



Vivienda Social en Portugal: Propuestas de Álvaro Siza en la Década de 1970

Social Housing in Portugal: Álvaro Siza Proposals in the 1970s

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Resumen

La obra arquitectónica de Álvaro Siza constituye un profundo testimonio de un enfoque holístico que trasciende el mero diseño de edificios. En su práctica, Siza aborda el ecosistema dinámico de la ciudad, integrando dimensiones sociales, económicas y arquitectónicas. Sus proyectos realizados en el marco de los programas del Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local (SAAL), tras la Revolución de los Claveles (1974), reflejan un firme compromiso con la vivienda como vehículo de transformación urbana y social, donde «cada decisión debe tomarse como parte de un proceso dinámico» (Siza, 1976).

Este artículo explora proyectos clave de vivienda social desarrollados por Siza en los años setenta, como: i) el Barrio de Caxinas en Vila do Conde (1970-72); ii) el Barrio de S. Victor (1974-79) y el Barrio de Bouça (1974-78), en el marco del programa SAAL; iii) el barrio de Lada (1976) y dos edificios en la calle Reboleira (1977), en el distrito de Ribeira, dentro de la iniciativa del Comissariado para a Renovação Urbana da Área de Ribeira/Barredo (CRUARB), en Oporto. Estas obras revelan cómo, en lugar de imponer formas predefinidas, la arquitectura de Siza evolucionó a partir de una observación crítica del lugar y de una respuesta reflexiva a las necesidades de la comunidad.

La metodología se apoya en investigación archivística y bibliográfica, trabajo de campo y dibujo como herramienta de estudio, con un análisis multiescalar que explora la relación entre entorno urbano y soluciones tectónicas, tendiendo puentes entre dimensiones tangibles e intangibles de la vivienda, desde la manzana hasta el barrio.

Estos proyectos constituyen un laboratorio metodológico para los desarrollos de vivienda en contexto urbano por Siza en décadas posteriores. Más allá de su significado histórico, ofrecen lecciones relevantes para el debate contemporáneo sobre la vivienda social, al destacar el papel de la arquitectura en la interacción entre sociedad y tejido urbano.

Palabras clave: Álvaro Siza, Viviendas Sociales, Caxinas, S. Victor, Bouça, Oporto.

Abstract

Álvaro Siza's architectural oeuvre stands as a profound testament to a holistic approach that transcends the mere concept of building design. Within his practice, Siza addresses the city's dynamic ecosystem, integrating social, economic, and architectural dimensions. The projects that he carried out after the Carnation Revolution (1974), under the Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local (SAAL) programs, reflect a deep commitment to housing as a vehicle for urban and social transformation, where "every decision must be taken as a part of a dynamic process" (Siza, 1976).

This article explores key social housing projects developed by Siza in the 1970s, examining the methodological transition between projects such as i) Caxinas Neighbourhood in Vila do Conde (1970-72); ii) the S. Victor Neighbourhood (1974-79) and Bouça Neighbourhood (1974-1978) under the SAAL program; iii) in the Lada Neighbourhood (1976) and two buildings in Reboleira Street (1977), in the Ribeira district under the Comissariado para a Renovação Urbana da Área de Ribeira/Barredo (CRUARB) initiative in Porto. These works reveal how, rather than imposing predefined forms, Siza's architecture evolved from a careful and critical observation of the place, and a thoughtful response to the community's needs.

Our research methodology is supported by archival and bibliographical research, fieldwork, and drawing as a research tool, with multi-scalar analysis exploring the relation between the urban setting and the tectonic solutions, bridging the tangible and intangible dimensions of housing, from block to neighbourhood.

These projects, designed in the 1970s, provide a methodological laboratory for Siza's housing projects in urban contexts in the following decades. Beyond their historical significance, they offer relevant lessons for contemporary debate on social housing, highlighting the importance of architecture in the interplay between society and the urban fabric in the shaping of urban environments.

Keywords: Álvaro Siza, Social Housing, Caxinas, S. Victor, Bouça, Porto.

1. Introduction

1.1. Álvaro Siza and Social Housing in the 1970s

Architecture in moments of social upheaval has long drawn the attention of critics and historians (Dijk, 1984, p. 9). Álvaro Siza (b. 1933) began his career in the mid-1950s, in a Portugal marked by scarcity and mass emigration. His early work developed under the dictatorship, within a limited scope for architectural practice. The Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974 expanded his practice, allowing him to work directly in the city and engage with social housing and larger urban projects that had not been possible earlier.

That change also coincided with the international circulation of his work. Publications such as *Controspazio* (1972), edited by Vittorio Gregotti, and *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (1976), edited by Bernard Huet, published his projects and helped situate the SAAL operations within European debates on housing, urban transformation and the architect's public role. Their reception beyond Portugal shows that these projects were read as part of a wider discussion on participatory design, the city, and architectural responsibility.

Siza's work was also shaped by his close relationship with Fernando Távora and with the School of Fine Arts of Porto, where he studied and later taught. The School was a centre of critical reflection on modern architecture, and, in the 1970s, became a testing ground for a new pedagogical and professional orientation through SAAL. The programme brought teaching into practice and involved professors and students from the newly established Faculty of Architecture in the technical brigades. As Figueira (2014, p. 14) notes, Siza and his peers developed, in the 1970s, a poetic reinterpretation of rationalism, informed by postmodern devices such as citation, collage, and formal reinvestment. This "poetic rationalism" marked a departure from strict functionalism and allowed for greater formal and socio-cultural experimentation.

