

## **SOFT PROSPECT** — *Affordable futures in Klara Nova*

Located on the southern edge of Zagreb, Klara Nova stands at the intersection of rural and urban conditions. This hybrid context becomes the foundation for a model of affordable, collective, and ecologically regenerative living. The project proposes a housing system based on modulation and traditional low-tech construction, reducing costs without compromising spatial quality. All units are built in brick using familiar techniques that empower local labor and craftsmanship. Floorplans eliminate corridors, maximizing usable area in every room. Modularity enables flexibility, allowing homes to evolve with changing domestic needs over time.

Urban form is structured through an orthogonal matrix, echoing Zagreb's historical expansion, but reinterpreted to introduce permeability and spatial generosity. Rather than free-standing buildings, the housing units are arranged in paired structures: on the ground floor, each pair shares a common party wall, while on the upper level, units touch only at a single corner. This configuration combines the economic and spatial advantages of paired plots with the perceptual and environmental benefits of near-detached housing. The result is greater exposure to light and air, increased façade area, and enhanced privacy—without increasing construction costs. These pairs of parcels are always grouped two by two, with pedestrian paths running between each pair of buildings. This creates a fine-grain system of interwoven movement through the neighborhood, increasing porosity and promoting a walkable, human-scaled environment. The configuration supports social interaction while preserving moments of quiet and retreat.

Mobility is further guided by the 15-minute city principle: a dispersed network of accessible green and public spaces, each equipped for rest, play, and everyday activities. A single 15-meter-wide vehicular avenue provides primary access; all other paths are traffic-calmed and reserved for residents. Minimal paving and the avoidance of unnecessary underground infrastructure significantly reduce land consumption and construction costs. This approach frees large portions of the ground for collective use—gardens, paths, sports, and nature.

Affordability begins with the land itself. By minimizing excavation, sealing, and artificial transformation of the soil, the project both reduces costs and preserves the existing topography and vegetation. The site's spontaneous ecosystems—what Gilles Clément calls the “third landscape”—are used as a design basis. Parcels and paths are laid out to follow this terrain, which is then enhanced through planting, artificial hills, wet zones, and ponds created from excavated soil. Architecture becomes a form of environmental care. Biodiversity is not added later but embedded from the outset. Ponds, pollinator habitats, tree canopies, and natural soil zones are distributed across the site, creating a living green infrastructure. These semi-natural, thematic spaces support local species, enrich microclimates, and offer educational value. The result is a manufactured nature that affirms Zagreb's green transformation and fosters daily contact with ecological processes.

Domestic life is extended by integrating production and local economies into the urban fabric. Ground floors accommodate small commercial and workshop spaces tied to local food systems or artistic practices. These functions, rooted in rural modes of production, reactivate traditional relationships between home, land, and labor. Upstairs, housing units reinforce the vitality of the street while maintaining residential comfort and flexibility. Networks of proximity are reinforced through spatial closeness, social interaction, and cultural continuity. Public interest is served not just through housing, but through infrastructures of care, exchange, and collaboration. A productive business zone, focused on green entrepreneurship and new technologies, is complemented by multipurpose communal spaces—sites for working, learning, and gathering.

In Klara Nova, affordable futures are not abstract ambitions. They are built through simple, replicable means: efficient layouts, traditional techniques, shared resources, and sensitive land use. Together, these strategies compose a resilient urban model—adaptive, inclusive, and rooted in the landscape and lives of its inhabitants.