"THE PERIPHERY IS THE PERIPHERY EVERYWHERE": CULTURAL PRODUCTION IN URBAN PERIPHERIES

Street art placemaking in a segregated Lisbon neighborhood: reflections on socio-spatial stigmatization and urban governance

Otávio Raposo [1]
Pedro Varela [1]
Lígia Ferro [2]
Jordi Nofre [3]

[1] Iscte — University Institute of Lisbon, Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology, Lisbon, Portugal
[2] University of Porto, Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto, Porto, Portugal
[3] NOVA University Lisbon, Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences, Lisbon, Portugal

Abstract:

The present article examines how a street art project led by young people of African descent in the Bairro da Torre neighborhood of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area has contributed to challenging the historically negative perception associated with this territory. For decades, both media and institutional narratives have portrayed the neighborhood as a no-go area linked to crime and marginalization. Drawing on ethnographic research, the present article analyzes the ambivalent role of street art as a tool for urban regeneration and for contesting territorial stigma, seeking to symbolically dissociate the neighborhood from imaginaries of violence. At the core of our analysis is the way in which these artistic interventions have been used by local authorities as an urban governance strategy to "clean up" public spaces by removing actors and social practices deemed "dangerous," thereby reinforcing social control and facilitating the expansion of gentrification.

Keywords: Street Art; Youth; Urban Regeneration; Segregation; Gentrification.

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Street art placemaking num bairro segregado de Lisboa: reflexões sobre estigmatização socioespacial e regeneração urbana

Resumo:

Neste artigo, debatemos como um projeto de *street art*, dinamizado por jovens afrodescendentes do Bairro da Torre — localizado na Região Metropolitana de Lisboa — tem contribuído para desconstruir a percepção negativa associada a esse território, que, há décadas, tem sido representado como uma *no-go area* vinculada ao crime e à marginalidade. Com base numa pesquisa etnográfica, analisa-se o papel ambivalente da *street art* enquanto instrumento de regeneração urbana e combate ao estigma territorial, com vista à desvinculação simbólica do bairro ao imaginário de violência. No centro da análise está a forma como essas intervenções têm sido apropriadas pelo poder local como estratégia de governança urbana, orientada para higienizar o espaço público de atores e práticas sociais consideradas "perigosas", contribuindo para o reforço do controle social e a expansão de novas fronteiras de gentrificação.

Palavras-chave: street art; juventude; regeneração urbana; segregação; gentrificação.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last four decades (1980s–2010s), Portuguese cities have undergone radical transformations. This is especially true for the capital, Lisbon. Following Portugal's accession to the European Union and then the EEC, beginning in 1986, a neoliberal shift consolidated in national policies, reversing some of the gains of the Carnation Revolution of 1974. A series of major public works and mega-events shook up Lisbon with the aim of making it more attractive to tourism and foreign investment. The selection of Lisbon as European Capital of Culture in 1994, the hosting of the 1998 World Exposition (Expo 98), and the Euro 2004 Football Championship are examples of this policy. At both the local and national levels, major efforts were made to position the Portuguese capital on the map of global tourist destinations in Southern Europe, resulting in urban interventions that transformed the city. Some of these interventions aimed at regenerating devalued and/or degraded areas of Lisbon (such as historic neighborhoods and port area), leading to the expulsion of poor populations to the city's peripheries through gentrification or forced removal (as examined by Patrícia Pereira (2017) in the case of Expo).

The phenomena of gentrification and touristification accelerated in Lisbon after the capitalist crisis of 2008-2009, which saw exponential growth in unemployment and job insecurity. The Troika Plan[1] implemented in 2011 imposed financial austerity measures and cuts in workers' rights. According to Luís Mendes (2017), this resulted in the adoption of a new model of territorial management and development, marked by the deregulation of the housing market and urban land use. It is in this context of the rise of the neoliberal city

1 This plan was agreed upon between the Portuguese State and the Troika: the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission, and the European Central Bank.

project that the tourism, leisure, and entertainment industries assumed a central role in the urban regeneration of Lisbon, being presented by politicians as key elements for the country's economic recovery. Political attention focused on the creation of tourism opportunities in order to attract new flows of visitors following the closure of North African receiving markets due to the region's sudden geopolitical instability (as evidenced in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco). The rapid and intense touristification of Lisbon over the last decade accelerated the displacement of lower-class populations from the city's center (where they had lived in rented accommodations) to its peripheries. This phenomenon can be seen as the suburbanization of poverty, as Rodríguez (2024) suggests in the analogous case of the city of Madrid (Spain).

