

Public art and social media: street art tourism, sociocultural agency and cultural production in contemporary Lisbon

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Abstract This essay engages with Guias do Mocho [Mocho's Tourist Guides], a bottom-up cultural tourism initiative emerging in Quinta do Mocho, a 'peripheral' neighbourhood of Lisbon, as a way of problematizing the relationship between public and street art and social media aesthetics. Scholarship on digital creative industries and street art tourism tends to emphasize the complicities of this kind of cultural experience with neoliberal understandings of the urban space. By examining an example of bottom-up, localized guided tours that operates through social media in the context of peripheral areas of Lisbon, we argue that public art and social media should be seen as part of a more complicated correlation, one in which the affects and effects of creative, site-specific projects are actively developed and expanded in unforeseen ways. Our research demonstrates that public art and social media are mutually developing a renewed economy of attention and system of valorization. The critical examination of both elements is compulsory when measuring the impact of art-driven processes of community development.

Introduction

Social media and digital technologies have transformed our understanding of the public space as well as the social relationships that compose and produce its fabric. This transformation urgently asks for a reconsideration

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of 'the public' within public art. Although this inquiry is far from new (see Miles, 1997; Deutsche, 1998; Kwon, 2004), it seems to be more pressing than ever, given public creativity's embeddedness within increasingly intricate and interconnected communicational and socioeconomic networks. The digital can hardly be seen as just a 'site' for artistic practices, nor as a dissemination channel. Rather, it conditions our visual ecologies and regimes of knowledge (MacDowall and Budge, 2019; Leaver *et al.*, 2020).

What it at stake is how the situatedness of public art; the social relationships it triggers are redefined and renegotiated through the expanded field of social media interactions and mobilized as part of community development strategies¹. Public art serves as a perfect tool for materializing the focus on experience of 'artistic capitalism' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Brouillette, 2014; Lipovetsky and Serroy, 2016; Garrido Castellano, 2022) as well as the 'creative imperative' that affects an increasing number of individuals (Mould, 2018). Conversely, public art is also evolving to adopt 'social media aesthetics' (Vernallis, 2013; MacDowall, 2019). The relationship between artistic production and the beholder has been substantially transformed due to the emergence of social media communicational devices. But this is hardly the only, or even the main, change that social media is bringing to the production and study of public art. Crucially, these debates on public art are central for practices and theorizations of community development, as they put the finger on the possibilities and challenges that communities and creative practitioners often met when trying to articulate processes of collective empowerment and social transformation.

Conceiving of present-day practices of public art and social media as 'natural allies', we argue that this alliance conditions how citizenship is framed and exclusions are challenged through the materialization and occupation of peripheral urban spaces. This has enormous consequences for issues related to community development, for it situates public art at the centre of processes of cultural affirmation that do not just happen 'on site'; rather, they materialize in the interstices of an increasingly blurred and inoperative online/offline boundary. More than this, if we assume that public art 'is also art that happens in social media debates', then the dichotomy between local audiences and official powers also becomes more complicated.

In this article, we attempt to explore the implications of these issues by examining *Guias do Mocho* [Mocho's tour guides], an online urban tour initiative managed by local residents of Quinta do Mocho, a neighbourhood in the peripheral area of Lisbon. Engaging with recent scholarship on artistic production and post/decolonial studies in Portugal and borrowing

¹ In this article, we understand community development broadly as a contested field where a multiplicity of social agents strive for the articulation of practices and processes of social transformation.

from long-term, sustained ethnographic fieldwork research in Quinta do Mocho² and other peripheral areas of Lisbon; in this article, we argue that the bottom-up creative processes mobilized as part of Guias do Mocho is exemplary of the potential of community-led cultural production as a platform for effective community development. Quinta do Mocho has been in the spotlight for hosting one of the most ambitious programmes of urban regeneration and social inclusion through street art taking place recently in Portugal. The digital intervention that constitutes Guias do Mocho has played a central role in displaying a 'distinctive and positive image' of the neighbourhood (Guinard and Margier, 2018, p. 14), whilst it has also been useful for attracting tourists and street art enthusiasts that 'seek authentic experiences in multicultural territories' (Raposo, 2022, p. 7)³.

