Turning life into art and art into a way of life. A cross-country perspective about art-based research, critical pedagogy, and social intervention^

Sofia Sousa*, Tommaso Farina**, Paula Guerra***

Abstract

This article is the result of a partnership and disciplinary crossing, directed towards social intervention through the arts. In this sense, we used a multi-sited ethnography (Barbosa et al., 2020), i.e., we focused on the study of two distinct empirical cases, one in Portugal and the other in Italy, in order to understand and emphasize how sociology and critical pedagogy can be complemented with artistic practices, more specifically with the use, application and analysis of art-based research, thus promoting more effective means of intervention and perception of the social reality lived and experienced by different social actors, but also by the researchers. For the Portuguese case the initiative "The Neighbourhood is Ours!" will be presented, and for the Italian context the project "Alice In Wonder Wall", both targeted at young people from different backgrounds and with different experiences.

Keywords: art-based research, sociology, critical pedagogies, youth, social intervention

---

* Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Porto (FLUP); Institute of Sociology, University of Porto (IS-UP). E-mail: sofiaarsousa22@gmail.com.

** Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism (SFBCT), University of Macerata. E-mail: t.farina@unimc.it.

*** Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Porto (FLUP); Institute of Sociology, University of Porto (IS-UP); Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research (GSCR), Australia. E-mail: pguerra@letras.up.pt.

1. Art-based research and critical pedagogies. An overview about the Portuguese and Italian case studies

How do critical pedagogy and sociology connect? This was the question that guided the writing of this article. To offer an answer, it is important to highlight the scope of this article. Thus, we propose the crossing of two European perspectives from the Global North: the Portuguese and the Italian, on the benefits, advantages, consequences, and difficulties of using artistic practices, as a means of inclusion and social intervention, but also as a tool for scientific research. Using a qualitative methodology, we'll present, discuss and analyse two case studies: 1) the Workshop "The Neighbourhood is Ours!"[1], a set of artistic initiatives carried out between May and June 2021, in Portugal, among young people not working, not studying or not following an education course (NEEF/NEET), living in one of the most disadvantaged and stigmatized social neighbourhoods in the northern area of the country, namely the Cerco do Porto neighbourhood; 2) a street-art/graffiti project planned as a socio-educational intervention and urban co-design social experiments, which took place in the metropolitan area of Rome, in 2015. The project, named "Alice In Wonder Wall"[2] involved a group of 20 students from different classes of the "Gandhi" Comprehensive Institute, in the marginalized San Basilio district of Rome.

Increasing importance has been given to the incorporation of artistic practices as a methodology, which is why Fisher and Phelps (2006) consider that artistic practices can be understood as an essential vehicle in the emerging dynamics of action research. At the same time, art-based research is also a promoter of civic involvement; a symbol of active citizenship (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). Thinking about art-based research and art-based education, we agree with Carvalho (2017), when the author states that civic participation cannot only be theoretically envisaged, i.e., these ways of participation should be analysed from activities, behaviours and initiatives carried out in geographical – and sometimes digital – contexts, taking communities as a starting point. Furthermore, in the scope of this article, we venture to assert that art-based research is a means of improving citizenship practices, but also a vehicle for fostering community links which, in turn, potentiate discussions and reflections around specific social problems.

---

[1] This workshop, as part of the CANVAS project - Towards Safer and Attractive Cities: Crime and Violence Prevention through Smart Planning and Artistic Resistance, was supported by the European Regional Development Fund (FEDER), through the Programme COMPETE 2020 and received project funding POCI-01-0145-FEDER-030748.

[2] This urban co-design social experiment has been planned and developed by the Cultural Association W.A.L.L.S., Rome, Italy, in collaboration with Cooperativa Sociale Integrata A.r.l. Ampio and Cooperativa Sociale Eureka Onlus.

For Murdoch III et al. (2016) the term art-based research is replaced by art-led development; a replacement that comes a belief that the arts have a determining role in community development, in the sense that they facilitate social interactions, collective action and strengthen of social ties. Thus – and bearing in mind our case studies – we considered it pertinent to mention that art-led development policies are motivated by a variety of approaches and factors, the most common of which concerns community development, including apprenticeships and informal forms of education. The community development perspective adopts an approach that assume that the arts are a factor in the creation of social benefits, but also as a promoter of equitable development. The Workshop "The Neighbourhood is Ours!", carried out by the Portuguese researchers, intended to go further, and involve residents in their communities, but also to promote the involvement of those who were external to the community, since the principle was that the capacity for collective action is built together, namely from co-creation processes (Androutsos and Brinia, 2019).

For Engelchin et al. (2019), the development of research that delves into the ways in which the arts can be used – within formal and informal education – still merits further exploration, and it is this gap that we have sought to address. Further, the authors argue that the main gap focuses on the study of co-production and co-creation processes, social in nature. The authors – and we – start from the idea that art as a subject of analysis, can be understood as a method of institutionalized of the same, affirming it as a vehicle of personal and collective communication, given that it allows and institute the usage of symbols, images, metaphors, experiences, and feelings as an indirect expression of a social reality (Foster, 2007). By referring to the potentialities of art-based research, we want to demonstrate the ways in which – in our case studies – art (image, music, performance, among others), was detached from static and voiceless visions. We wanted to show the various notions and perspectives related to the act of *being with art* (Thomson and Davies, 2019). In this way, we collate that art has direct impacts on the bodies and acts of social agents, given that we feel before we think and reflect on what we are seeing, so at this level, a comparison can be established with music, which, like painting or graffiti (for example), first causes sensations and then allows thought or reflections, that is, it promotes community and civic involvement, within a state of affectivity.

