FINDING COMMON GROUND: Urban Design Studios Providing Ideas for Neighbourhood Regeneration in Porto and Vila Nova de Gaia

29/10/2026 | Sigrid Busch, Els Keunen, Shaharin Annisa, Rainer Goutrié and Astrid Ley

Main message/overview of presentation

- How can design studios help envision alternative futures for safe, affordable housing?
- In Porto and Gaia, how can residents be actively engaged in building common ground?

  - **Common ground** = shared visions and understanding about housing and neighborhood development
  - **Common ground** = shared spaces

THE DESIGN STUDIOS

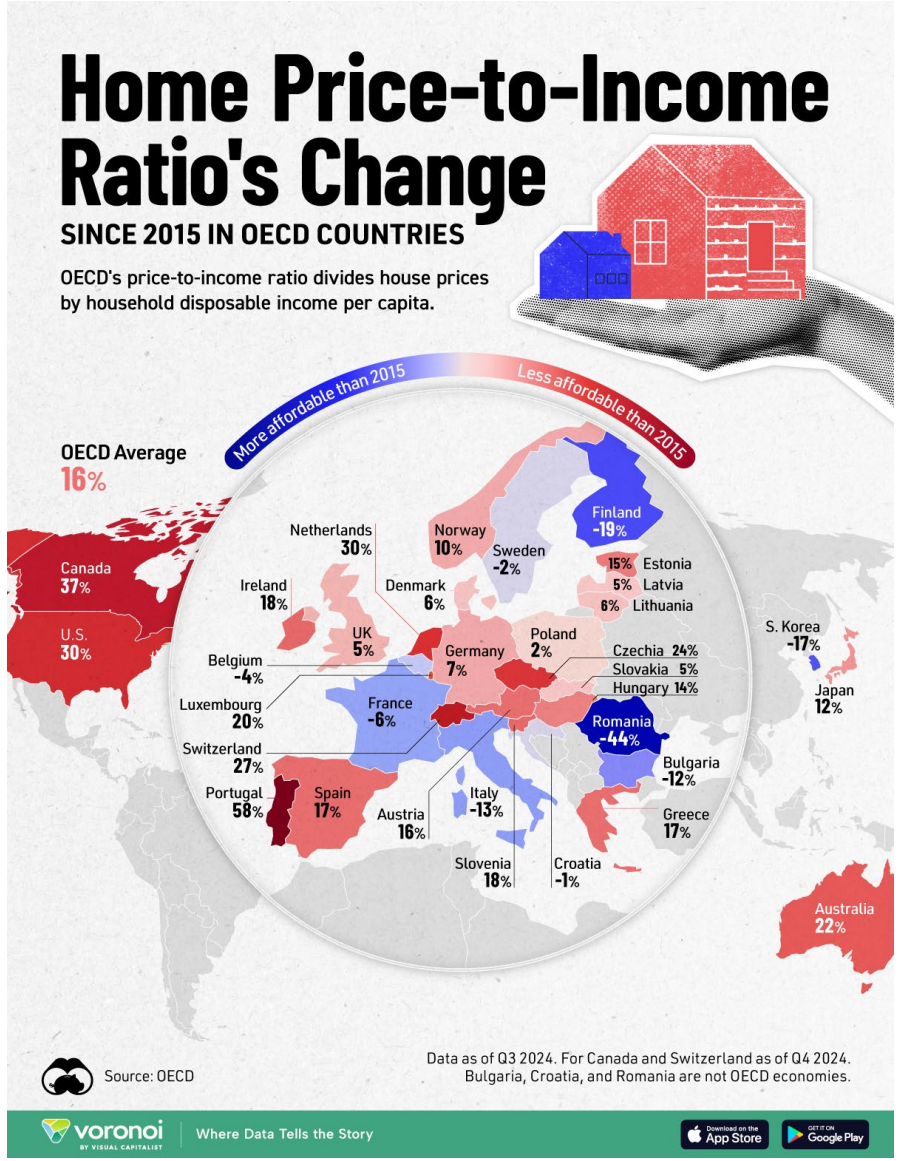
The design studios

- Project-based course where students develop design proposals for a specific site or problem
- 37 students, divided into two groups
  - 15 students of the Bachelor and Master of Architecture and Urban Planning: focus on Porto
  - 18 students of the Master Integrated Urbanism and Sustainable Design, including two exchange students from Namibia: focus on Gaia
- In collaboration with DASH partners Domus Social (Porto) and Gaiurb (Gaia)

Housing crisis in Portugal

- Sharp increases in housing prices and rental costs, without comparable salary increases
  - Increased foreign investment
  - Touristification
  - Insufficient new housing construction

  ⇒ Shortage of affordable housing
- **Student's task:** develop innovative strategies, processes, visions, and designs for urban trans-formation at and beyond the neighborhood scale



Source

The design studios

Common ground: Housing as social infrastructure
The Porto studio



Dr. Sigrid Busch



Rainer Goutrié



Prof. Dr. Astrid Ley



Els Keunen



Dr. Shaharin Annisa

Common ground: Co-creating affordable and social housing | **The Gaia studio**

Design studio phases

1

Phase 1: Diagnosis and site analysis

Onboarding

Training school Porto/Gaia

Site analysis presentation



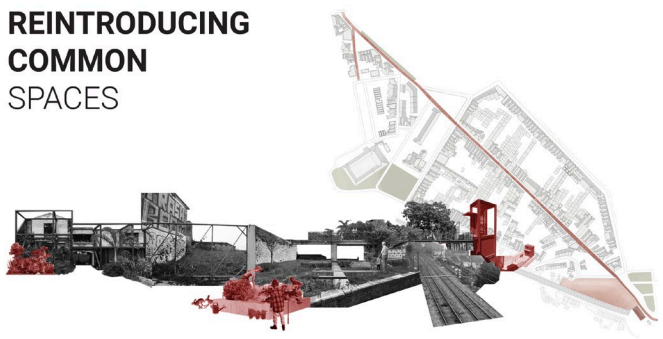
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Phase 2: Theme, concept or design development

Joint workshops

Tutorings

Intermediate presentation



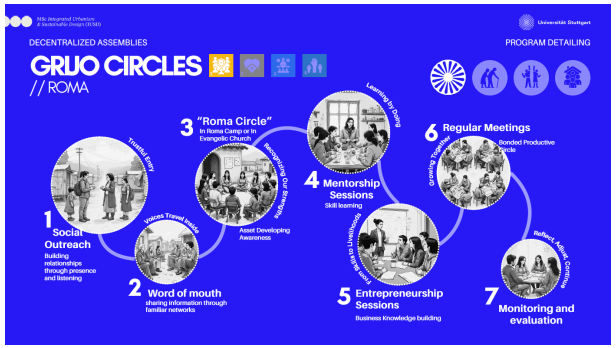
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Phase 3: Strategic or design development

Joint workshops

Tutorings

Final presentation

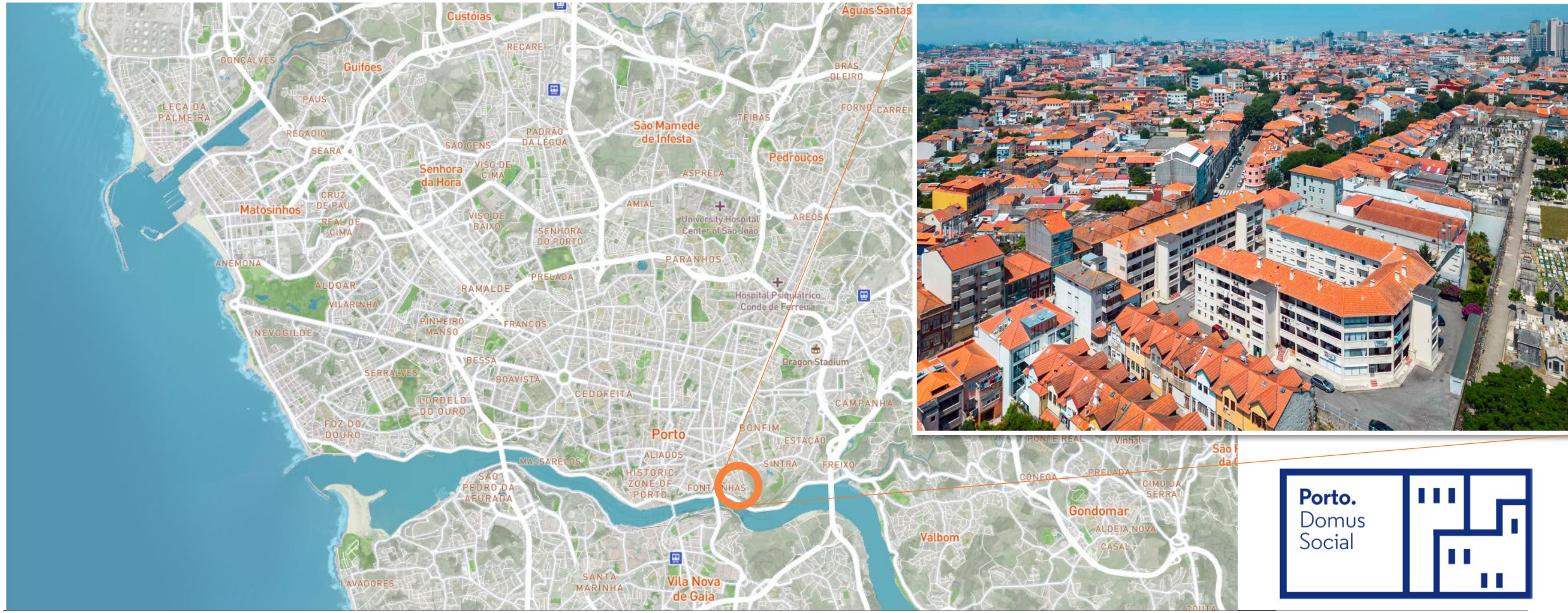


Planning sites & partners



PORTO STUDIO
COMMON GROUND: HOUSING AS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Location: Duque de Saldanha neighbourhood in Bonfim



