

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2019-04-04

Deposited version:

Post-print

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Sequeira, A. D. (2017). Ephemeral art in impermanent spaces: the effects of street art in the social construction of public space. In Pedro Costa, Paula Guerra, Pedro Soares Neves (Ed.), *Urban intervention, street art and public space*. (pp. 65-74).: DINÂMIA'CET-IUL, ISUP.

Further information on publisher's website:

--

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Sequeira, A. D. (2017). Ephemeral art in impermanent spaces: the effects of street art in the social construction of public space. In Pedro Costa, Paula Guerra, Pedro Soares Neves (Ed.), *Urban intervention, street art and public space*. (pp. 65-74).: DINÂMIA'CET-IUL, ISUP.. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Sequeira, Ágata Dourado (2016), «Ephemeral Art in Impermanent Spaces: The effects of street art in the social construction of public space», in Guerra, Paula; Costa, Pedro e Neves, Pedro Soares (eds.) (2016), *Urban Intervention, Street Art and Public Space*, Lisboa, Urban Creativity. ISBN 978-989-977 12-6-0

«Ephemeral Art in Impermanent Spaces: The effects of street art in the social construction of public space»

Ágata Dourado Sequeira

PhD Candidate, DINAMIA 'CET / ISCTE-IUL

Introduction

This article sets out to show how the production and practices of street art in Lisbon have strong effects on what concerns the creation of images of the city – in its marketable consequences – and the promotion of discourses about the urban public space and its structures.

Because street art displays a very particular relation with the urban space, the research on the dynamics that its practice and production create with the actors and institutions that shape the cities, show that it has an active role in creating images of the city, as well as proposing discourses about its public space. This article results from a research on street art and its implications in the social construction of public space, from the urban context of Lisbon. Within this research, street art is conceived as an art world in formation, specific as it exists in-between an underground practice and a full participation in the contemporary art world and its markets.

The collection of street art images by the artists and street art enthusiasts, while a simple way to fight the inherent transience of this art form, perpetuating it through digital means and on internet's «virtual streets», allows the artists to showcase their work to a broader audience, with a conscience that many times precedes the street art piece itself, thought for its future virtual display rather than meeting the eye of the passer-by.

The new possibilities around the practices and projects of street art allow for new street art pieces to be created in a scale that, while illustrates the acceptance of this art form in the visual mainstream, also is effect of the role the powers that shape the cities consider street art can have in creating images that promote the city both as tourist and business destination. On the other hand, many street artists and street art collective projects find that through street art and the possibility of intervening in larger scales and in legitimized contexts, they too can have

a say in the fate of their cities, namely in the state of its and its relation to local communities and the unbalanced powers that shape the place they live and work. In this way street art can also be a visually compelling way of starting and promoting discourses about the public space of the cities, with several street art projects making questions and creating spaces for public intervention and citizen participation, in the continual process of production of meaning in the public space.

Keywords: *street art, social construction of space, public space, urban sociology, art worlds.*

1. Street art and images of the city

1.1. An ephemeral urban art

Street art is, genetically, ephemeral. Because they are outside, street art pieces are not only subject to the elements, as to human intervention, and therefore their disappearance or alteration is expected. The *habitat* for this art form, the street, characteristically enables the degradation of street art pieces, in what itself constitutes a dynamic relation between the intervention and the urban daily life.

The way artists deal with this predictable transience is diverse, and is connected to the diversity of their personal and artistic paths and the way they conceptualize the practice of artistically intervening in the public space. Therefore, when questioned¹ about the way they relate to their street art pieces after finishing them, their perceptions included both the *will to preserve* the pieces - protecting it from the elements and human intervention, even to the point of applying special protective coating -, and a certain *detachment* towards the fate of the piece, considering that once finished it is «no longer theirs». Within the tension between the will to preserve and the detachment towards the street art pieces, the artists' perceptions translate the way they conceive and frame their individual street art practice, in what constitutes, in fact, a process of socialization of the artist in face of that apparently inevitable condition.