Thinking of the Portuguese context, Cerco do Porto neighbourhood was inaugurated in the 1960s and since then it has been one of the largest social

housing districts in the city of Porto, more precisely in the parish of Campanhã[3]. In fact, it is currently one of the most populated. Initially, it was built to meet the housing needs of the city, however, it quickly became a geographical and social space marked by uncertainty, stigma, precariousness, crime, and social exclusion (Sousa, 2018; Guerra, 2002). In that sense, from a sociological point of view, we believe that this research – namely the "Neighbourhood is Ours!" Workshop – is based on the use of expressive, artistic, and interactive processes as an integral part of the research. Besides, from the perspective of social pedagogy, a further reflection about art-based methodologies and public spaces is needed. Mostly at this time, where the spread of SARS-CoV-2 has inevitably weakened the social and relational dimension. The result of this weakening, which above all concerns children and adolescents, who lived through the impossibility to deal with recreational play (Wulf, 2014; Farina, 2020) during lockdown, inevitably also reflects on the area. This, in fact due to the forced stop on production activities, including cultural entertainment and live shows, has been deprived not only of spaces and structures to fill, but also of content with which to enliven the structures themselves, of generous people and educators (Deluigi, 2010). On this subject, in an article published by the *FNAS*, the Italian Federation of Street Artists it reads:

At this (historic) time, artists and street entertainers are bearers of experience and expertise that the indoor sector has not refined in the same way. To those who show the urgency to "get outside", generating possible proposals to give new impetus to culture, we ask that they do not forget that professionals who are expert in "outside" and its dynamics are out there and always have been, and that they can help to find solutions to take us where we need to be. There is knowledge that has often not been considered as "high" compared to traditional places, but which is "extremely high" in this regard (Boron G., Barnaba M., Lanciotti A., Vecchio B. and Toso F., (2020, pp. 2-3).

It is perhaps important now to turn to these artists, these workers, and professionals, for a comparison on practices. It is time to be pragmatic. We need to speak to people, to bring them back, together, to find one another. These artists do not speak to critics or to the *élite*. They speak to families, workers, shopkeepers, the homeless; they speak to priests, addicts, old people, politicians, immigrants, local tourist boards, associations, volunteers, and passers-by. These are their public. These are their customers. Because these artists do something simple: they talk to people. From here, an appeal to political decision-makers not to underestimate, in the lengthy recovery process

---

[3] The Campanhã valley is in the easternmost part of the city of Porto. According to Paula Guerra (2002), this is one of the most disadvantaged parishes in the municipality of Porto, marked by high levels of poverty and other various social problems.

that awaits us, the importance of the arts and culture, including events with performing arts, and not to fall into the trap of relegating them to the "suspended time" (Corsi, 2020) where the indignity to our socialisation: conditioned, penalised, rewritten, as a haven for affective and cognitive areas and their original context, is the meta-question that represents the suspension of all possible suspensions (Corsi, Susca and Farina, 2020). On the contrary, following a dialectic approach between theory and practice, which forms the fundamental regulatory criterion for pedagogical epistemology and educational work "in the field" (Baldacci and Colicchi, 2016), it is considered essential to identify norms and procedures that will guarantee a safe, serene performance of the above relational occasions, since reducing communities to a simple container of places, without cultivating a relational and emotional dimension means de-centering the role of people and reinforcing their real need for interaction (Paroni, 2004). At the same time, it is important to mention that art-based research – like art-based education – focuses mainly on the research process, and not so much on the product, thus there is a need for constant reflexivity. For Seregina (2019), associated with art-based research are visual media as an alternative source of research, such as the use of photographs and illustration. Although sociologists already have a tradition of using visual methods (photovoice, ethnography, among others), it is important to question why it is only now that these methods are reaching a wider audience (Rose, 2014): one of the explanations refers to the use of technologies in an intensified way. At the same time, the concept of visual culture has also been gaining interest over the years – and artivist practices – fostering citizenship and intervention in youth – due to the potential of digital technologies in relation to visual methods – gains strength. Nevertheless, in an age in which the diffusion and pervasiveness of new media also involves the weakest, poorest and least literate social classes, it is urgent to reflect not only on the potential of digital technologies but also on the dangers that lie behind an incorrect use of the same. In this sense, the lesson of Paulo Freire (1968) is exemplary and must not be forgotten, but rather, reread in the light of the characteristics of contemporary society. In fact, it recalls that democracy and equality are not innate in man but it is the fruit of education, and it is necessary to start with the oppressed and the weakest, assisting them first of all in understanding their rights and in the emergency of fighting to conquer them (Freire, 2017). The Brazilian pedagogist, at the end of the 1960s, conceived the educational process as an act of continuous deposit of contents, bringing it back to what he himself defined a "banking" conception of education, whose main concern was to avoid restlessness, curbing impatience, mystifying reality, avoiding the unveiling of the world to adapt man (Ibid.). Anyone can draw a parallel thinking at what's happening today with the use of new media, adding, however, a further level of

complexity. In fact, the information to which we all have access every day is potentially infinite, as well as the information we receive and which we must necessarily filter, select, metabolize. An enormous challenge, especially for those who are not precociously educated in the critical reading of media-mediated contents and messages. So, once again, the risk is that, where there is educational poverty, young people, hit by a wave of "fragments of the world", transform those same fragments into contents of consciousness.

2. Methods

Firstly, we should mention that this article is in line with the exercise of a multi-sited ethnography (Barbosa et al., 2020) – Portugal and Italy – whose objective is related to the understanding of the dynamics of institutional and spatial-temporal intervention of two populations, and their ways of appropriation and signification of territories, through the arts. Thus, our objectives are twofold: firstly, we want to assess how art – or community artistic practices – can serve the social sciences, in the sense that they can be understood as a methodology, a tool, a resource and an output and, on the other hand, we intend to investigate how the arts, in two geographical, historical and social contexts, assume an important role in the design of intervention strategies for youth, and in plans for promoting social inclusion. In the following section, we will present and reflect upon our case studies (Creswell et al., 2007).

Focusing on the "Neighbourhood is Ours!" Workshop, we can immediately ascertain that it was based on the use of a qualitative methodology, based on a logic of action-research and prevention-action. The focus of this Workshop was on the use of art-based research to reduce/institute the feelings of insecurity related to the Cerco do Porto neighbourhood and to break the stigma associated to NEET youngsters. Authors such as Avison et al. (2007), state that action research institute collaboration between researchers and the object of study. In fact, we, as researchers, wanted to be an active part in promoting structural changes, starting from what Clark (1972) calls the communities' stock of knowledge. Art-based research, in this context, emerged as the means through which it became possible to promote the intersection between interpersonal and social levels of inclusion (Guerra and Sousa, forthcoming).

