

3.5. Overflowing days. Flows and routes in/of the Portuguese urban culture

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Abstract

This research — beginning in 2017 — has as main objective understanding a whole set of agents/events/demonstrations/artifacts/fruitions which have been acting as producers/translators/commutators/transmitters of “new” Portuguese contemporary urban culture. They are *overflowing* artistic, social and territorial borders, which gives them uniqueness in the current processes of reconfiguration of identities. This implies an approach of a set of “actors/settings/scenes” that have been developing activities since the beginning of XXI century in the different cities of the country with particular impact at the crossroads of arts, territories (local, global and translocal) and identities, whose interventions constitute themselves as relevant cultural agents in a perspective of *glocalization*. We are considering cultural and social spaces with a local basis, which are territorially embedded and with a significant identity nature, whose processes and dynamics will provide a new dimension to explore Portuguese culture, once *overflowed* to other territories and dimensions (international, for example).

Keywords: scenes, creativity, territories, arts, translocal.

1. Background

What is Portuguese culture today? Such question is a profoundly complex one, in an ever-changing flux, and which might only merit a response through the use of an interpretative lens which mixes sociology, cultural studies and anthropology. In this project, we intend to bring to light a myriad of new agents, events, manifestations, artifacts and fruitions which have developed as producers, translators, commuters, and transmitters of contemporary Portuguese urban culture (Silva, 2017; Silva & Guerra, 2015; Silva *et al.*, 2015 and 2013). This is the vague and partial answer to the previous question, but no doubt brings us several elements to start constructing an answer — as recent researches have shown the existence of immanent structures of “actors”/“environments”/“scenes” which have developed with their activities since the beginning of the XXI century in the various cities of the country, in particular in what refers to the mix between arts, territories (local, global and translocal) and the identities in which they operate.

As intrinsically cultural as they are, cities have always served as crucial poles of creativity, innovation and artistic effervescence. Various routes have been pointed to justify that relation. First up, several economic justifications have pointed to cities as fulfilling a minimum demand (and supply) to warrant these activities (whether market mediated or not), as well as noted the existence of a critical mass which is brought together in cities through resource accumulation (economic, social, artistic, technologic). A second route to explain this has been to note that city concentration makes possible the use of economies of scale and scope to reduce costs and increase marketability, as well as develop an “atmosphere” which promotes the clusterization of such activities. One last branch of explanations point towards the specificity of lifestyles and ways of living in an urban-metropolitan environment, which leads to profound structural changes in the values and social practices of the individuals in such contexts, and which contribute to these processes of urban concentration. These include processes of individuation, liminality and greater mobility, lower social

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control barriers, and the search for distinctive logics of identity statement, which tend to be transitional, reflexive and plural. These approaches have been particularly important in Portugal since the opening up of the country to media and mass culture in the early 1980's, and have been more specifically felt in Lisbon and Porto.

In this sense, cities are centres of economic development, concentrating crucial activities of the development of complex productions which require more resources, as well as technical, technologic, professional and knowledge based means, not to mention markets and cultural services. As they concentrate social groups that are more educated and younger age groups, this tends to reinforce the cities' roles as cultural hubs, as these groups are more culturally active and dynamic. Embracing cosmopolitanism, multiple modalities of everyday life styling and the diversity of urban cultures, they lead to the production of specific demands, and feed into the circles and informal networks which characterize the worlds of more specialized cultural production and creation, whether traditional or *avant-garde*. Cities have likewise served as stages of political strategies oriented to transform culture into a decisive trump in terms of interurban competition (Throsby, 2001; Zukin, 1995).

To these general aspects one could add other factors, such as the strong territoriality of the means of providing or enjoying cultural activities, which are prone to complex structures of production and consumption based in symbolic knowledge (including here realities such as cultural and creative neighbourhoods, or other territorialized clusters of cultural activities), situations in which the "environment" effects and the lived atmospheres are often crucial to their vitality. The mechanisms of territorialisation of cultural activities have been widely debated in the more recent decades, whether in terms of concentration economies or urbanization, in terms of intelligibility of institutional logic, or even the rhetoric figure of the 'creative cities' which together point to what has been called cognitive-cultural capitalism (Becker, 2007, 1984; Bourdieu, 1996).

