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Urban Movements in Lisbon's Crisis Environment

Letícia do Carmo

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EPFL, École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne

EPFL | ENAC | INTER | LASUR
BP 2131 Station 16
CH-1015 Lausanne
Switzerland
contacts : +41 21 6938069 / +41 76 70 70 841 / leticia.carmo@epfl.ch

Abstract

In the context of today's economic and social crisis, the city of Lisbon is shyly starting to thrill with desire for change. Several socio-cultural spaces, with different degrees of autonomy from state control and market forces, are having an important role in this city's regeneration, revealing the intersection of several types of urban movements. A precise geographical context, along with particular kinds of space occupation, events or actions over time, must be taken into account in order to better understand a complex situation that can lead to wider debates on theoretical subjects such as *gentrification* processes, *creative cities* policies, *the right to the city* or the sensitive experiencing of an urban environment.

Urban Movements in Lisbon's Crisis Environment

In the context of today's economic and social crisis, the city of Lisbon is shyly starting to thrill with desire for change. Several socio-cultural spaces, with different degrees of autonomy from state control and the market forces, are having an important role in this city's regeneration, revealing the existence of a wider urban movement.

By analysing these socio-cultural spaces, their activities and the interactions among them, we realise that there exist different types of urban movements whose distinctiveness depends on the criteria we might want to adopt.

Some common principles and interests that these socio-cultural spaces share are at the basis of these considerations, and certain actions and events that have recently occurred in a specific area of Lisbon reveal that an organised collective action is in the making.

1. At the beginning, most of the actions or activities that a space proposed would be independent from those put forward by another space. These actions or activities would mostly be courses or workshops, cinema sessions, concerts or jam sessions, parties, eventually some debates, exhibitions or independent publishing. Nevertheless, there would be activities based in conviviality and linked to autonomous, independent and non-profit ways of management. Some examples can

be found in the spaces called "Abril em Maio", "SOU", "Prédio do Anjos", "RDA69", "Casa da Achada";

2. Most recently, some of these spaces already started to organise common or shared events, based on principles of proximity, whether spatial ones or specific affinities with groups of people (like friends, for instance) or still particular interests. Here, we can mention actions like building occupations, urban gardening in available places, shared kitchens, and a growing interest on the organisation of soft mobility related actions (like fixing bicycles and promoting its use at a larger and "massive" scale). As examples of collective or shared projects we have: "Cinema-lá-em-cima/Cinema-lá-em-baixo", "Casa de São Lázaro", "Horta do Beco", "Forno comunitário", "Ciclofinina" (in Anjos); and, as examples of spaces sharing activities based on proximity values: "Casa Independente", "A do Jonas", "Residências Artísticas", "SOU" (in Intendente);

3. Finally, in May 2013, most of the previously mentioned associations and spaces decided to gather along and organise a festival, "Faz-me festas nos Anjos"[1] (Img 2), whose main purpose seems to have been a gain of strength and visibility of the associations and their activities along the year. It was an organised and collective street action, which proposed: a set of debates about mobility; occupying actions; urban gardening; closing down of streets to car traffic for a marathon (while creating a temporary pedestrian path to connect the spaces); mural painting; social and street games; itinerant concerts; urban sound hiking (passeios sonoros); shared kitchen; theatre; flea market; bicycle repair workshops; *photopaper*; etc. The festival was organised by most of the spaces and associations mentioned on the previous topics, and also by Intendentart, Gmurda, Unipop, StressFM, "Associação Terapêutica do Ruído", "Taberna das Almas", "Recreativa dos Anjos", "Clube Recreativo dos Anjos" and the parish of Anjos.

We can, consequently, observe that there have been an evolution and a collective construction, as well as an improvement in the collective organisation over time (which corresponds mostly to the last 5 years). Therefore, and according to the Pickvance's definition, we may interpret this development as an "urban movement", due to its

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[1] http://fazmefestasnosanjos.blogspot.pt/p/blog-page.html

organisation and *collective action* which has already lasted a certain *period of time* (Pickvance, 1989, p. 74).