Within the Workshop, artistic initiatives related to music, graffiti and photography were carried out, and two participative milestones were also achieved. The first was the visit of the research team to the neighbourhood, and the second was the final presentation session of the results of the initiatives by these youngsters at the University. Perhaps this second milestone was the most relevant since that for those youngsters it was their first contact with a

university and with the academic environment. The initiatives began in May 2021, and occur weekly, under the format of artistic residencies. Linking our discourse with the action research, it is important to mention that the activities, the artistic contents, the schedule, and other formal and informal aspects were established, not in a bottom-up logic, but side-ways. Initially, our goal was to work only with NEET youngsters from Cerco do Porto neighbourhood, however, we soon realized if our goal was to counteract the stigmatization, as well as counter the stereotypes regarding this space as being unsafe, we should open the initiatives to everyone who was interested in participating. Besides working with youngsters from the Cerco neighbourhood, we counted on the participation of young people institutionalized in a youth centre, because one of our guest artistic mentors [4] for the cypher workshop, worked in that centre. Thus, during the initiatives – which ended in June 2021 – we worked with 15 young NEETs aged between 14 and 22 from Portugal, Brazil, Sudan, Morocco, Angola, and Colombia, thus creating a multicultural dynamic that would have been difficult to achieve if we had limited ourselves to young residents of the Cerco do Porto neighbourhood. In the following section of this article, we will present one of the initiatives carried out: the showcase of the OUPA! Group, held during the Workshop, which was based on a community mini-concert organized in a logic of co-creation-, held at the OUPA! Association, in the Cerco do Porto neighbourhood, and directed to the young people who participated in the initiatives, but also to other youngsters from the neighbourhood, with the intention of revealing the power of music as a form of resistance (Guerra, 2020a) and of social intervention. Thus, we propose a content analysis (Bardin, 1977) of the lyrics of the songs written by the young mentors of the OUPA! Group, because we believe that music can be a pedagogical weapon (Guerra, 2020b), as well as assume themselves as engines of resistance, contestation, and collective affirmation. What we intend to assess is that art – in this case music – can (and should) be seen as a fundamental element for the pursuit of research in sociology and critical pedagogy.

According to Richard Schechner (2014), the practice of performance art and the theories of performativity are closely related. Many performance artists work solo, conflating the artist and the artwork. The solo performance is a "one and only", the artist – sometimes naked literally as well as figuratively – is an "original," both creator and object created. One of the recurring themes/actions in performance art is the construction of identity. The question performance art

---

[4] We speak about Daniel Figueiredo, also known by his artistic name $tag One, a rapper from the Cabanas neighbourhood who already had a close relationship with the members of the OUPA! Cerco association. $tag is known for his music directed towards the community, the neighbourhood and young people. More information at: https://www.instagram.com/stagone4435/.

often asks, sometimes answered, sometimes left hanging, is, "Who is this person doing these actions?" (pp. 158-162). Performance art evolved to some degree from painting. Therefore, unlike theatre, dance, and music, much performance art was and is the work of individual artists using their own selves – bodies, psyches, notebooks, experiences – as material. Referring to streets, urban-metropolitan or unstructured environments, today street artist converge in participatory planning ideas and projects.

The elaboration of such projects is often done with the equal involvement of users or actors, through spaces and moments of planning, with the technical and/or administrative persons of the public administrations. The definition can be traced back to the English word *partnership*, borrowed from the political and social sciences of the Anglo-Saxon school. The aim of the collaboration between the social actors is the pursuit of a social objective, which has positive repercussions on the local community. According to Raymond Lorenzo (1998), participatory planning is an educational process. Making different people work together allows, for mutual knowledge, the understanding of the different problems. Everything contributes to the growth of the sense of belonging to a local community.

A form of participatory planning that can be considered also a form of contemporary art is the co-design social experiments' perspective. With the aim of combining theoretical research and practical applications, some (not many) work groups in this scientific sector have been able to take a strongly pedagogical stance, as shown by the experience begun in the large district of San Basilio, in Rome. The adopted research methodology consists of the participation of urban planners, engineers, anthropologists, and sociologists in a work group, and integrates studies which "borrow" (and therefore, perhaps not using them in a totally orthodox manner) approaches from sociology and anthropology (e.g., the use of life stories and in-depth interviews, work in the field, participating observation, research-action) and it integrates them with traditional or innovative methods that investigate spaces (Cellamare, 2011). This multidisciplinary approach is used to strengthen the wealth represented by the existing network of institutions and local stakeholders; the aim is to create a common outlook and to share means and methods, respecting the particularities of each. Particular attention will be paid to listening to people, not just as "recipients" of a service, but as stakeholders in planned and activated initiatives, with an eye to a positive re-appropriation of the area, and the good use and care of same.

3. Surrounded by art: music as an epitome to the resistance of contemporary youth

Since the 1990s this social neighbourhood has been the target of several and

diversified urban and political interventions [5], however, none of those had significant long-term effects. Historically, the initiatives of political and social intervention carried out for this territory have only focused on architectural aspects, thus leaving aside the populations, especially the younger ones. Years later, in 2013, a political initiative emerged with the intention of breaking with this history of interventions, we talked about the "Cultura em Expansão" Programme[6], an initiative that arose with the purpose of promoting intervention and social inclusion through the arts. This programme – an initiative of the Porto City Council – was born at a time when, in Portugal, cultural policies were extremely valued. In addition to promoting social inclusion, the programme aimed to provide a cultural offer throughout the city, from urban centres to the peripheries, as was the case of the Cerco do Porto neighbourhood. In 2015, the OUPA! project was created and included in the "Cultura em Expansão" Programme, with the objective of reconciling the young NEEF[7] (Ferreira et al., 2017) with arts. Since then, these youngsters who have been part of OUPA![8] never abandoned music again; and music has never left them, in fact, it has become their main vehicle of performance within the community, serving to enhance the neighbourhood and its young people, countering the stigmas and prejudices imposed on them. In fact, at the end of the programme, these youngsters kept the OUPA! activities going, having opened an Association that functions as a community studio for young people and, what's more, these young people were our partners in the planning, organisation, dissemination, and execution of the artistic initiatives of the "The Neighbourhood is Ours!" Workshop.