Within this context, Siza found interlocutors among his peers who also sought to move beyond fixed cultural codes and challenge the dominant models of the time. Costa (1990a, p. 16) describes his approach as "not situated within any particular theoretical or stylistic movement." That position reflects a disciplined commitment to working

directly with site, programme, and institutional conditions. Siza's rejection of a "coded non-dialogue" resulted in work that resists "banalization, conformity, or neutrality", particularly during a period of intense social and political transformation.

This article examines how Siza's social housing projects of the 1970s linked architectural design to urban and social change. In response to housing shortages and political upheaval, he developed strategies that balanced urgent needs with urban continuity, ranging from new layouts to interventions in historic districts. The argument here is that these projects should be read as a sequence of situated experiments through which Siza refined the relation between programme, site, community and implementation.

His work was shaped by a constant negotiation between residents' demands and institutional limits. As Nuno Portas observed, "urban action begins with the popular mobilization of the poorly housed or, if you prefer, the poorly urbanized" (1975, p. 60), while institutions also play a determining role in shaping the city (1972, p. 25). Siza's projects are situated within this tension: neither top-down nor purely spontaneous, but dependent on mediation, adjustment, and design judgment.

Siza never believed architecture and its solutions were instruments for solving great social problems, preferring, instead of a predetermined thematic distinction, the possibility of investigating and acting in his field, without ambiguities. In this sense, architecture functions as mediation between programme and site. As Siza himself stated (1986, p. 39), "A participatory process moves between conflicts, tensions, clashes, surrender, leaps, pauses; it includes errors and their critique; it accumulates experience; it tends towards wholeness".

2. Objectives and Methodology

This study analyses Álvaro Siza's social housing projects in relation to debates on housing, urban form and the role of architecture in post-revolutionary Portugal. It situates the projects within their historical and cultural contexts, with an emphasis on the housing policies and institutional frameworks

that shaped them. The cases are examined individually and, where relevant, comparatively, in order to identify shared principles and specificities. The analysis considers diverse contexts, from historic centres to coastal fishing communities later adapted for leisure use, highlighting the tensions and gaps between national housing policies, municipal agendas, and their architectural outcomes. This multi-scalar approach helps clarify how planning decisions shape architectural solutions and influence the built environment.

The study focuses on Siza's social housing projects from the 1970s and 1980s, considering his earlier experience with single-family homes for wealthy clients. That background is relevant because it helped him to develop a close and attentive relationship with clients, a capacity he later transferred to projects involving residents, associations and public agencies. The article places particular emphasis on the SAAL programme and its participatory methodology, as well as on the CRUARB, which operated in Porto's historic centre. Caxinas is included as a relevant case because it allows comparison with the other projects while also showing the specificity of a privately commissioned intervention.

Research methodology is supported by archival and bibliographical research, fieldwork, and drawing as a research tool, with multi-scalar analysis exploring the relation between the urban setting and the tectonic solutions, bridging the tangible and intangible dimensions of housing, from block to neighbourhood.

Archival research is supported by a range of repositories, including the Álvaro Siza Archive at the Serralves Foundation, the Municipal Archives of Vila do Conde, the Porto Historical Archive and the Porto District Archive, with particular attention to the SAAL collection. This documentation (partially unpublished) is complemented by specialised bibliography, contemporary press coverage and published interviews with Siza and other key figures, allowing for pivotal decisions and turning points in the design process to be identified.

Also, the article combines historical analysis with close reading of drawings, plans and photographs, bridged with field observation. The selected projects are analysed across three levels: institutional framework, urban context

and architectural proposal. More specifically, the study considers the type of commission, the relation to the existing urban fabric, the degree of completion, the use of materials and construction techniques, and the tensions between design intention and implementation. This structure allows comparison without flattening the specificity of each case.

The projects selected show both the diversity of Siza's practice and his methodological consistency. The analysis ranges from the urban context to the housing unit and construction detail. Siza adapts each intervention to its specific circumstances and avoids standardised solutions. This flexibility is matched by a strong concern for precision and coherence. As Barata (1997, p. 41) notes, "Siza's clients, contrary to popular belief, cherish their homes and describe the details as though they co-authored the design."

The outcomes of these projects were not uniform. In Caxinas, the project was only partially realised and later altered in implementation. As Fernandez (1998, p. 61) notes, although "the user is the main protagonist," Siza's plan was "irredeemably destroyed" because it "was never fully accepted". In São Victor and Bouça, the projects were shaped by strong participatory frameworks as well as financial and political constraints. In Lada and Reboleira, the emphasis shifted towards heritage-sensitive rehabilitation within the historic centre. These differences are central to the article's argument, because they show how Siza's work generated design knowledge through practice, negotiation and incomplete realisation.

Rather than presenting these projects as a single model, the article examines the conditions that produced different outcomes and considers how they informed Siza's later work. The case studies show how architectural practice can generate design knowledge through negotiation, implementation and, in some cases, incompleteness. They also clarify the continuing relevance of these works for debates on social housing, participation and architectural quality.

