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**Sociability and collective action in a working-class neighbourhood: the social representations of Alcântara in the early twentieth century**

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### **Abstract**

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the peripheral area of Alcântara became one of Portugal's most important industrial centres. The development of its economic activity was accompanied by a massive growth in the population. As it became urbanised and industrialised, the representations of the neighbourhood also changed. In a few decades, Alcântara ceased to be associated with the image of a remote suburb, a place that had no clearly defined boundaries or a space defined solely in terms of its industrial function. In this article, Alcântara neighbourhood is a case study that helps us understand how collective practices shape new representations of the city and urban life. The purpose of this article is to analyse the specific role of the *Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular* in the transformation of the representations associated with the Alcântara neighbourhood in the early twentieth century. During this period, this association contributed to shape different levels of "collective representations" of Alcântara. It also contributed to the formation of an authentic style of urban life at the scale of the neighbourhood, drawing attention to people that represented the local community and speaking on their behalf.

### **Keywords**

Lisbon, industrialization, urbanization, neighbourhood, sociability, republicanism

This article aims at analysing how sociability and community life in the city shape social representations of urban spaces. I explore this issue considering social representations of Alcântara, a Lisbon neighbourhood, in the early twentieth century. At that time, this territory was connected to three interweaved processes that affected images and representations on it: its industrialization, urbanization and republicanisation<sup>1</sup>. However, I argue that transformation of images associated with Alcântara was not merely the result of functional, morphological or sociological developments. The spread of new forms of social interactions and sociability – both formal and informal – played a significant and proactive part in this process in which the truly urban nature of the Alcântara neighbourhood was recognised.

Alcântara case study helps situate Lisbon via the global process of the industrialization of big European cities (Hohenberg and Lees, 1995). In the second half of the nineteenth century, Alcântara was a space clearly organized around industrial production. At that time, the peripheral area of Alcântara became one of Portugal's most important industrial centres, with some of the country's biggest textile, mechanic or chemical companies and factories. The development of its economic activity was accompanied by a massive growth in the population, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when it went from 8 000 residents in 1864, to 20 000 in 1900, and over 30 000 in 1930 (Vidal, 2006). The image of Alcântara was then one of an industrial space, outside the city, where the workers of the textile or metallurgical factories piled up.

Until the late nineteenth centuries, Lisbon press used to describe Alcântara as a working-class suburb that formed itself at the margin of the city and urban society. The social evolution of this neighbourhood and its cultural transformation are then reminiscent of that of countless working-class suburbs of the great European cities (Merriman, 1991; Faure, 2006). As it became more urbanised and integrated to the city frame, descriptions and social perceptions of this neighbourhood also changed. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Alcântara was still predominantly inhabited by a working-class population, but it was no longer perceived as a working space in the sense that this kind of space was described for example by Michel Verret (1995, p. 119): “a specific urban matrix” but which rarely integrated “the values of the classic urbanity”. The image of Alcântara was shaped by references linked to industrialized production or even to a working class culture or a more specifically working class lifestyle, but without being clearly associated with a feeling of belonging to a working class. During the first half of the twentieth century, this social space became more diversified and the identity of Alcântara became more complex and integrated the presence of a more composite population in the

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<sup>1</sup> This article resumes and goes deeper into some parts of my book (Vidal, 2006). This publication was funded by FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia [PEst-OE/SADG/UI4038/2014].

everyday life of the neighborhood. In a few decades, Alcântara ceased to be associated with the image of a remote suburb, a place that had no clearly defined boundaries or a space defined solely in terms of its industrial function. Little by little, Alcântara became a traditional urban place, seen as an integral part of the city. Alcântara was finally recognised as a part of Lisbon imaginary, one that aspired to integration into the dominant social and cultural framework, which would contribute to the construction of the Lisbon identity.

To analyse the role of sociability in these transformations, I will focus specifically on the action of the *Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular* – or just *Promotora* – that was one of the most important voluntary associations of Lisbon, during the first half of the twentieth century. Founded in September 1904 by sympathisers with the Republican Party and Freemasonry, this collective dominated associative life in Alcântara at that time. *Promotora* succeeded in establishing a deep symbolic and practical interaction with Alcântara because it carried in the same movement three main cultural references that had shaped the history of the neighborhood since the mid-nineteenth century. *Promotora* remained at the same time the representative – and frequently the voice – of a republican bastion, a traditional Lisbon neighbourhood and a former working-class suburb.