Nielson (2011) states that hip-hop, more specifically rap, became – since its emergence – the anthem of youth resistance, and of ethnic, disadvantaged, and stigmatised populations. Although this assertion is made in relation to the North American context, Portugal does not escape this characterisation. In fact,

---

[5] The main urban intervention plan that can be highlighted is URBAN, a plan of improvements, directed to the Campanhã Valley. This plan was an initiative carried out by the European Commission and was based on a series of objectives and action axes, among which we highlight local dynamisation, the dynamisation of multipurpose and innovative equipment, urban and environmental requalification and management, communication, and local visibility.

[6] Available at: https://www.culturaemexpansao.pt/.

[7] The NEEF concept is specific to Portugal and refers to young people who are neither in the labor market nor in the formal education system.

[8] The OUPA! group and is composed of several young NEET artists. Currently, the group is a reference in the scope of artistic-community interventions in Campanhã and Porto. More information available at: https://www.facebook.com/oupacerco.

groups such as the Dealema[9] or Mind Da Gap[10] marked the younger generations of the 1990s, putting Porto rap on the map, while tackling themes such as the stigma attached to social neighbourhoods, juvenile delinquency, political, economic and social issues or police violence. Since the 1990s, various critics have dubbed rap a 'resistance culture', as an expression and artistic practice that unveiled the enormous potential for music to assume itself as a language of liberation (Rose, 1994). Inevitably, over time, rap came to be seen as a form of denunciation social exclusion and stigma; it came to epitomise the narration of young people's ways of life in social neighbourhoods. However, as rap asserted itself as an oppositional culture (Martinez, 1997), its critical, contestatory and pedagogical capacity was lost in a haze of stigmas and labels, enhanced by the media. Thus, issues such as delinquency, violence, criminality, and vandalism, became the touchstones in relation to hip-hop culture, in general, and in relation to rap, in specific. Despite the veracity of the 'social criminalisation' of rap – mainly when done in relation to social neighbourhoods – what is certain is that it never stopped resisting and reinventing itself and, currently, continues to be the epitome of youth resistance (Ren and Feixa, 2021). In fact, we even ventured to state that since the 1990s, social institutions have realised the potential of rap as a form of social intervention.

Focusing on our object of study – the OUPA! Cerco project/artistic group- we can ascertain that throughout the various conversations we had with its members, it became clear that these youngsters are aware that they do not have the same educational, work and life opportunities as youngsters who do not live in social neighbourhoods. For the members of OUPA! and especially for Ricardo[11] – the group representative – from early on, rap assumed itself as a

---

[9] Group that represents the hip-hop from Porto since 1996, which makes them one of the oldest Portuguese hip-hop groups. They started with the fusion of 2 projects Factor X (Mundo and Dj Guze) and Fullashit (Fuse and Expeão), however they met the "5th element" Maze, and all together they formed Dealema which has been active for 20 years with the same line-up. More information at: https://www.dealema.pt/biografia/.

[10] They were a hip-hop group from the city of Porto, made up of reference names such as Ace and Presto and Serial (producer). They began in 1993, still as Da Wreckas. In 1994, they recorded their first demo as Mind da Gap and immediately made a big impact on the scene, reaching number one on José Mariño's Rapto programme with the track "Piu-Piu-Piu". Their debut album was in 1997, with Sem Cerimónias, and was undoubtedly an important moment for Portuguese hip hop, still in its initial phase at the time. More information at: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind_da_Gap.

[11] We complied with the guidelines included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000/C364/01), especially with regard to Article 8 "Protection of personal data", including any information, private or professional, concerning an identified or identifiable natural person (Article 2(a) of EU Directive 95/46/EC). We also comply with the guidelines contained in the General Data Protection Regulation No. 2016/679. The collection, processing, management, and exploitation of data will similarly be based on the guidelines provided by the Codes of Ethics of the University of Porto, the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto, the

means capable of building a new world of opportunities, different and independent from those that are socially and politically inaccessible to him. In addition, the discouragement and disbelief of these youngsters with regard to social intervention projects also became evident, because to date, few projects have taken into consideration the needs of young people, their interests and tastes, i.e., there is a history – in the Cerco do Porto neighbourhood – of project activities based on a top-down logic. And how is this revolt expressed? Through music. Looking at the specific case of the artistic-musical practices of OUPA! it becomes impossible not to frame rap as a materialisation of a broader spectrum of community arts (Lawton, 2019). The 2016 song "Rótulos e Preconceitos" was one of the songs selected by the group to be targeted for performance during the mini concert. The choice of this song was clearly based on its pedagogical component, as it intends to counter and denounce the labels and stigmas suffered and experienced by the young people who participated in the Workshop (see figures 1). In the lyrics we can read the following verses:

> Awaken your conscience, you can be the labeled one
> Live in one essence,
> Respect to be respected.
> It doesn't matter if you're a junkie, a thug or a lawyer,
> Doctor, combed man
> If you come on foot or by car (...)
> What I can say, to me it matters little (...)
> Here everyone's equal, no parental differences
> And no lawsuits or marital problems (...)
> Be black, fat or bi
> Fake, dread or wanna be (...)
> Show what's in you, be free and shameless.
> Free yourself from prejudice, because any one of us dreams.
> (OUPA! Cerco, "Rótulos e Preconceitos", 2016, our translation)

Portuguese Sociological Association, the International Sociological Association and the Oral History Association and International Council on Archives. In addition, the Code of Ethics of the International Sociological Association and the Statement of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association will also be acknowledged. Besides that, we have the express consent of the person concerned to the use of his real name.