3. Historical and Political Context

3.1. Background of the Carnation Revolution

The Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974 marked a profound shift in Portugal's political and social landscape, drawing international attention to the country. With the fall of the dictatorship and the beginning of democratisation, the state prioritised long-neglected social issues, including housing. This new context triggered a wave of social housing projects and redefined the architect's role, which became increasingly involved in urban and social renewal. As Siza (1986, p. 37) noted, the revolution "opened up a vast and urgent field for design, rooted in the direct and varied participation of the population." Democratisation imposed a new social responsibility on architects and encouraged close collaboration with communities to redefine both urban form and housing typology.

However, as Dijk (1984, pp. 9–10) pointed out, "Siza did not fall into the trap that many activists and theorists of this period did." He avoided the bureaucratisation of the architect's role, which often led to secure positions within the public sector. His 'only reactionary act' was to seize the opportunities presented by this turbulent time, advocating for rapid construction while maintaining close relationships with clients, now groups of residents living in appalling conditions. His earlier experience with single-family house projects was crucial in developing this ability to work closely with clients, a faculty he carried into his larger social housing projects.

The urgency of rapid construction was one of the major challenges of this period. The priority was to provide housing for thousands of families who had been displaced or were living in poor conditions. Reflecting on the São Victor project, Siza stated: "The most important thing was to build quickly, study people's reactions, and learn from that for the next project" (1984, p. 21). In the early phases, it was therefore not possible to elaborate fully developed architectural proposals, given the urgency of the situation. The process evolved through continuous learning, with each project becoming a step in an ongoing design process shaped by interactions with residents.

As Costa later described, the April Revolution "released the overwhelming energy of the masses, their initiative,

their spontaneous organisational capacity" (1978, p. 68). For Siza, this meant that the design process should remain open and collaborative with residents, not only during construction, but also throughout planning and adaptation. As he stated, "Experience is important if it remains in contact with the architect and the brigade" (Siza, 1984, p. 21). This participatory method, with the architect acting as an active mediator, was central to Siza's approach during the revolutionary period, particularly in the SAAL projects, where architecture responded not only to housing needs but also helped to rebuild community life.

3.2. The Role of the SAAL Programme and CRUARB Initiative in Shaping Social Housing in Portugal

The SAAL programme was one of the most significant post-revolutionary social housing initiatives in Portugal, introducing a participatory approach to architecture. Focused on rehabilitating degraded urban areas, the SAAL marked a period of contestation and experimentation. As Siza (1986, p. 37) noted, "The 25th of April enabled the intervention of popular movements fighting for housing and the right to the city". In Porto, Siza acknowledged the city's duality: the "representative city" and the "marginalised city" of the *ilhas* and courtyards, long ignored by public policy (1986, pp. 37–38). Despite municipal efforts in the mid-20th century, around 7,000 precarious *ilhas* dwellings remained by 1974, lacking direct street access.

The SAAL aligned with the "third generation of plans", prioritising urban consolidation and rehabilitation over expansion (Costa, 1998, p. 66). In Porto, it opposed relocation policies from central areas to suburban housing. Instead, it promoted integrated, humane solutions that preserved communities and reinforced the existing urban fabric. As Costa observed, it was a "concerted and coordinated action" (2023, p. 125) that reflected a growing concern with the historical continuity of central areas and challenged the prevailing model of peripheral expansion.

Fernando Távora's 1969 study for the Barredo district anticipated this approach, proposing a socially informed understanding of the city's heritage values and treating the built environment and its resident population as an integrated whole. This pioneering approach extended

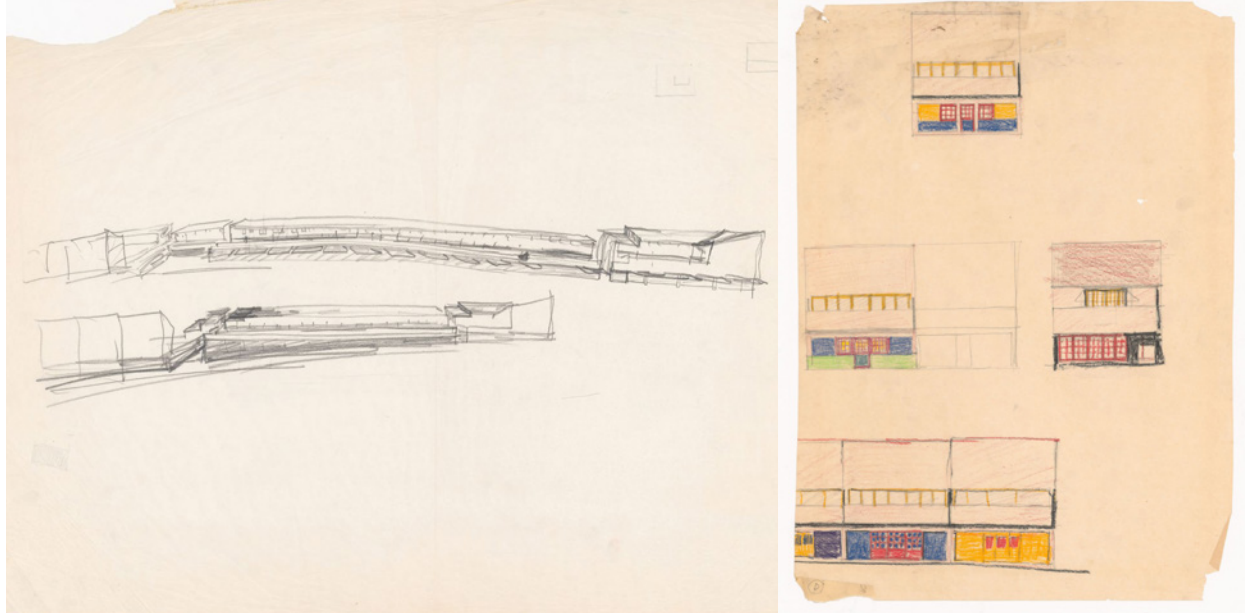


Figure 1: Sketches for Conjunto Habitacional em Caxinas, Vila Cova - Vila do Conde; and B). Sketch for Conjunto Habitacional em Caxinas, Vila Cova - Vila do Conde. 1970-1972.