*Promotora* was soon playing an important role in the everyday life of Alcântara, transforming the neighbourhood's social space. It conducted a great variety of actions in the field of education, culture and social care. In its first years, *Promotora* occupied a floor in a building on Rua de Alcântara. From 1912, its imposing new headquarters on Largo do Calvário, in the heart of the neighbourhood, became the meeting point for all Republican sympathisers, but also a place for social get-togethers where cultural evenings, parties and other leisure activities were organised. *Promotora* contributed to the formation of an authentic style of urban life (Velho, 1995) at the scale of the neighbourhood, drawing attention to people that represented the local community and speaking on their behalf, notably in the Lisbon press. *Promotora* acted also as a mediator in local life and sought to defend the interests of a population that was gradually being recognised and described as one that was forming a community.

Social interactions of *Promotora* with the Alcântara neighbourhood occurred then through a process of local appropriation and elaboration of diverse cultural forms and references. In this article, I will analyse how these different practices and collective actions carried out specific cultural references that altogether contributed to the making of Alcântara identity. First of all, I will explore the relation between the effort to educate the people of Alcântara and the image of the republican bastion. I will then analyse how the neighbourhood community was celebrated thank to the cultural and leisure activities. Lastly, I will discuss how the connections between

Alcântara and a working-class past lays in the valorisation of a heritage linked to an industrial tradition that gained legitimacy and strengthened the identity of the neighbourhood community.

### **1. The republican bastion: educating the people of Alcântara**

Portuguese Republicanism was defined politically and socially as an urban movement. It aimed at transforming the form of government, removing the monarchy, but it was also the political expression of a “cultural revolution” under the guidance of Neo-Enlightenment (Catroga, 2010). Lisbon provided the Republicans with their most stable social base through a diversified network of newspapers, local associations and clubs (Alves, 2002; Catroga, 1991). The Republican Movement was a particularly active agent on this front as it was the instigator of political actions in Lisbon’s neighbourhoods and developed an associative movement that was in direct contact with the residents of the city; in other words, it occupied the public space (Paquot, 2009).

The Republican Movement started to occupy an important place in the associative life of Alcântara towards the end of the nineteenth century. One of the first Republican centres operating in Lisbon was the *Centro Eleitoral Democrático de Alcântara* (the Democratic Electoral Centre of Alcântara), which opened in 1870. At first, these centres were simply militant structures and venues for the literate elite. However, slowly but surely these groups extended their activities to numerous fields of local associative life: culture, sport and above all education. In 1910, the newspaper *O Século* listed 30 Republican associative schools in Lisbon; five of these were in Alcântara, including the one with the most students: the *Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular* (O Século, 1910).

The political context at the start of the twentieth century undoubtedly contributed to the rapid recognition of *Promotara's* influence. Following the end of the Monarchy, the influence of the Republican Movement gradually won over most of the districts in Lisbon. Nevertheless, even in a city that was in the grips of Republicanism, Alcântara was often cited as an exemplary neighbourhood due to its fervour and commitment to the cause. The electoral records from the start of the twentieth century illustrate the rapid progress made by the Republican Party in this working class neighbourhood. In the general elections, the Republicans obtained nearly 40 per cent of the votes in Alcântara in 1905, 61 per cent in 1908, and 76 per cent in 1910 (Almeida, 1985). At a time that was generally favourable to the Republicans, their results in Alcântara were well above the Lisbon average although they did not register the extraordinary landslides of the Socorro and São Cristóvão neighbourhoods.