Porto. Domus Social

Project proposal: FUTUREPROOF BONFIM

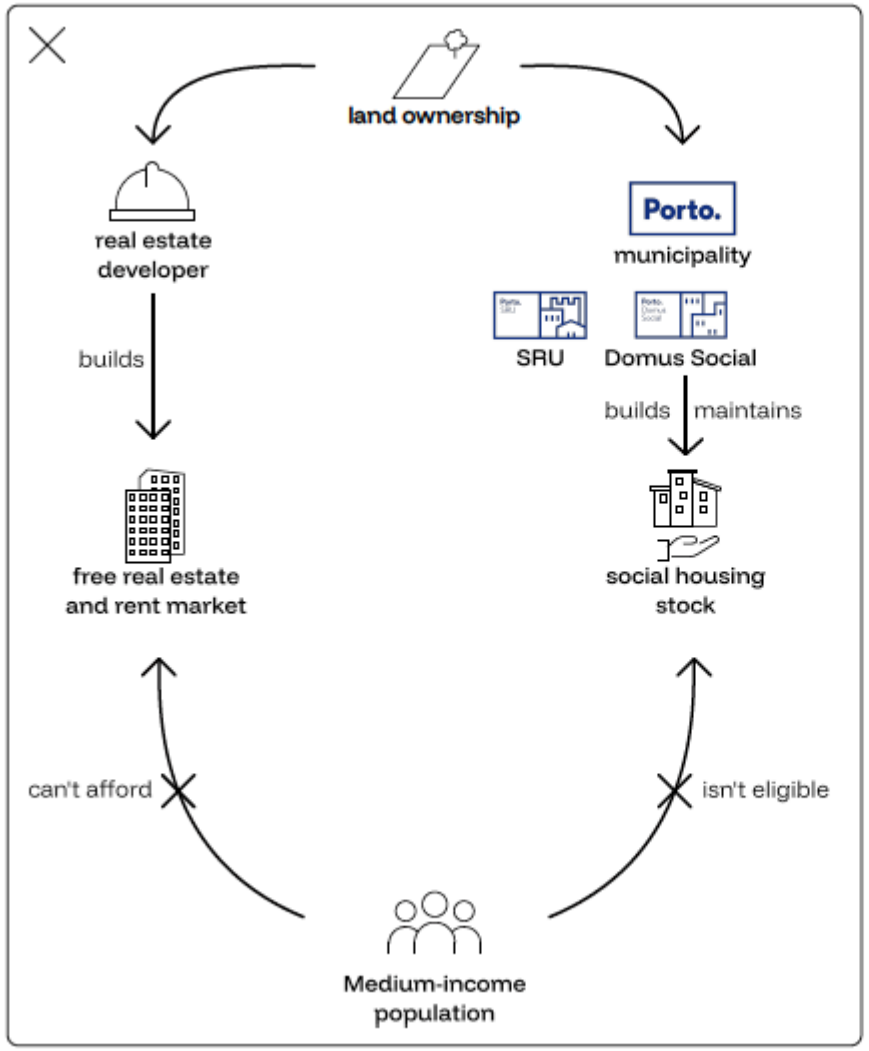
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SOPHIE KAISER
SVEN MASER
(M.Sc. Arch-students)



SOPHIE
KAISER



SVEN
MASER



Concept

Dystopia

Utopia

Housing Cooperative

"Gap housing"

The gap between the maximum income for eligibility for social housing and the required income for affording a home on the free rental market can be closed.

Release of the social housing market

Subsidizing cooperative land ownership is considerably cheaper for the municipality than providing social housing and can diminish the pressure on the social housing market.

A futureproof concept

With shared ownership and a non-profit structure, cooperatives are a long-term solution to housing market speculation.

Housing cooperative as a commons

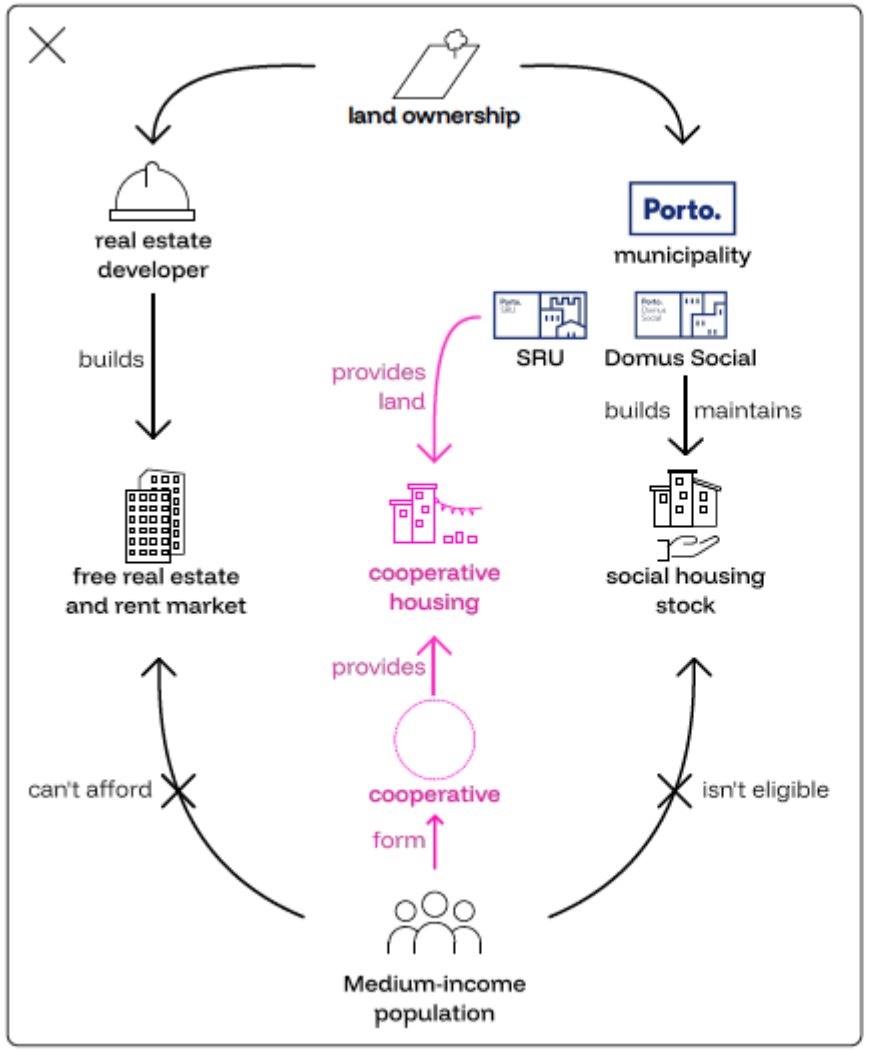
Shared ownership of houses introduces a new dimension of community.