heritage values to contemporary buildings in an "articulation between architecture and humanity, based on the relationship between public and private" (Moniz *et al.*, 2014, p. 320). As a pioneering initiative in integrated urban rehabilitation in Portugal, SAAL subverted the top-down logic of public housing, promoting a participatory model in which residents actively contributed to urban transformation.

Operating in a context of political instability and a weakened state, SAAL enjoyed a rare degree of autonomy. In this environment of institutional fragility, there was room for creativity and community involvement. At the same time, the CRUARB played a crucial role in transforming social housing policies and urban renewal in Portugal. The CRUARB focused on the preservation and improvement of historic areas like Porto's Ribeira, while also enhancing the living conditions of its residents. Siza participated in the CRUARB, contributing proposals for Largo da Lada and interventions in two houses on Rua da Reboleira.

Taken together, the SAAL and CRUARB shifted the focus of housing policy from standardised solutions towards community-centred strategies. Their work reimagined the housing block not as an isolated object but as a key part of the neighbourhood and the broader urban fabric.

4. Social Housing in the Urban Context by Álvaro Siza in the 1970s

The analytical framework proposed for this study addresses the main factors needed to understand the urban interventions in Siza's social housing projects. First, it considers the legislative and institutional context, highlighting the role of the SAAL and CRUARB programmes. Second, it examines the type of commission and the different agents involved, including the state, local authorities, residents and associations. Third, it analyses the urban setting, the relation to the existing fabric and the degree of integration or transformation. Finally, it addresses the architectural consequences of these conditions, including typology, construction, materials and the degree of completion of each project. This structure is intended to support comparison while preserving the specificity of each case.

4.1. Caxinas Neighbourhood, Vila do Conde (1970-72)

The Caxinas neighbourhood project is located in a fishing community north of Porto. Among the cases studied, it is the only one not integrated into a government programme or initiative, resulting from a private commission. Its main objective was to draft a plan capable of regulating the rapid and seemingly uncontrolled urban growth of a plot located on the seafront. The aim was to integrate future housing into the existing context, respecting the topography and the area's characteristics. The complexity of the land and budget constraints posed significant challenges.

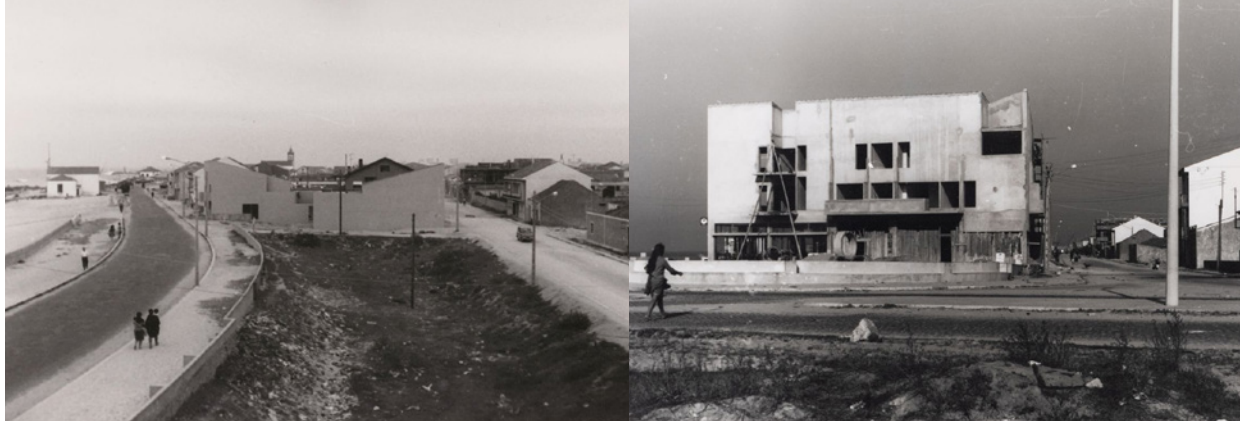


Figure 2: A. Photograph of Conjunto Habitacional em Caxinas, Vila Cova - Vila do Conde; and B). View of Conjunto Habitacional em Caxinas, Vila Cova - Vila do Conde, Portugal. Circa 1970.

Its place within Portuguese architectural production also coincided with a broader geo-cultural opening towards American influences, including authors such as Robert Venturi, whose work Siza acknowledges in this project (2011, p. 22). Drawing on a "rationalist affiliation" (Figueira, 2014, p. 175), the Caxinas project opened a series of projects that Siza, ironically, called the architecture of monotony (Costa, 1990, p. 31). Within this "authorial search," Siza "rediscovered the codes of the modern pioneers of the 1920s Siedlungen" (Tostões, 2008, p. 42). His proposal, grounded in a rationalist framework, allowed typological variation and was open to collage and local acculturation without veering into a "populist mimesis" (Bohigas, 1976, p. 11). Siza's strategy for Caxinas, which favoured flexibility and acculturation without abandoning a rigorous formal framework, demonstrates his ability to balance innovation with respect for local traditions.