Figure 1 - OUPA! (Ricardinho and Drunk Nigga) in performance, during the mini-concert in the scope of the "The Neighbourhood is Ours!" Workshop, at OUPA! Association, in Cerco do Porto neighbourhood, in 2021. Photo credits: Sofia Sousa

Besides the fact that we can see in these lyrics the revolt against imposed stigmas, especially when they say that any individual can be a victim of labels and prejudices and not only the residents of social neighbourhoods, we can also see a collaborative and pedagogical aspect, in the sense that the song conveys the inclusive and empowering message of the population, i.e, it aims to inspire youngsters to let go of these labels, encouraging them to dream and to have personal goals, not resigning themselves to the processes of hetero-exclusion; processes that are materialized in scarce job opportunities, precarious work, housing difficulties, poverty, teaching and education, among others. In effect, this music marks a difference between the formal and informal learning system. Rap in specific, and music in general, can be seen as non-formal education, in the sense that – in this spatial-social context – they emerge as a response to different juvenile demands inside and outside the school context. If previously non-formal education was only seen as a programmatic alternative to formal education, nowadays it emerges as a response to social problems and, from our point of view, the various artistic expressions – related to non-formal education – should act in complementarity with formal educational programming, because only in this way could we provide adequate answers to the needs of young people.

Another aspect of community arts for education is that they directly address grassroots settings, i.e., art serves a public interest, such as issues of civic responsibility or active citizenship. In the song stated above, sexism and the

role of women in society are also addressed: "Woman's place is in the kitchen". In fact, this is more pressing because in this neighbourhood the traditional divisions of gender roles are still very much present, in which women do not work and are resigned to the role of caretaker of the domestic space and children (Sousa, 2018)[12]. At the same time, in the song under analysis, topics such as domestic violence are also addressed, when they sing "why do you hit the woman in front of you?". In fact, this was a very sensitive topic for the youngsters who participated in the Workshop, since some of them had family members arrested for homicide and, in most cases, had witnessed situations of domestic violence. It is from this intersection and identification of personal experiences with music and an artistic practice that, in our understanding, emerges the importance of associating sociology with pedagogy and art.

In Lawton (2019), we can read that art possesses the ability to shape human powers, adapting them, and putting them at the service of society, which makes us view the musical productions of OUPA! as a form of community-based art education (Ulbricht, 2015); something that lies in the fact that these productions enhance community involvement, self and hetero learning experiences and social intervention. Rap appears here as the responsible for the creation of a space propitious to discourse and dialogue and, in our case, the same did not resign itself to dialogue between and with the youngsters, but also with the research team, fostering artistic co-creation processes (Helguera, 2011; Horvath and Carpenter, 2020). With this Workshop and the application of art-based research, we realised that these techniques go beyond the use of art as an illustrative image of what we say theoretically, i.e., it is something that involves more methodology than method (Knowles and Cole, 2008).

A second message emerged during the mini-concert, and that was about the interventional capacity of music. During a brief pause, the members of OUPA! talked about the importance of music in their lives, as well as discussed, the ways in which music had helped them through less good times. The message was clear: music was their way of enduring, and existing (Guerra, 2021). Let's read an excerpt of the song "A Música é" (2016),

> Music to me is everything, and I prove it
> My breath and it's all I need (...)
> Decorate my name, cause I only talk about what I go through
> And as a singer I went to the stage to demonstrate that side,
> Ask my father, my brother or my trooper Joca (...)

---

[12] In fact, in some work carried out in the neighbourhood (Sousa, 2018) it was found that some women who had served prison sentences for drug trafficking did so to exonerate their husbands or partners, which immediately highlights the role that women occupy within these territorial, social and cultural contexts.

> So focus on what I say, cause music is what I live
> 9 years married to it and it's it that inspires me
> Feel the melody, that gives me strength for another day,
> Music is my life, and a smile at least creates
> (OUPA!, "A Música é", 2016, our translation)

Through the analysis of this lyrics, we can glimpse what Bank et al. (2016) enunciate as PYD (Positive Youth Development). This concept starts from the idea that young people and children, even if they come from disadvantaged social and geographical contexts, have an appetite for success at school, or personal success, etc. The lyrics of the song demonstrate how music serves as a platform, because it allows the creation of opportunities for these youngsters to develop meaningful social relationships, support networks and social cohesion. Furthermore, it is evident that music – in the case of the OUPA! – has allowed these youngsters to expand their geographical horizons, i.e., to get involved in prosocial activities: for example, they were responsible for representing Portugal at a music festival in Slovakia[13]. So, the development of opportunities and capacities on the part of these youngsters through music meets the PYD, since it encourages a positive development, based on the capacity to adapt to the most diverse social situations, while it promotes and strengthens resilience in relation to negative experiences (Lerner, 2005): stigma, labels, discrimination, poverty, exclusion, among others. In fact, this is evident in the last stanzas of the song.

Focusing on Lerner's (2005) contributions, we can refer six essential characteristics in relation to PYD, which are materialized in the artistic practice of OUPA! group, but also in what were the main outputs obtained from the realization of the Workshop. The first characteristic refers to the competences. Both the participation of youngsters in the OUPA! project and the participation in the "The Neighbourhood is Ours!" Workshop promoted a positive view of their capacities in specific domains, in this case artistic, technical, and social, such as how to make a beat, creative writing, creating a technical rider, how to respond to work invitations, among many other aspects. Thus, by carrying out initiatives of this nature, in addition to enhancing the skills of each of these young people, we are also fostering other skills that will eventually be transmitted to other young people, creating a latent PYD cycle, and this through music and the arts. Then, connections are also established; relationships with researchers, young people, institutions, politicians, and other social agents, and these are reflected in two-way exchanges. Music also impacts character formation, as it strengthens a sense of right and wrong; it promotes confidence,

---

[13] The Error Festival, which gives visibility to various forms of community arts. More information at: http://www.divadlobezdomova.sk/FESTIVAL_ERROR.html.