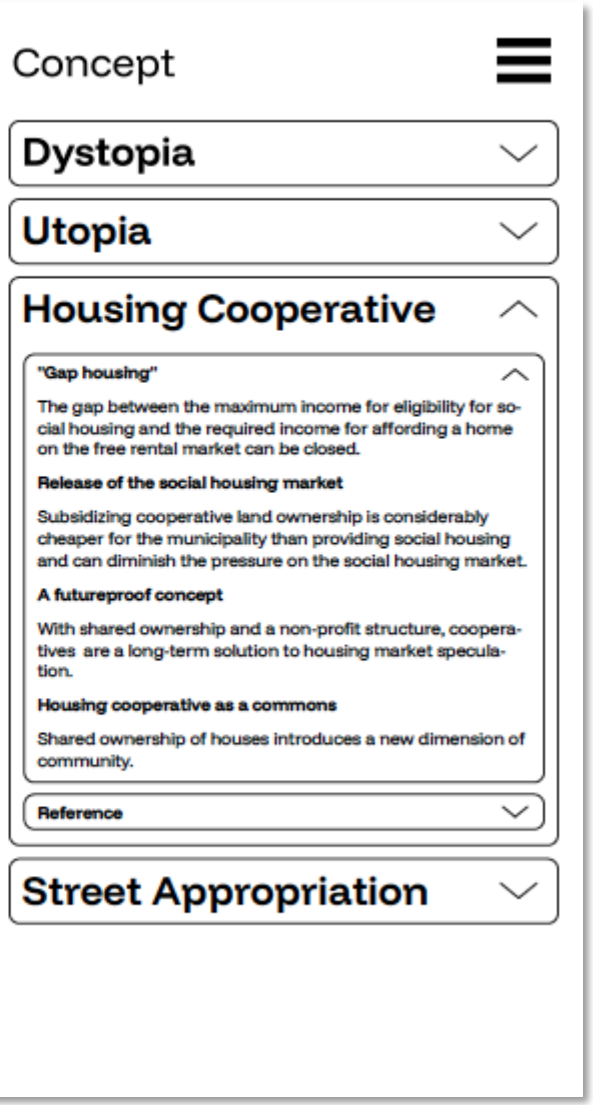
Reference

Street Appropriation

Project proposal: FUTUREPROOF BONFIM

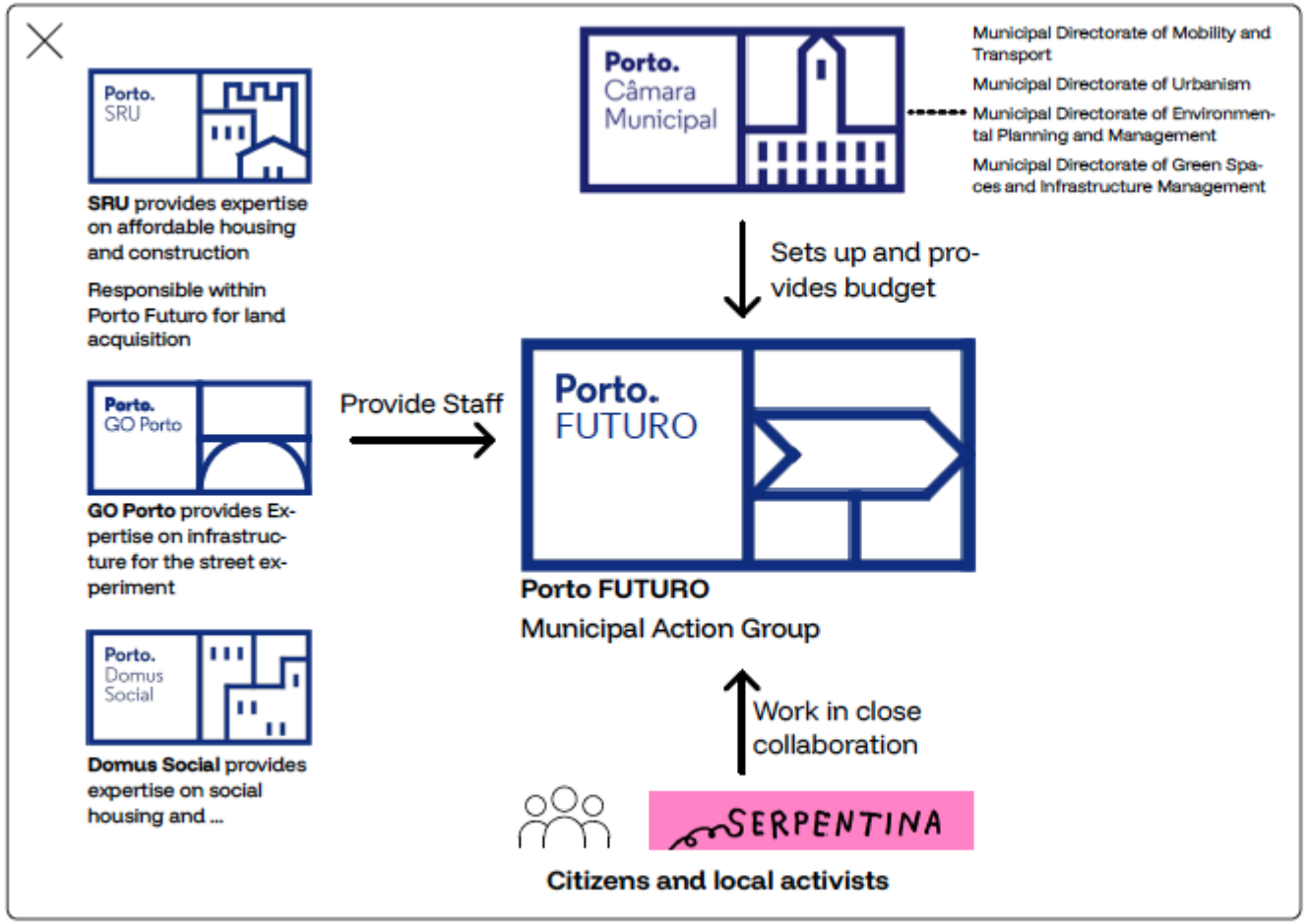
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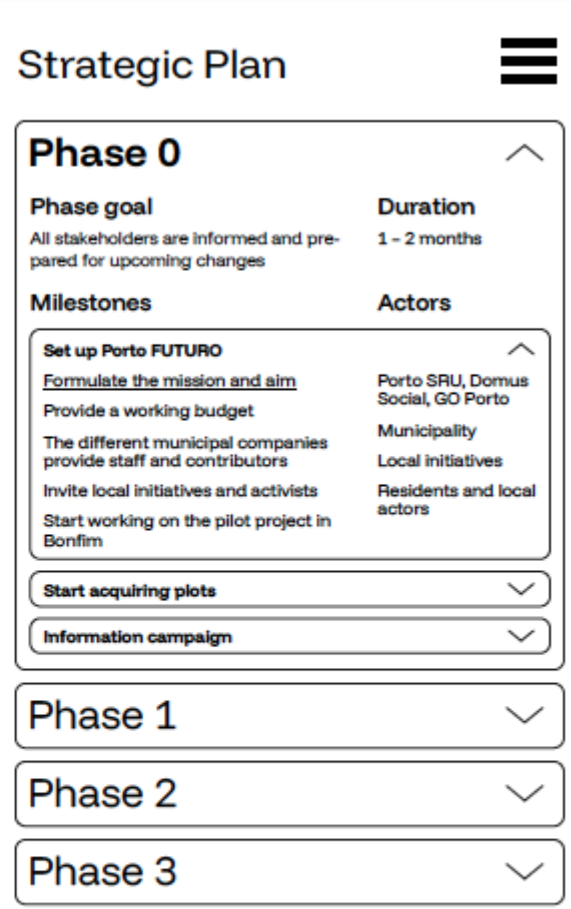




Project proposal: FUTUREPROOF BONFIM

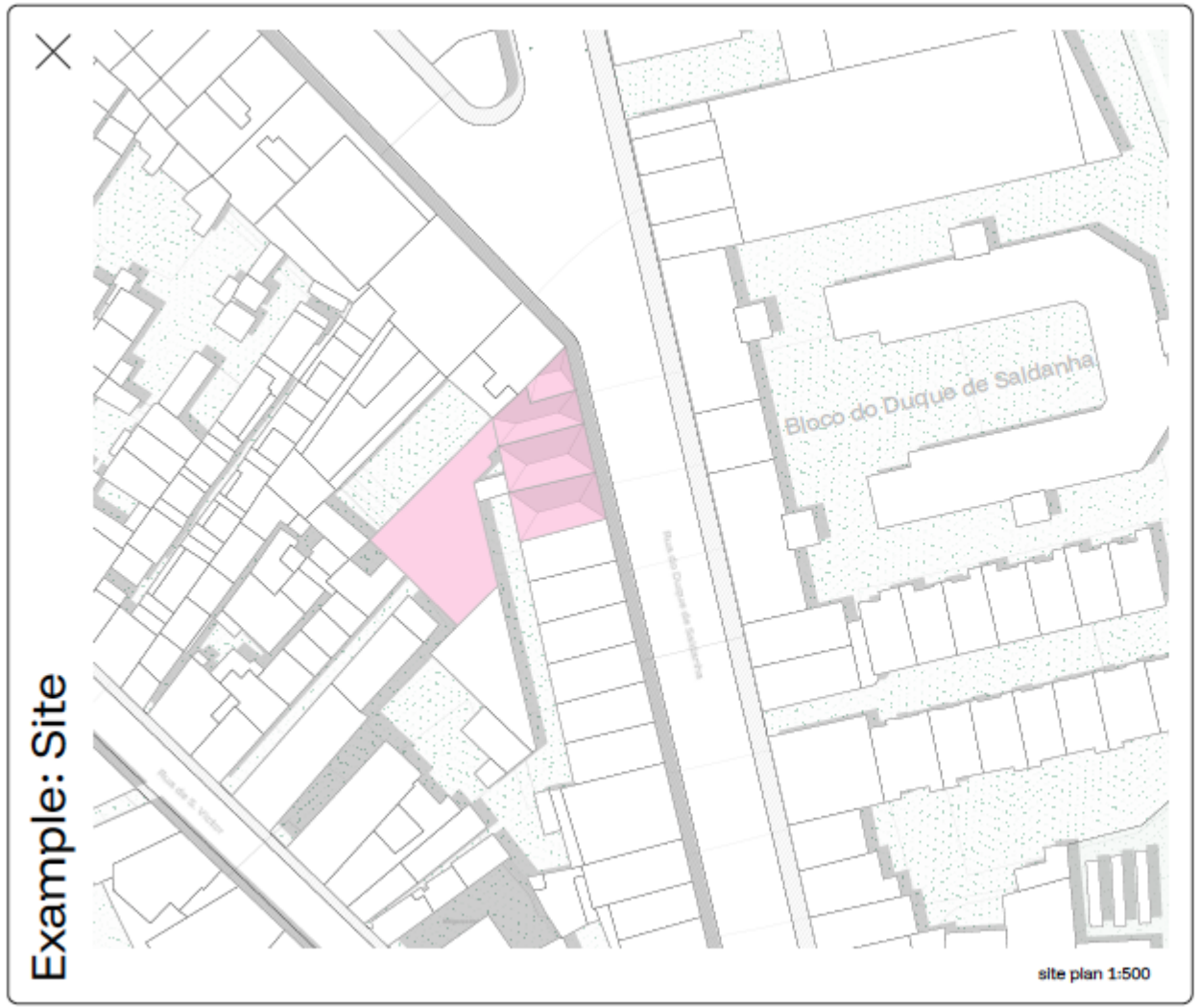
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Strategic Plan