Public art and civic agency in Portugal

Before becoming a prominent public art territory with more than 100 artistic murals, Quinta do Mocho was strongly stigmatized by the national media as a dangerous and 'no-go area'. Inhabited mostly by people of African descent, this neighbourhood of 3000 inhabitants was associated with criminality, and its young residents were considered potential delinquents (Raposo, 2019a). In order to challenge territorial stigma and fostering community participation of Quinta do Mocho dwellers, the Loures City Council in partnership with Ibisco theatre launched in 2014 the festival 'O Bairro i o Mundo'. It was then when the first large-scale street art pieces were made to decorate the buildings of this social housing neighbourhood. The festival's slogan was 'showing the neighbourhood to the world and bringing the world to the neighbourhood'. This goal was accomplished through diverse artistic expressions, such as music, theatre, dance and street art. One year after, matching a change in the political colour of the local municipality, the project became known as the Public Art Gallery (*Galeria de Arte Pública*; GAP hereafter). From this point on, the festival was interrupted and the artistic murals remained the only strategy of intervention in the neighbourhood. The success of this initiative led the authorities or Loures City Council to expand street art to the entire municipality, creating the Loures Public Art Festival (LAP; hereafter) in 2016. The number of large pieces of street art, many of which were produced by signature Portuguese (Vhils, Odeith

2 Ethnographic work was carried out by the second author between 2016 and 2019, when 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted with young residents, community leaders, non-governmental organization workers, artists, and representatives of the municipality.

3 The tours were first organised offline; in the context of this essay, however, we will focus on the digital side of Guias do Mocho, as the previous period has already been analyzed in detail.

and Bordalo II) and international (Hopare, Utopia and Vinie) artists, grew exponentially.

The main case study this article explores, Guias do Mocho, is a previously *in situ* (nowadays also digital) bottom-up, locally organized guided tour initiative. Guias do Mocho consolidates already ongoing in-site and digital actions regarding informal street art tour activities in the area, which emerged from the neighbourhood as an attempt to localize and nuance the attention the area has received since the murals were painted. The Guias do Mocho initiative is related to the need for greater autonomy of the Mocho's cultural community and is inseparable from the underfunded cultural and community development actions that emerged as a result of the shifting interest of the Loures City Council in Quinta do Mocho over the past decade.

Several reasons explain such digital presence: the lack of interest by the city council in boosting a sustained community development and social inclusion project; the difficulties that local guides have always found in securing a fair payment for their work; the little exploitation of the tourist potential of Quinta do Mocho; and the 'one-off' nature of the mural interventions in the area, which encouraged a superficial image of urban regeneration whilst sidestepping dialogue and collaboration with the local population.

The case of Guias do Mocho is particularly relevant nowadays, as Lisbon currently faces the double need of coming to terms with its former status as a colonial metropolis and heightening its contemporary purchase in the cultural capitals marketplace. Within this process, the pieces of mural art that can be contemplated in Quinta do Mocho became a valuable asset that could be institutionally mobilized with the objective of encouraging tourism and branding an 'ethnically cool neighbourhood' (Raposo, 2022, p. 24). This strategy of place branding has proven particularly successful in portraying an image of productive and conflict-free governability (Zukin, 1995) according to the principles of creative cities (McAuliffe, 2012; Miles, 2012; Schacter, 2014). This article attempts to expand existing debates on art and the public space by zooming into issues of community development, collective and racial affirmation, right to the city and socioeconomic inequalities.

In the context of this article, we see the proximity between social media and public art as going beyond a simple sum of both elements. We contend that social media is more than a space for the representation and dissemination of public art; that public art is affected by social media aesthetics in profound, structural ways; that the digital creates (instead of just reproducing) 'the everyday of public art' (Cartiere and Zebracki, 2016); and finally that digital audiences have become one of the main targets of public art, with 'local' communities and those who participate in the daily life of the same public space being relegated to a secondary role.

We believe that such approach is particularly useful in the case of present-day Portugal, because it highlights the political economy of the dissent and the alliances formed as part of the interactions resulting from processes of artistic intervention in urban settings⁴. For decades, public art in Portugal has meant more than just art made in public spaces. The act of installing art pieces in public settings is seen as strongly linked to the process of democratization and modernization of the country that followed after almost 50 years of dictatorship. During the 25 April Revolution, which put an end to the Estado Novo dictatorship in 1974, bringing the art to the streets and to the masses became an imperative. In particular, mural painting was seen as a suitable way of creating a new, democratic and progressive community. At another level, major figures of Portuguese modern art, including Jorge Vieira and João Cutileiro, revolutionized the aesthetic codes of public monuments. Such creative interventions had important political connotations, as it attempted to represent a new democratic society (Oliveira, 2020). Later on, the incorporation of Portugal into the European Union added some layers to this process: public art also became a marker of modernity and Europeization (Ponte, 2022, p. 71). Another major transformation happened during the following decade: if the focus during the 1980s was on democracy and post-dictatorial values, the subsequent years witnessed a renewed interest in portraying a different city, more modern and cosmopolitan. This transformation was undertaken through large-scale urban interventions, out of which the creation in 1998 of the Parque das Nações on the occasion of Expo'98 still remains the most decisive⁵.