It is in this context that we propose a "new" approach to Portuguese cultural which stems from the transformations which have operated in the country in the last decade: (i) the valuing of initiatives which are based on relational and artistic density and which are associated with the clustering of agents in urban space; (ii) the valuing of size, seeking to foment the existence of a critical mass of cultural agents, to achieve a minimum of demand and supply of cultural forms; and (iii) the diversity and heterogeneity of the means, resources and markets in which those agents operate. All of this facilitates and empowers the processes of concentration of these activities in the urban space, allowing the agents to reduce the friction of distance and to minimize the costs of transaction, joint exploration of scale and scope economies, and maximization of positive externalities in the exploration of image and symbolic meanings of place.

It is all these aspects which lead to the crucial importance of urban environment to these activities, and which can be seen in: (i) the formal and informal trade and the way in which these are established (products, tacit knowledge, information, technologies, productive resources, etc) and the relations of reciprocity associated to it; (ii) the new possibilities and markets, which only the size, density, diversity and heterogeneity of these spaces allow (giving new experiences, greater notion of risk, etc.); (iii) the specific mechanisms of collective learning, as well as accumulation and diffusion of cultural, knowledge and innovation capital; (iv) the multiple expressions of social and relational capital, of the strategies of legitimation, reputation and the possibilities of direct contact with cultural mediators, as well as the processes of creation of specific collective identities.

2. Overall and specific goals

The core goal of this project is the explanation and understanding of a myriad of activities, agents, events, manifestations, artefacts and fruition, which have made themselves visible through networks of producers, translators, commuters and transmitters of a new contemporary Portuguese urban culture. This entails, as we have noted, an approach to a myriad of "actors"/"environments"/"scenes" which have been active since the beginning of the XXI century in several

cities of the country, specifically in the way their crossing of arts, territories and identities (Crane *et al.*, 2002). Their territorial interventions — whether local, global or translocal in scope — take on a particular importance in the promotion and publicizing of Portuguese culture (Bennett & Peterson, 2004; Chaney, 1994; Straw, 1991). As such, these actors and scenes take form in cultural and social spaces, which play identity and social roles in defining the territories and territorial aims (national or international for instance), and which open up a new flank through which to explore Portuguese culture (Jürgens, 2016).

Through this main goal, we can now suggest a series of relevant and paradigmatic cases of these new forms of urban culture dynamics: Maus Hábitos, Zé dos Bois, Jardins Efêmeros, Preguiça Magazine, Barreiro Rocks, and Laboratório das Actividades Criativas [Creative Activities Lab]. These are paradigmatic in as much as they bring together a widely distinct array of characteristics and dynamics between culture, arts, and territory, in a complex, mutating and singular way. These are not solely cultural or artistic actors, but “environments” and “scenes” which unite actors, events, manifestations, artefacts, audiences and programming. They are contemporary cultural elements of great importance, as they show that contemporary culture includes other dimensions beyond the well known and studied — that is, as cultural, artistic, symbolic and territorial/transterritorial identities. They are overflowing, as they break the standard identity, disciplinary, thematic and artistic borders that these areas impose (Costa, 2002; Fortuna & Leite, 2009; Pais, 2010).

The approach to these cases will be developed firstly taking into account the importance that territory and territoriality take on as structuring elements of action and existence in culture. This can be seen in three levels: from a locative point of view, that is, of the importance of the proximity of others (distance reduction and agglomeration); from a synergetic point of view, as it relates to being with others (joint advantages in economy and urbanization); and from a territorial point of view (recognizing the specific dynamics of territory in terms of the relations established between them) (Campbell, 2013).

A second analytical dimension is the recognition of the importance of structuring in the production of size and critical mass, relational density, heterogeneity of agents and artistic practices, importance of access to circuits of mediation and gatekeeping, importance of proximity and access to spaces of sociability and conviviality, and the functioning of an “artworld”, as well as the crucial reticular nature of agents and arts practices. It will be likewise interesting to identify some crucial aspects of the functioning of the respective artworlds, simultaneous to agglomeration, and which have been noted for their structuring of spatial organization: on the one side, the importance of “per project” work, intermittent, without formal ties, and its impacts on the requirements of territorial agglomeration; on the other, the dissolution of the boundaries of work/leisure, creation/fruition, production/consumption, life/anesthetization and its spatial implications (Karpic, 2007; Thornton, 2009; Santos, 1988).