Phase 0

Phase 1

Phase goal
Develop ideas and create consent among stakeholders

Duration
1 – 2 months

Milestones

Actors

Group building

Site selection

Select a suitable site — Cooperative

Come to an agreement with the municipality as a cooperative — Porto FUTURO, Porto SRU

Financial preparation

Define dwelling needs and common areas

Street space workshop

Plan first hard changes in the street

Phase 2

Phase 3

Project proposal: FUTUREPROOF BONFIM

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Financias

Tax reduction

For cooperatives, the VAT for construction is 5% (regular: 23%)

Financing

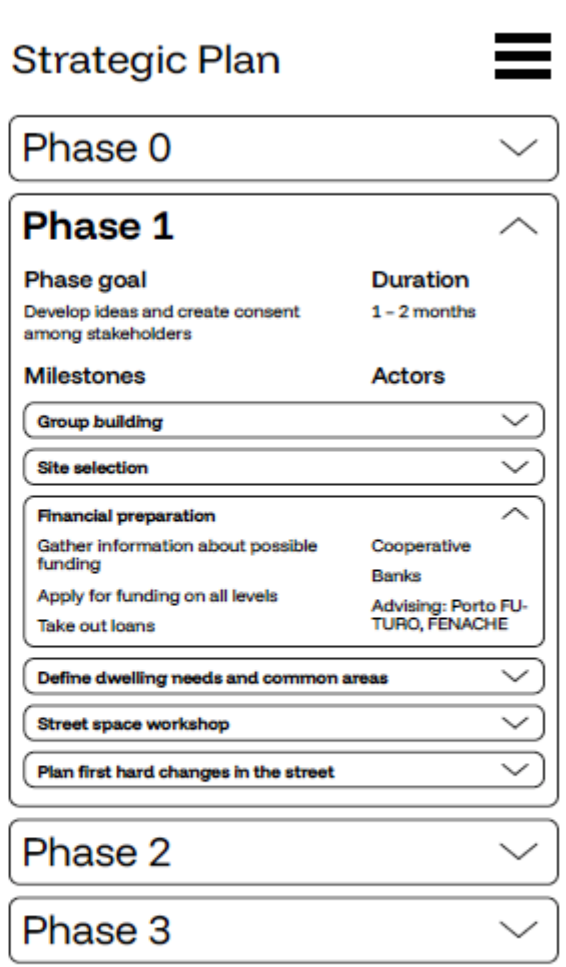
A subsidized loan of up to 250,000,000 € will be granted through the Banco Português de Fomento.

Renovation

In the case of rehabilitation of existing housing stock, a non-refundable public loan will cover 25% of the total construction cost.

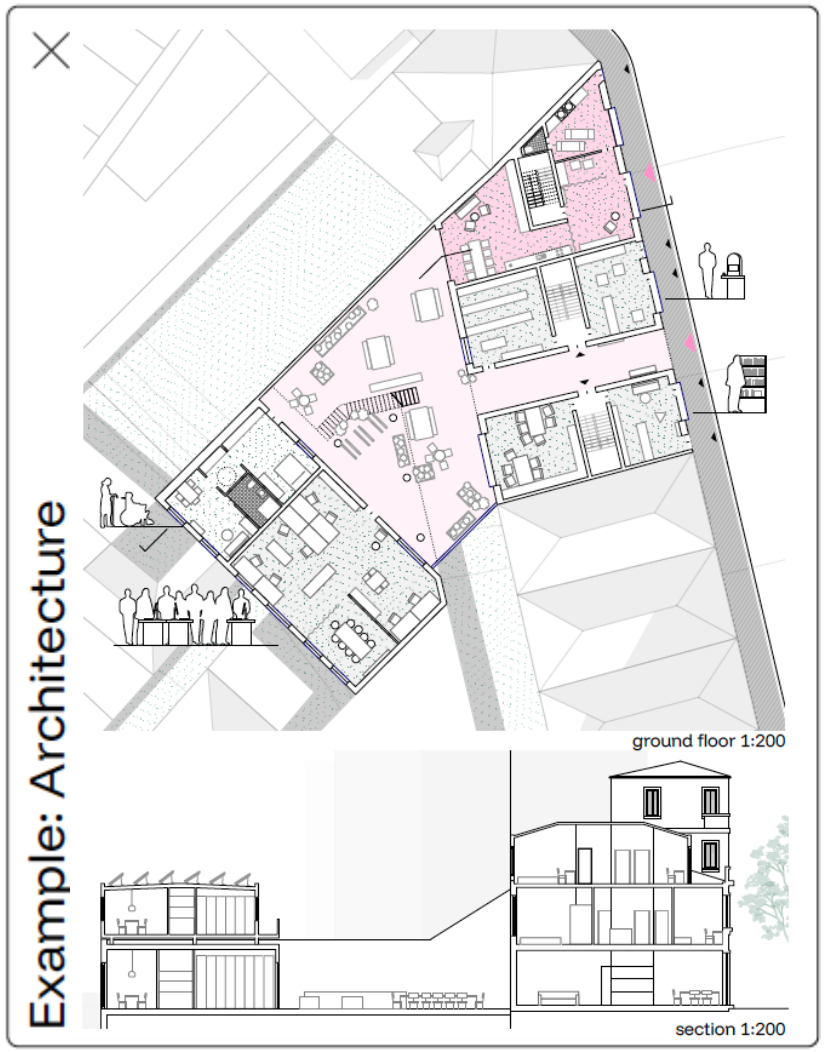
Access to public land through Porto Futuro

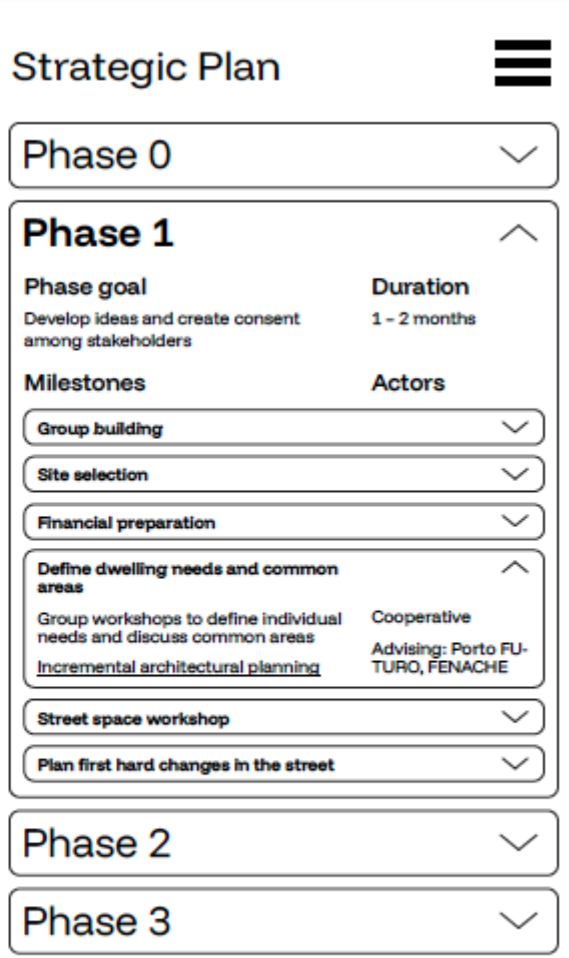
In collaboration with the cooperative, a suitable plot is chosen and provided to the cooperative for free.