On the other hand, the transience of the street art pieces can be positively valued as integral part of the intervention. As specific *habitat* of this artistic form, the street is also a dynamic environment. While continuing to explore the question of transience in the creation of street art pieces, let's approach how photography comes forth as central element in relation to that ephemeral nature of street art, and also the possibilities it allows, together with the internet, in spreading the work of its artists.

¹ Within the set of interviews to Lisbon street artists that took part for the research project from which this article is a result.

1.2. Street art images

The will to preserve the ephemeral marks of expressive human intervention in the walls of the cities is not a recent phenomenon. It is worth mentioning the photographic collection of Parisian graffiti between the 1930s and the 1960s, by George Brassai (2002). More recently, it is also essential the reference to the works of Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, who documented the subway graffiti art in the 1970s New York. The result of this compilation of images can be seen in the book *Subway Art* (Cooper e Chalfant, 2009). The photographic incursions in this graffiti world were made easy by the direct contact with the writers and their will to have a quality photographic record of their interventions, in what constitutes a way of «fighting» its inevitable transience.

In fact, photographing a piece is also to resist its predictable ephemeral nature, allowing that the work lives beyond its erosion. According to Ricardo Campos, there is a disjunction between the physical work and its image. This in the sense that, for a street practice that is so intimately connected to the physical space of the intervention – as is graffiti, but also street art –, being its localization, eventual erosion and inevitable transience, indissociable aspects of its definition, the collection of photographic images assumes the meaning of a rupture with that ontological condition (Campos, 2010:266).

Nowadays, the diffusion of street art images is enormous, receiving extensive projection through the internet, as well as print media. Street artists are fully aware of the potential of this diffusion, and so the photographing of their pieces, together with other technological resources, is frequently an essential part of their work, assuming the role of *memory technologies*, *communication technologies*, and *narrative and representative technologies* (Campos, 2010:270).

In what concerns the research project that originated this article, the way in which the street artists approached the role of photography in their work, during the interviews that were made, is also a relevant aspect. From their speech, photography appears as a way of preserving the street art intervention, as an image record that surpasses its ephemeral nature. Secondly, photography appears, for some street artists, as a key aspect of their street art practice, as a way of learning and sharing new techniques. In this sense, it also allows for new sociabilities to take place between street artists, or between them and street art enthusiasts. Thirdly, photography constitutes itself as a way of observing the reactions of the passers-by, in the sense the act of someone casually finding a street art piece and then photographing it and putting it online can be a way of appreciating the artwork.

Besides the relation between street artists and photography, also several photographers that are not related to making street art – both amateurs and professionals – dedicate their time to street art photography, which has as natural consequence the spreading of street art images throughout the internet. Johannes Stahl refers to the close relation between street art and visual culture in the following way: «(...) The new media have come to a sort of arrangement with the culture of *street art*. (...) Visual documentary has become an integral part of the action because it will most likely be all that remains of the work after a relatively short time.» (Stahl, 2009:221). Street art, its photography and the internet appear therefore in close relation, in recording pieces whose transience is a remarkable feature, As for the role of internet, it will be approached in the following section.

1.3. Virtual Streets

Reflecting on the role of the production of street art images poses questions, namely as to the street art that is made to expose itself to the eye of the passer-by correspond another one, made in regard to the eye of the photographer and the diffusion of images through the internet. Being the visibility factor of importance in the spreading of street art images by the artists, it is by some considered that the internet has a fundamental role, which might even take part of the creative planning of street art pieces. Therefore, the places of the interventions are frequently chosen besides their accessibility and visibility to passers-by, because the main intention is to make the pieces visible to a much larger set of people through pictures or films that show it on the internet. This way, the sharing street artists do of their work on the internet is an important part of their street art practice, giving much more visibility and replacing the experience of physical encounter of the public with the pieces, that so many times are located in secluded places.