The geographical context is determinant to better understand why these spaces started to appear preferentially in this part of the city, and is also very important to the understanding of the inner interactions. If we focus on this spatial aspect, we realise that the old « city of lights » (which corresponds to the neighbourhood of "Baixa", Lisbon's downtown) is getting darker and darker, shutting down – due to the economic crisis - the doors of traditional sources of an organic city life (the traditional commerce, small cafés, traditional civic associations and housing). Besides, the « forgotten and dirty city » is slowly emerging from the shadows of the hill of the castle, which maybe we can consider as a "central interstice" of the city. It concerns the neighbourhood of Mouraria and its extension – which I consider to be the area of Martim Moniz and São Cristóvão – and the neighbourhoods of Intendente and Anjos (Img 1). These three neighbourhoods, following each other geographically along a linear element (the axis of Rua da Palma / Av. Almirante Reis), are about to converge into one, if we consider the perspective of the intensification of interaction of actions and activities among them, as we have seen before[2]. For a better understanding of these relationships, we shall as well mention the recent – two years ago – displacement of the Lisbon's mayor office to the square of Intendente: it was an action that led to the creation of a spatial central node between the neighbourhoods of Mouraria and Anjos, which is working since then as a linking element. This square, previously almost inaccessible due to its activities related with drugs and prostitution, suffered a human and urban cleaning process. These previous users of the space are still around, but are more discreet, since police now controls more closely the area; artists are arriving, the buildings are being renovated, "proper" coffee-shops start to open their doors and summer festivals take place in the new *public space* that has been created since then.

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[2] Also, when considering the spatial configuration of the city of Lisbon, an administrative reform of the parishes has been made. Most of the smaller parishes (in terms of area) were extinct, especially those existing in the oldest and most central part of the city. New and bigger ones were created, which now aggregate the former ones. This way the municipality of Lisbon managed to reduce the number of administrative areas, from 53 to 24, this new spatial division of the city being intended to be more realistic, particularly in matters of administrative efficiency. All these places and areas I have previously mentioned belong nowadays to only 2 parishes, while earlier they belonged to about 5 (http://www.cm-lisboa.pt/municipio/juntas-de-freguesia).

So, if we draw a spatial plan of the area that is being analysed, we have Intendente in this central position, flanked on the North side by the neighbourhood of Anjos, and on the South side by Mouraria and Martim Moniz. In Anjos, no observable institutional support occurred; consequently, the streets keep on being a bit dirty and dark, and the built environment has not really been renewed. Nevertheless, it has been a favourite place for students for quite a while now, eventually due to the accessible rents of the flats, and that may be related in a way with the degraded conditions of the buildings and the existence of illegal rental contracts[3]. However, this kind of conditions attracted also artists and activists, who are mainly constituted of precarious workers and young generations.

On the other hand, Mouraria and Martim Moniz are presently very mixed areas in terms of population. There, the percentage of immigrated people is one of the highest in Lisbon, which means that we can find in place both a traditional local population and commerce, and a very multicultural one. In the last years, this multicultural aspect has been used to strengthen the identity of the area in a positive way. The former problematic main square of Martim Moniz went through an urban renovation which invested in leisurely use of its public space, directed mostly to the residents (before, it was just an empty square, and now there exist food-kiosks, benches, fountains and flowers).

When analysing the particular case of Mouraria, we must underline that this neighbourhood is considered to be the place where *fado* was born. So if we notice that *fado* was recently elected as "immaterial heritage of culture" (application submitted in 2010[4], accepted in 2011[5]), we realise that it coincides with the beginning of the development of the program of

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[3] We cannot avoid mention, at this point, certain aspects of the « housing rental market » in Lisbon. There exist 3 kinds of apartment rentals: one under a recent legal environment, either through the real estate agencies or directly controlled by the proprietors; the illegal renting, escaping the income tax, which financially tends to be a little cheaper than the previous one; and the ancient contracts made under "Lei das Rendas", which has been, for decades, a very problematic issue and affects the whole country. Very briefly, the rents have been frozen since long time in spite of very high inflation rates in the seventies, the eighties and the nineties, with disastrous consequences in the built environment. In fact, the proprietors do not have the income to proceed to the necessary repairing works and are not allowed to put a term to the existing contracts. This leads to a dead end and consequently to a general degradation of the conditions of the buildings, and of the whole city in general. This law has been recently reviewed, but the changes are having disastrous social consequences, most particularly due to the present situation of economic crisis.

[4] "Candidatura do Fado a Lista Representativa do Património Cultural Imaterial da Humanidade" (http://www.candidaturadofado.com/wp-content/themes/candidatura/docs/brochura_apresentacao_candidatura_fado.pdf)

[5] 26th Novembre 2011, approved by UNESCO and distinguished as "tradition and expression of identity of the culture of the country" of Portugal (free translation, *in*

the municipality of Lisbon (CML) "Programa de Desenvolvimento Comunitário da Mouraria (PDCM)", in 2010[6], created to support financially, through differentiated measures, this very degraded neighbourhood (cultural and social interventions, but also urban regeneration). This package of measures is nothing but an example of the classical political strategy to renew a central area of a city, which finds support in a kind of a touristy publicity based in traditional motifs. Also, since more or less the same period, the association of residents "Renovar a Mouraria" has been very active in improving the socio-cultural and urban revitalization of the neighbourhood through various actions and projects[7].