The growing political unrest in the last years of the Monarchy also spread to the streets of Alcântara with some regularity. A number of incidents bore witness to the support the Republican cause enjoyed among large numbers of the Alcântara population. At the start of August 1906, a turbulent visit by the Prime Minister, João Franco, to Alcântara hit the national headlines when protesters threw stones at him. This violent demonstration led to the indictment of Republican militants from the neighbourhood, including two members of the board of directors of the *Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular*. After some protests in the Republican press, a large rally was organised on 15 August. The opportunity was seized to spread the image of a truly united community of residents and citizens. The front page of the newspaper *O Mundo* on 16 August 1906 carried an article saying: “*The openly Republican borough [Freguesia] turned out in force. The enthusiasm of the thousands and thousands of men and women was a sight to behold as they flocked to the site of the rally rather than enjoying relaxation and respite much needed by the working classes that make up the majority of this densely populated borough*” (our translation). The same kind of discourse can be found in the Republican newspapers reporting the incidents which marked the elections in Lisbon in April 1908. Two protesters died during one demonstration in Alcântara. The Alcântara Street was named “*Rua do Cinco de Abril*” in memory of that bloody incident that marked the end of the Monarchy. This political context at the start of the twentieth century undoubtedly contributed to the rapid recognition of *Promotora's* influence.

Nevertheless, *Promotora's* sights were not set on political action and much less on electoral battles. The founders of *Promotora* had far more ambitious objectives and the principal field of action was education. Its primary mission was to instruct and educate the “people of Alcântara”, an expression that was used time and again in the minutes of the General Assembly and in the pages of the association newspaper, *A Educação Popular*. According to the by-laws approved at the General Assembly of October 12<sup>th</sup> 1904, the goals of this institution were “the physical, intellectual, moral and civic education of all classes in general” (*Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular*, 1904). The implementation of this programme included widely diversified and more or less formalised initiatives. In addition to education and training courses, there was also the decision to create a reading lounge, to offer conferences on the most varied subjects in the fields of sciences and arts, and to organise industrial fairs, trade shows or artistic performances. The new by-laws, updated in 1921, further specified the goals of this association, while placing greater focus on school activities: the aim was no longer merely to educate but, above all, to teach. Thus, Article 3 established that *Promotora* would undertake to “defend popular instruction and education through primary teaching, lessons, lectures, presentations, reading lounges, educational exhibits” (*Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular*, 1921). Article 5 clearly stated the political philosophy framing the association's activities: “*Sociedade*

*Promotora de Educação Popular* refrains from any partisan politics. However, it was founded by the Republicans of Alcântara, and, therefore, it was their principles that it sought to defend, through education and instruction" (Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular, 1921). The aim was to transform minds and unify consciences through education, thus ensuring the dissemination of republican ideas, following the traditional pattern in European reform movements<sup>2</sup>.

The primary goals of *Promotora*, constantly reaffirmed in the discourse of its directors or in the articles of the *Educação Popular* newspaper, also needed to meet the immediate needs of the population. The general context of education in Portugal at that time largely explains this position. In 1899, 82.9 per cent of schools in Lisbon were private. The consequences of the gaps in the Portuguese education system were twofold: high illiteracy rates, which were hard and slow to decrease, and the emergence of an alternative network of associations that tried to overcome the State's powerlessness (Ramos, 1988).

|                          | 1900 census |      |        |      | 1930 census |      |        |      |
|--------------------------|-------------|------|--------|------|-------------|------|--------|------|
|                          | Alcântara   |      | Lisbon |      | Alcântara   |      | Lisbon |      |
|                          | H           | F    | H      | F    | H           | F    | H      | F    |
| <b>Reading knowledge</b> | 51.4        | 40.9 | 59.1   | 48.9 | 65          | 50.4 | 68.9   | 56.1 |
| <b>Illiterate</b>        | 48.6        | 59.1 | 40.9   | 51.1 | 35          | 49.6 | 31.1   | 43.9 |

**Table 1. : Literacy Level in the borough [*Freguesia*] of Alcântara and in Lisbon (source: Census)**

According to the national census, while distinguishing individuals able to read and those who were illiterate – unable to read or write – the average educational level of Alcântara's population was poor but, during the first half of the twentieth century, it improved more rapidly than in the other parts of the city (Table 1). Was this the result of an action by *Promotora*? It is difficult to say, as it can be complex to assess changes in the level of literacy of a population based on surveys that established their own criteria. However, *Promotora* seems particularly well suited to the conditions and lifestyles of a working-class population. It understood, in particular, that education should be a part of life. Men and women – but in fact more men than women – could continue to improve their literacy and knowledge as adults. *Promotora* proposed several types of teaching methods, depending on the population's age groups and categories: courses during the day or in the evening, adult literacy courses, primary education for children, evening