Project proposal: FUTUREPROOF BONFIM

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Strategic Plan

Phase 0

Phase 1

Phase 2

Phase 3

Phase goal
Ongoing appropriation of the spaces

Duration
open end

Milestones

Actors

Appropriate new spaces

The Cooperative moves in	Cooperative
Open ended appropriation of the spaces	Residents, businesses

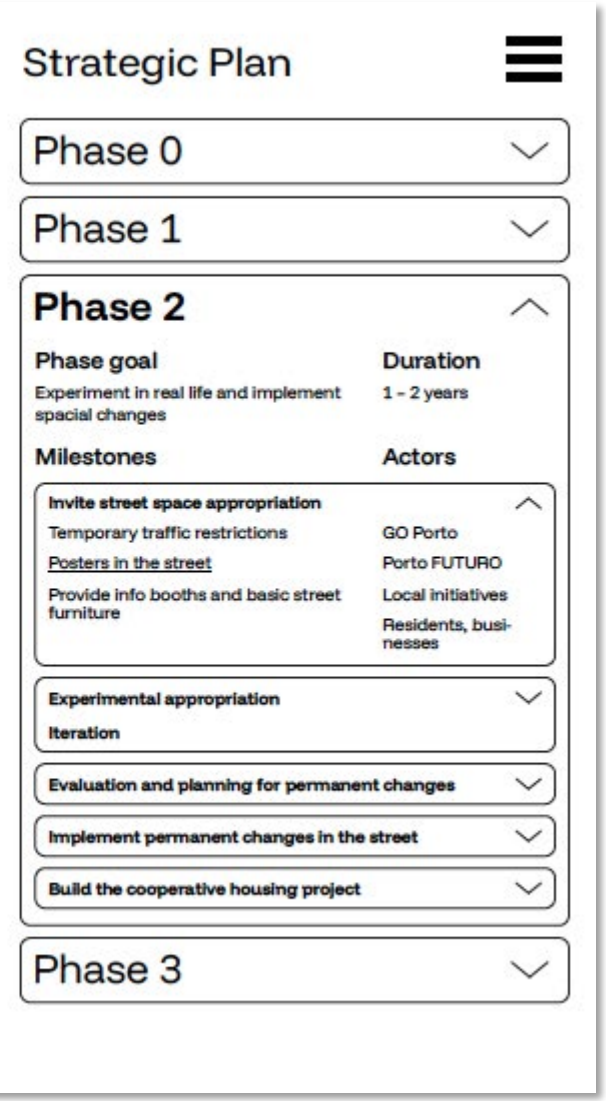
Institutionalize Porto FUTURO

Evaluate outcome and replicate success

Project proposal: FUTUREPROOF BONFIM

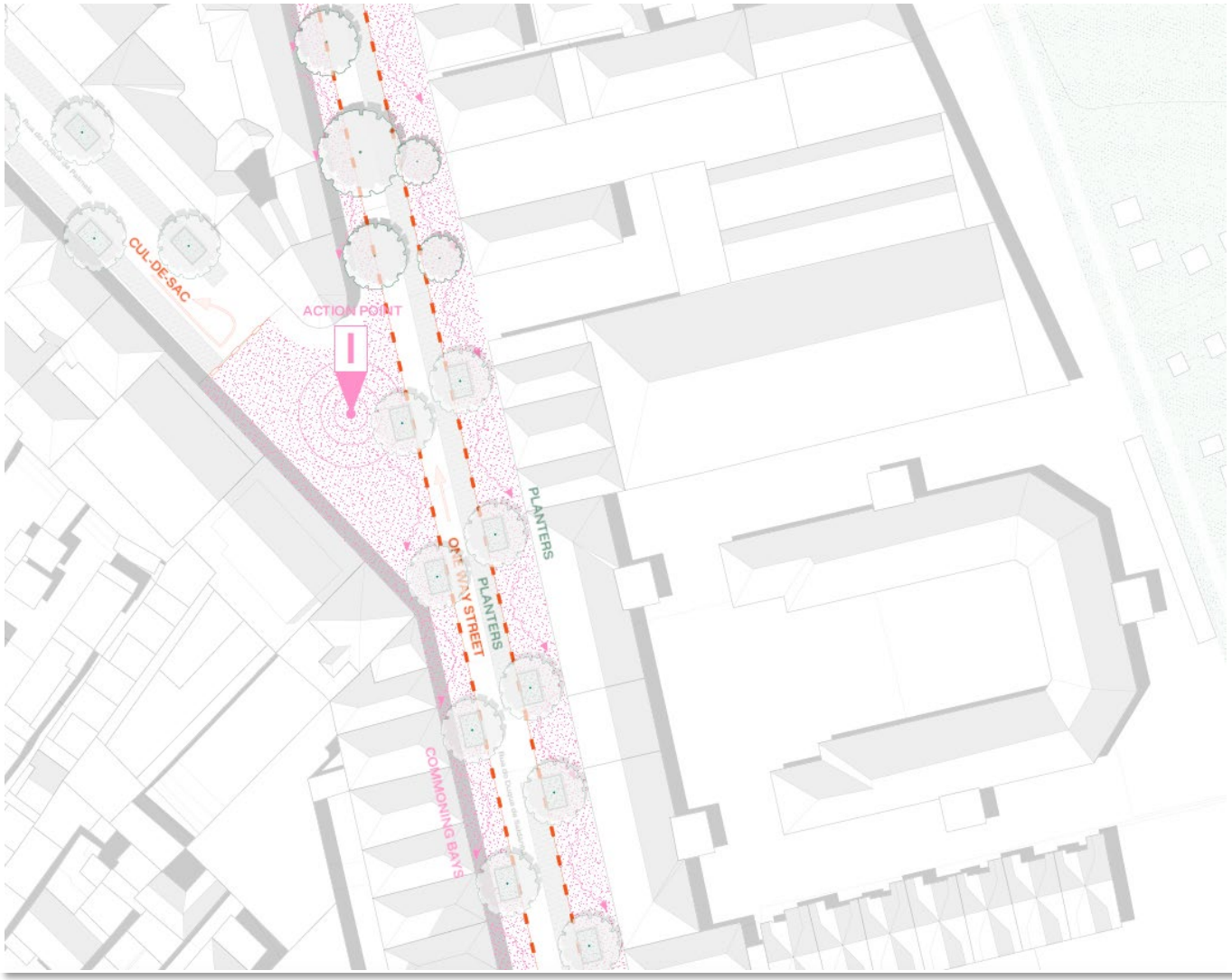
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Strategic Plan

Phase 0

Phase 1

Phase 2

Phase goal
Experiment in real life and implement spacial changes

Duration
1 - 2 years

Milestones **Actors**

Invite street space appropriation

Experimental appropriation
Iteration

Evaluation and planning permanent changes

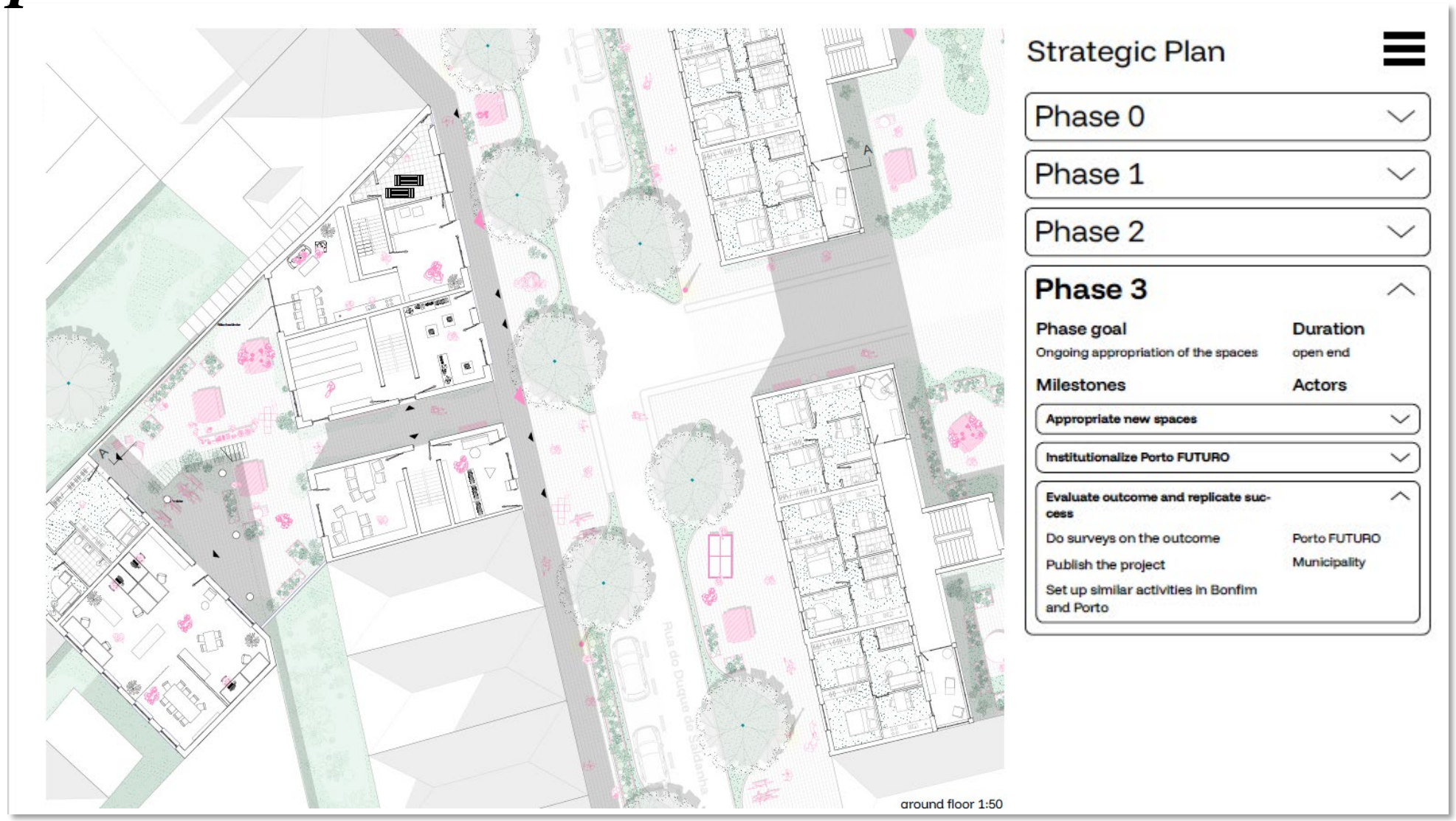
Implement permanent changes in the street
Change the road surface — GO Porto
Unseal surfaces, plant trees and greenspaces — Porto FUTURO