Lisbon is of particular international scientific interest, not only because of the interwoven phenomena of gentrification and touristification, but also because of the role played by artistic and cultural productions — including *street art* or urban art[2] — in public space. Art and culture have become central elements in the city's plans to not only promote capital growth and requalify previously degraded central areas, but also to foster a multicultural and cosmopolitan dimension in certain peripheral territories. This has been analyzed by Chapuis and Jacquot (2014) in the case of Paris. These authors reflect on the experience of "otherness" of those who visit the so-called "ethnic" neighborhoods, whose residents are presented as exotic "others." Along these same lines, Gravari-Barbas (2017) has analyzed the growing attractiveness of territories on the margins of mass tourism. This author problematizes this phenomenon from an economic perspective, observing that it often opens up opportunities for these regions' inhabitants as local guides, cooks, and artisans. However, as Loukaitou-Sideris and Soureli (2012) revealed with regards to the city of Los Angeles, the economic impact of this cultural tourism tends to be modest.

In the current context of hyper-tourism, historically segregated neighborhoods in European, North American, and Latin American capitals[3] have become part of an "alternative" tourist circuit. There is a growing demand for inclusive forms of tourism, perceived as more authentic, for those who wish to be more than just visitors to a staged city. Through creative tourism, peripheral and/or marginalized working-class neighborhoods have been transformed into new *hotspots* for the "tourist gaze". This is one effect of what Richards and Raymond (2000: 18) call the "creative turn in urban development". Such neighborhoods are frequently the target of urban policies aimed either at responding to the growing demand from tourists interested in visiting places outside the usual circuits[4] or at promoting the economic development of these disadvantaged areas. It is within this ambiguous framework, stretched between

2 As several authors remark (Radosevic 2013; Blanché 2015) *street art* and *urban art* can have distinct meanings. For the purposes of the present article, however, we use both concepts interchangeably for. However, "*emic*" term used by our interlocutors is *urban art*.

3 For a more in-depth look at these logics as they play out in Latin America (where they are known as slum tourism), see Freire de Medeiros (2009) and Dürr & Faffe (2012).

4 For a critical reflection on tourism outside the usual circuits, see Gravari-Barbas and Delaplace (2015).

the symbolic valorization of territory and its commodification, that cultural placemaking asserts itself as a set of actions aimed at improving the attractiveness of places previously perceived as uninteresting or even dangerous. This process involves both externally imposed interventions and processes initiated and conducted by residents themselves. According to Ellery et al. (2020) the latter can evoke a sense of place and/or belonging, depending on the degree and form of community involvement in the process.

The Torre neighborhood fits into this context. Characterized by processes of precariousness and urban marginalization, inhabited by low-income working-class populations, Torre has been progressively reconfigured as a desirable cultural destination for national and international tourists. This process began in 2016, when a group of afro-descended youth from the neighborhood, located in the city of Cascais, organized the first street *art murals*. This initiative would give rise to the Infinito Urban Art Festival.

In this article, we problematize how this artistic initiative of cultural *placemaking* and community intervention contributed to overcoming processes of socio-spatial segregation and territorial stigmatization. We will also explore its effects on the subjectivities of young people. The dynamics of collaboration and tension between young residents and local power institutions around "artistic creation" in public space constitute one of the main axes of our analysis, given the growing importance of cultural creation as a resource for community governance. It is within this framework that we situate Torre neighborhood is situated. Although young people have autonomy in organizing the Infinito Festival, the event is also a device through which the municipality can exercise forms of control aimed at sanitizing public space. This results in the removal of actors and social practices understood as "dangerous", creating favorable conditions for disciplining neighborhood residents and possible future gentrification.

This present article is part of the PERICREATIVITY project, which aims to analyze the artistic and creative expressions developed by young people from segregated territories, as well as the public inclusion policies directed at these youths.[5] The approach we have adopted for the research carried out at Torre has prioritized qualitative methodologies -- namely ethnography -- and the development of collaborative audiovisual co-creation practices.[6]

The fieldwork conducted by the first two authors of this text began in March 2023 and concluded in June 2025, involving a total of 68 site visits. The research included participant observation and systematic field diary entries, as well as fifteen semi-structured interviews with young people, residents, and social intervention professionals. This ethnography mostly took place within a community intervention project aimed at local youth, which will be referred to pseudonymously as Kria-te. Throughout our fieldwork, we participated in six

5 The project team has been conducting fieldwork in five territories: four in the Lisbon metropolitan area and one in the city of Porto. For more information, please visit the project website: https://pericreativity.iscte-iul.pt/en/