<sup>2</sup> One of the major references for the directors of *Promotora* was the Spanish teacher Francisco Ferrer. The execution of this anarchist militant in 1909 caused an upsurge of emotion. The November 1909 issue of the *A Educação Popular*, with the title "The murder of Ferrer": ", reads as follows: "the illustrious teacher Francisco Ferrer, the evangelist of a new order based on Education, fell to the bullets of the Order, the reactionary Order..." *A Educação Popular*, no.9, November 1909



refresher courses in different subjects (Portuguese, French, History, Geography, Arithmetic, Music, Handicrafts, among others). Up until 1921, only men could claim the status of *sócios* (members) of *Promotora* but all classes were eligible for membership including their families (women and children)<sup>3</sup>. The only condition for access was to pay the annual fee and an additional fee for each enrolment. In 1909, the overall amount of these fees represented about one day's wages for low-paid workers in the textile industry (*A Educação Popular*, no. 9, November 1909).

Although the purpose proclaimed was the creation of a community of equals, some forms of distinction still persisted, some more evident than others. Those concerning gender were the most blatant. While, in 1904, the children's school was mixed, evening classes for adults were mainly attended by men. In 1909, evening literacy courses were created, and reserved for the wives of members. In the first year, fifteen women enrolled. For girls, there were also handicrafts (*lavo*res) classes, where they were taught sewing, embroidery and other activities particularly reserved for women. The Republican Alcântara shaped by this *Sociedade* was, thus, strongly gender-biased. Men and women did not attend the same courses or the same places.

Between 1923 and 1946, 1 790 students – children and teenagers – were enrolled for one or more years at *Promotora* school. During that same period, 1 700 individuals of an older age group attended the evening classes. The heads of the association complained about the continual renewal of members, as the main motivation for membership was access to the school and to the different training courses (Minutes of the General Assembly, Archive of the Archive of the *Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular*). The association never had more than a few hundred members at a particular given time. At the General Assembly of 1909, 294 members were registered. During the previous year, there were 186 new admissions and 220 terminations. In 1926, a newspaper clipping kept in the archives reported 900 members (Archive of the *Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular* - ASPEP). From the establishment of the association up to the 1940s, there were, thus, many more students than actual members. This difference indicates that attending *Promotora* was often a family affair: men would join *Promotora* and participate in the daily life of the association. They would attend evening classes, while women attended their own courses, and children went to school during the day. Thus, *Promotora's* schools quickly strengthened social ties across the neighbourhood.

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<sup>3</sup>According to the 1904 by-laws, the association was open to all, without any requirement of residence - it was not exclusive to the residents of Alcântara - but it was a "society of males" (Article 4). The new by-laws adopted in 1921 excluded that clause and *Promotora* was then opened to members of both genders (Article 2).

## 2. The traditional neighbourhood: the pleasure of being together

In Lisbon, associations and clubs had a significant role in the construction and the permanence of an original urban identity, based on the valorisation of the small communities of the old neighbourhoods. This recurrence of traditional visions of the city was rooted on the particularity of urban places which history and cultural traditions were folklorized and performed during traditional festivities (Cordeiro, 1997). In Alcântara, the political context of the First Republic gave another perspective on the diversity of this urban identity making. It was the Republican press that best reported the transformation of Alcântara images, valorising local proximities and neighbourhood relationships.

*Promotora* project stemmed from a national, even universal vision, which was ill-adjusted to local specificities, or that, at least, was not prepared to take them into account. The Republican Movement helped make Alcântara a recognised urban space. But, from the republican point of view, this space mostly existed as part of a collective and national project. According to the Republicans, Alcântara was first and foremost a community of Portuguese citizens. This “bastion of Republicanism” had to share the same symbols and memories as the surrounding communities. In other words, the exclusive link between *Promotora* and the Alcântara residents was not a given or an obvious fact. Its geographic and even physical presence – the imposing headquarters overlooking the main square of Alcântara – were not enough to ensure the association an 'a priori' positive relationship with its immediate surroundings. It should be noted that neither the name of the *Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular*, nor the goals established in its by-laws make any explicit reference to the quarter or the borough [*freguesia*]. According to its by-laws, the association was open to all, without any requirement of residence – it was not exclusive to the people of Alcântara.