Caxinas was one of the first projects to gain international recognition. It was published in influential journals, such as *Controspazio* (1972), *Lotus International* (1975), and *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (1976). In the 1980s, it was again featured in *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (1980) and was included in the exhibition "Alvaro Siza Architetto 1954-1979" in Milan (1979). It later became central to reflections on postmodernity in Portuguese architecture.

The volumetric and material strategies tested in Caxinas, later developed in projects such as Casa Beires, distanced Siza from an initial organic style, bringing him closer to a language that, although compared to Cubism and/or vernacular architecture, can be seen as the architect's own expression. In the development of low-cost holiday homes (Fig. 1), "Possible solutions are provided, no more than that, along with a vast toolkit that includes levels, dimensions of openings, window frame designs, types of finishes, etc." (Fernandez, 1998, p. 6), in a simplified manner to facilitate

construction by local labour. Archival research made it possible to consult annotations on the drawings mentioned above (Fig. 2).

Siza adopted a direct approach, responding to the residents' demands, using a methodology that emphasises the constant interaction between architecture and urbanism and a strong adaptation to local specificities. Unlike many other architects, he did not approach it from above through urban planning, but through direct action and the claims of the neediest inhabitants.

4.2. S. Victor Neighbourhood, Porto (1974-79)

The project for the S. Vitor neighbourhood, part of the SAAL programme, was a response to the urgent housing needs that arose after the 1974 Revolution. Rooted in local specificities, it incorporated a "rationalist tradition" that allowed for the creation of singular architectural objects. Siza led the São Victor SAAL Brigade in a context where local residents opposed the proposal to build a car park in the space left by the demolition of the *ilhas*. The plan preserved the specificity of the original morphological structure of the area, while integrating international influences adapted to the context (Fig. 3). One of the project's collaborators, Souto de Moura, then a student, compared the axonometric drawings of S. Vitor with those of Pankokweg (1927) in his internship report (2020).

Siza adopted a participatory approach, involving the local community, the Residents' Association, and architecture students. This demonstrated the architect's ability to respond to the social and political demands emerging from the 1974 Revolution, reflecting his commitment to social and participatory architecture. Siza remarked that

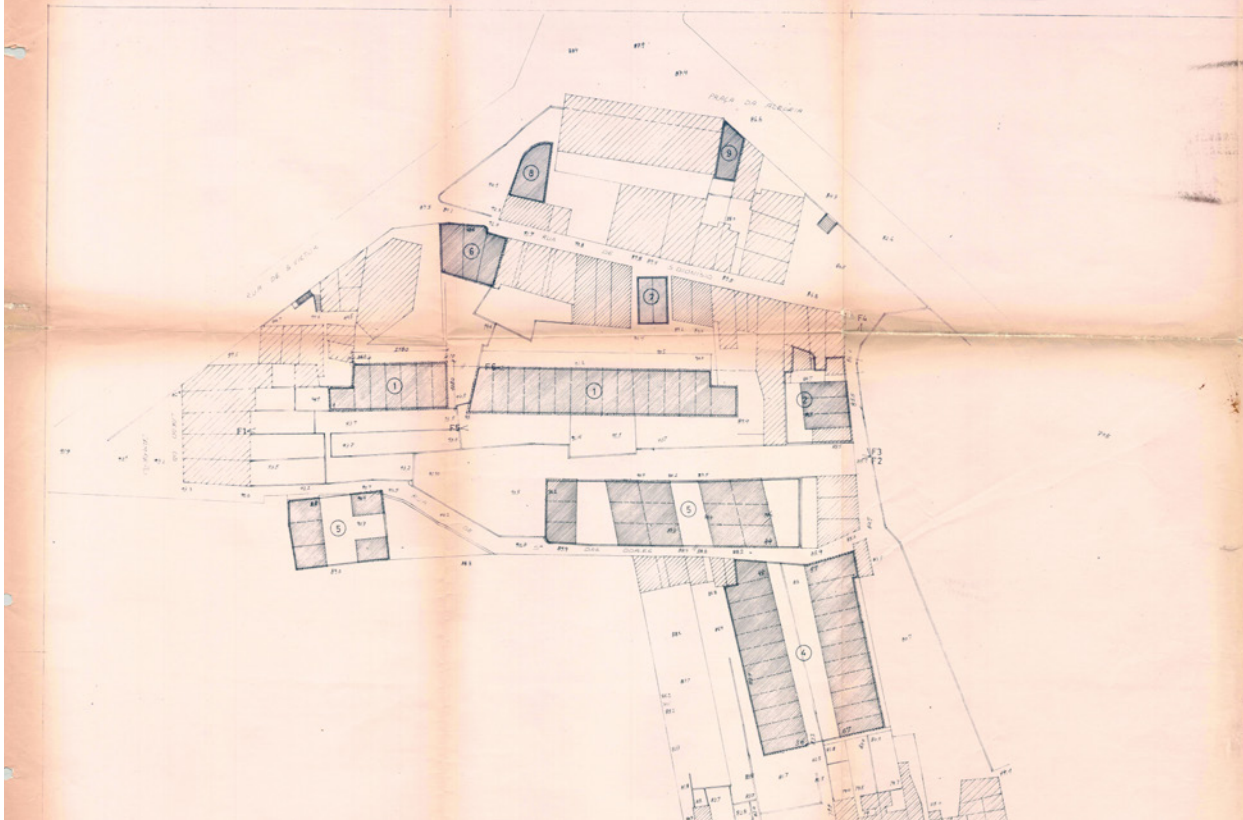


Figure 3: FFH SAAL. Preliminary Execution Project. 1st Phase. General Plan, 1975.

the projects he designed and built for the SAAL were developed through open dialogue rather than through a totalitarian approach (1984, p. 20).