6 We produced two co-created documentaries with young people and community leaders from Torre. This experience is not discussed in this article, however, as it falls outside the scope of the central issues we present here.

tours of the Torre Urban Art Gallery, two of which were recorded in audio and video. We also attended key moments in the life of the neighborhood: two editions of the Infinito Festival and three community parties. We supplemented our analysis with documentary research in multiple archives, including sociodemographic data from the 2021 Census, maps, and aerial photographs. In order to protect our interlocutors from any potential institutional repercussions, we have used fictitious names in the present article, both for the participants and for the community and local government entities present in the neighborhood. Before submitting the text for peer review, we discussed its content with some of our interlocutors, namely with the two community leaders mentioned.

STREET ART, TOURISTIFICATION, AND SYMBOLIC REDEVELOPMENT IN SEGREGATED NEIGHBORHOODS

The presence of "segregated" in the title of this subchapter is not accidental. Processes of urban space production in capitalist cities (especially during the second half of the 20th century) have been characterized by socio-spatial segregation, responsible for producing unequal conditions in the way resources (goods, services, employment, leisure) are spatially distributed. Urban and metropolitan zoning laws that spatially regulate both economic functions and populations based on their income and ethnic-racial origins (Chatel et al. 2017; Shertzer et al. 2022), have contributed to the reinforcement of segregation in metropolitan areas worldwide (cf. Buck et al. 2021; Ham et al. 2021). This phenomenon is particularly relevant in the context of the urban expansion experienced during so-called late capitalism, given the worsening of social inequalities and urban injustices resulting from the dominance of the current paradigm of neoliberal urbanism.

Understanding neoliberal urbanism (widely discussed in hundreds of academic works) is key for the analysis of the urban transformations of the city of Lisbon, its peripheral neighborhoods, and its greater metropolitan region over the last four decades. Portuguese scientific literature has indicated that the introduction of neoliberal urbanism principles into the urban planning of Lisbon and its associated municipalities in the mid-1980s (cf. Santos 2023) has been associated with the production of a territory characterized by high levels of spatial, social, educational, and racial segregation (Firmino et al. 2026). These processes have also been linked to low public budgets for the improvement of infrastructure, collective facilities, and urban living conditions (Gonçalves 2025). Based on an analysis of neoliberalization from a threefold perspective (project, governmentality, and policy formulation), Tulumello (2016) suggests that the implementation of neoliberal urban planning at the neighborhood level has led to an increase in friction between local communities and public administration, including police forces (Raposo et al. 2019; Zoettl 2025).

Over the last three decades, formal and informal expressions of street art (or urban art) have become one of the most common strategies for the requalification of public space,

especially in abandoned industrial areas, peripheries, and working-class resettlement neighborhoods (Ophrat 2022). In Europe, street art has also become fundamental in many urban regeneration actions in formerly degraded central areas of "tourist cities" (Baudry 2017; Pieroni and Naef 2019; Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miró 2020). Interestingly, the role of street art as an important instrument for the requalification of public space in socially precarious neighborhoods on the outskirts of large cities allows it to be directly associated with one of the most widespread forms of cultural placemaking (Sweeney et al. 2018; Matthews and Gadaloff 2022; McClinchey, 2023), generating new images of territories that promote a "community counter-narrative of place" (Elliott, Thomas and Byrne 2020).

Although a deeper critical perspective is needed regarding street art as an efficient engine of city branding, creative tourism, and urban regeneration, we have recently benefited from important contributions from researchers who warn of conflicts of interest between local populations and public authorities, as well as the institutional purposes of domesticating bodies and spaces. In this sense, some authors warn that street art is also used as "a means of masking the dynamics of socio-spatial exclusion" (Guinard and Margier 2018: 18), in which artistic murals "ornament processes of precarization" (Raposo 2018: 142). One of the most critical scholars of this phenomenon is Rafael Schacter, who sees street art festivals as the aesthetic expression of the creative city and its place-marketing policies. The author employs the term *art washing* to highlight the simulacrum of rebellion in these initiatives, as well as their subordination "to the strategic and acquisitive desires of the contemporary neoliberal city" (Schacter 2014: 162).