However, a curious lexical contrast between the first and second version of the by-laws corroborates the strengthening of the links between *Promotora* and Alcântara during the first two decades of the twentieth century. In 1904, Article 1 reads as follows: "*An association [sociedade] with head office in Lisbon is hereby established, under the name Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular*" (Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular, 1904). In 1921, the new wording stated that: "*Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular, established on September 30th 1904, which continues to have its head office in Alcântara, shall henceforth be governed by the following by-laws*" (Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular, 1921). In less than 20 years, *Promotora* changed the spatial reference: It was no longer based in Lisbon, but in Alcântara. The link between *Promotora* and Alcântara was not, thus, the straightforward consequence of a global process that could be seen all over the city. It was born from

*Promotora*'s actions at the local scale. I would like now to give some examples of these activities and practices that were more informal and not exclusively connected to the field of education.

First of all, it's necessary to stress that *Promotora* community actually corresponded to that of the neighbourhood. In other words, the different schools of *Promotora* were primarily attended by people actually residing in Alcântara (Vidal, 2006). There was no exponential growth in the number of *Promotora*'s members or students. *Promotora* never reached the size of *A Voz do Operário*, an older school association in Lisbon that, at this same time, had extended its influence in all the eastern part of the city and beyond. Thus, during the first half of the twentieth century, *Promotora* was undoubtedly a place where ties were created between individuals who, besides being members of the same association, shared the same residential space. The fact that *Promotora*'s action remained at a small scale, circumscribed to a fairly large urban space but never that of the city, undoubtedly contributed to deepen these ties, at least symbolically, between the association and its neighbourhood. But specific forms of interaction were also implemented during the first decades of the twentieth century. These ties were knotted at school events but also during holidays and leisure time, which took on an increasingly important role in the life of the association.

In these circumstances, *Promotora* and Alcântara communities were intermingled. For example, *Promotora* managed to give some impact to its efforts towards the literacy of the Alcântara population. During the first years of its existence, *Promotora* regularly published, in periodicals or in its own newspaper, the names and grades of its students – children, women and adults – who had passed the tests, thus certifying the completion of a course. Each year, in October, on the occasion of the anniversary of the association, merit prizes were awarded to the most talented young students. All these small events received praise in the Republican press<sup>4</sup>. The newspaper *A Vanguarda*, whose director, Magalhães Lima, was the honorary president of *Promotora*, published the most comprehensive articles, which included all details on the personalities who had attended and the highlights of the ceremony. These ceremonies rewarded individual but also collective efforts, as all winners also represented the community of Alcântara.

The Portuguese Republican Movement used unifying symbols whenever there were festivities or ceremonies. Neighbourhood everyday life is marked by countless commemorations: processions in the streets of Alcântara or straightforward meetings or conferences in the main hall of *Promotora* headquarters in Largo do Calvário. From 1910, *Promotora* was always associated with the solemn ceremonies paying tribute to outstanding personalities who fought in

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<sup>4</sup> In particular, see issues: *A Vanguarda* and *O Mundo* of 21 October 1907, *O Século* and *O Diário de Notícias* of 2 October 1912.

support of the Republican regime: the funeral of Manuel de Arriaga in 1917 and of the journalist Gregório Fernandes in 1915; the official tribute to Magalhães Lima in 1919; and Teófilo Braga's jubilee in 1922. The centenary of the Liberal Revolution of 1820 was also celebrated with great pomp and ceremony, as was the anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic every year on Fifth October of course. The collective memory was not only based on national references but also embraced the local context. Alcântara's past and its public figures were not forgotten and indeed *Promotora's* anniversary was the most memorable event in the Republican era. Every year, the main hall of *Promotora* was filled with its directors, members and public figures of Alcântara who applauded the association's work. On that day, the values of the association were promoted in an extremely formal ceremony. In 1920, one supporter of *Promotora* was excluded from the ceremony for having remained seated while the national anthem was being played (*Minutes of the General Assembly*, 29 June 1920, ASPEP).