in a logic of self-worth, counteracting the frequent processes of self-exclusion. It is also visible the impacts on care and compassion, since music promotes empathy for the other, as well as the ability to see outside of oneself and embrace diversity and, in parallel, music allows youngsters to get involved and contribute to the (re)construction of social, family, and institutional environments and, ultimately, develop active citizenship competences. Let's read a short excerpt of the song "Cercados" (2016), which goes along with the idea of music as an ability to see outside oneself,

> 1960s, inaugurated neighbourhood
> 32 blocks until it was expanded,
> Zone for those who know, has several exits (...)
> Always belonging to the Campanhã borough,
> Noble people, always fighting for tomorrow (...)
> Block 8, spot where people played ball
> It was hours on end throughout the summer,
> Dealers try to keep their business up
> The brothers inside, now all they can do is have faith
> Fortunately we've got schools for the kids to enjoy
> To make a name for themselves, and show off their talents.
> Social housing, in a neighbourhood seen by a bad name
> Welcome to my spot, seven days a week.
> (OUPA!, "Cercados", 2016, Our translation)

Going towards the previously stated points, and thinking about the message that the young people of OUPA! wanted to transmit during the mini-concert, we cannot fail to mention that – from a sociological point of view – when we analysed music as an agent of change (Tas, 2014), most literature is prone to see culture as a symbolic and discursive field, which aims at framing musical contents in a broad spectrum of meanings; meanings that go beyond the lyrics. This is evident in the music "Tou com os meus" (2019), where more than the theme of "party" and "fun", subliminal ideas of unity, references to stigmatisation and resistance are present, highlighted by us in the excerpt.

> Because I'm with mine living the moment
> if it's to the limit believe me I don't fall
> I'm with my friends **you say it's a crime**
> **for a boy to be from the hood**
> You pray to the heavens for a grey day,
> **but I'm with the gang even with the rain I go out**

You want the dock, **so watchful I change Cerco into exciting Cairo**[14]
(OUPA!, "Tou com os meus", 2019, Our translation and highlights)

Eyerman and Jamison (1998), treat music as a cognitive praxis, according to which individuals and communities use music to contest existing challenges and discourses, and it is possible to frame the group OUPA! here. On the other hand, Roy (2010) adds that music has also been seen as a cultural project, used to cross racial boundaries. Let us see that one of the members of the group – Drunk Nigga – whenever possible, refers that he was the first black guy to live in the neighbourhood. Hence, Roy (2010) concludes that the impact of music depends to a lesser extent on the meaning of the lyrics or its sonic qualities but depends above all on the social relations in which it emerges or is inserted.

4. "Alice In Wonder Wall": re-thinking a place starting from the will and aspirations of its young inhabitants

The main premise, describing this project, is that among the different approaches to urban planning, which use art, color, and light as central elements to bring out the intrinsic quality of places, including the suburbs, one cannot fail to mention street-art. This art form can express the personality and identity constructed and socially perceived by the members of a local community. There are numerous interventions by street artists, conducted in deprived contexts, marginal or at risk of marginalization, which demonstrate the regenerative, aggregative, perceptual, and sensorial stimulation potential. Street art was born in the United States in the early 1970s, inspired by the experience of eclectic artists such as Keith Haring and Jean Michel Basquiat. In the 1980s he also arrived in Europe, where the French artist Jean-François Perroy became its main exponent. Starting in the 2000s, especially thanks to the contribution of the English artist Banksy, the phenomenon of street art became global. The subjects represented in street art generally communicate social issues: freedom of expression, pacifism, police repression, antiprohibition, civil rights, freedom of conscience, racial discrimination, etc.

The use of color and light, in the experiences of urban regeneration, not only have an aesthetic-decorative impact but, above all, psychological, communicative, informative and, therefore, on perceptual and judgment processes. In fact, color is an integral element of our world, not only in nature

---

[14] This last verse is a reference to the 1982 song "Cairo" by the group Taxi. This song referred to the city of Cairo, in Egypt, considered by Taxi as a place favourable to corruption, but also to fun, discovery and mysteries. By using this reference, OUPA! wanted to mention that the neighbourhood also had the same characteristics, making an appeal to its discovery.

but also in the human-built environment and has always played a role in the evolutionary process of humanity. "Alice In Wonder Wall" is a good example of the principles described above, aimed at young people development through participation in co-design, urban re-qualification and art-based education. The collaboration between writers and students has resulted in an experience of ideation, choice of subject and discussion around the type of artistic intervention. The murals and the street art workshop planned involved a group of 20 students from different classes of the "Gandhi" Comprehensive Institute of San Basilio District. The goals were:

- creating a work that would highlight the negative aspects of the periphery while showing how to rethink it, starting from the will and aspirations of its young inhabitants;
- making the school a place for analyzing the social conditions of the places that students live in every day, putting it in dialogue with the context in which it is inserted.

In the conceptual phase writers and students analyzed the territory together through paper and photographic materials, trying to intercept places and situations that represented the different faces of the neighborhood. This led to the synthesis of the positivity and negativity expressed by the territory in indicative keywords. In the implementation phase, analyzing all the words produced together with the students, the difficulty of transforming words that express concepts and not objects into a visual equivalent emerged. The process of symbolizing positive and negative concepts (such as peace, love, environment, crime, drug dealing, addiction, etc.) allowed students to perform an interesting imaginative exercise and to improve their graphic skills with the help of writers. Finally, the analysis of the words led to the creation of 20 symbolic images. The different subjects contributed to composing and constituting the final work: a large tree, which represents the common frame. The branches carry positive messages (to water and grow) and negative messages (to prune, to revive a strong and luxuriant tree-community) (W.A.L.L.S., 2015)[15].