Over the last decade, street art festivals and guided tours in Lisbon's peripheral neighborhoods have created new centers of tourist and cultural attraction. These attempt to promote *place branding* and to counteract the territorial stigma associated with historically segregated areas of the city. These initiatives multiply and many of them organized by public authorities According to Campos et al. (2021: 702), this makes street art a "strategic instrument for urban management". However, non-institutionalized bottom-up street art interventions of and other artistic expressions have also been created by young people from the segregated territories of the Portuguese capital, with the aim of enhancing these regions' symbolic image. In the racialized neighborhoods analyzed by Raposo and Nofre, informal placemaking actions serve as a trigger for challenging stigmas and for "decolonizing and subverting the gaze of the tourist city, situating its periphery as a center of cultural creativity and social dynamism" (Raposo and Nofre 2024: 183–184). However, the depth of the effects of segregation, marginalization, and stigma cannot be underestimated.

In previous works, we pointed to the superficiality of the impacts of "street-artification" in these territories (Raposo 2023), as well as its misalignment with the needs of local populations, revealing street art's more instrumental than truly transformative objective (Raposo 2019). In the peripheral neighborhoods of the Lisbon metropolitan area, we can identify five main factors that have led to increasing tensions between local communities and public institutions:

1) The continuous worsening of the physical conditions of residential buildings and the public spaces around them;

2) The increasingly bleak scenario for younger generations in terms of employment opportunities and future prospects — especially among poor and Afro-descendant youth;

3) Disinvestment in the welfare state and the weakening of public policies aimed at combating poverty and social exclusion;

4) The scarcity of public equipment and services, as well as a quality transport network that ensures an efficient connection to the entire urban territory, and

5) Growing stigmatization and punitive criminalization promoted by the so-called institutional-media-civic front (as named by Wacquant 2023), which includes an increase in police violence, particularly against young black people from stigmatized neighborhoods.

Faced with the resulting governmental challenge, the Portuguese State and the municipalities of the Lisbon metropolitan area have been developing a series of community intervention actions over the last two decades. These focus on artistic and cultural development, entrepreneurship, and the social inclusion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in neighborhoods pejoratively labeled as "problematic".[7] The initiatives are part of a broader framework of neoliberal urbanism characterized by the retreat of the welfare state and the valorization of localized solutions that transfer the responsibility for the resolution of social problems to the community. While these interventions adopt a seemingly more inclusive approach, promoting school support, community events, and street art festivals, they also take on punitive aspects, which can be seen in such devices as camera surveillance and ostentatious policing. Both modalities are part of the same set of governmental technologies characteristic of neoliberal urbanism, mobilized by State powers. They aim to reconfigure neighborhoods to make them more governable by reinforcing mechanisms of social control while disciplining their inhabitants. These policies and strategies are thus best understood as being oriented towards the removal or containment of actors and social practices considered socially undesirable, while simultaneously disseminating morally sanitized values and norms. In a context of weakening structural policies that combat poverty and social inequalities, low-cost urban policies take pride of place as mechanisms for inclusion and social cohesion. The neighborhood occupies a central role as the stage for the implementation of these policies (Uitermark 2014).

In Portugal, the Escolhas Program (PE) is the main national public policy aimed at children and young people from territories affected by social marginalization It currently encompasses

7 The term "problem neighborhood" was, for years, the dominant label used in media and political discourses to designate resettled and self-built neighborhoods characterized by precarious conditions in Lisbon and Porto. The term even appear in official reports such as the Annual Internal Security Report (RASI). More recently, the lexicon describing urban poverty and exclusion has expanded, giving rise to expressions such as "critical neighborhoods," "priority intervention zones," or "sensitive urban areas." See: Raposo et al. (2026).

more than 25,000 participants in 118 projects spread across 75 Portuguese municipalities. Created in 2001 with a focus on preventing juvenile delinquency, the PE has adopted a discourse centered on the "integration of children and young people from the most unfavorable and problematic socioeconomic contexts" (Council of Ministers 2004). The current orientation of the Escolhas Program emphasizes the "valorization of the educational power of the arts," the development of "critical and creative thinking," and the deconstruction of "stigmas associated with the territories and populations with whom the projects intervene" (RCM No. 74/2023). However, the monitoring and mitigation of behaviors considered deviant among "at-risk" youth[8] remains central to the Program's objectives. The PE has advanced control systems that require its technicians to register participant data on a computer platform, distinguishing between direct and indirect participants. The former constitutes the priority target group of the Escolhas Program, which establishes a minimum participation quota for these young people, who are considered to be "at risk" of delinquency.[9]

It is important to critically address this notion of "at risk" youth. First of all, we must naturalizing the disqualifying imagery that the term promotes in its framing of these young people as "maladjusted," "dysfunctional," or "problematic." Secondly, we need to understand that the PE's stated objective of "inclusion" often functions as a euphemism for social control under the pretext of preventing juvenile delinquency, especially when it comes to public policies for Afro-descendants or Roma. Because the concept of "risk" situates young people as objects needing State intervention, whether through care or punitive measures, the term also tends to strip them of autonomy and political agency. Finally, the notion of "risk" can be understood as part of the neoliberal urbanist discourse, which understands responsibility for the problems of urban life from an individualistic perspective and eschews any grammar of rights or wider social responsibility.