The way in which the residents of Alcântara received this ideological and symbolic *corpus* was probably very varied and inconstant. Politicisation at the local level is a complex process that combines different levels of interpretations and exchanges between the customs, traditions and cultural references in these communities (Hastings, 1991). In the case of *Promotora*, as so often with this type of association, it is difficult to distinguish the political or militant activities (even education) from the social practices that were more geared to leisure and entertainment. During the Republican period, *Promotora* helped implement a neighbourhood lifestyle into everyday life, peppered with parties, dances, musical evenings, theatre, New Year and Carnival celebrations, sporting events with *Promotora* football club and, from 1915, the first sessions of cinema productions. All these initiatives increased in number after 1912. The spacious headquarters in Largo de Calvário provided new opportunities and, above all, could be used to raise money. In fact, the justification given for these activities – at least in the early years – was to raise money for the association and to help its more needy members buy books, for example, or to set up a school canteen. But these activities contributed also to promote Alcântara beyond the boundary of the neighbourhood. At the end of the 1910s, the performances of the amateur theatre company made *Promotora* famous with shows that were comprised of comic turns, poetry recitals and *fado* sessions. From the 1920s, the cinema sessions became increasingly successful and attracted residents from other neighbourhoods of the city. This was in turn the source of some problems and disturbances: the "dubious" audience of sessions attended by too many "foreigners" raised some concerns among the association's directors (*Minutes of the General Assembly*, 25 February 1921, ASPEP).

On these occasions, breaking away from the ideological framework corresponded to a change in the way the association worked. The normally all-powerful board of directors was no longer in total control of the activities. Initiatives by individuals or small groups enjoyed unexpected

success. This change in the association's everyday life and momentary abandoning of explicit ideological references did not mean the social life in *Promotora* was impoverished or had lost significance. The sociologist Michel Verret gave a perfect description of the kind of working-class sociability that must have been found in *Promotora*: "*The working class style in the association is none other than the own style of the working class culture. Controllable levels of camaraderie: "small collectives", having a "small glass of something", a "party", or a "something to eat". Little formality: working on the basis of "goodwill". Minimal hierarchies: few bosses. Or otherwise, so many that nobody can give anyone orders: two presidents, seven vice-presidents and lastly an honorary president. Collectivity based on "affiliation" more than on "compliance" and on "expression" more than on "pressure", where people go to "see each other" rather than "to be seen", and not because of the lessons being given or the complex exercises but more because of the simple pleasure of being together*" (Verret, 1996, p. 192, our translation). If we are to understand the everyday life of this association and its connection with the life of Alcântara residents in all its complexity, we must take into account the ordinary invention of new practices and symbolic orders.

### **3. The working-class area: representing the community**

*Promotora's* action was all the more effective as it was also part of the history of an urban space, marked by industrial tradition. The connections between Alcântara and a working-class tradition laid then in more formalised actions in which *Promotora* assumed a proactive approach to defend local interests and the specificity of the community history. In fact, *Promotora* has quickly acquired a role as representative of the neighbourhood's residents. Since the early years of the Republic (1910-1926), it has held a significant role in the relationships among the city's different levels of government. *Promotora's* closest partner was not the city council, but the Alcântara borough assembly (*Junta de Freguesia*)<sup>5</sup>. This assembly contributed to the life of the association by distributing books for schools or providing clothing for children. Likewise, both institutions were often side by side in the events that punctuated the life of the neighbourhood, namely when interests and wellbeing of the local community were threatened by external authorities or power. For example, in January 1911, the *Junta* organised a demonstration against the city's plans to build a barracks for the *Guarda Republicana* on the *Necessidades Park*, one of the few recreational areas of Alcântara. On this occasion, the assembly received the support of *Promotora*, which called all residents of the neighbourhood

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<sup>5</sup>In the pages of *A Educação Popular*, the municipality of Lisbon was seldom mentioned. In 1921, during a general meeting, a proposal to give the Lisbon City Council the title of "honorary member" (*sócio honorário*) found some resistance. One of the members of the board argued that, with a grant of twenty escudos per month, the City was doing nothing but its duty. Nevertheless, the proposal was accepted by majority of votes.

out to the street to protest<sup>6</sup>. But the most prominent joint action at the time was probably the creation of the Alcântara School Canteen in July 1909 with the purpose to provide working-class children attending local schools with meals at low prices, but also with clothes and books, as well as free medical care. This canteen was largely funded with donations from commercial and industrial establishments in the neighbourhood.