Besides the effects that result from the encounter between the passer-by and the street art piece in the streets of the city, it is relevant to approach the effects of the diffusion of street art images in the «virtual streets» that a route through street art websites suggests. These «streets» expand through websites that include personal street artists' pages, blogs, online magazines, among others, namely those that are dedicated to concentrate and spread street art images at a global scale². Another type of websites assume a city-oriented kind of structure, suggesting «virtual tours» to the street art they show³.

² Such as Wooster Collective (www.woostercollective.com) or Unurth (www.unurth.com).

³ Such as Google Street Art Project (<https://streetart.withgoogle.com>).

Authors such as Stahl affirm that the presence of street art in the internet is almost equivalent to its presence in the physical world, which leads to assume that the will to document an ephemeral piece –which Campos designated as creating *digitalized memories* (Campos, 2010:271) – is just one of the many facets of a profusion of images that is also result of networking between the street artists, as well as street art enthusiasts (Stahl, 2009:223). The possibility that otherwise unknown street artists can show their work to the world, from a computer screen and through high-resolution images, is also noted by this author: «(...) today virtually unknown people can spread their message all over the internet. At the same time, this form of publication, whilst its individual successes are measurable by the number of hits, allows the originator to stay relatively anonymous if he wishes.» (Stahl, 2009:225).

However, with the spreading of street art images through the internet comes the risk of taking them out of context. There can be, on the other hand, an effort of providing spatial context, when these images are integrated in virtual routes, through the street art of a city, for instances. These efforts in giving spatial context to these street art images can constitute an approach to the concept of *circuit*, such as José Cantor Magnani defined it, within his analysis of juvenile groups (Magnani, 2010). This concept designates, in his words, «the uses of space and urban equipment – allowing (...) the exercise of sociability through encounters, communication, management of codes -, however in a more independent way in relation to space, without hanging on contiguity.» (Magnani, 2010:18).

From the perspective of Magnani and in the sense that there is something that identifies the location of the street art pieces, visual testimonies of the use of space, it can be said that a collection of such images can constitute a *virtual circuit*. However, seeing images of street art remains inherently different than the experience of finding street art in the city's streets, in the sense that in the first the surprise effect disappears, diluting the experience, as Anna Wacklawek referred (Wacklawek, 2010:179). In a picture of a street art piece, its location tends to be an accidental factor, that may or may not be identified. The emphasis of these images is the quality of the work itself, not the location. Even though the encounter with an image is always a mediated experience, as also is the observation of street art on the street, a street art image never allows for the same impact as finding a piece on the street: «(...) the record of the work exists, but in a sort of void where site and time are obsolete. This dislocation prevents a complete reading of the piece, since unless we actually experience the work live, we do not have access to its impact in or experience of a particular urban context.» (Wacklawek, 2010:178)

This observation raises further interrogations concerning the possibility of some street art being created specifically to be «seen» through a computer screen, on the internet, in pictures

or film, instead of the encounter with the piece in the same physical place, due to the considerable media attention to the street art phenomenon, and consequent availability of means to some artists. And in such a case, in what way would it make sense to use the word «street», when recalling to this form of art, when the street is in fact virtual and the physical location of the piece is often unknown or difficult to find. At the same time, street art images in the internet can appear out of its specific context, proposing images of city in the general and unspecific sense of an urban contemporary imagery.

This mediated practice, with images of interventions making a strong presence on the internet, can be associated to the formation of new publics and practices, of people interested in following the work of street artists, be it virtually or through the urban streets. Dolores Hayden said that «along with new media come new definitions of public.» (Hayden, 1997:67), to which we can add that with new publics, also may appear new markets and new ways of exploiting these mediated street art images.

1.4. Images of street art in marketing and tourism

Presently, street art is subject to intense media attention. There is a certain hype of street art, manifest in the amount of hardcover books that show images of street art pieces, in the news about street artists and the amount of articles and websites that can be found online, as well as is the several street art initiatives that multiply all over the country and abroad – street art festivals, street artists' exhibitions, the emergence of street art tourism, and media images of street art that seem ubiquitous.

Concerning the effects of the use of street art images for tourism, I will now address what it can express about the construction of an image of the city for touristic consumption, as well as the relation between street art and marketing and publicity within the urban public space.

