on one of the *ilhas* ("islands", a type of working-class housing very common in Porto) of Granja. The family consists of a couple and their two children, who currently reside in a housing unit of approximately 15m² without sanitary facilities – using shared facilities with other residents of their island. Their current residence has limited and poor natural lighting and ventilation, making it particularly unsuitable for the two children; the housing situation of this family was deemed the most urgent.³³

The participatory component is strong and evident in the project due to the understanding of the project-work as a social practice, with a multidisciplinary approach that integrates designers, social workers, builders, and residents in a horizontal practice. Through activities, workshops, assemblies, and gatherings, the entities aimed to promote a model of empowerment for self-management of both the process and the new housing itself. The act of designing and the construction site are interpreted as tools for co-production and sharing of knowledge and skills among all involved parties.³⁴

The interaction with the four individuals who will inhabit the new space became increasingly intense due to the actions of the entities, who know and actively engage with the territory and its people, turning the action into a laboratory for understanding its socioeconomic-cultural context.³⁵

Vanessa, Tiago, Leticia, and Santiago could participate and negotiate in the architectural project actively and constantly. The design of electrical and plumbing installations was also discussed with the family to adapt to their needs and desires. Self-construction is also something that is desired to be introduced in small tasks such as assisting in painting, wood treatments, tile placement, and finishes with less technical responsibility – not to increase participation but to expedite the process so that the family, who showed themselves willing and excited to help, can move to the new home as soon as possible.³⁶

32 *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, "Desenvolvimento Comunitário Participado Através de Obra de Dois Fogos Para Renda Acessível," *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, 2020, <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/projetos/00000535/index.htm>.

33 Fernando Pimenta, Interview by the author, in person, July 15, 2022.

34 *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, "Desenvolvimento Comunitário Participado Através de Obra de Dois Fogos para Renda Acessível," *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, 2020, <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/projetos/00000188/index.htm>.

35 Fernando Pimenta, Interview by the author, in person, July 15, 2022.

36 Fernando Pimenta, Interview by the author, in person, July 15, 2022.



Final Discussion

The Resolution of the Council of Ministers 158/2023, dated December 11, announced the launch of the second edition of *Bairros Saudáveis*, which was allocated €15 million, representing a 50% increase in budget compared to the first edition. However, on August 7, 2024, the Government decided not to continue with BS. This information was communicated by the Assistant Secretary of State to the Presidency, Rui Armindo de Freitas, justifying the decision with the fact that the pandemic context in which the programme was initially created had been overcome. Also, he assumed that the current government does not share the same assumptions as its predecessor, who had decided to move forward with the second edition of the programme.

Unfortunately, as previously mentioned, it will not be possible to analyse or speculate on future editions of the programme studied in this research. However, it is pertinent to consider several related issues, including the role of NGOs and organizations directly engaging with marginalized populations, the housing crisis in Portugal, the social role of participatory architecture, the exacerbation of social inequality due to the COVID-19 pandemic, public awareness of the need to improve the quality of both public and private spaces, and the necessity for the creation and continuation of public policies similar to the one examined in this study.

Regarding the initial ideas of the projects, 3 out of 4 (cases 2, 3 and 4) originated from diagnoses, perceptions and research carried out by entities directly involved and active in their respective territories, together with the residents. These results were already present before BS existed, and with its implementation, some identified problems were solved. This demonstrates the importance of these entities and partnerships and may indicate the need for direct public support in their creation and maintenance.

Concerning the vulnerable territories under analysis, 2 out of 4 are municipal social neighbourhoods (cases 1 and 2), while the remaining 2 consist of illegal occupations of vacant or self-constructed buildings (cases 3 and 4), all facing substandard living conditions. This illustrates that the housing crisis in Portugal remains unresolved and, compounded by the escalating housing rents due to the influx of tourism, may be exacerbating over time. The average waiting period of five years for adequate housing in a social neighbourhood in the Porto district further underscores this assessment of the Portuguese housing crisis.³⁷

³⁷ Fernando Pimenta, Interview by the author, in person, July 15, 2022.

All 4 case studies reported that community participation was crucial and significant, even if sometimes inconsistent and not present in all phases. These statements confirm the data in the application forms and are in line with the principles of the programme. The parallel participation of external people from vulnerable territories in the projects proves to be a positive and interesting strategy, increasing the relationship between territories and their respective cities and citizens.