Around *Promotora* unfolded a relatively dense network of individuals who gave a new image to the life of the neighbourhood. At the origin of the creation of *Promotora* was a group of tradesmen and small industry owners. The occupations of the eighteen founding members revealed great social homogeneity: a property owner, five tradesmen, seven industrialists, a teacher and four sales employees. In April 1905, a general meeting elected the first board of directors: The chairman, António Joaquim de Oliveira, was a sales employee; the vice-chairman, Pedro José Teixeira, was a teacher; the treasurer, Eduardo José da Silva, was an industrialist; the board also included two sales employee, two tradesmen and a barber. All of them lived in Alcântara. Many of them held other positions in other associations of the same neighbourhood, such as the School Canteen.

The path of António Joaquim de Oliveira illustrates rather well the profile of this kind of local elite, which, in the case of Alcântara, often involved the carrying out of management responsibilities at *Promotora* and a social proximity with industrial environment. Joaquim António de Oliveira built his entire career, both professionally and as a public person, around the Alcântara neighbourhood. His untimely and accidental death in March 1923 aroused great emotion and the many obituaries published in newspapers can outline a path fully devoted to the Republican cause<sup>7</sup>. Born in 1863 in Alcântara, he hailed from a family of merchants and married the daughter of one of the neighbourhood's tradesman. Eulogies were consistent in mentioning his Alcântara roots. His immediate family formed a socio-professional sphere that bore a strange resemblance to the composition of *Promotora's* first board of directors: it included tradesmen, industrialists and teachers. António Joaquim de Oliveira founded and directed an impressive number of communities and clubs in Alcântara. According to *Diário de Notícias*, at the time of his death, he was a member of the boards of "all the republican and school communities of [Alcântara]" (*Diário de Notícias*, 12 March 1923). However, his most prominent work remains the creation of *Promotora* and it was this that allowed him to pursue a more political career. This career would be modest and, again, essentially local as he was an influential member of the *Junta de Freguesia*. Shortly before his death, however, his reputation exceeded the boundaries of the neighbourhood, when he became part of the administrative body

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<sup>6</sup> Various newspaper clippings - late January 1911 – Archive of the *Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular* (ASPEP).

<sup>7</sup> In particular, see *O Rebate*, *O Século*, *O Diário de Notícias*, *A Voz do Operário*, *O Mundo*, of the week of 15 March 1923.

of the district of Lisbon. The death of António Joaquim de Oliveira was an occasion to celebrate the Republican identity of Alcântara, but also the industrial tradition of the neighbourhood.

Indeed, the network cast by *Promotora* stretched to the large companies of the neighbourhood. Some of the business owners of Alcântara formed a group of progressive employers, esteemed and often quoted as examples by *Promotora*. On the contrary, these special relationships with some companies excluded a more conservative group of industrialists. Thus, the directors of Companhia União Fabril (C.U.F., one of the main companies in the neighbourhood at time) were ignored by *Promotora*. Among the hundreds of press clippings collected by *Promotora*, very few mention the actions of C.U.F.'s management. On the other hand, in 1910, *Promotora* joined a tribute by the employees of *Companhia de Fiação e Tecidos Lisbonense* to their employers. Alfredo Brito, Custódio Bizarro and Horace Syder, who had run the company since 1909, appeared on the first page of *A Educação Popular*. The newspaper praised the "tactfulness" of this new management (*A Educação Popular*, no. 10, January 1910). The ties between some Alcântara employers and *Promotora* were also reflected by acts of patronage: financial donations, offerings of books or clothing. Industrial or commercial establishments in the area also offered cinema sessions to *Promotora*'s students.