Economic and political issues dictate the importance of big cities, in a global context, distinguish themselves, in a movement towards competition that intends to attract both investment and visitors. This aspect is particularly appealing for contexts in which economic activity, in a broad sense, and apart from big corporations, appears underdeveloped or unstructured. Art in the cities – and also, with particular mediated relevance, street art – emerges as having a central role in its visibility at a global level: «No matter how restricted the definition of art is implied, or how few artists are included, or how little the benefits extend to other social groups outside certain segments of the middle class, the visibility and viability of a city's symbolic economy plays an important role in the creation of place.» (Zukin, 1996:82).

Such is the case of Lisbon, in which tourism emerges as unequivocal orientation of a considerable part of the decisions about the public space and the elements that constitute it, by the entities that have the power to decide about it. Whether this approach is sustainable in the long run, that would be a question to be developed in another context. However, it is surprising to note that the strategies through which cities intend to distinguish themselves, are on so many occasions, the same. Given this, street art images emerge as illustration of a contemporary and modern city, ideal for city breaks of visitors that are also contemporary and modern. No stranger to this transfiguration is the production of light discourses, for media use, profusely followed by images of colourful street art murals, that emphasize that contemporary dimension, so desirable for a competitive tourist destination.

Therefore, street art in the cities – and also Lisbon – appears to have a key role in several mediated constructions, in which the «rankings of the best cities to see street art» are example, while not saying anything, however, concerning the actual outline of the street art in these cities, on the projects that are taking place, or the conditions for the artists. Specifically, in terms of marketing of the cities, monumental street art interventions tend to constitute a valued source of images, which, taken out of context, present the city as an attractive, young and contemporary destination, while losing the diversity of discourses that these pieces, in fact, represent.

However, along with this imagery, a considerable set of business opportunities is created for small tourist businesses, which promote street art tours showing selected pieces in Lisbon, with the care to offer context and explanations on how they were made – which is not in itself a misrepresentation of street art, but an indirect way this art form can contribute to produce public space, in the sense it is the object of this kind of movements of the urban actors.

A distortion of an artistic object might, on the other hand, be present in marketing and publicity in a broader sense, in which brands that intend to associate with street art imagery do in three different ways: by appropriation of images of street art pieces, without asking for the consent of the artists; by hiring designers – connected or not to street art practices - to elaborate a kind of images that refer to street art; or by the participation of the brands in street art events, and in this sense representing an opportunity for paid work and visibility for the street artists, and even the possibility of not having their creativity compromised by a theme the brand might suggest.

Apart from the specific activity in the world of marketing that incorporates street art, it is relevant to approach the relation between publicity and artistic street practices as forms of occupation of public space. In its origin, graffiti and street art, in their most spontaneous forms, inevitably assume meanings of appropriation of public space, in the sense that who practices it

intends to ‘respond’ to an urban ambient that is dominated by publicity and by architecture, both imposed, by making interventions in a particle of public space – a wall or other available structure – which becomes a canvas: «All graffiti and street art is a battle over public space: who controls it and what it is used for.» (Lewisohn, 2008:104). While the political consequences of street art are intimately connected to their specific context and the way they constitute an attempt to ‘balance’ the distribution of the powers that manage urban public space, the act of intervening in the public space is, in itself and beyond the message or image it conveys, a political act.

The billboard displays a symbolic element as evident as its physical dimension, in the sense it constitutes a legally authorized form of occupation of the public space, which is deeply intrusive of the everyday visuality of the city, by its inhabitants and passers-by. In a context such as Lisbon, in which street art interventions seem to increase its visibility and dimension, namely through the several initiatives that promote large scale muralist interventions, there seems to be a clear competition of the visual space of the city, at several levels. As Mário Caeiro indicates, there are pieces of art in the public space – street art or not – that compete with the city, the street furniture and structures, publicity, and even among each other (Caeiro, 2014:288), in a movement of complexification of urban public space, in its visuality.