Once defined the general panorama of the area, several topics of discussion come on the table:

1. Might we understand this process as a classical gentrification process?
2. Is the city of Lisbon, through its municipal power structures, using a "Creative Cities strategy" of local development, based on Florida's (2002), Landry's (1995, 2006) and Peck's (2005) hints for an economical city success?
3. Can those mentioned socio-cultural associations and spaces, within the global crisis context, be considered as an alternative to the public space reclaiming under Lefebvre's (1968) thematic of "the right to the city"?
4. May the emergence of those spaces be associated, in some way, to the search of the Lisbon's inhabitants for a more sensible experiencing of the urban space, in the same way the Situationists might have wanted to explore?

We believe that the spatial development we mentioned before – and their socio-cultural conditions as they were influenced by opposite varieties of fluxes – generates a particular kind of gentrification, slightly different from the classical process, initially defined by Ruth Glass (1964) and further on explored by Neil Smith (1996), that we are used to see. The main difference dwells on the fact that the economic conditions of the inhabitants of the referred neighbourhoods has not really changed, and that no one with larger monetary incomes is

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 http://www.rtp.pt/noticias/index.php?article=503874&tm=4&layout=121&visual=49)
[6] PDCM : http://www.aimouraria.cm-lisboa.pt/pdcm.html
[7] http://www.renovaramouraria.pt/

replacing and pushing away the people who were previously living there; actually, due to the "crisis" factor, those social actors have even become more precarious, and no better perspective of a positive change is really expected in a near future.

On the other hand, the municipality of Lisbon still aspired in 2012 to transform Lisbon into a "competitive, innovative and creative" city, according to its website slogan[8]. And we can still find some of those wishes expressed on the mayor's online publication, yet in a much more indirect and discreet way. We notice that the word "creative" has been replaced by "internationalised"[9], and that the main slogan of the website is now "Lisbon, a city for the people". Florida's, Landry's and Peck's lessons are not totally forgotten: "…a tolerant urban atmosphere[10], opportunities for self-realization, and a rich offer of cultural and leisure activities[11]" (Holm, 2010) seems to define the environment of a "Creative City", desired by that demanding "creative class". And we may find something within that logic in Intendente (the examples of "Casa Independente","A do Jonas" and "Largo Residências artísticas Intendente", which are places geographically close to the mayor's office), and eventually in the new project planned for the old "Hospital do Desterro" (which is an ongoing renovation project aimed for *creatives* since the beginning, managed by an enterprise called Mainside, that is behind other successful "creative projects" in Lisbon like "Lx Factory" or "Pensão Amor").

However, the above mentioned "opportunities for self-realization" seem to be more and more far away because spending money on culture is no longer on the top of the list of priorities of the government. It is true that the government's discourse is used in order to convince people that, because of the crisis, the lack of financial resources appears as an opportunity to develop and boost creativity. This discourse has nevertheless attracted an intense criticism to the point that a well-known figure in the intellectual milieu declared that such a statement "reveals a tremendous ignorance" and "a disregard for creativity", as well

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[8] « Lisboa : Competitiva, Inovadora, Criativa », in www.cm-lisboa.pt, seen in March 2012
[9] « Cidade competitiva, inovadora e internacionalizada", in
 http://issuu.com/camara_municipal_lisboa/docs/af_publicacao_antcosta_web_short/5?e=6409185/3071069,
seen in June 2013.
[10] Like a multicultural population.
[11] Like ACS, restaurants, coffee-shops, shops, corresponding to a street level culture.

as a "lack of awareness" and "despise [for] the future"[12]. He states that "Creativity does not rhyme with austerity" («Criatividade não rima com austeridade»), and that the shutdown of the Ministry of Culture in June 2011 plus the spending cuts in the cultural sector that came with the national austerity program implemented by the incoming government, are the best proofs that no attention is given to the encouragement of creativity.

Therefore, "creatives" are no longer a real privileged "class" in Lisbon, since they are becoming more and more precarious. What is happening, more specifically in this part of the city, is that they are becoming something similar to "activists", or rather "artivists", or even "creativists".

"In times like the present, solutions come up from the purportedly alternative area, proposing a return to an economic system of barter (…). These are episodic solutions for small scale projects, whose longevity is rather short."[13] (Pinto Ribeiro, 2013). This statement, authored by the above mentioned public figure, is probably referring to the socio-cultural spaces and associations that I previously mentioned in this text – those polyvalent and interactive places of culture and of creativity, available for art production and exchange of savoir faire, but also identified as spaces of thought and action.