Other forms for promoting the industrial past of Alcântara were no longer based on institutional or formal relationships, but rather on the display of this tradition as heritage. It was about showcasing techniques and know-how through a wide range of initiatives or events that gained significance through the first years of *Promotora* existence. In October 1907, for instance, a field trip was held to a shoe factory, considered as one of the most important and modern company of the neighbourhood at that time. The board and members of *Promotora* were treated to a full tour of the various workshops of this model establishment whose techniques and know-how were perceived as the collective heritage of Alcântara inhabitants. This visit merited several small articles in the press. *A Vanguarda* published a more consistent article on the event, describing all the technical qualities of the business model (ASPEP).

However, the more ambitious attempt to disseminate the industrial tradition of Alcântara was an exhibition project, in September 1914. This project turned out to be unsuccessful due to the war that had broken out in Europe. However, between June and August 1914, *Promotora* was able to present its initiative in the press and gain the support of many businesses in the neighbourhood. In June 1914, *A Vanguarda* published an interview with António Joaquim de Oliveira. The director of the association confessed that this was an old project, whose idea dated back almost to the founding of the institution. *Promotora* intended to show the diversity of local production: "*Alcântra is an active neighbourhood and local industries have enjoyed a development unknown to many. It is important to say this. It is important that Lisbon and the entire country know that there is a neighbourhood which, along with other business centres,*

such as Covilhã, Guimarães and Porto, contributes to all sectors of our industry"<sup>8</sup>. In the early twentieth century, Alcântara was still an unusual place in a country where industrialized centres were few.

An organising committee was formed within *Promotora*. Preparatory meetings were an opportunity to assemble all "*residents of the neighbourhood*" who shared the same desire to disseminate Alcântara's role in the "*progressive development of national labour*" (*O Reclamo*, September 1914). The exhibition was reserved exclusively for the production of local industry, which is to say of the borough [*freguesia*]. *Promotora* requested the participation of all the industrial undertakings in the neighbourhood. They showed great enthusiasm. In the weeks following the announcement of the project, *A Vanguarda*, *O Mundo*, *A República*, and *A Capital* repeatedly published long lists of industrial but also commercial undertakings that joined the initiative. Gradually, the practical conditions of the exhibit were defined. *Promotora* published a first poster of the programme. Virtually all industries were represented: from textiles to food, from metalworks, to timber industries, from small chemical industries to earthenware or typography. According to the newspaper *O Século*, only the Alcântara neighbourhood would be able to assemble such diversity (*O Século*, 26 May 1914). But the classification of exhibitors also reflected the image of Alcântara in that summer of 1914. The organising committee had planned to group exhibitors into twenty classes, corresponding to groups of consumer goods. Emphasis was, therefore, more on finished products than on techniques: more on the screws than on threading techniques, more on the different grades of olive oil than on refining methods. Alcântara was presented as an area of diversified production at the service of Lisbon and not actually as a specialised industrial centre. It was the Alcântara contribution to the urban economy that should have been highlighted.

#### 4. Conclusions

This article aimed at analyzing the role of the *Sociedade Promotora de Educação Popular* in a process of identity transformation that affected Alcântara at the early twentieth century. To conclude, we can stress the originality of Alcântara case study from the point of view of the social and cultural history of Lisbon. At the turn of the twentieth century, Republican press described Alcântara as a model territory in which political progress and strategies for social policy were highly the most successful. However, the past of this outlying territory, highly connected to the industrialised process, could yet be perceived as an impediment to its fully integration into the urban fabric. During the first decade of the twentieth century, *Promotora*

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with A.J. de Oliveira, *A Vanguarda*, 5 June 1914.



managed to achieve a significant influence because this voluntary association promoted a large and diversified range of actions, formal and informal, that exceeded its primary goal: the education of the people of Alcântara. This study aimed then at connecting the *Promotora* actions to the everyday life of the neighbourhood. During this period, Alcântara inhabitants could frequent *Promotora* to improve their education level but also, and mainly, to share leisure and social times. The action of this voluntary association was clearly connected to Alcântara images, namely in the Lisbon press. But this study showed also how *Promotora* has contributed to shape different levels of collective representations of Alcântara: the cultural and intellectual configurations of these representations, the ways in which identity discourses were exhibited, as well as the more institutionalised representations of the resident community (Chartier, 1989). Therefore, this case study helps to better understand how urban representations are produced and transformed by collective practices.

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