Half of the 4 case studies had to suppress activities and objectives due to insufficient funding: "Desenvolvimento Comunitário Participado através de obra de dois fogos para Renda Acessível" could only execute one of the two renovations, and "910 Fogos – Espaços Mentais, Espaços Reais" did not conclude two of its nine activity fronts. Additionally, the "Balneários Comunitários" only managed to build one of the two promised bathhouses. These failures to fulfil tasks and objectives presented to the residents of the intervened territories need indeed greater monitoring and attention in possible future similar programmes to manage the expectations and frustrations caused to the project beneficiaries.

Regarding architecture, 100% of the case studies relied on architects to conduct their projects or were even created by them. It is interesting and hopeful to perceive that architecture is still sought after as a means of social transformation and that, even in complex and multidisciplinary projects, the social role of the architect can still be exercised.

There were various positive aspects and enthusiastic feedback from those involved. There were also, as expected from an experimental programme in its first edition, mistakes and paths to be improved in the 4 case studies and in general. For example, the bureaucratic and the contracting parts, which was intended to be much simpler, but which ended up being extended, leading to an unforeseen extension of the programme.

The present study revealed and reaffirmed numerous deficiencies in many Portuguese housing contexts, whether geographically peripheral or socially excluded in urban centres. Social inequality was shown to be even more accentuated in the times of the pandemic crisis, causing social problems that directly interfere with the quality of life of people living on the margins of society. Architectural intervention or action in space as strategies (or part of them) for social transformation was also addressed and made visible through the analysed cases.

The awareness of the population regarding the direct relationship between the quality of their spaces and their own quality of life seems to be questioned in academia. However, the research showed that even in a public programme not directly related to space, 42% of its applications were directly or indirectly related to it, demonstrating a broad awareness of that relationship. This may be a consequence of a recent extrapolation from the field of architecture and urbanism, reaching common and even media spheres, and should be a crucial step towards solving existing problems – since the first step in solving a problem is identifying it.

[Fig. 4]

Desenvolvimento comunitário participado através de obra de dois fogos para renda acessível.
Photo: Leonardo Ramires, 2022.

However, it is not in the interest of the evolution of a city and even of society for people to identify the problems of their homes, streets, and neighbourhoods if hypotheses for solving them are not formulated. The recovery of strategies that succeeded and even the demonstration of completed BS projects showed that, even in a brief period and with a short budget, significant social improvements can be made. It becomes quite evident that it is necessary and urgent to democratize access to architecture and reconnect it with its essential role of political action and fraternity for/to the people.

Every architectural action is political, every architectural action is social. The exploration of architecture as a tool for social transformation through public policies should be more active. Still, it is known that capital aims for profits and breaks the social function of each profession, not only that of the architect. For instance, the teaching in the generality of the architecture schools should explore other possibilities of action beyond the figure of the "star architect" and their autonomous practice, which has been commonly addressed and is still notably predominant.

Raising awareness among students, professionals, entities, and even public authorities about the need for popular participation in public policies is necessary, but still ineffective. When crossing the theme of public participation with the high multidisciplinary nature of the case studied, something different from what is commonly studied in architecture courses emerges: no one works alone, and architects are always in contact with the social sciences and with their practitioners. As stated by Távora³⁸: "The architect must not suppose himself the demiurge, the only one, the genius of organized space – others also participate in the organization of space. We must attend to them and collaborate with them in the common work."

Given the success of the BS programme and its demonstrated impact on spatial development, it would be beneficial to consider establishing a mentoring system focused on architecture and urbanism. Such a system could help promote entities in creating more coherent and viable project proposals related to spatial issues and support the execution of approved projects. Additionally, as Isabela Rusconi suggested, exploring the implementation of a model like Brazil's, which provides free architectural assistance to low-income families, could be valuable. This model, known as "ATHIS" (Technical Assistance for Social Housing), offers project preparation, monitoring, and execution support for construction, renovation, expansion, or regularization of homes, ensuring the right to decent housing as outlined in the Brazilian Constitution. A deeper examination of the first edition of Bairros Saudáveis and similar initiatives could further stimulate architectural education to address social inequalities and foster empathy as a core principle for architects.³⁹

The development of this study on the problems of quality of life faced by economically segregated social strata and the potential of architecture to address these issues is not aimed at solving the problem, but rather at contributing to the debate and fostering new questions and inquiries.