In other words, we are talking about some of the most common challenges which with the younger generations are facing today. These challenges concern both knowledge and the transmission of knowledge, thus first involving the school and the main educational agencies and participation in an increasingly complex and multicultural society. According to Jerome Bruner (2000), for a young person in training, participating in a culture means addressing, from a psychological point of view, «issues concerning the creation and negotiation of

---

[15] All the informations about this project and the other realized by W.A.L.L.S Association can be found at the following link: https://onthewalls.it/.

meanings, the construction of identity and the sense of personal action» (p. 8). In projects like "Alice In Wonder Wall", the same issues characterize the typical attitude of the adolescent to measure himself against the other within the group of peers which represents not only the first and smallest voluntary social formation but also a powerful filter between the life of the adolescent outside his own family, and society, constituting a real social laboratory that helps to develop his own and original idea of citizenship and participation in the life of the communities to which he belongs.

Figure 2 - A student showing the scale model with 20 symbolic images chosen for the making of the final graffiti. Photo credits: Valerio Muscella

Now, the question is: in such a multifaceted framework, which pedagogical perspective can contribute to place the ideals of citizenship, community, common good and social participation at the center of youth horizons? In the Italian school environment, a possible starting point for a reflection on education in favor of society is the very recent Law n. 92/2019, which introduces the obligation to teach Civic Education in all school levels and grades. An excellent opportunity to develop educational practices aimed at defining a new idea of citizenship, active and aware. The ministerial guidelines present three macro areas on which the teaching of Civic Education will focus:
- the first concerns the study of the Constitution, for a more conscious participation in civic, cultural, and social life;
- the second concern the sustainable development, for the knowledge and protection of the cultural and environmental heritage, but also of health and common goods;

- the third digital citizenship, for a conscious and responsible use of the new means of communication.

According to Michele Corsi (2011) is essential that the school becomes aware of the change resources it has at its disposal, to the extent that society is called upon to choose a citizenship project that reflects its cultural and political identity. But it is only through the synergistic effort of school, family, and society that a truly transformative educational action can be achieved. It is therefore necessary to move from school to the territory, to meet young people where they are, without forgetting, indeed, taking advantage of the opportunities and levels of communication offered by the network.

Therefore, moving from the classrooms to the streets of the city and identifying youth work as one of the most effective tools for raising awareness among young people about social participation, democratic life and the value of differences we can consider, here again, art-based education and research valuable perspectives to develop projects with young people. Also, the guidelines contained in the *European Youth Strategy 2019-2027*[16] bring educational interventions back to the territory, with the primary objective of helping the new generations to fully exploit their potential, promoting personal development, autonomy, a sense of initiative and social participation. Society and the territories, therefore, return to being a background within is possible to activate and integrate participatory and transformative processes. This is fundamental for the new generations of citizens, to whom educational institutions and agencies are asking to think big (globally) but to be able to act small (locally), for the common and collective good.

5. Final remarks

We live in an age where all societies are subject to sudden, interdependent changes and it is now clear that any problem, regardless of its nature, cannot be faced from a single viewpoint. The vastness of the questions that embrace the everyday needs an equally vast range of answers from multiple disciplinary approaches charged with the planning, design, and transmission of knowledge. Art-based projects and research represent a source knowledge within a broader horizon, with a high degree of attention on the question of the suburbs, which are a significant problem all around the world: like housing disadvantages, the question of city of acceptance, the city seen from its past, a model of housing development that is more attentive to city life and quality of housing than to

---

[16] For more information on the contents and the 11 goals of the strategy see also: https://europa.eu/youth/strategy_en.

rents. For these reasons, is important to work on the (re)activation, promotion and boosting of the educating community, understood as the groups of formal and informal subjects, with different roles, who pursue shared aims linked to the referral of young people for educational and training purposes and who share these responsibilities with families. From this viewpoint, particular attention must be paid throughout the action to listening to and involving local individuals from the public, social private sector and private sector (schools, families, associations, town hall, parishes, university, social cooperatives, informal virtuous concerns, the young people themselves) that can contribute to achieving the shared aims. The positive effects of the art-based path always impact the collectivity: involvement from different social elements and – more in general, the local population in its widest sense, in terms of social background and age – in achieving the aims, will be useful in reinforcing the integration/action between inhabitants and area, promoting social cohesion, and creating a sense of community.

References

Allen L. (2004). Music and Politics in Africa. *Social Dynamics*, 30(2): 1-19.

Androutsos A. and Brinia V. (2019). Developing and Piloting a Pedagogy for Teaching Innovation, Collaboration, and Co-Creation in Secondary Education Based on Design Thinking, Digital Transformation, and Entrepreneurship. *Education Sciences,* 9(2): 113-129.

Avison D., Baskerville R. and Myers M.D. (2007). The Structure of Power in Action Research Projects. In: Kock N. (Ed.). *Information Systems Action Research. An Applied View of Emerging Concepts and Methods*, 19-42. London: Springer.

Baldacci M. and Colicchi E. (editors) (2016). *Teoria e prassi in pedagogia. Questioni epistemologiche*. Roma: Carocci.

Barbosa A.P., Sousa S. and Guerra, P. (2020). (Des)encontros de uma etnografia multissituada em regiões urbanas de marginalidade avançada no Brasil e em Portugal. *Iluminuras,* 21(54): 447-477.

Bardin L. (1977). *L'Analyse de contenu.* France: Presses Universitares.

Boron G., Barnaba M., Lanciotti A., Vecchio B. and Toso F., (2020). *Spazio pubblico non è terra di nessuno, ma è dove tutto ricomincia*. Roma: FNAS «testo disponibile al sito: http://www.fnas.it/notizie/spazio-pubblico.html (03/2022)».

Bruner J. (2000). *The Culture of Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Carvalho C.P. (2017). Community intervention in urban areas: A youth driven initiative. *Action Research,* 0(0): 1-15.

Cellamare C. (2011). Pratiche dell'abitare. La ricerca urbanistica e la Città degli uomini. *Etnografia e ricerca qualitativa*, 2: 306-311.

Clark P. (1972). *Action Research and Organizational Change.* London: Harper and Row.

Corsi M. (Ed.) (2011). *Educare alla democrazia e alla cittadinanza*. Lecce: Pensa MultiMedia.

Corsi M. (2020). *Il tempo sospeso. L'Italia dopo il coronavirus*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.