This kind of projects tends to appear and subsist in buildings that already exist, which either were abandoned or simply were no longer used for a period of time. The available space is therefore reused, passing through a process of occupation[14], transformation and recreation of that same space, giving it a new function, usually different from the previous one. In this area we can observe that basements, garages and roof terraces are now being used for the most varied activities (ex: "SOU","RDA69","Prédio dos Anjos"). But also old palaces, or derelict and abandoned buildings (ex: "Casa Independente" and "Primeiro Andar", "São Lázaro", "Ministério" and "Mouradia", respectively) are being used. But the only two real squatted spaces of all I mentioned were "Casa de São Lázaro" and "Ministério". The first one claimed the right to the city through a visible and provocative position towards the authority

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[12] (Pinto Ribeiro, 2013)

[13] My translation of : «Em tempos como os de hoje aparecem soluções do campo supostamente alternativo propondo o regresso a um sistema económico de trocas directas (…).São soluções episódicas, para projectos de pequena escala, cujo tempo de duração é curto.».

[14] It must be underlined that the term "occupation" is used here in a larger sense of "move into a place and use the space".

agents in a way that resulted from the posters displayed outside by the windows of the first *squat*: "So many houses without people. So many people without houses / You cannot evict an idea"[15]. The second *squat* reacted against the project of a luxury hotel intended for that place. However, none of these occupations had a long life span: "São Lázaro" was squatted twice and that never lasted more than a couple of months, and "Ministério" (better known as "Palácio Silva Amado", which used to host the Ministry of Education, abandoned for many years now) only managed to last 2 days.

Nevertheless, experimental and alternative projects of another kind, also based on strong social ideals, are occurring in this part of the city: Mouradia[16], for instance, is a "manifesto-building", according to those who created it ("Artéria", a non-profit collective of architects[17], and "Associação Renovar a Mouraria", composed by inhabitants of the neighbourhood (Pacquot et al., 2012, p. 96)). The project consists of a sustainable rehabilitation model of a former ruined house in order to regenerate the surrounding zone and is aimed at providing social and cultural facilities to its inhabitants. It is a participative project that anticipates only minor changes whenever it needs to be readapted (that may be compared to an acupuncture treatment), and criticises a very frequent Portuguese architectural practice of "rehabilitation" that consists of "demolishing a building while maintaining its façade".

An interesting finding is related to the legal status of most of these alternative projects. These projects are being run under legal rental contracts, even if paying quite accessible prices[18]. But the fact that there has been an option for the status of "association" is quite particular, because this allows the spaces to be neither "private space" nor "public space". This hybrid position allows them:

-   on one hand, to receive guest as "members", and to sell drinks and food just as if they were common public spaces but remaining non-profit;
-   on the other hand, to avoid all bureaucracy related to a legal status of a "public space" (which implies, for instance, standard architectural project measures,

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[15] "Tanta casa sem gente, tanta gente sem casa / Não se pode despejar uma ideia", my translation.
[16] Mouraria+Moradia=Mouradia
[17] www.arteria.pt/portfolio/edificiomanifesto_7.html
[18] Information got from actors involved in some of the projects, at interviews conducted in January 2013.

accesses for handicapped people, non-smoking interior spaces or the implementation of several security measures – and, consequently, significant expenses on construction works).

This detail is certainly influential in the determination of the aesthetics of the space in a certain way. But, more than that, the status permits them to have some degree of autonomy; it is a clever way of using the rules established by the dominant system, to which it is hard to escape, by transforming those rules to their own profit. It may even be understood as a subversive action associated with the daily life rules reinvention, in a similar sense to the one Michel De Certeau defines[19] (de Certeau, 1980, p. XXXVIII).

This kind of *bricolage* we have just mentioned[20], along with the proposed activities and the aesthetics' environment created by these spaces and associations, reveal a search of a more poetic and sensitive experiencing of the urban daily life by the actors who use them. Along with their discreet spatial occupation in the interstices of the city – those basements, garages, roof terraces, decadent palaces or derelict and abandoned buildings, which often either do not have an explicit visible access or are located in small, hidden and dark streets – , these factors bring about the creation of a certain atmosphere that can almost be assimilated to a theatrical scenario (which might even be enhanced by a nighttime usage, when most of these spaces are actually more active). It is in this sense that we believe that some of the ideas developed by the Situationists find a comparable situation in these spaces because, according to them, the city is the place "of a revolutionary transformation of the existence, achieved through the participation of the citizens and the reintegration of the poetic into the ordinary life"[21] (Simay, 2008).