Build the cooperative housing project

Phase 3

Project proposal: FUTUREPROOF BONFIM

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Fig. 34: collage - commoning in the street

Strategic Plan

Phase 0

Phase 1

Phase 2

Phase 3

Phase goal
Ongoing appropriation of the spaces

Duration
open end

Milestones

Actors

Appropriate new spaces

Institutionalize Porto FUTURO

Evaluate outcome and replicate success

Do surveys on the outcome	Porto FUTURO
Publish the project	Municipality
Set up similar activities in Bonfim and Porto	

GAIA STUDIO
COMMON GROUND: CO-CREATING AFFORDABLE AND SOCIAL HOUSING

Location: Grijó





Location: Grijó

- Suburban area, fragmented development
- Informal settlements with substandard housing conditions inhabited by Roma
- Unimplemented proposal to relocate them to site of abandoned factory
- Hard to access social housing







Project proposal: Lively Grijó

Main problem: **Lack of inclusive public spaces in Grijó**

- A **deficit of public life**: residents rely on private spaces
- **Spatial fragmentation**: disconnected streets limit spontaneous gathering
- **Exclusion of certain groups**: spaces fail to support intergenerational or cross-group interaction

Jonna Farah Rana Haritha



Theoretical framework

LIVELY NEIGHBOURHOOD OF GRIJÓ

THEORIES OF PUBLIC SPACE AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS BY JAN GHEL

- HUMAN SCALE
- PUBLIC LIFE--> BUILT FORM
- INTENSITY OF INTERACTIONS

THEORIES OF URBAN CONTACT ZONES

- SPACES OF ENCOUNTER
- DIVERSITY & NEGOTIATIONS
- EVERYDAY MICRO-INTERACTIONS

IMPORTANCE OF OWNERSHIP TO FIND A COMMON GROUND

SHARED SOCIO-SPATIAL UNDERSTANDING

(how people interact in spaces & how does those spaces look like + Find a common Ground to create)

LEVELS OF INTERACTION INTENSITY

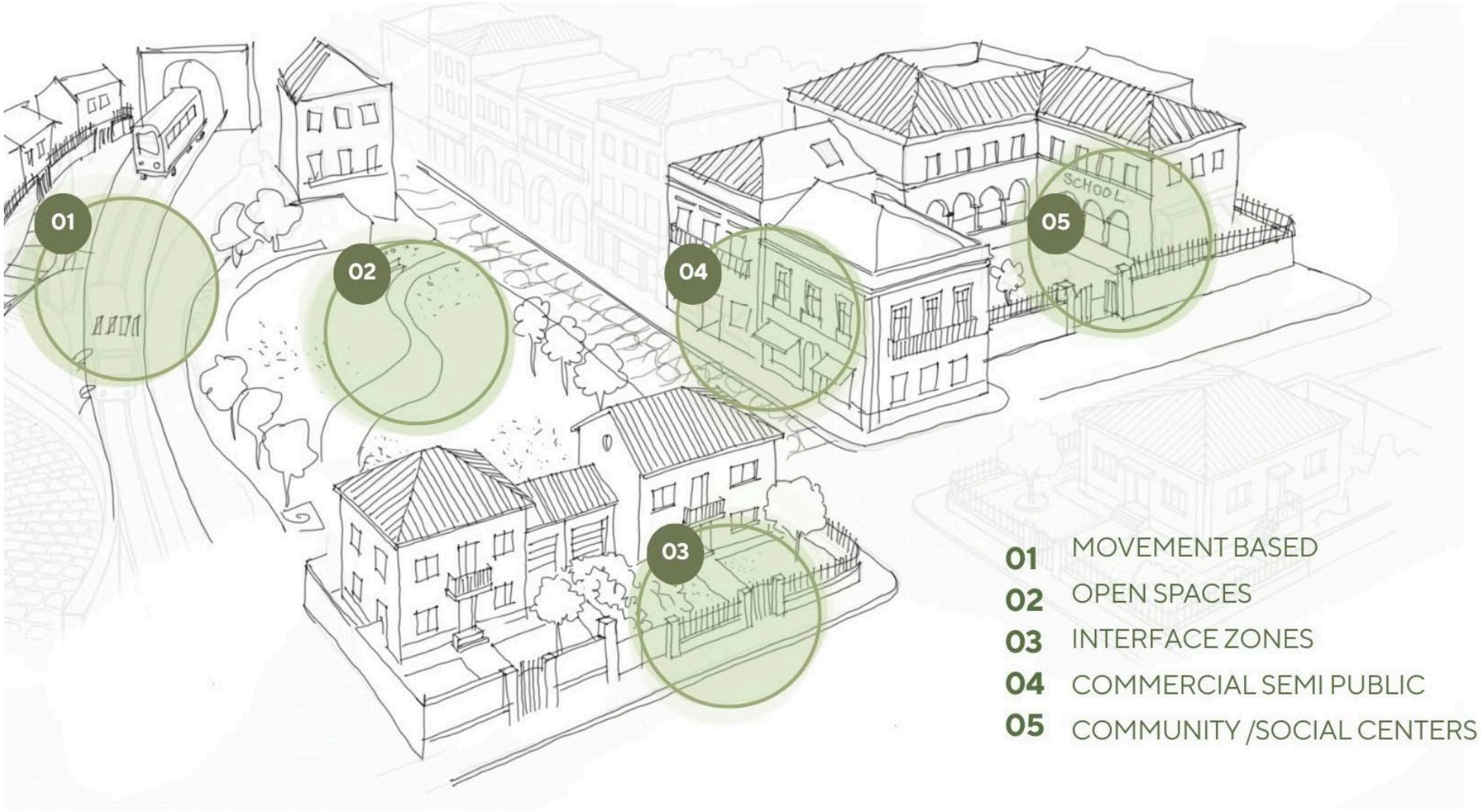
(ADAPTED)

TYPOLOGIES OF URBAN CONTACT ZONES

(INSPIRED FROM CONTEXT)

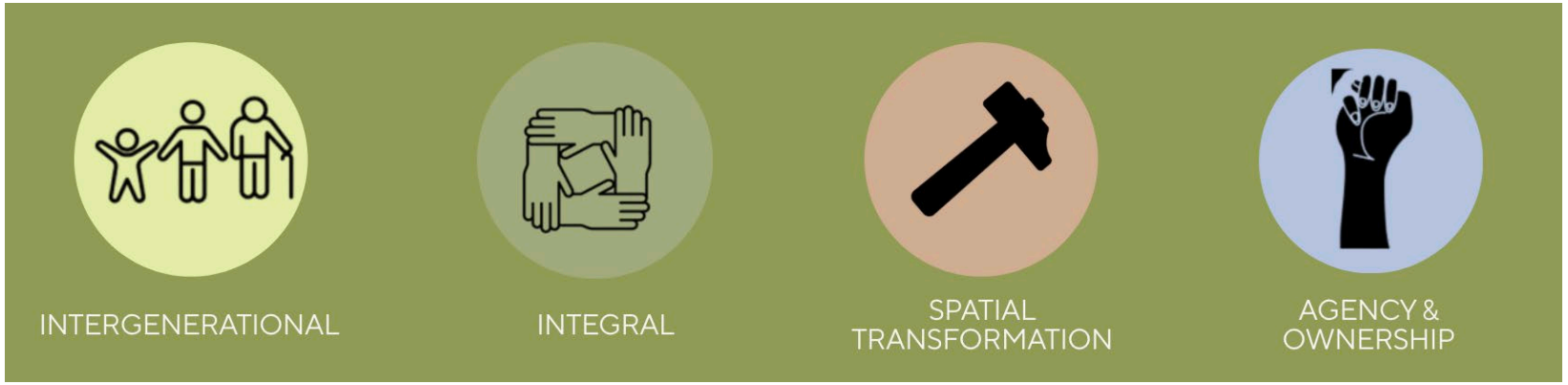
UCZ FRAMEWORK

Existing Urban Contact Zone Typologies in Grijó



Vision

Activating by enhancing or creating different urban contact zones (UCZ) to foster social interactions between different generations and social groups and incrementally giving ownership and "agency" to the people through co-creation