The project began in November 1974 and involved the construction of 32 homes in the first phase and 20 in the second. It included the construction on vacant land, the reconstruction and restoration of buildings. However, due to financial constraints, only 12 of the planned homes were built, with the budget undergoing several revisions and additional costs. Given the circumstances and the need for rapid construction, the building incorporates stone masonry on the ground floor and concrete blocks on the first floor, reinforced with localized structural columns. The slabs are made of lightweight reinforced concrete, standard systems that would go on to characterize post-25 April self-building practices across Portugal.

The São Victor project reflects the broader socio-political and productive context, which was shaped by external factors and internal tensions. Financial difficulties and internal divisions within the neighbourhood also impacted the project, exacerbated by architectural changes that altered its original identity. As Siza noted, "São Victor will succumb to division of the population, a division perfectly

planned. In the existing houses, people were convinced to replace the windows with aluminium ones, or by the symbolic destruction of all the remaining pre-existing stone walls. There was a consciously planned intervention, not an evolution of the houses in response to their adaptability" (1984). As Fleck notes, "What could have been S. Victor can only be seen in past photographs" (2023, p. 9).

4.3. Bouça Neighbourhood, Porto (1974-78)

The Bouça neighbourhood project reflects Álvaro Siza's commitment to creating housing solutions that responded to the urgent needs of the post-1974 Revolution period. From the outset, Siza described it as an "economically radical" project, a key feature of the SAAL programme, which aimed to build affordable and high-quality housing with limited resources. Like the São Victor project, Bouça revisits the morphology of Porto's traditional *ilhas*, adjusting it to a new scale and establishing a more open relationship with the exterior. In addition to these local references, the project incorporates modernist references to European housing models, such as Bruno Taut's residential blocks in Berlin (1931), Ernst May's in Frankfurt (1927), and Alvar Aalto's in Sunila (1938). These influences are visible in the

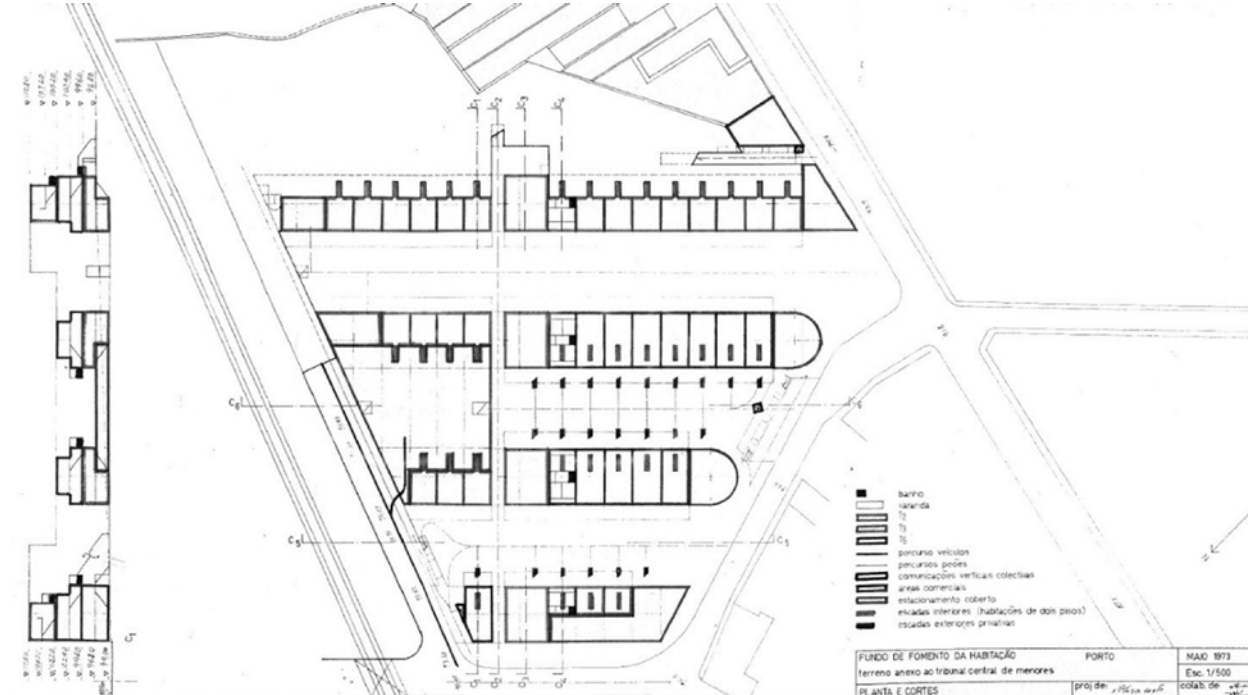


Figure 4: Housing Development Fund. Land next to the central juvenile court. Plan and Sections, May 1973

linear construction, the repetition of small single-family houses, and the insertion of small support modules.