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[19] «A une production rationalisée, expansionniste autant que centralisée, bruyante et spectaculaire, correspond une autre production, qualifiée de « consommation » : celle-ci est rusée. Elle est dispersée, mais elle s'insinue partout, silencieuse et quasi invisible, puisqu'elle ne se signale pas avec des produits propres mais en manières d'employer les produits imposés par un ordre économique dominant.» (de Certeau, 1980, p. XXXVII).

[20] «…les usagers « bricolent » avec et dans l'économie culturelle dominante les (…) métamorphoses de sa loi en celle de leurs intérêts et de leurs règles propres.» (de Certeau, 1980, p. XXXIX).

[21] My translation : « le lieu (…) d'une transformation révolutionnaire de l'existence, à travers la participation des citadins et la réintégration du poétique dans l'ordinaire. »

After discussing possible answers to some questions related to a specific area and to circumstances that are occurring in Lisbon at the present moment, we still have one last issue to discuss: in what sense, finally, can those socio-cultural associations and alternative projects and spaces be considered as the boosters of an urban movement, or how can they, at least, be related to one?

In the context of crisis that Lisbon (and Portugal) has been facing these last years, several politically minded and protesting movements appeared, like "Que se lixe a Troika", "Occupy Lx", "Precários Inflexíveis", "Movimento Sem Emprego", "Indignados", "Geração à Rasca" or "Plataforma 15 de Outubro". Some of these movement names are not limited in scope to national territories. We shall underline that many of the people that participate in these movements are also using the spaces and associations referred in this paper; even more, many debates and a part of the management of these protest movements are sometimes occurring in those spaces.

Therefore, we can observe an intersection of local and global scales of different kinds of urban movements, which entails a dynamic network of people and places. And that consideration is not only restricted to a social type of movements, but might be understood in a wider sense, which may subsequently include participative and collective actions, events or projects developed by local communities.

The socio-cultural spaces and associations discussed in this paper seem, consequently, to be part of a complex intersection of several types of urban movements, which intersect each other in very different scales of analysis.

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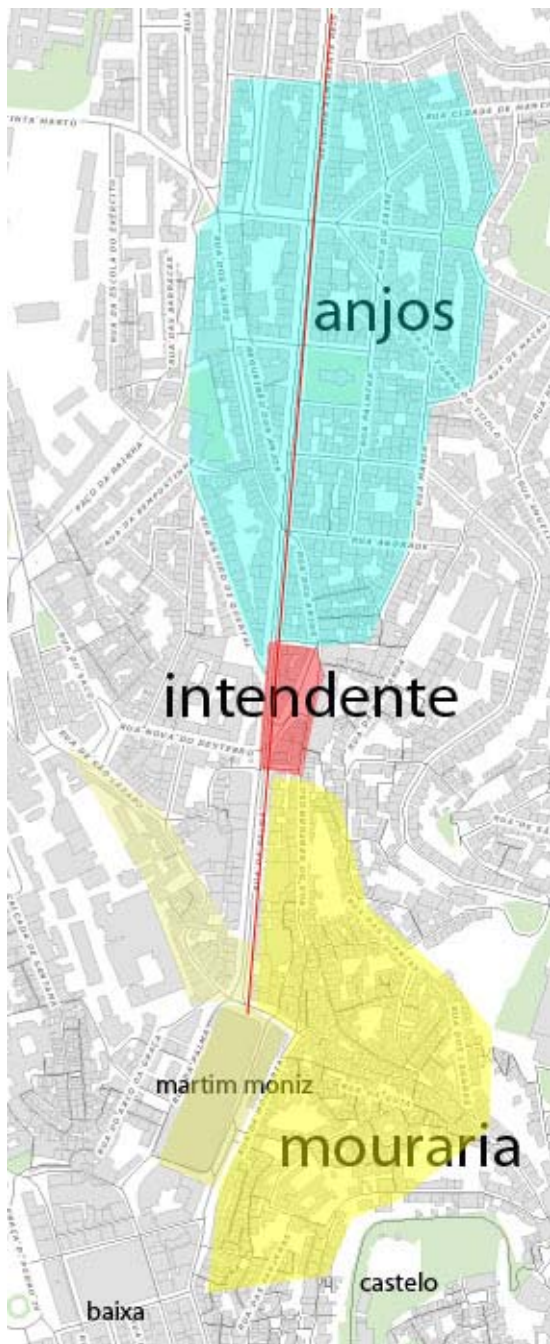
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Img 1 – Map of Lisbon: identification of the neighbourhoods discussed in the paper.

Img 2 – Poster of the festival « Faz-me festas nos Anjos » (found on the festival's website).