Compared to monumental sculpture, graffiti and urban art are relatively more recent and only become consolidated during the 1990s (Soares Neves, 2015; Campos and Sequeira, 2016; Ferro, 2016). The development of urban art interventions in the space of Lisbon is also closely linked to the economic growth that the country experienced during the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s, as well as to the intensification and diversification of tourism. In fact, Campos and Sequeira (2019) see the impact of cultural tourism and the development of urban art as parallel and mutually enriching sources in the case of Lisbon. These authors explain the success of the process of cultural rebranding that put the Portuguese capital on the spotlight of cultural tourism through a series of international and national factors, including social communication (with an increasing weight of digital platforms), as well as the interest of political agents and local entrepreneurs. Campos and Sequeira (2019, p. 142) also highlight the importance of urban art tours in the construction of an image of alterity and exoticism that moves away from the

4 A valuable precedent of the kind of approach we seek to develop in this article, albeit focused on different spaces and topics, can be found in the work of Gloria Diógenes (2015a, 2015b, 2015c).

5 On the urban renewal effervescence during the 1990s, see Lopes (2007).

traditional values associated with Lisbon's cultural heritage. What remains clear, in any case, is that the practice of urban art is nowadays indissolubly linked to Lisbon's cityscape, something that has led to its consolidation and institutionalization (as the creation in 2008 of GAU—Galeria de arte urbana exemplifies).

Three main issues conditioned art criticism on public art in Portugal: the divide between monumental, top-to-bottom projects and more informal creative processes; the prominence given to artists with a formal training, and the focus on production rather than on audience responses and reception. As a consequence, only a few public controversies resulting from the installing of a few pieces of public art have been examined in detail (including João Cutileiro's sculpture of D. Sebastião in Lagos, Algarve, as well as Cutileiro's monument to the 25 April Revolution in Lisbon). In contrast, the analysis of graffiti and urban art has been more associated with anthropology and sociology of culture (as exemplified by the work of Lígia Ferro, Ricardo Campos and a long, etc.)

This split has generated a strong divide, one that makes the study of exchanges and similarities between different trends of urban creativity still challenging. The consequence is that a large set of visual creative practices (such as the Art Public Gallery of Quinta do Mocho project) often remain outside of the scope of art historians, or then are commented in passage when it comes to art historical debates, being considered as 'less aesthetic'. As we have argued elsewhere (Garrido Castellano and Lança, 2019; Garrido Castellano and Paulo, 2019; Garrido Castellano and Raposo, 2020), this relative invisibility affects the working conditions of cultural workers, particularly affecting racialized creators, as it installs a divide that has to do with the reticence in accepting racialized creators as fully fledged citizens and cultural producers and consumers. What becomes clear from this overview is that the idea of public art being something made 'by white Portuguese artists for white Portuguese citizens' need to be reassessed by looking at issues of reception and public participation. In any case, neither 'public' nor 'citizen' should be taken as neutral words.

Guias do Mocho and/as community development

The use of street art as a tool for urban transformation in Quinta do Mocho led the Loures City Council to recruit local youngsters as cultural guides. The participation of these guides as unpaid volunteers within GAP was crucial to consolidate this cultural project, as it generated awareness and acceptance within the local population. Quinta do Mocho began to appeal to media coverage, when the image of the neighbourhood became associated with art and culture instead of just with negative stereotypes of violence

and drugs. In 2015, for example, the headline of a report characterized the area as ‘a dodgy area that became a Public Art Gallery’. The enthusiasm the local guides experienced for being part of an original urban policy that promoted ‘good practices’ and that highlighted positive aspects of their neighbourhood soon began to fade as they became aware of the exploitation they suffered for doing unpaid labour⁶. The rhetoric of volunteer work and entrepreneurialism became instrumentalized by the City Council to encourage the participation of groups of young residents as part of the process of urban rehabilitation, thus ignoring the challenging economic situation that the Quinta do Mocho still faces (Raposo, 2018, 2019a).