On a third level, it matters to understand the specific functions of each case. It is important to identify and develop a cartography of the functions which will take place in each case: spaces of transmission, formal and informal, information (gathering and providing of information over activities, work opportunities, competence enhancement, etc); spaces of experimentation and exploration of new possibilities of creation/production/consumption/fruition; spaces of construction of new artistic reputation; spaces of socialization, conviviality and sociability; spaces of *networking* and integration into certain artworlds; spaces of collective accumulation of knowledge; spaces of construction of a common identity and self-acknowledgement. The symbolic questions of place identification of each space in the matters of reputation are particularly interesting — and it should provide a great challenge to note whether the reputation of a given space derives from its participants or vice-versa. In this we will attempt to produce a cartographic image of each of these symbolic spaces of the city. In an interrelated way, it matters to understand if these cases have contributed to the reconfiguration of identities, as we believe that artefacts and urban forms which create meaning, as much as they relate to the expression and celebration of identity and the values of a given place (Guerra, 2013, 2015).

3. Methodology, evaluation indicators and results to be achieved

The project will systematically address six paradigmatic cases of “new” Portuguese culture transshipment (Burawoy, 2000): Zé dos Bois Gallery, the space Maus Hábitos, Barreiro Rocks and Jardins Efémeros festivals, Preguiça Magazine and the Laboratório de Actividades Criativas association.

The *Zé dos Bois (ZDB)* gallery in Lisbon is an initiative of a group of artists, as a way to nourish a place where they could produce and disseminate their work, a possibility which otherwise would not exist. It is self-defined as a structure of experimentation and exploration, a multidisciplinary space open to different artistic manifestations (editing, architecture, dance, films, visual arts, jewellery).

As a locus of experimentation and research, with a performance spectrum quite wide and always looking for an intersection of different artistic languages, the activities of the ZDB are not limited — as the gallery name could wrongly suggest — the mere display of objects. In addition to a regular program of exhibitions of different artistic expressions (most recently with a strong focus in the visual arts), which “escape” to the institutional circuit and commercial art galleries, the ZDB is also known and recognized by the experimental music concerts, improvised and electronic that, once again, are not easily found in large auditoriums or large theaters in the capital Lisbon. In parallel, since 2001, ZDB also promotes annual residencies for artists that have contribute to transform it in a space of content creation, experimentation and reflection, especially in the field of visual arts. With regard to music, the ZDB has been also working as an experimental place for Portuguese bands like Cool Hipnoise, Space Boys, Los Tomatos, Terrakota, Manta Rota, Dead Combo and Loosers. There is still place for the theatre, dance and other performances as well as cinema — all imbued with an alternative logical. It is also important to note the specific interventions of the ZDB — collective authorship and those which are generally situated between performance and installation — and also the continual educational services, that are targeted every for children (800 every year), with the main objective to teach them to read, to interpret and to development a critical perspective on contemporary art.

Maus Hábitos is a space guided by the modernity and by the desire to introduce cosmopolitanism in the city of Porto, through their cultural promotion. Since discovered by its director, in 1999, the guiding objective of its action is to transform this place in an artistic creation space, open to different forms of art, and able to cast culturally the city.



Figure 1: Zé dos Bois.

Source: Retrieved from www.zedosbois.org.



Figure 2: Maus Hábitos.

Source: Retrieved from www.maushabitos.com.

Mostly, the primary aim of this challenge was precisely to provide a place for artistic projects that had no place in other contexts and to spread at the same time the concept of recycling. It is therefore necessary to note the importance of the visual arts, photography, visual and performing arts, that was most felt at the beginning, but now continues to fulfill the Maus Hábitos' agenda in order to promote new national and international artists, as well as partnerships and exchanges between them. Therefore, most of the divisions of this "house" are occupied by temporary exhibitions. It is also important to underline the training aspect of space, where they have on a regular basis been held several workshops relating to different artistic areas.

Leiria's *Preguiça Magazine* is much more than a simple blog. It is an informational and relational convergence of urban culture space located in this city, but also now in Coimbra and Marinha Grande, and with the desire to develop a national and transnational scope. This is not only an informative space, but space of opinion and experience about the Portuguese urban culture in its global aspect.