2. Street art and the production of discourses about the urban space

2.1. Street art projects and local communities

While art in the public space can sometimes generate controversy, and other times consent, as it interferes directly with the delicate tissue of daily social interactions in urban context, let’s now see how the experience of producing and organizing legal street art events can contribute to the intensification of a certain sense of community. The testimonies of the interviewed that dedicate themselves to these projects both illustrate and clarify their positions about that symbiotic potential that can be established between street art and communities.

The new contexts for the production of street art are articulated in distinct ways, as in what concerns the way they are organized, as their purposes. While, referring to the Portuguese context⁴, Wool, Wool on Tour and Muraliza are street art festivals, project CRONO, on the other hand, developed under a project logic. Other events are promoted according to a different perspective, of incorporation within the work or associations or collectives, as is the case of the APAURB (Portuguese Street Art Association) and ÉBANOC collective street art initiatives.

⁴ Which were addressed in the research this article results from.

As for Wool festival, which takes place in Covilhã, the relation with the local community is promoted through the very structure of the initiative, with sequential street art interventions, talks and workshops that stimulate the interaction between artists and the locals, along with a set of street art interventions that have a transformative effect of the public space, in permanent terms. On the other hand, project CRONO (Fig.1), which took place in Lisbon between 2010 and 2011 with several street art interventions, namely those in the facades of derelict buildings, assumed intents of urban rehabilitation and aesthetical qualification through the physical structures of the city – particularly, its derelict buildings – and the uses of its space.



Figure 1: Intervention in derelict facade, projecto CRONO, by Os Gêmeos. Foto by the author.

Therefore, it aimed to potentiate new relations between the city and its inhabitants, namely through the realization of the idea of public space as place for spontaneous action. In contrast, the projects connected with APAURB followed a different course of action, proposing voluntary collective action by all the interested citizens – not only street artists. The logic that underlies this course of action is the promotion of the involvement of the citizens in their city, through active participation in the betterment of public spaces for collective use. As for the institutional entity, through GAU (Urban Art Gallery – within a municipality department), the way their projects connect with community life has to do, on one hand, with the opening of calls for the participation of all the interested – specifically, in the initiative ‘Recycle the Look’, of painting of bottle banks – and, on the other hand and more significantly, the promotion of local rehabilitation through street art interventions that approach local aspects. This implies the

selection of urban sensible projects, wherefore the importance of the active role the street artist can have in the process. An example would be the intervention in Junta de Freguesia da Penha de França (Fig.2), while another one, this time out of the institutional frame, would be the initiative «Passeios Literários da Graça», by ÉBANOCollective.



Figure 2: Intervention by Leonor Brilha, in Penha de França, Lisbon. Foto by the author.

An important aspect in the incentive of local dynamics through street art is collective memory. The art intervention that opts to approach local histories consists of a crossing between immaterial culture and a specific material representation, in a tendency noted by Dolores Hayden (1997:67). Therefore, artists that incorporate that sensibility in their work can be contributing for the stimulation of local imagery within local communities, through works that might assume the quality of «memory artefacts», once «(...) the memory unravels as social and political act of construction and reconstruction of meaning (...)» (Andrade, in AAVV, 2010:16). Or, referencing Hayden: «Places trigger memories for insiders, who have shared a common past, and at the same time places often can represent shared pasts to outsiders who might be interested in knowing about them in the present.» (Hayden, 1997:46)

While public space, as we saw, is the place of encounter of individuals, the artistic interventions that approach aspects of the history and immaterial culture of a place assume the potential of allowing that the *place of encounter* becomes also the *place of sharing*, in the sense of belonging to a community and building discourses on the local specificities. Therefore, direct contact between those who organize street art initiatives, the street artists and the local

communities where the interventions take place, is an important moment in the process of attribution of meanings to the actions and contributing that these can inclusively be associated with an emotional connection. In the words of Malcolm Miles: «But it is equally significant that such cultural work is carried out by individuals (...) whose contact with their public is direct (...). Human contact interrupts the blander realm of mass culture and advertising.» (Miles, in AAVV, 2010:41). Thus, human relations that establish within these projects among all the intervenients are a fundamental aspect in the construction of public space in urban contexts, in face of a hegemonic ‘mass culture’ and publicity.