The idea of keeping tours free of charge was justified on the grounds that local guides should look for alternative ways of ensuring their sustainability, such as selling merchandize and paraphernalia to the tourists. This option, however, proved to be unproductive, as the amounts received were derisory. The local community felt also ignored, as the implementation of GAP was put into practice under the promise that it will constitute the first step within a more ambitious process of urban regeneration, one which to this day has not been developed. The lack of public infrastructure, the indifference of public powers towards the living conditions of the Quinta do Mocho residents, the feeling that public art was being used as a tool for political propaganda and the lack of dialogue with the local population within GAP and LAP made the guides aware of the unviability of their partnership as volunteers.

After a period of 3 years in which local guides volunteered on a street art tour initiative that gathered more than three thousand visitors per year (Raposo, 2022), in 2018, the local guides decided to gain autonomy from the local government by turning digital. The creation of a Facebook site ‘Guias do Mocho—Bairro de Arte Pública’ was the first step of a process of digital consolidation of the activities the guides were already developing. Soon thereafter, they expanded and diversified its digital presence within social media.⁷ Before this movement, all social media coverage linked to the Loures Public Art Festival was controlled by the City Council, which was also responsible for public relations and organization of the guided tours.⁸ Increasing their digital presence provided the guides with an opportunity

6 GAP was one of the top projects at the third edition of the ‘International Award UCLG-Mexico City Culture 21’, considered by the jury to embody ‘good practices’ of implementation of the Agenda 21 of Culture in its 2018 edition. See <http://obs.agenda21culture.net/es/good-practices/galeria-de-arte-publico-quinta-do-mocho> [last accessed 9 November 2022].

7 The establishment of partnerships with tourism companies, the organisation of lunch in local restaurants for tourists and the production of merchandizing will evolve in the creation of Kallema, a tourist company led by two local cultural guides and entrepreneurs.

8 Initially taking place at a monthly basis, the number of tours increased up to a weekly basis as more pieces of mural art were developed.

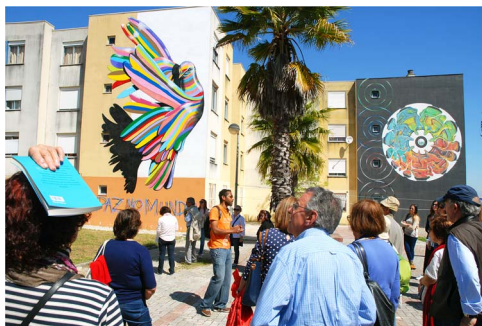


Figure 1 Street Art tour self-organized by local guides. Source: Otávio Raposo

to organize independent street art tours, charging visitors a small fee for the tours (Figure 1).

Raposo (2022, p. 4) has recently characterized the ambitious street art campaign that redefined the image of Quinta do Mocho as marked by two processes: 'The use of street art as both an institutional strategy of urban promotion, creating new images (and representations) about the city and its margins; and [...] the use of street art as means of managing social inequalities, by silencing demands and concealing poverty'. To fully grasp the importance of these two processes it would be useful to look at additional examples, such as these offered by other neighbourhoods within the outskirts of Lisbon, including Marvila, Padre Cruz and Lumiar.⁹ The artistic interventions in these areas coincided with a crucial moment in Lisbon's recent history, that of the (partial) overcoming of worse consequences of the 2008 financial crisis, a process in which tourism played a decisive role. In effect, the cultural boom of the last 10 years (which included the creation of landmark museums such as MAAT and the articulation of different urban art festivals) was made possible by the consolidation of Lisbon as a creative city for the international market. This period coincides with the election of the now First Minister António Costa as Mayor of Lisbon¹⁰.

At this time, Lisbon was caught on a paradox: on one hand, anti-austerity politics were predicated upon the uneven impact of the economic privation experienced in previous years; on the other, the solution to this social unevenness prioritized tourism and foreign private investment, particularly through the financialization of real state sector, generating tourist gentrification that works against the most impoverished families

9 These neighbourhoods have hosted different editions of the Muro Festival, an initiative coordinated by the Urban Art Gallery (GAU), which is funded by the Lisbon City Council.

10 Before being elected Prime Minister of Portugal in 2015, António Costa was Mayor of Lisbon from 2007 to 2015.

(Mendes, 2017; Sequeira and Nofre, 2020). Art has not been exempted from these contradictions; on the contrary, the financialization of a fragmentary and intermittent art scene played a decisive role in shaping the image of Lisbon under precarious circumstances. Teixeira Pinto (2018, p. 97) summarizes well the situation by acknowledging that ‘it remains somewhat puzzling that a country that never had a strong contemporary art scene could witness a contemporary-art-led gentrification’.