The design process developed on two levels: first, direct contact with residents, which promoted a participatory approach; second, the development of the architectural project, aimed at addressing problems potentially generalisable to the city as a whole. The initial plan envisaged the construction of 138 homes of various types, distributed across four four-storey blocks arranged in parallel. The homes are organised on two floors (duplexes), with a common access gallery on the second floor (Fig. 4).

The formal terraced articulation of the houses creates a rhythm that reinforces the connection between the housing units and the existing urban structure. However, due to financial constraints and political factors, only two of the planned blocks were built, leaving the project incomplete for several years. It was only in the early 2000s that Siza resumed and completed the project.

This complex exemplifies a careful balance between functionality and economy, reflecting both the pragmatism of the design and the intention to create a residential space that addresses practical needs alongside the social dimension of architecture. It synthesises local and international influences, remaining sensitive to the socio-

economic context and encouraging active community participation in the design of their living spaces.

4.4. Lada Neighbourhood, Porto (1976)

The Lada Neighbourhood project, located in Porto's Historic Centre (CHP), stands out for its complexity, stemming from its position in a heritage-rich area and the urban and social challenges posed by significant deterioration. Largo da Lada, with its intricate topography, experienced considerable physical and social decline, a common issue in various historic areas of the city. In response, Siza proposed a comprehensive intervention, inspired by Távora and by the *Estudo de Renovação Urbana do Barredo* (1969), that encompassed the entire historic neighbourhood. The aim was to restore visual and spatial continuity, reconnecting the urban landscape with surrounding architecture, from Ribeira Square to Nasoni's works (Siza, 1976b) (Fig. 5).

The study involved collaboration with the CRUARB, consulting architects, and designers to assess the site's potential, aiming to improve the living conditions of the marginalised community residing there. Siza's proposal sought to regenerate the degraded area through renovation and new construction, including housing and social/commercial spaces, ensuring future community

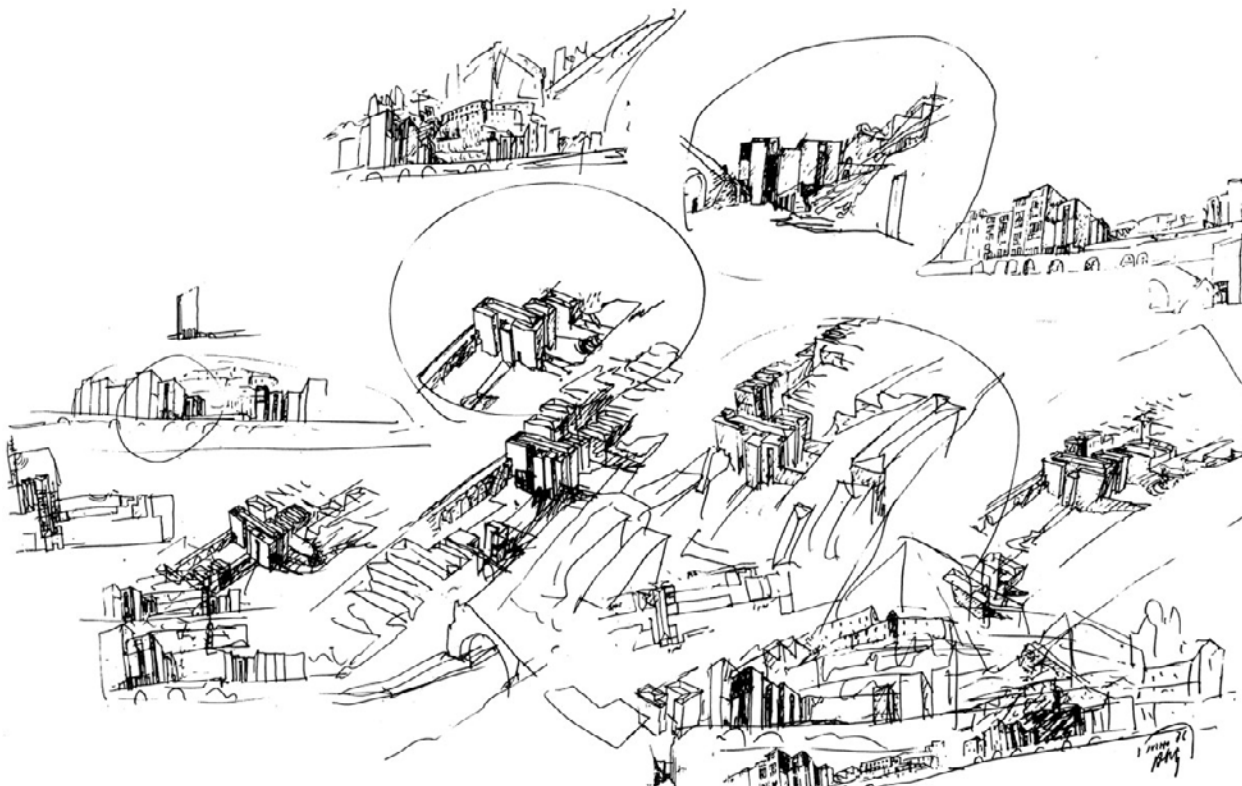


Figure 5: Sketches by Siza for the Lada neighbourhood, 1976.

appropriation. It also proposed reorganising pedestrian connections while preserving existing elements as forms of memory. Siza advocated for a "contemporary architectural language" for the site, avoiding imitations to integrate the area sustainably into urban life.