38 Fernando Távora, *Da organização do espaço*, 9ª, Argumentos 2 (Porto: Rainho & Neves, 1962), 74.

39 Rusconi, Isabella. Interview by the author. Zoom, May 20, 2022.

Bibliography

- Allegrí, Alessia, and Rita Ochoa. "Intermittent Practices in the Contemporary City: The Case of Lisbon." In *Advances in Human Factors in Architecture, Sustainable Urban Planning and Infrastructure*, edited by Jerzy Charytonowicz, Alicja Maciejko, and Christianne S. Falcão, 249–256. Cham: Springer, 2021.
- Arnstein, Sherry R. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation." *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35, no. 4 (1969): 216–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>.
- Bairros Saudáveis. "Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis Já Está On-Line." *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, June 8, 2021. <https://www.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/noticias/384,08062021/index.htm>.
- . "Programa Bairros Saudáveis — Candidaturas Aprovadas Para Financiamento, Por Freguesia." *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, June 8, 2021. <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/6298976/>.
- . "910 Fogos — Espaços Mentais, Espaços Reais." *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, no. 596/2020. <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/projetos/00000179/index.htm>.
- . "Balneários/WC Comunitários." *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, no. 10/2020. <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/projetos/00000247/index.htm>.
- . "Desenvolvimento Comunitário Participado Através de Obra de Dois Fogos Para Renda Acessível." *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, no. 420/2020. <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/projetos/00000535/index.htm>.
- . "Mulheres em Construção!" *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, no. 580/2020. <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/projetos/00000075/index.htm>.
- Bordenave, Juan E. Díaz. *O Que É Participação*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1983. <https://www.ces.uc.pt/projectos/somus/docs/BORDENAVE-D.-O-que-e-participacao.pdf>.
- Coentrão, Abel, et al. *20 Anos de Orçamentos Participativos em Portugal*. Vila Ruiva: Europeia Books, 2022.
- Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities [Morte e Vida de Grandes Cidades]*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1961.
- Lerner, Jaime. *Acupuntura Urbana*. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2005.
- Loureiro, Isabel. "Uma Política Nacional Para a Mobilização Local." *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, May 10, 2021. <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/opiniao/00000022/index.htm?uma-politica-nacional-para-a-mobilizacao-local>.
- Ochoa, Rita, and Alessia Allegrí. "Espaço Público e Cidade Pós-Pandemia: Para Uma Nova Geografia do Comum." *Urbanólogo In Foco* 2 (2021). <https://www.urbanologo.com/espac%C3%A7o-p%C3%BAblico>.
- Pereira, Gaspar Martins. "SAAL: Um Programa de Habitação Popular no Processo Revolucionário." *Revista da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto* 4 (2014). <https://ojs.letras.up.pt/index.php/historia/article/view/1200>.
- Pol, Enric. "Symbolism a Priori. Symbolism a Posteriori." In *Urban Regeneration: A Challenge for Public Art*, edited by Antoni Remesar. Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2005.
- Roseta, Helena. "Bairros Saudáveis — Helena Roseta Explica na RTP 1." Interview by *Bom Dia Portugal*, RTP 1, June 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_4k0CueXms.
- . "Uma Política de Habitação para Portugal." *Revista Jornal dos Arquitectos* 261 (2022): 26–29.
- Roseta, Helena, and Aitor Varea Oro. "Relatório da Consulta Pública do Projecto de Regulamento." *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, October 2020. <https://www.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/participar/consulta-publica/000032/index.htm>.
- Soares, Mónica. "Cidade Partilhada, Cidade Participada." Master's thesis, Universidade de Lisboa, 2017. <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.5/15399>.
- Távora, Fernando. *Da Organização do Espaço*. Porto: Rainho & Neves, 1962.
- Teixeira, Elenaldo Celso. *O Local e o Global: Limites e Desafios da Participação Cidadã*. São Paulo: Cortez, 2001.
- Urbano Antunes, Paula. "O Poder da Colaboração." *Jornal dos Bairros Saudáveis*, January 23, 2022. <https://jornal.bairrossaudaveis.gov.pt/opiniao/00000084/index.htm?o-poder-da-colaboracao>.