The involvement of communities in the governance of segregated territories is another central characteristic of policies influenced by neoliberal urbanism. Racialized and marginalized youth are encouraged to be active subjects in the empowerment of their neighborhoods, a process that Soo Ah Kwon (2013) designates as "affirmative governmentality." With the increasing visibility of artistic productions by young people from urban peripheries (partly driven by the advancement of digital technologies (Yúdice 2002; Aderaldo and Raposo 2016) the State has begun to mobilize them for the purposes of social inclusion, encouraging their

8 "Risk" gained centrality in community intervention strategies in the US and France from the 1980s on (Castel 1991), being widely mobilized in social projects aimed at racialized youth living in neighborhoods affected by processes of marginalization. Considered more prone to deviant behavior, these young people are the target of preventive approaches that combine surveillance and social control with empowerment and participation, involving them voluntarily in governance structures (Kwon 2013; Raposo 2022).

9 To be considered children or "young people at risk," these youths must fall into at least one of the following situations: school absenteeism; school failure; early school drop out; unoccupied (including NEET youth); unemployment; deviant behaviors; being subject to educational guardianship measures; being subject to promotion and protection measures; immigrants in vulnerable situations (Normative Order No. 17/2012).

participation as partners in community interventions. This is the case with urban policies that promote expressions of hip-hop culture and institutionalized street art interventions and which sometimes appropriate the creative energy of young people in order to neutralize their potential for protest, placing this force at the service of State interests. Although cultural revitalization processes based on the promotion of street art festivals can function as a means to enhance the touristification of working-class, racialized, and peripheral neighborhoods (Raposo and Nofre 2024) — potentially contributing to a symbolic revitalization in how they are perceived by society — their community governance component cannot be ignored. Given this, any analysis of street art must also critically engage with the role of urban policies in the social control of public space in neighborhoods considered to be "undisciplined" (Uitermark 2014: 1,427). We must question how street art can take the form of a visual device oriented towards the social and moral hygenization of youth practices.

THE TORRE NEIGHBORHOOD: A SEGREGATED ENCLAVE BETWEEN ELITE TERRITORIES

Located in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Torre is a social housing-dominated neighborhood in the municipality of Cascais. For many years, it was considered to be a no-go area associated with crime and marginality. Inhabited by working-class families from the lower social classes, about half of its 1,500 residents[10] are of African origin — including Portuguese and immigrants, mainly from Cape Verde and Angola, countries once occupied by Portugal as part of its colonial empire in Africa.

Since its origin in the 1960s, the Torre neighborhood has undergone two significant periods of residential expansion: the first between 1962 and 1979 and the second between 1989 and 2000. When the first social housing units appeared, the neighborhood was far removed from the center of Cascais, both symbolically and in terms of accessibility, and the neighborhood was bordered by a small rural cluster and a cemetery. During this period, the residents were mostly white and from the Portuguese working class. Notably, the pioneers were fishermen, cannery workers, and municipal civil servants. They were later joined by families from various labor sectors who eventually became the majority in Torres.

The second phase of expansion, carried out between 1989 and 2000, occurred when the neighborhood received new buildings intended to rehouse populations mostly of African origin. These people came from a self-built neighborhood called Cruz da Guia, which had emerged in the vicinity of Torre between the 1960s and 1980s.[11] Cruz da Guia was composed of precarious, self-built single-story houses. It was initially inhabited by native-born

10 We determined the number of residents in the Torre neighborhood by analyzing the subsections of the 2021 Census.

11 It was during these decades that thousands of migrants arrived from rural areas of Portugal and from the former African colonies in a process that gradually led to the emergence of numerous precarious and self-built neighborhoods on the outskirts of Lisbon.

Portuguese people, but gradually began to receive a growing number of African inhabitants, mainly from Cape Verde and Angola. This immigrant African population would eventually become the majority in the neighborhood.

The relocations from Cruz da Guia to Torre took place at the initiative of the city hall between 1989 and 1991, and were later integrated into the Special Relocation Plan (PER) between 1997 and 2000. In the first phase of relocation, some people moved into buildings while others were sent to temporary ground-floor houses. This was a slow process, and it was only a decade later that these residents would be rehoused in permanent homes. The PER -- considered to be the main public housing policy in Portugal following the Carnation Revolution -- was created in 1993 with the aim of eliminating "shantytowns" (*favelas* in Portuguese) in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto. However, the PER promoted relocation of many families from central areas to "social neighborhoods" on the outskirts resulted in an intensification of urban segregation, especially among black, immigrant, and Roma populations (Alves 2021).