2.2. Ruins and derelict buildings: Street art and abandoned structures

In large contemporary cities, the usage of certain urban structures corresponds to the apparent abandonment of others, which constitutes one of the most visible urban problems of the city of Lisbon: the amount of derelict buildings, of «expectant condition» (Ferreira, 2004:35), which configure a «cartography of sorrows» (Serrão, in Silva, 2014:17) of urban space. A walking incursion through the centre of the city is enough to assert this reality.

On the other hand, the vitality of cities and urban life can also manifest in these contexts, in the unused buildings that may risk ruin, that therefore resume their condition of places. Squats are an example, previously uninhabited houses that are occupied by young inhabitants, with the purpose of not only living but building a space for artistic and cultural expression, just as the artistic squats Elsa Vivant presented in her dissertation about Paris (Vivant, 2008). Street art also appears as recurrent presence in the decadent urban structures, abandoned or interrupted in their uses – structures that mark a «suspended social history» (Fortuna e Meneguello, 2013). According to Carlos Fortuna and Cristina Meneguello⁵, these structures in ruins are consequence of a process they call «urbicide» (op.cit.), which frequently is, I’ll add, the object of street art interventions. While attempting to build discourses on urban public space and their uses, these abandoned structures are used for street art initiatives, as canvas for interventions.

Such an example would be project CRONO, in what refers to the interventions that took place in the facades of derelict buildings in Lisbon, assuming the mission of signalling these expectant situations. This aspect also revealed itself as a visual element with important repercussions in what concerns the activation of reflections and discourses on the problem of derelict buildings in Lisbon. Another example is the street art interventions that took place in the Alcântara tunnel, promoted by APAURB, with the intention of improving an urban space of common use through voluntary and collective work. The initiative «Passeios Literários da

⁵ In their research on two urban abandoned cine-theatres, in Portugal and Brazil.

Graça» by ÉBANOColective is also relevant in this matter, as its interventions in degraded facades expressed the aim of signalling the cultural singularity of a Lisbon neighbourhood, while commenting on the state of degradation of a significant part of its buildings. Institutionally-wise, the creation of a municipal organism, GAU, dedicated exclusively to the proposal and support of street art initiatives, can be interpreted as a sign of a process of urban public action with the intention of enhancing urban public spaces through street art, with the notion of the transient condition of this art form.

On the other hand, the individual initiatives of street artists also may express a discourse or commentary on the state of abandonment or degradation of urban structures. Street artist Tinta Crua, for instances, frequently glues his posters in the windows of empty stores (Fig.3), expressing the will to see them «filled» with something that gives it the «life» that seems to be missing, while considering his interventions as a way of signalling this expectant condition of the structures of suspended use. Another street artist, Miguel Januário, from the project ±, frequently chooses derelict spaces for his interventions, as he considers these locations to enhance the message that underlies his point of view as an artist.



Figure 3: Poster in abandoned store window, by Tinta Crua. Foto by the artist.

Returning to Fortuna and Meneguello, these authors consider that to stop the process of devitalization of the urban buildings involves «making democracy more democratic» (Fortuna e Meneguello, 2013:255). As we've seen, the art in public space can implicate the potential to encourage citizen participation, and therefore it can also be said that street art can have an active role in this matter, not only by signalling the situations of abandonment of buildings, but also by creating critical discourses about it. While public art participates in the construction of public space and sometimes appears as instrumental in the processes of reconfiguration of its uses, this can also happen with street art, through initiatives that, as integrated projects, can promote these mechanisms through artistic interventions, in a way that is as much effective as is the level of engagement with the local communities.