Siza's position was clear: "urban design should go beyond mere restoration or physical elimination of the existing city" (1977). The project was thus guided by two clear objectives: a) the building plans should include areas for collective construction and specific types of housing; and b) ensuring that the intervention respected the historical and social context while promoting urban and residential improvements. Although the case studies in the CHP are less widely published, significant articles, such as Gregotti's for *Lotus magazine* (1978), and more recent analyses by Cruz *et al.* (2024), have shed light on these proposals for urban intervention in Porto's historic centre.

4.5. Reboleira Street Buildings, Porto (1977)

Siza intervened in buildings nos. 191 and 192 on Rua da Reboleira within the Historical Centre of Porto (CHP) and the urban rehabilitation plan promoted by CRUARB. This initiative aims to revitalise the city's dilapidated areas and aligns with other projects such as the Largo da Lada. It reflects Siza's commitment to preserving architectural heritage and regenerating the area socially, while also addressing sustainability principles.

The work began with a detailed architectural survey, including elevations and cross-sections at a 1/50 scale. Based on this analysis, he created a general plan of the layouts (P3 to P8) (Fig. 6). This meticulous survey enabled the preservation of the original structure and typological elements, such as partitions and finishes, while integrating modern, functional solutions.

In his intervention report, Siza emphasised the importance of preserving the morphology and material and cultural values of the buildings. He also notes, "although the recovery of certain elements may be costly when considered in



Figure 6: General plan of the layouts (P3 to P8).

isolation, it avoids an unpredictable extension of the works, if not their total demolition, with the consequent loss of material and cultural values" (Siza 1976a). The project aimed to use reclaimed wood from other historic buildings and to restore or replace existing ironwork with matching pieces from specialist shops. It also included restoring windows with reclaimed wood and ironwork, and refurbishing the entrance hall with materials such as steel and slate. The goal was to avoid demolitions and preserve the buildings' cultural and material values.

The rehabilitation of buildings nos. 191 and 192 on Rua da Reboleira demonstrates Siza's deep understanding of the Porto bourgeois house, with a strong emphasis on sustainability. It involved careful consideration of materials, design, and techniques to ensure precision in the intervention. The preservation of the typo-morphological structure, the reuse of demolition materials, and attention to detail, subtly integrating modern elements, reflect a profound respect for the buildings' material and cultural values.

However, Siza acknowledged the challenges faced during the project's implementation. The lack of complementary actions and experimentation with solutions resulted in delays and made community involvement difficult. This challenge led to a gradual distancing of the neighbourhood's inhabitants, which Siza regretted, given the importance of active community participation in urban rehabilitation projects (Siza, 1976a).

5. Final Remarks

Álvaro Siza has left a relevant legacy in the field of social housing and urban development, particularly through his projects in the 1970s. The projects discussed in this article were not simply responses to Portugal's housing crisis;

they also redefined architecture as a social and political instrument. By incorporating community participation, Siza helped reshape the architect's role and expanded the democratic scope of city-making. This approach fostered a sense of community, preserved cultural memory and identity, and transcended a mere functional response to existing demands. By repositioning the architect as a mediator, architecture became a means of creating significance rather than just a technical solution to housing problems.

These projects demonstrate Siza's profound understanding of place across different scales. His approach highlights the constant interaction between architecture and urbanism, underscoring the importance of integrating local solutions and creating housing spaces that positively impact both the physical and social landscapes.

Siza's work during this period illustrates how he balanced the pragmatic urgency of construction with a continuous commitment to dialogue with residents and an aesthetic sensibility that transcended immediate requirements. Instead of pursuing a path of "populist mimesis," which could have led to repetitive, meaning-free architectural acts, Siza incorporated a critical and creative dimension into his solutions. This balance between innovation and pragmatism, coupled with constant interaction with residents, allowed Siza to develop projects that not only met housing needs but also created quality spaces with lasting significance for communities. Across the cases examined, Siza balanced the urgency of construction with sustained attention to dialogue, precision, and formal coherence.

The relevance of these interventions remains visible in later projects, serving as a model for integrating local contextual influences with principles of architectural history. This is exemplified by his plan for Malagueira (initiated in 1977 during his first visit to the site), where Siza

could apply these principles on a larger scale. The projects examined here show that it is possible to operate within economic and social limitations without compromising architectural quality or a critical, innovative vision. São Victor and Bouça exemplify how participatory processes can make residents co-authors of their environments, challenging hierarchical urban planning models. Largo da Lada reflects a commitment to preserving the existing urban environment while promoting social cohesion. The interventions on Rua da Reboleira tested principles of conservation and sustainability, while the plan for Caxinas exemplifies Siza's responsive approach to specific contexts, enhancing space quality and fostering social cohesion. Taken together, these works remain useful references for rethinking collective housing today. Not just as physical infrastructure, but as a framework for everyday life and community building.

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Procedencia de las imágenes

- Fig. 1. Álvaro Siza fonds, CCA, Montréal. Gift of Álvaro Siza
- Fig. 2. Álvaro Siza fonds, CCA, Montréal. Gift of Álvaro Siza.
- Fig. 3. Álvaro Siza Archive, Serralves Foundation.
- Fig. 4. Porto District Archive.
- Fig. 5. Álvaro Siza Archive.
- Fig. 6. Historical Archive - Casa do Infante.