The two main phases of housing construction in Torre show how class and ethno-racial factors intersect, revealing the profound transformations in how socio-spatial segregation manifests itself today in post-colonial European cities. Today, these cities, characterized by neoliberal policies, gentrification, touristification, and institutional racism, demonstrate that "class," in isolation, is not sufficient as an explanatory key to understanding urban injustices. Segregation, in addition to reflecting inequalities in the spatial distribution of resources, involves differentiated dynamics of representation and symbolic power, as pointed out by Ana Elorza (2019) and Loic Wacquant (2023). From this perspective, the public images that mark urban territories link ethno-racial and class divisions, shaping experiences of living and conditions of access to the city, including precariousness, oppression, and stigmatization. Any analysis of neo-liberal urbanism must thus consider the intersections between class, "race", ethnicity, place of birth, and economic and social factors such as job insecurity, housing, education, legal-migration status, and vulnerability of family networks (Do Carmo, Cachado and Ferreira 2015; Carreiras 2018).

The issue of the periphery gained public visibility in Portuguese society from the 1990s onward, a time when the poor, segregated, and peripheral neighborhoods of Lisbon gained relevance in the media (Raposo et al. 2019). These territories were racially marked and came to be understood as synonymous with crime and incivility as political and media agendas allied in blaming the youth of these regions for the supposed increase in urban violence. The Torre neighborhood followed this trend, seeing its status reduced by stigmatizing categories that labeled it as a violent and marginal territory. A 1995 headline of the local newspaper *Rota das Linhas* is revealing of the process of territorial stigmatization underway at that time: "Only the Torre neighborhood is worse than the favelas and ghettos". The report highlighted the neglect this neighborhood suffered at the hands of local authorities, as well as the serious

degradation of public spaces. According to the newspaper, Torre was an environment that fostered "drugs and crime" (Rota das Linhas 1995: 22).



Figure 1. Headline from *Rota das Linhas*. Source: National Library of Portugal.

As racialization intensified during the 1990s, the Torre neighborhood presented markedly precarious characteristics, with dirt roads, dilapidated buildings, and temporary and self-built housing. As mentioned above, the beginning of the new millennium saw a new population being rehoused in the neighborhood, which at least put an end to precarious housing. This phase was integrated into a broader process of urban rehabilitation of Torre. Significant interventions were carried out such as the paving of roads, the installation of traffic signs and sidewalks, the construction of a new playground, improvement of public lighting, and the introduction of a new toponymy, inspired by themes related to fishing, the sea, and the narrative of Portuguese explorations. In one of the areas of the neighborhood, previously occupied by temporary housing, a multi-service pavilion was built. This area, currently known as *Praça do Atlântico* (Atlantic Square), later came to include a skatepark and an open-air amphitheater, a space that now annually hosts the Community Festival.

It is also important to highlight the evolution of housing ownership in this area. Originally conceived as a social housing neighborhood, consisting of publicly or municipally owned properties, the Torre neighborhood underwent a significant transformation from the mid-1990s onwards, when residents were allowed to purchase homes, something that is no longer possible today. As a result, today, about half of the apartments in the neighborhood are privately owned

(2021 Census).[12] This change in property ownership has placed the neighborhood within the dynamics of real estate speculation, exposing it to a process of gentrification.

All of this must be understood within the context of the socioeconomic dynamics of Cascais and, in particular, Torre. Formerly a fishing village with some industrial activity, Cascais began to increasingly focus on tourism and elite housing from the second half of the 20th century onwards. This process intensified over the decades, and today the Torre neighborhood is configured as an impoverished working class enclave, surrounded by elite territories.



Figure 2. Torre neighborhood in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. Source: Map by Varela.

The privileged location of Torre makes its classification as a peripheral neighborhood questionable, especially if we consider two variables proposed by Tiaraju D'Andrea (2020) — income (poverty) and geography (distance) — to reflect on the objective and quantitative condition of this concept.[13] Torre is located in an affluent area of Cascais, marked by the presence of hotels, resorts, and luxury condominiums such as the Quinta da Marinha. The neighborhood is also located less than 3 km from the center of Cascais, and is now integrated into the urban fabric of greater Lisbon. However, from a symbolic or qualitative point of view, Torre is laden with meanings, experiences, and identities that mark it as "peripheral".