The Public Art Gallery that redefined the image of Quinta do Mocho is a good example in case, yet it is also interesting for a different reason: the proliferation of online materials intensified by (albeit not reducible to) the public art programmes initiated in Quinta do Mocho and other areas was instrumental in rebranding the Portuguese capital city into a multicultural and cosmopolitan creative enclave (Garrido Castellano and Raposo, 2020). At the same time, the transformation of so-called peripheral neighbourhoods into public art hotspots also conditioned the perception of Portuguese citizens and foreign tourists alike towards the neighbourhood. This renewed perception, in turn, immediately fostered specific modes of engagement with the cultural forms developed in the area, expanding the audiences of local tours and prioritizing the direct contemplation of the ‘Instagramable’ murals over other creative practices (Raposo, 2022). Paradoxically, the spread of online content also ended up downplaying the residents’ and cultural guides’ control over the production and reception of cultural practices in the area.

Street art tourism has become a tour de force mechanism for the branding of the creative city paradigm. For Andron (2018, p. 1037), ‘street art walking tours in particular offer a rigid, well-rehearsed, non-collaborative presentation of their material, whose selection and presentation leaves little room for contingencies’. In this sense, they offer a perfect match for the increasing emphasis on consuming supposedly original experiences within cultural tourism trends, one reinforced by the excitement of going off the beaten track into the city’s peripheral areas. The configuration of walking tours brings together processes of institutionalization of public art and paradigms of private entrepreneurialism operating amidst the gaps left by ill-funded public interventions. A paradox emerges, then, if we consider the situatedness of many public art processes and the condition of ‘mere observers and commentators’ (Andron, 2018, p. 1038) that many guides adopt.

The case of Guias do Mocho is somewhat different, as the initiative works at a much smaller scale and relies on the visitors’ good will to be economically self-sufficient. Driven by inhabitants of Quinta do Mocho, authority is invoked here also in different terms, not so much as a source of power but as a gesture of hospitality (we must recall here that, until very recently, Quinta do Mocho figured as a ‘no go’ site for Portuguese



Figure 2 Local guide talking about the meaning of the Nomen's mural. Source: Otávio Raposo

and international tourists alike). The tours are sustainable, relying on the genuine interest of visitors instead than on the will to increase audiences. The emphasis, finally, is put on the neighbourhood's history, but also in the challenging situation of some of its present-day inhabitants, acknowledging the ambivalent role that those creative interventions such as the murals have on their daily lives. The murals are often narrated as 'mirrors' of local daily life, a moment of informal curation in which the guides reflect on the artist's point of view on a particular work in relation to the neighbourhood's multicultural environment. This is the case with the painting of African leader Amílcar Cabral and several female characters, including a black woman allegorically removing a white mask. Created by the artist Nomen, this work was associated by the guides with the territorial stigma to which the neighbourhood's residents were exposed on a daily basis (Figure 2).

The transformation of a building into an upside-down cardboard box was interpreted as a critical thought on the way in which immigrants are 'dumped' in neglected areas of the city. With the African continent and the word 'Africa' highlighted, one can see in that same mural a jumpsuit next to a domestic apron, symbols of the most common jobs performed by men (construction) and women (cleaning) in Quinta do Mocho. The story of this mural was explained on one of the tours as follows by one of the guides:

We know that many of the good things about Portugal, from Vasco da Gama Bridge to Expo [World Exhibition of 1998] were made thanks to masses of immigration, lots of hard work, right?! And that was also important. Hence, the name of the artwork is 'Worker Ghetto Box', symbolizing Africa and representing the role of the immigrants in Portugal. [José's speech, audio recording by Otávio Raposo, 2016]

Challenging the thirst for curating visitor's experience centred on a few particularly visually-appealing highlights, *Guias do Mocho* compels visitors to look around and to pay attention to the social fabric that integrates the

neighbourhood. Such alternative visuality involves slow exposure to the movements taking place in the neighbourhood, as well as engagement with a broader variety of creative manifestations beyond the famous murals. As part of the tour, the guides emphasize the cultural and ethnic diversity of the musicians who inhabit Quinta do Mocho; introduce the *tias* (the oldest women) that still sell *salgados* and street food in shops and/or in the street; and tell stories about internationally successful talented local residents, including the poet Osvaldo de Sousa and several batida Djs and footballers. The idea of *caminhar devagar* (wandering around slowly) replaces the urgency for consuming and having unique experiences that is proper of cultural tourism. The tours organized by Guias do Mocho are conversational and rely on a processual relationality driven by mutual interests. The guides are residents of Quinta do Mocho, many of them involved in diverse social causes; these are brought to the fore in relation to the murals. As a consequence of this, a relational approach is encouraged, one that goes beyond the singularity of each artwork and the aesthetic value conferred to renowned artists to celebrate the *bairro das artes* [arts' neighbourhood], and the creative agency of the entire neighbourhood (Figure 3).