Proposed interventions per typology



02 OPEN SPACES

- **Shaded seating** with planting (pergola + bench)
- **Group-friendly** seating arrangements
- **Kids areas** near school-facing park areas
- **Pop-up** festival or market
- **raised wooden stage** for performances
- **Ground-based games**
- **Urban Garden on abandoned Land**



SCENARIO -01
-Enhance school waiting area

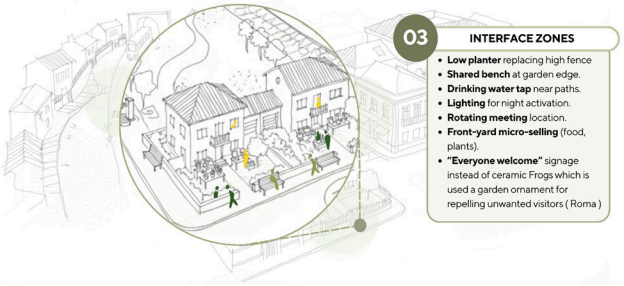


SCENARIO -02
-Create Urban Garden



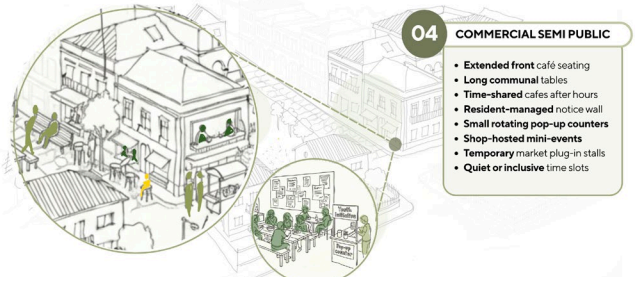
01 MOVEMEN BASED SPACES

- **Bus station : shaded benches**
- **Mobile kiosks** or food carts
- **Street book exchange box**
- **clear pedestrian lanes** with tree and street elements
- **Child friendly streets (Kidsotopia)**



03 INTERFACE ZONES

- **Low planter** replacing high fence
- **Shared bench** at garden edge.
- **Drinking water tap** near paths.
- **Lighting** for night activation.
- **Rotating meeting** location.
- **Front-yard micro-selling** (food, plants).
- **"Everyone welcome"** signage instead of ceramic Frogs which is used a garden ornament for repelling unwanted visitors (Roma)



04 COMMERCIAL SEMI PUBLIC

- **Extended front** café seating
- **Long communal** tables
- **Time-shared** cafes after hours
- **Resident-managed** notice wall
- **Small rotating pop-up counters**
- **Shop-hosted mini-events**
- **Temporary** market plug-in stalls
- **Quiet or inclusive** time slots



05 COMMUNITY/ SOCIAL CENTER

- **Flexible multi-use room**
- **Shared kitchen** for communal meals
- **Tool and equipment** library
- **Youth-led** activity room
- **Quiet room** for elders or care
- **Workshop** and skill-sharing space
- **Community notice** and sign-up wall
- **Storage** for pop-up activities
- **Local stories** recorded, shared, and displayed.

Strategic plan

	PHASE I	PHASE II	PHASE III	PHASE IV
PHASES	**GROUNDING & TRUST BUILDING** (UNDERSTAND EXISTING UCZS WITH RESIDENTS & ESTABLISH SHARED AWARENESS, TRUST, AND BASIC COLLECTIVE SKILLS)	**ACTIVATION & CO-PRODUCTION** (STRENGTHEN SOCIAL TIES THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTION IN EXISTING UCZS AND ESTABLISH WORKING GROUP STRUCTURES.)	**INSTITUTIONALIZATION & EXPANSION** (TRANSFORM THE ACTIVE GROUP INTO A FORMAL RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION CAPABLE OF PROPOSING AND MANAGING UCZS)	**REPLICABILITY & AUTONOMY** (STABILIZE SHARED PRACTICES AND GOVERNANCE SO THAT UCZS ARE REPRODUCED THROUGH EVERYDAY ROUTINES RATHER THAN PROJECTS.)
MILESTONES	Shared understanding of existing UCZs	Existing UCZs are enhanced through collective action		Shared Practices Are Sustained by the Community
	Initial agency and trust are established	Encounters become regular and self-organized		
		A proto-structure for collective organization emerges	From informal to recognized association	

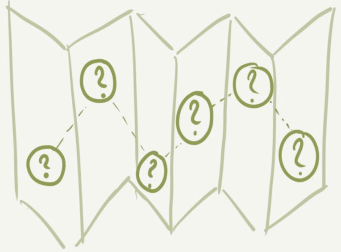
Detailed steps per phase

PHASE I

OUTREACH & INCLUSION



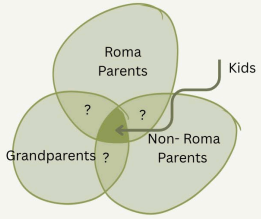
CITIZEN LED EXPORATORY WALK



CITIZEN LED EXPORATORY WALK



SOCIAL BRIDGING



PITCH IMPROVMENTS

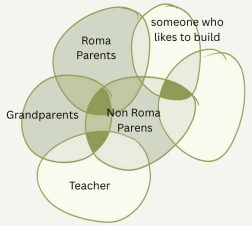


Source: Google maps

CAPACITY BUILDING/ DECISION ASSEMBLY



NEW GROUP FORMATION/ MICRO MANDATES



Micro Mandates:

- Who brings the Materials?
- Who brings some food?
- Who stays in contact with the shool