12 Data acquired through our analysis of the subsections of the 2021 Census.

13 According to D'Andrea, a territory is not peripheral simply because it is poor, but because it is located in a region with significantly below-average income. It is also necessary to consider its distance from and difficulty of access to the city center, given that resources are unevenly geographically distributed.

These express different positions of subalternity experienced by the resident population whose social space is influenced by the effects of precarity, segregation, and stigma. Thus, after decades of intense urbanization, Torre ceased to be an isolated space distant from the center of Cascais. The neighborhood benefitted from improved accessibility and increased public investment, particularly from the 2010s onwards, when the Kria-te project began. This project was created in 2013 within the scope of the Escolhas Program. From the very beginning, Kria-te counted on the participation of a large number of local entities, led by the Cascais City Hall.[14] With the support of this project and local government institutions, such as the Parish Council, as well as third-sector entities operating in the neighborhood, a group of young residents organized themselves in 2016 to create street art murals on the gable ends of the buildings where they lived. This intervention coincided with the building facade rehabilitation plan developed by the Parish Council. The following year, the Malta da Torre youth association was formally created.[15] This would consolidate itself as an active agent in the process of neighborhood's transformation. In 2016, the Torre skatepark also underwent a process of requalification, later being embellished with street art interventions. Finally, in 2018, the first edition of the Infinito Festival took place with the official support of city hall. In 2025, the event celebrated its seventh edition in 2025.

These initiatives had significant impacts on the processes of socio-spatial segregation and territorial stigmatization in the Torre neighborhood, something we will discuss in the following subchapter from the perspective of two young residents and the urban art actions they organize.

ARTISTIC AND COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION IN TORRE: THE NEIGHBORHOOD AS SEEN THROUGH THE TRAJECTORY OF TWO LOCAL LEADERS

The first time we entered Torre, we were amazed by the neighborhood's charm, with its clean and well-ordered streets, well-maintained playgrounds, and even a skatepark. We had just visited other peripheral neighborhoods in the municipality of Cascais, whose greater precariousness and socio-spatial segregation contrasted sharply with the environment we were now walking through. The beauty of the street art murals on the building facades caught our attention, some of them being photographed by foreign tourists on electric scooters. With clearly identified signs, the toponymy of Torre featured names alluding to the world

14 Although this project is just over a decade old, the history of the Torre neighborhood has always been marked by the continuous activity of local associations and social intervention organizations of a civic, religious, and State nature. Among the main organizations involved are a sports club dedicated to football; a residents' association with roots in the popular movements of the post-April Revolution; and a nonprofit social organization with religious inspiration focused on children and the elderly. Later, with the prevalence of crime prevention and social inclusion policies aimed at youth, the Kria-te project emerged. More recently, the Malta da Torre youth association has appeared. For more information, see Varela et al. (forthcoming).

15 "Malta" is a common slang term in Portugal, with a meaning similar to "galera" or "turma" in Brazil or "gang" in the U.S.

of fishing, from fish (Salmonetes, Dourada) and other marine animals (Albatroz, Estrela do Mar) to vessels (Caravelas, Naus), evoking the past of the neighborhood as linked to the sea. The first impression of what we observed was written down in our field diary as follows:

> The neighborhood consists of low, four-story buildings that differ from each other according to their area, indicating different construction periods. The streets and sidewalks are well-maintained, and there are also several playgrounds, gardens, a sports court, and even a skatepark. The street names allude to the world of fishing, given that Torre was an old fishing neighborhood: we even saw a boat parked on the street. The neighborhood is pretty and pleasant, and we saw foreign tourists strolling around on rented electric scooters, photographing street art murals. In fact, there were about 20 murals scattered throughout the neighborhood, one of them depicting two young people embracing and holding a globe with the motto "Malta da Torre" and, next to it, the tag "Youth One 404". We would later discover that this number — 404 — refers to the bus line that crosses the neighborhood. It is used by young people as one of their symbols." (Field diary of Raposo, March 30, 2023)

That day we visited Kria-te, a social inclusion project integrated into the Escolhas Program and aimed at young people. It operates in a prefabricated house located in the heart of the neighborhood, with ample outdoor space and even an urban garden. Upon arrival, we were warmly welcomed by the young people and staff present, including Ruddy and Sky[16], who showed us around the space, which was divided between a large work space/social room (equipped with a sofa, a flat-screen TV with a Playstation, and two meeting tables) and a music studio. It was from there that a Afro-house rhythm o emanated. Two young people were practicing their DJ skills on the project's mixing board. The centrality of arts and creativity in Kria-te Program was clear, serving as a way to enhance talent and broaden the educational and professional paths of young people.[17] This strategy also served as an incentive to attract youth to the project, keeping them under staff supervision and, implicitly, keeping them away from the dangers associated with the neighborhood.