The difference between 'looking up' at specific pieces of public art and looking around is a subtle (are we not still talking about one of the main prerogatives of the *flâneur*?), but nevertheless a fundamental one. By urging visitors to engage with Quinta do Mocho as a whole by hand of the area's *moradores* [inhabitants], Guias do Mocho encourages one of the main functions of public art, the idea of activating citizens to interact within public spaces (see Cartiere and Tan, 2021). Importantly, this idea of privileging public collective engagement over tourist-like contemplation of individual pieces of mural art generates an alternative sociality, one based on long-term exchange and critical inquiry. Indeed, street art tours are usually joined by a shared lunch in local restaurants. The moments of fraternization with residents during these tours are common and allow for more personal and intimate conversations. A look at the Facebook Guias de Bairro [Neighbourhood Tour Guides] page confirms that questions and answers and conviviality occupy a central role in all the tours. Social media expand the scope of these beyond the visit, as the local *guias* encourage constant engagement with their audiences. If street art tourism can be displayed to mobilize 'authoritative discourse' (Andron, 2018, p. 1036), the case of Guias do Mocho reveals that it can also be repurposed as a source of online and offline conviviality and relationality.

In any event, the Guias do Mocho project should not be seen as simply a resistance against the progressive incorporation of Lisbon into the creative city paradigm. None of the resources mobilized by the group of local guides can prevent the use of the Quinta do Mocho mural programme



Figure 3 Worker Ghetto Box. Source: Otávio Raposo

as part of Lisbon's urban rebranding. In fact, the initiative is threatened by the same forces that affect many practices of self-managed, non-profit cultural tourism. It is crucial, then, to avoid a romanticized vision of resistant communities supposedly embedded by altruistic desires vis a vis 'money-driven' top-down powers. At the same time, however, *Guias do Mocho* succeeds in making visible issues of cultural labour and adopt a critical view on the culture-led regeneration process carried out by GAP. Rather than merely celebrating an urban policy that changed the neighbourhood's public image, the project reveals its ambivalences and contradictions, presenting tourists with the challenging living conditions that continue to afflict the residents through a material and direct examination of signs of abandonment, including ruined playgrounds and the holes and cracks that can be observed throughout the neighbourhood's walls.

A second, interrelated dimension of *Guias do Bairro* has to do with challenging top-to-bottom understandings of co-creation. Co-creation supposedly was at the centre of the mural programme funded by the Loures City Council. The main objective of this initiative was to encourage dialogue

between street artists, *moradores* and the city council, so that each artwork would emerge out of this relational exchange. In practice, however, many locals felt that they were given less consideration or even were ignored when the incorporation of ‘big names’ of Portuguese and international street art were prioritized over the neighbours’ desires. In fact, despite being a central part of the plan, real collaboration never happened.

Guias do Mocho shifts the attention from supposedly co-creative processes (which can include co-creation anecdotally to keep the neighbours happy) to raise important issues of cultural ownership and civic agency. The online coordination of tours and other activities has been an effective way of calling the straightforward narrative resulting from the official artistic intervention that produced the murals into question. Through the relational activities developed by the guides, not only the meaning and the aesthetics, but also the purpose and the socially transformative dimension of cultural creativity in Quinta do Mocho become a contested territory. This is particularly important if we think about the fact that the Portuguese public sphere continues to be fractured by an always-shifting colonial divide, by which racialized subjects are still spoken for or directly excluded from sociopolitical processes. The main motto of Guias de Bairro, ‘era uma vez um bairro de má fama. Um dia vieram uns’ pintores ‘e a magia aconteceu. De’ ghetto ‘a galeria de arte pública - uma visita fundamental’ [once upon a time there was a neighbourhood of bad reputation. Some ‘painters’ came once and magic happened. From ‘ghetto’ to public art gallery—a not to be missed tour], highlights the basic divide that conditions the lives of many Afro-Portuguese citizens to this date. By responding to the ‘má fama’ of Quinta do Mocho, Guias de Bairro does more than addressing the neoliberalization of culture that is often associated with art washing.