It is not a magazine limited to music, but it also focus the consecrated and emerging arts from all over the national and international territory. It is a magazine that converts itself into a "scene" when it organizes several events as concerts, exhibitions, DJ sets, alternative fairs and book launches. It has markedly virtual existence, but also real in the context of these events.

Held in the city of Barreiro since 2000, *Barreiro Rocks* festival is considered one of the most charismatic festivals in Europe. The public and critics are unanimous to refer to an "unique environment", the quality of the program and the involvement of the local community and musicians as differentiating factors of this event. It results of sociability, conviviality and the association of a young people group around the Hey Pachuco Association. It is a festival that operates in various artistic disciplines (music, films, literature, exhibitions...) and in recent years has been nominated for several categories of Europe for Festivals, Festivals for Europe and Portugal Festival Awards.



Figure 3: Preguiça Magazine.

Source: Retrieved from preguicamagazine.com.



Figure 4: Barreiro Rocks.

Source: Retrieved from <https://pt-pt.facebook.com/barreiorocks/>.

The Municipality of Barreiro supports Barreiro Rocks and it is programmed and produced by *Hey, Pachuco!* Cultural association. At present, Barreiro Rocks is much more than a festival, it is a programming and cultural and artistic space production in Barreiro that involves continuous programming in different spaces from the musical, photographic, videographer points of view. It is also synonymous of cultural intervention and artistic residency, recording studios, and of a “scene”: the Barreiro one.

The *Jardins Efêmeros* festival exists since 2011 and happens in the historical centre of the city of Vies in the month of July. It brings together a focused programming and production in various artistic fields from the sound, dance, theatre, cinema, visual arts and architecture. It is assumed as a “multidisciplinary cultural activities, with a strong experimental and contemporary language” program.

Pausa Possível, a non-profit association, is behind this; its purposes are: (i) to development activities, whether practical or theoretical, in a sense of artistic and cultural interdisciplinary sharing, within regional, national and international contexts; (ii) to development programming, focusing on coordination of different areas at the level of creation, dissemination and artistic and/or academic research; (iii) to create and to disseminate programs and/or activities to promote education and social cohesion; (iv) to development programs and/or activities aimed to the rehabilitation of urban areas and the preservation of identity and to the appreciation of the tangible and intangible heritage.



Figure 5: Jardins Efêmeros.

Source: Retrieved from jardinesfemeros.pt.



Figure 6: LAC — Laboratório de Actividades Criativas.

Source: Retrieved from www.lac.org.pt.

Since 2001, LAC has become an artistic host structure — unique in the western Algarve, which annually allows hosting approximately 20 individual and collective projects, in areas as diverse as music, painting, sculpture, and/or other alternative projects of non-commercial nature. At the same time, LAC promotes exhibitions, performances, concerts in order to promote the resident artists, but also as a result of the partnerships with different entities. At the level of training, it develops annual courses with dance activities, Artistic Expression, Creative Writing and it promotes workshops and technical workshops in various artistic fields. LAC promotes research within the artistic fields, providing access to the Documentation Center that is available in its installations.

Thus, this project will approach systematically paradigmatic cases of “new” Portuguese culture transshipment. The methodological approach of these cases is of an intensive nature using procedures that enable the convergence of specific analyses (programming, spaces, the artistic fields, creators of the works, critics, public) for the analysis of Portuguese culture contemporary through the prism of overflowing character identities, arts and territories (Adorno, 2003; DeNora, 2011; Jameson, 1991; Jauss, 1990).

From the in-depth study of these cases, including the analysis of its history, development of processes and evolution, territorial and social interconnections processes (exploitation of their capital and networks in which they operate), their agendas (actions, interventions, territoriality levels, etc.), it is intended to understand how they constitute in cultural agents in a given territory (and with a relevant nature identity) and implementing local borders and gain prominence in the national and international “radar” (Margolis & Pauwels, 2011; Melo, 1994).

The work developed implies in the activation of a plurality of techniques of sociological research towards all programming developed dynamics, co-production, production, training and enjoyment developed during the project implementation year: the ethnographic direct observation, analysis and research documentary (this reported to the last five years of activity), the collection of images and sounds, conducting in-depth interviews, mapping and network analysis, etc. This work will provide diachronic and synchronic information about the programming, thematic, networks of actors and partnerships, relational capital, spaces and territories, the methodologies, the logics of communication, the statement strategies, scope and reputation, and identities and fruitions inherent in each case under consideration.

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