Urban art projects, in the public sense Hayden (1997) associates with the expression, indicate a way of conceiving public space that involves a considerable diversity of actors – promoters, artists, entities – and creative and expressive forms of approaching the urban issues. Presently, Lisbon constitutes an example, because for the first time a considerable set of interventions is made visible, with the aim of promoting dialogue and public discussion on the matters that concern urban buildings and their degradation and abandonment, while using this component of urban morphology as canvas for artistic intervention.

The diversity of these projects in which art operates in the public space – particularly street art – is expressive of how an expressive discourse can be created about the very place they operate, in a mechanism that brings street art closer to the languages of public art as promotor of citizen participation. According to Patricia Phillips (1998), art in public space, apart from its form or duration, has the potential to create forums for dialogue: «A public art that truly explores the rich symbiotic topography of civic, social, and cultural forces can take place anywhere – and for any length of time. It would not have to conform to such formal parameters, for it would not find its meaning through its situation in a forum, but it would create the forum for the poignant and potent dialogue between obligation and desire, between being of a community and solitude.» (Phillips, 1998:98).

The element of transience is distinct, as inherent relation between street art and the physical space it occupies suggests questions about not only the lifecycle of the intervention, but, foremost, the place of the intervention, as Anna Wacklawek argues: «The experience of urban painting as a transitory process is inextricably tied to the work's meaning as an element of a city's changing composition.» (Wacklawek, 2011:91). Critical urban art, in which street art can be included namely through the individual or collective initiatives mentioned, therefore assumes a role of *construction of urban public space* (Low, 2014), inasmuch as the fluidity of

its ephemeral condition contrasts with the rigidity the old monument paradigm intended to attribute to public space. Mário Caeiro (2014) states that that transience is particularly rich in the possibilities of creation and reception for an urbanely situated art.

From the street art projects in derelict buildings to the spontaneous interventions of street artists, a critical sense about the uses of public space stands out, as these constitute examples of critical urban art. To it underlies a critical and expressive discourse about the situations of abandonment of the buildings, not only by directly recreating artistically its memory in the public space it stands – encouraging therefore dialogue within the community – but also signalling these structures, using them as canvases for the interventions, in a visual appropriation that is never exempt of taking a stand. Artistic initiatives such as these allow to stimulate that «happening of the city and its citizens», that Mário Caeiro (op.cit.) referred to.

Conclusion: Images and Discourses about the urban public space

In this article I aimed to show how street art can both contribute to the creation of images of the city and the promotion of critical discourses on the urban public space and the powers that shape it, in a process that both connects with the crescent visibility of this art world and the new processes that involve a diversity of actors, from street artists to promoters, to the institutions.

The transience and degradation that are inevitable in street art pieces are central aspects in this practice, for which the street appears as dynamic habitat. Street artists deal with this ephemeral nature between the will to preserve their pieces or conforming with their erosion, with a certain detachment, considering each street art piece they create as a «gift» to the street. The photography of street art pieces assumes therefore a role of fighting this transience, while the dissemination of these pictures through the internet allows the artists to acquire bigger visibility and reach a broader audience.

The dissemination of street art images through the internet can led to divergent experiences: on one hand, to observe street art through the internet, and on the other, to find street art pieces in their physical location, where they appear as surprise elements of the urban fabric. As for the relation between street artists and the potential that comes with the internet in their work, they assume the possibilities of a broader exposure of their work, with the consequent recognition and bigger audience. Some artists assume the street art they create as made specifically to be exhibited virtually, considering that to be an essential – and instrumental – part of their street art practice. The dissemination of street art images in the internet is therefore a central aspect in the construction of an artistic path in this specific art world.

On the other hand, this diffusion of virtual images is not without effects in what concerns the marketing of cities, since images of the street art the cities exhibit can contribute for the creation of a imagery of contemporary and modern city, made to attract visitors and investment.

Another aspect approached was the way in which the configuration of public space can expose the relationships of power that constitute it – particularly, in what concerns the disuse of physical urban structures. These, on the other hand, have the potential of proposing new ways of living the city, through the appropriation of these structures - be it by occupation, or by being subject to artistic interventions – and through their reconversion. Specifically, we've seen how the ephemeral nature of street art is connected with the impermanence of the urban buildings, and how this artistic practice can assume the role of promoting dialogue and discourses on the public space, in a specific urban context where the issues of degradation and abandonment of buildings is a distinct feature.