Corsi M., Susca V. and Farina T. (2020). Educating Today: The Challenges of The Present. Research Paths. The Contemporary Time of Coronavirus. *Education Sciences & Society*, XI(1): 25-40.

Creswell J.W., Hanson W.E. and Vicki C.P. (2007). Qualitative Research Designs: Selection and Implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist,* 35(2): 236-264.

Deluigi R. (2010). *Animare per educare. Come crescere nella partecipazione sociale*. Turin: SEI.

Engelchin D.S., Huss E. and Massry N. (2019). Arts-Based Methodology for Knowledge Co-Production in Social Work. *British Journal of Social Work*. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bcz098.

Eyerman R. and Jamison A. (1998). *Music and social movements. Mobilizing traditions in the twentieth century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Farina T. (2020). The crisis of symbolic, ritual and mimetic values of childhood play during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Education Sciences & Society*, XI(1): 41-53.

Ferreira T., Pappámikail L. and Vieira M.M. (2017). *Jovens NEEF: Mudanças e Continuidades no Pós-Crise*. Lisboa: Universidade de Lisboa.

Fisher K. and Phelps R. (2006). Recipe or performing art? Challenging conventions for writing action research theses. *Action Research,* 4(2): 143-164.

Forrest-Bank S.S., Nicotera N. and Bassett D.M. (2016). Effects of an Expressive Art Intervention with Urban Youth in Low-Income Neighborhoods. *Child Adolesc Soc Work J,* 33: 429-441.

Foster V. (2007). "Ways of knowing and showing": Imagination and representation in feminist participatory social research. *Journal of Social Work Practice*. 21(3): 361-76.

Freire P. (2005). *The pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Continuum.

Freire P. (2017). *Le virtù dell'educatore. Una pedagogia dell'emancipazione*. Bologna: EDB.

Guerra P. and Sousa S. (forthcoming). Make the world yours! Arts-Based Research in Action at Cerco do Porto neighborhood. In: Saraiva M. (Ed.) *Urban Crime Prevention*. London: Springer.

Guerra P. (2021). So close yet so far: DIY cultures in Portugal and Brazil. *Cultural Trends,* 30(2): 122-138.

Guerra P. (2020a). Cidade, pedagogia e rap. *Quaestio – Revista de Estudos em Educação,* 22(2): 431-453.

Guerra P. (2020b). The Song Is Still a "Weapon": The Portuguese Identity in Times of Crises. *Young,* 28(1): 14-31.

Guerra P. (2002). *A cidade na encruzilhada do urbano. Algumas modalidades de relação e um estudo de caso acerca do processo de recomposição espacial e social do tecido urbano portuense na década de 90*. Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto.

Helguera P. (2011). *Education for socially engaged art: A materials and techniques handbook*. New York: Jorge Pinto Books.

Horvath C. and Carpenter J. (2020). *Co-Creation in Theory and Practice. Exploring Creativity in the Global North and South.* Bristol: Bristol University Press.

Knowles J.G. and Cole A.L. (Eds.) (2008). *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research.* London: Sage.

Laing D. (2003). *Resistance and Protest. Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World.* London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Lawton P.H. (2019). At the Crossroads of Intersecting Ideologies: Community-Based Art Education, Community Engagement, and Social Practice Art. *Studies in Art Education,* 60(3): 203-218.

Lerner R.M. (2005). Promoting positive youth development: Theoretical and empirical bases. In: Lerner R.M. (Ed.). *White paper prepared for the Workshop on the Science of Adolescent Health and Development.* Washington: National Academies of Science.

Lorenzo R. (1998). *La città sostenibile: partecipazione, luogo, comunità.* Milano: Elèuthera.

Martinez T. (1997). Popular culture as oppositional culture: rap as resistance. *Sociological Perspectives*, 40(2): 265-286.

Murdoch J., Grodach C. and Foster N. (2016). The Importance of Neighborhood Context in Arts-Led Development: Community Anchor or Creative Class Magnet?. *Journal of Planning Education and Research,* 36(1): 32-48.

Nielson E. (2011). "Here come the cops": Policing the resistance in rap music. *International Journal of Cultural Studies,* 15(4): 349-363.

Paroni P. (2004). *Un posto in strada. Gruppi giovanili e intervento sociale.* Milano: FrancoAngeli.

Reason P. and Bradbury H. (Eds.) (2001). *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice.* California: Thousand Oaks.

Ren S. and Feixa C. (2021). Being nomadic and overseas rappers Construction of hybrid identity in Chinese hip-hop scene. *Cidades, Comunidades e Territórios*, 160-174. DOI: 10.15847/cct.25618.

Rose G. (2014). On the relation between "visual research methods" and contemporary visual culture. *The Sociological Review*, 62: 24-46.

Rose T. (1994). *Black Noise*. Middleton: Wesleyan University Press.

Schechner R. (2013). *Performance Studies: an introduction.* London: Routledge.

Scott J.C. (1990). *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Seregina U.A. (2019). Co-creating bodily, interactive, and reflexive knowledge through art-based research. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 1-25. DOI: 10.1080/10253866.2019.1634059.

Sousa S. (2018). *O Cerco é a minha casa! Apropriações e identidades face ao espaço habitado*. Master Thesis. Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto.

Tas H. (2014). Melodies of resistance: Islamist music in secular Turkey. *Social Compass,* 61(3): 368-383.

Thomson J. and Davies B. (2019). Becoming With Art Differently: Entangling Matter, Thought and Love. *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies*, 19(6): 399-408.

Ulbricht J. (2015). What is Community-Based Art Education?. *Art Education,* 58(2): 6-12.
Wulf C. (2014). Le basi mimetiche, performative e rituali del gioco. *EDUCAZIONE Giornale di pedagogia critica*, III(2): 41-64.

Discography

OUPA! (2016). Rótulos e Preconceitos. CD. Cidade Líquida.
OUPA! (2016). A Música é. CD. Cidade Líquida.
OUPA! (2016). Cercados. CD. Cidade Líquida.
OUPA! (2016). Do Cerco ao Centro. CD. Cidade Líquida.
OUPA (2019). Tou com os meus. Single.