The project also counters celebratory views of Lisbon as a multicultural cultural capital, countering the idea that racialized Portuguese communities as passive receptors of ‘cultural aid’ while making emphasis on the real working and living conditions of Afro-Portuguese creators. As both the tours and the online presence of Guias de Bairro highlight issues of economic imbalances, the persistence of racism and discrimination and the long-lasting consequences of colonial attitudes, the project raises important questions: given the increasing attention that Lisbon has acquired as a touristic destination and cultural capital, to what extent can bottom-up processes challenge the ‘digital coloniality of power’ (Stingl, 2016), that is, the continuities and gaps by which patterns of coloniality are reproduced, normalized and maintained through digital means? In which ways can social media affect affective patterns of belonging and affiliation within public spaces? Does the extended domain in which public art now operates

pose an intensified challenge in relation to the visible and invisible barriers that racialized communities face in many European contexts?

These questions do not have an easy answer. In any case, coming back to [Andron \(2018, p. 2\)](#), we can say that street art tours often discriminate over what is considered art and what is not by drawing the audience's attention to specific spots whilst ignoring 'less artistic' ones. In this case, *Guias do Mocho* undertakes a reversal action against this authoritative force, diversifying the narratives that visitors receive and producing a more conversational experience. Taken together, these two elements contribute to shedding light on a wider variety of creative manifestations developed by the local residents, one that nevertheless does not romanticize their agency. In fact, the case of *Guias do Mocho* points at the intensification of the dynamics of *prosumerism* and cultural entrepreneurialism through engagement with social media platforms¹¹. Although it is clearly not outside of neoliberalism, it also works as a tool for community making.

Perhaps the most obvious outcome of the confluence of the digital and public art has to do with the archival information produced and displayed online. Social media facilitates an ongoing documentation and questioning of public art processes, one in which the boundaries between authorship and reception begin to blur. Kept updated from 2017 until 2021, the *Guias de Bairro* Facebook page gathers information about the debates triggered by the tours, making emphasis on the importance of such dialogue to challenge negative stereotypes about the neighbourhood and afro-Portuguese communities at large. The online debates taking place as a result of the tours can be seen as an original experience of engaged, community-driven research, in which the local community of *Quinta do Mocho* monitors and critically reflects on the impact that the mural art campaigns targeting the area have had on the neighbourhood's population. Of interest is the fact that these discussions reveal an awareness of the double-sided nature of art-driven processes of urban regeneration, but also an interest in documenting the impact of these processes locally, without relying on the authoritative voice of academics and urban planners ([Figure 4](#)).

If we assume that public art policies put into motion what [Martin Zebracki \(2012, p. 17\)](#) calls 'public artopias', that is, a set of claims about the socially transformative impact of artistic practice, then we can see the auto-ethnographic processes resulting from the tours operated by *Guias de Bairro* as a sort of realistic way of coming to terms with the practical consequences of these claims. Moreover, street art tours are traditionally

¹¹ *Prosumerism* refers here to the increasingly blurred border between cultural production and consumption, whilst cultural entrepreneurialism alludes at the incorporation of neoliberal principles of creativity, originality and self-made professional advancement into the cultural sector.

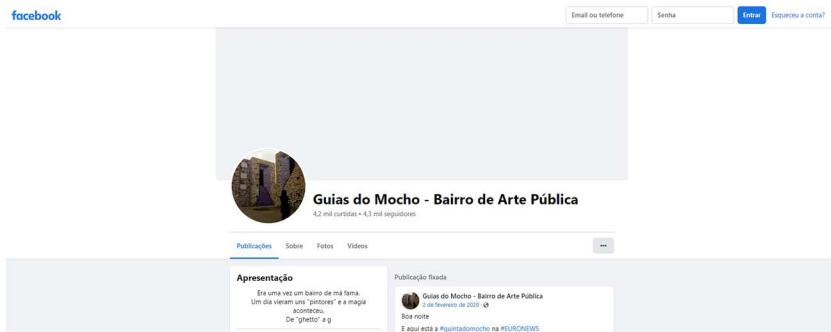


Figure 4 Guias de Bairro Facebook Site. Last accessed: 22 November 2022

associated with unidirectional knowledge production, by which cultural guides ‘study’ a particular reality with the intention of making the most out of the visitors’ experience. In contrast, in the case examined in this article tours are documented and researched by Quinta do Mocho residents with different intentions: not as a way of polishing a cultural product, but rather as a way of critically examining and engaging with the digital perception of the neighbourhood. The Guias de Bairro website, then, functions as a platform for informal apprenticeship (Raposo, 2019b) and relational exchange that expands the scope of the cultural activities developed in Quinta do Mocho.