The way street art, within these legal contexts, results from the connection between the activities and the organizations that structure it was also addressed. Particularly, it was shown how a street art initiative can correspond to a direct and significant involvement with local communities, through local requalification as a collective process, with the stimulation of feelings of belonging to a community through the inclusion of the locals in the projects, or the creation and promotion of discourses about the projects and the way they refer to the community. These aspects include logics of action that underlie the different contexts of street art initiatives, in which the involvement with local communities is a factor privileged by the organizing entities.

Therefore, this is an artistic form that not only may bring itself closer to public art, as it may potentially maximize its effects, namely through the interdisciplinarity that underlies its planning, as well as in the net organization of several interventions.

References

- Andrade, Pedro de (2010), «Arte Pública vs Arte Privada», in AAVV, *Arte Pública e Cidadania: Novas leituras da Cidade Criativa*, Casal de Cambra, Caleidoscópio Edições, pp. 44-67.
- Brassaï (2002), *Brassaï Graffiti*, Paris, Flammarion.
- Caeiro, Mário (2014), *Arte na Cidade: História Contemporânea*, Lisboa, Temas e Debates/Círculo de Leitores.

- Campos, Ricardo (2010), *Porque pintamos a cidade? Uma abordagem etnográfica do graffiti urbano*, Lisboa, Fim de século.
- Cooper, Martha e Chalfant, Henry (2009), *Subway Art: 25th Anniversary Edition*, London, Thames & Hudson.
- Ferreira, Vítor Matias (2004), *Fascínio da Cidade: Memória e projecto da urbanidade*, Lisboa, Ler Devagar.
- Fortuna, Carlos e Meneguello, Cristina (2013), «Escombros da Cultura: O Cine-Éden e o Teatro Sousa Bastos», in Fortuna, Carlos e Leite, Rogério Proença (org.), *Diálogos Urbanos: Territórios, Culturas, Patrimónios*, Coimbra, Almedina / CES, pp.233-258.
- Hayden, Dolores (1997), *The Power of Place*, Cambridge, The MIT Press.
- Lewisohn, Cedar (2008), *Street art : The Graffiti Revolution*, New York, Abrams.
- Low, Setha (2014), «Spatializing culture: An Engaged Anthropological Approach to Space and Place», in *People, Place, Space* #34, pp.34-38.
- Magnani, José Guilherme Cantor (2010), «Os circuitos dos jovens urbanos», in *Sociologia: Revista do Departamento de Sociologia da FLUP*, Vol.XX, 2010, pp.13-38.
- Miles, Malcolm (2010), «Clean City: Urbanism, Aesthetics and Dissent», in AAVV (2010), *Arte Pública e Cidadania: Novas leituras da Cidade Criativa*, Casal de Cambra, Caleidoscópio Edições, pp. 33-43.
- Phillips, Patricia (1998), «Out of order: The public art machine», in Miles, Malcolm, Tim Hall e Lain Borden (eds.) (2000), *The Cities Cultures Reader*, London, Routledge, pp.96-102.
- Silva, Gastão de Brito e (2014), *Portugal em Ruínas*, Lisboa, Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos.
- Stahl, Johannes (2009), *Street Art*, s.n., Ullmann.
- Vivant, Elsa (2008), *Le role des pratiques culturelles off dans les dynamiques urbaines*, Tese de doutoramento em Urbanisme, aménagement et Etudes Urbaines, Université Paris 8, Vincennes Saint –Denis.
- Waclawek, Anna (2011), *Graffiti and Street art*, London, Thames & Hudson.
- Zukin, Sharon (1996), «Space and symbols in an Age of Decline», in Miles, Malcolm, Tim Hall e Lain Borden (eds.) (2000), *The Cities Cultures Reader*, London, Routledge, pp.81-91.