PHASE II

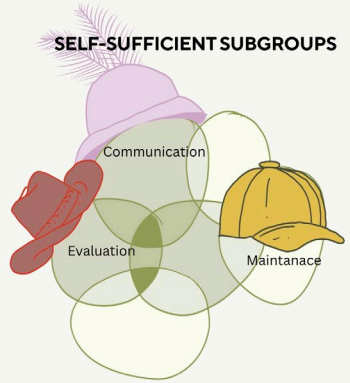
PHYSICAL & SOCIAL ENHANCEMENT OF UCZS



REGULAR ACTIVATION



SELF-SUFFICIENT SUBGROUPS



PHASE III

Creation of an UCZ

. Eg: Urban Garden



Roles along with the professional



Land ownership checking



Municipality agrees for the financial support

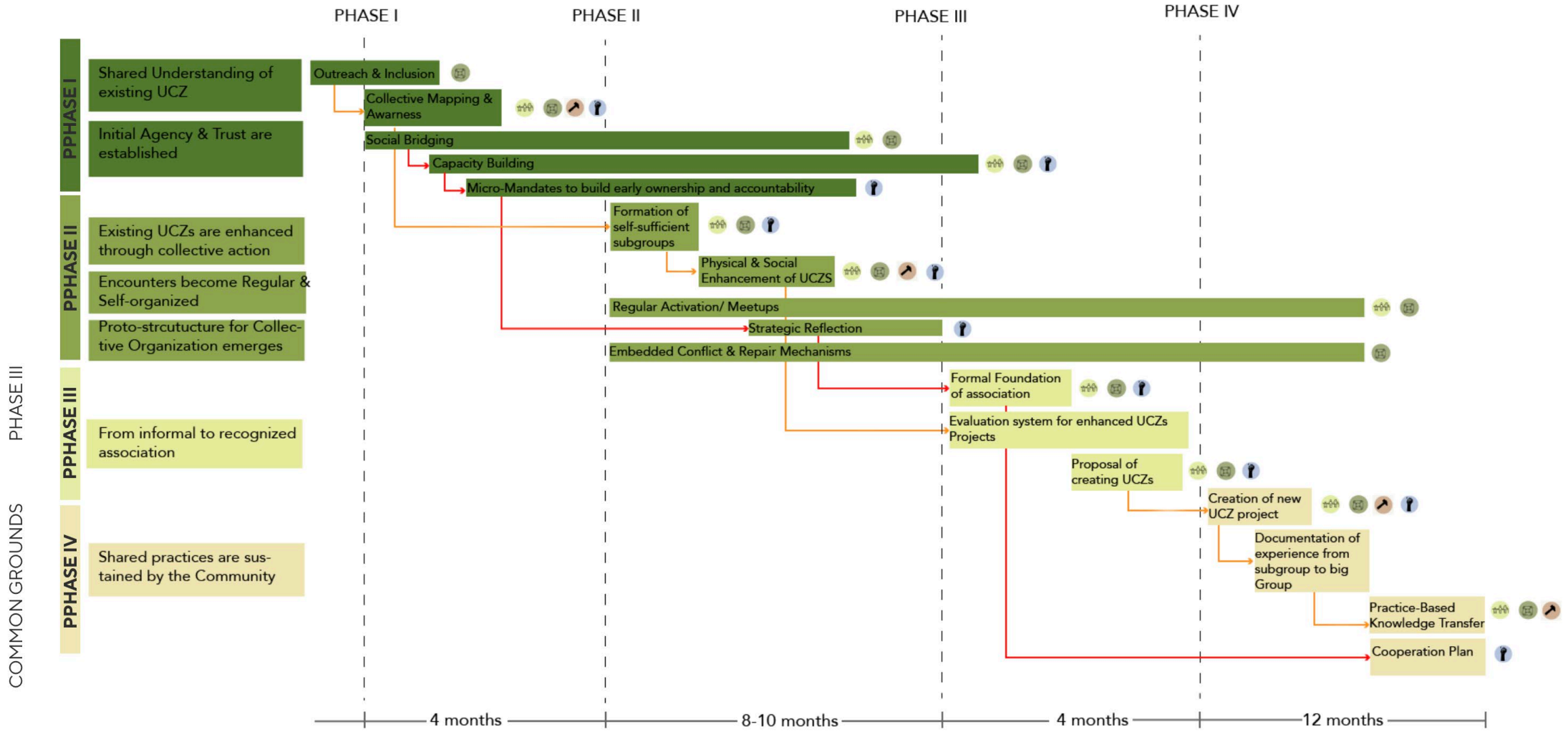


Water access



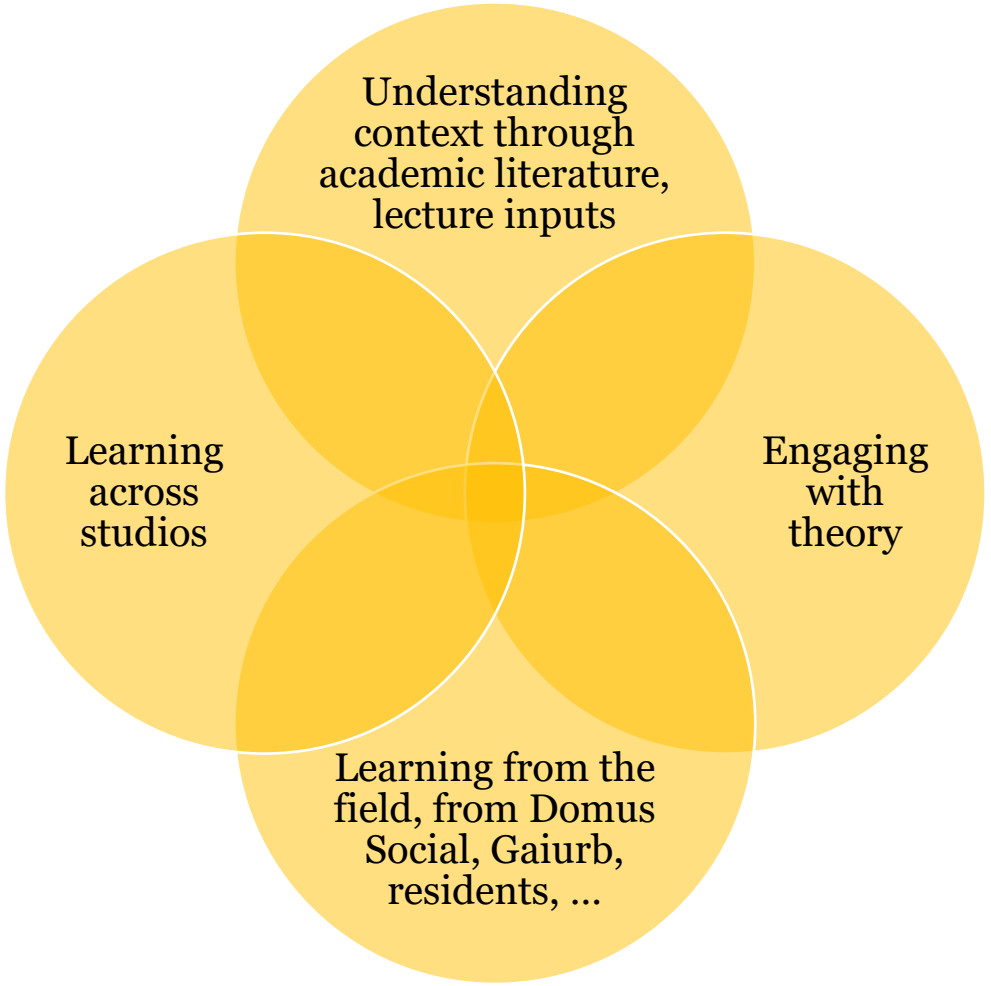
Soil fertility check

Timeline

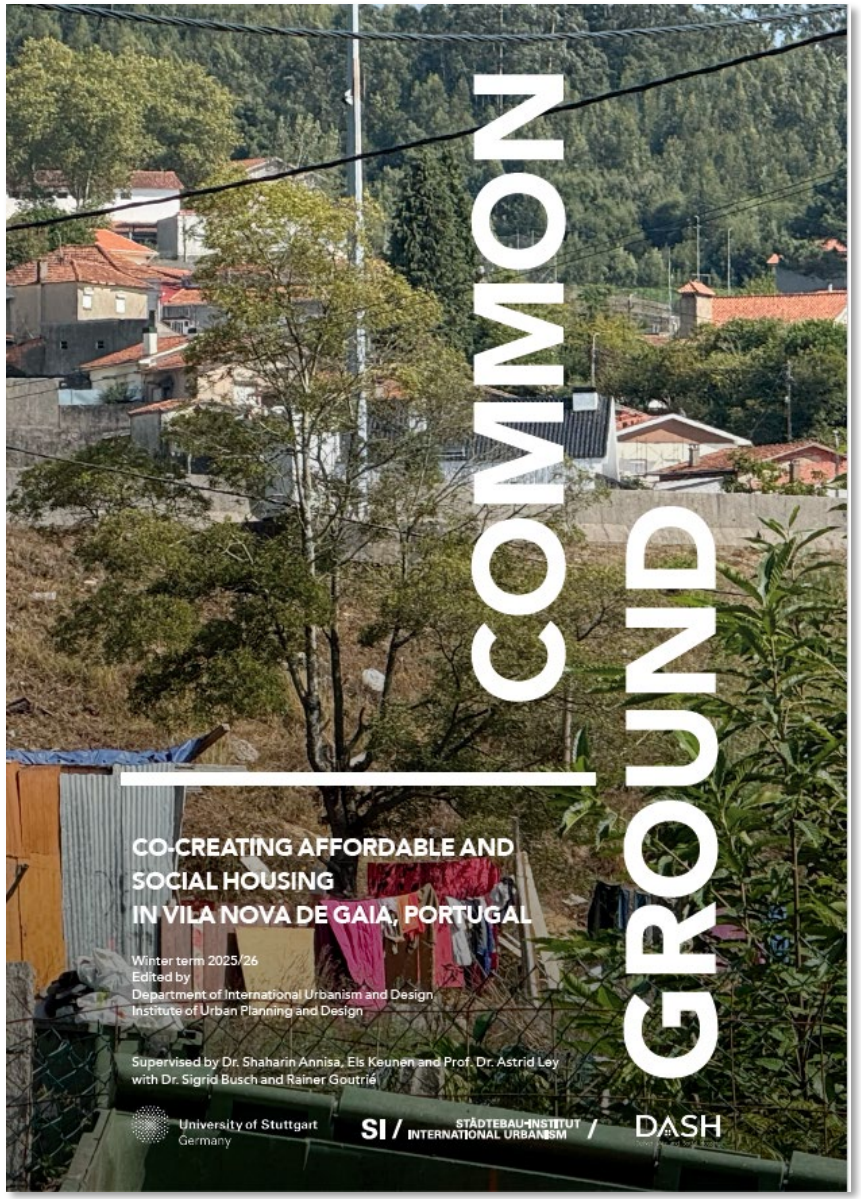

PHASE I
PHASE II
PHASE III
PHASE IV
PPHASE I
PPHASE II
PPHASE III
PPHASE IV
COMMON GROUNDS
PHASE III
Shared Understanding of existing UCZ
Initial Agency & Trust are established
Existing UCZs are enhanced through collective action
Encounters become Regular & Self-organized
Proto-strcutucture for Collec-tive Organization emerges
From informal to recognized association
Shared practices are sus-tained by the Community
Outreach & Inclusion
Collective Mapping & Awarness
Social Bridging
Capacity Building
Micro-Mandates to build early ownership and accountability
Formation of self-sufficient subgroups
Physical & Social Enhancement of UCZS
Regular Activation/ Meetups
Strategic Reflection
Embedded Conflict & Repair Mechanisms
Formal Foundation of association
Evaluation system for enhanced UCZs Projects
Proposal of creating UCZs
Creation of new UCZ project
Documentation of experience from subgroup to big Group
Practice-Based Knowledge Transfer
Cooperation Plan
4 months
8-10 months
4 months
12 months

INSIGHTS FROM THE STUDIOS

Reflections on the research and design process



Documentations of studio results





THANK YOU