Conclusions

Based on the direct observation of the Guias do Mocho case study, several conclusions can be drawn: the first one has to do with the mutually constitutive nature of public art processes and the economy of attention (see Lanham, 2006) proper to social media and to what Han (2022) calls hypercultural forms. In our case, we can see the articulation of an ambitious public art project in Quinta do Mocho made space for racial and community affirmation conceived of as a response to systemic vulnerability and marginalization. The same project, however, emerges as one of the clearest cases of commodification of difference in the former metropolitan space of Lisbon. The point, then, is not just to differentiate between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ uses and localized and ‘external’ audiences. Rather, what Guias do Mocho reveals is that the same public art project may generate different outcomes and operate through multiple temporal logics.

Secondly, the impact of social media and the digital on creative urban practices urges for a reconsideration of the temporal dimension of public and socially transformative art. Equally often mobilized as a resistive practice

against and as a facilitator of neoliberal commodification under the creative city paradigm, a far more nuanced view of what public art does emerges when the expanded temporal scope of projects such as *Guias de Bairro* is taken into consideration. Importantly, this affects how agency is conceived in relation to issues of community building, cultural ownership and collective affirmation. Such expanded temporality also conditions how co-creation is produced, discussed and negotiated within artistic practices (Horvath and Carpenter, 2020).

Furthermore, in the case of Lisbon, co-creative practices emerge as a fertile ground to examine crucial issues of inclusion and systemic marginalization that are often related to colonial assemblages. What *Guias de Bairro* reveals is that the idea of Lisbon as a multicultural creative city is contested and constantly redefined by a multiplicity of actors who operate in-site, but also online. More than this, we can see how several agents (and not just official institutions) are resourcing to public art to articulate dynamics of placemaking and creativity-driven processes of community building.

In this article, we have also argued that social media is transforming how public art is produced, discussed and researched. The digital domain should not be considered a simple space for the dissemination of already produced artworks. Instead, the consequences of this transformation go far beyond the visibility of public art and have a decisive impact on at least two cornerstone elements: first, social media affect how public art is conceived of in aesthetic terms and materialized; it also conditions the social relationships and the processes of social transformation public art usually triggers. Engaging with public art nowadays demands a careful reconsideration of the spatiotemporal dimension of visual creativity. For if we want to measure issues of collective agency and community development, urban transformation, right to the city and cultural territorialization, a traditional approach to the 'publicness' of public art (that is, an understanding of public art as art produced in the public space) is no longer enough. Instead, our span should problematize the continuities and discontinuities that bring practices emerging in different time-spaces together. This would imply conceiving of public art practices as a sort of urban repository whose visibility and accessibility is fractured by, but never fully subsumed into, the logic of neoliberal processes (see Loeb, 2022, p. 201).

The popularity of social media platforms like Instagram has increased in parallel to the proliferation of urban and public art practices. MacDowall (2019) has recently argued that Instagram and street art do more than sharing occasional visual features; more than this, both are mutually constitutive, this synergy affecting not only how street art looks like, but also its modes of circulation, consumption, production and interpretation. Crucially, this has enormous consequences for our understanding of public art's socially transformative role. For if urban creativity is inseparable from the dynamics

of digital media *prosumerism*, then the idea of public art as a site for collective socio-political negotiations and community building should be recalibrated to take into consideration the expanded temporality brought about by digital interactions. The main issue, then, goes far beyond the idea that urban art and social media influence each other; at stake is how civic imagination is conceived and materialized when the 'situatedness' of public art, its site-specificity, is radically transformed.

Several questions remain to be answered: to what extent a successful experience in using digital tools for community building in relation to public art can be replicated in a different neighbourhood? Does the confluence between Guias de Bairro and the mural programme displayed in Quinta do Mocho impacts on different generations in equal terms? To what extent has Guias de Bairro shifted the ground for future negotiations between bottom-up cultural and neighbours associations and political and public entities? And finally: given the Afro-Portuguese origins of the creators of Guias de Bairro and the majority of inhabitants of Quinta do Mocho, is it possible to track the impact of initiatives of expanded public art such as the one examined in this article on diasporic communities?

These questions reveal two main things: the most important one has to do with the publicness of public art, a priority that remains unchanged despite the 'digital expansion' of the realm where public and urban art takes place. This is particularly true in the case of Portugal, where, as we have seen, 'the public' is still associated with the materialization of the ideals of democratization and social equality (however transformed) advanced in the 25 April Revolution. In relation to this, debates on public art and social media cannot be based on generalizations; rather, they have to arise from a long-term consideration of the specificities of the studied locales.

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Data availability

All data are incorporated into the article and its online supplementary material.

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