Children of African immigrants, Ruddy and Sky were born in Portugal and lived in Torre at a time when the neighborhood still had precarious (self-built or temporary) housing, where their relatives lived. They are leaders in the neighborhood, both in terms of community involvement — they formed the Malta da Torre Youth Association — and through their privileged relationship with urban art: both are organizers of the Infinito Festival. 34 years old and of Cape Verdean descent, Ruddy is a community street art guide in Torre, organizing guided tours for national and international visitors. He considers this activity very important in counteracting the negative perception of the neighborhood, something he has been concerned with since childhood, when he defended Torre against the slanders he heard at school. Ruddy has taken on a "protective" and "community" role, stimulated in the

16 Names have been changed to preserve the anonymity.

17 The initials KRIA-TE stand for: creativity, art, talent, and entrepreneurship.

summer camps he participated in from a young age — where he even worked as a monitor in adolescence — which enhanced his current skills as a cultural mediator. This feeling of belonging and defense of the "community" is expressed by him as follows:

> (…) I always had this idea: "I'm going to change my community. One day they'll hear about me here in the neighborhood." But I never thought I was going to do community intervention. (…) I always had this neighborhood thing, this desire to not speak ill of the neighborhood. To this day, that still affects me. (Interview in Torre, May 17, 2023)

Ruddy's leadership skills did not go unnoticed by the institutions present in Torre. In 2016, Ruddy was invited to become a community technician for Kria-te. At this time, the first street art interventions began in the neighborhood. Up until then, the walls of Torre were covered in graffiti tags referencing the neighborhood ("Torre", "Torre City" and "404") and organized football fan groups. There were also messages of all kinds: some of friendship, others of challenge or intimidation.[18] When the Parish Council came to paint the buildings or simply erase the graffiti, young people would tag the walls again, asserting semiotic control over their living spaces. In an attempt to resolve this impasse, the Kria-te coordinators challenged Ruddy and other young people to think of ways to intervene in the community that would contribute to the requalification of the neighborhood and prevent acts of "vandalism" in public space. Inspired by experiences in other neighborhoods on the outskirts of Lisbon, Ruddy and other young people identified urban art as the alternative they were looking for. The group developed and presented a work plan to Parish Council that called for the creation of five murals. The youth received the "green light" to begin community mobilization. The participatory process involved the formation of different working groups to identify which walls would be painted according to what themes, to obtain permission from residents, and to select the artists. Ruddy highlighted the importance of involving the community in this process:

> Here the process was very community-based. If you have the whole community involved, nobody will ruin it. If it's me, Ruddy, doing it, someone else will say, "It wasn't me." Now, if you involve the whole community, nobody... everyone will preserve it, because it's a process for the whole community. (...) I immediately felt that the scene was going to work. You know why? We left her, and the kids would all go straight to the computer looking for designs, looking for urban art. (...) So these young people went to present the theme to the community; they went to get signatures. There were times when people were here at night, projecting three themes, three designs. The community chose [what we were going to do]. (Interview in Torre, May 17, .2023)

Motivated by the desire to contribute to a positive image of the neighborhood, the youths actively engaged in the development of community murals. Participation facilitated by convivial dynamics such as an "ideas barbecue." However, it was not easy to convince all the residents

18 Some of the messages found while visiting the neighborhood in 2009, using Google Earth, read: "Antigo. You will always be our troop," and "In Torre it's Blacks Rule."

of the project's validity, especially the older people. Some confused *street art works* with graffiti tags, while others harbored bad memories of previous experiences. A few weeks before the intervention, an entity external to Torre — the Muraliza association — produced six street art murals in the neighborhood, in a top-down process in which the residents had little say. It was thus important for the young people to distance themselves from this incident in their negotiations residents. The success of the inaugural mural was crucial for the drumming up the desired collective engagement. Starting from the first topic chosen by the community — multiculturalism — the youths contacted the artist Youth One. Some days later, Youth One sent Ruddy an initial sketch: a lion with a hat on its head. Upon realizing that the drawing did not meet the residents' expectations, Ruddy gave feedback to the artist, who created a new drawing in dialogue with the young members of the project. The result was two racialized youths embracing — one wearing a cap and the other a turban — holding a representation of planet Earth in their hands.



Figure 3. Youth One Mural. Source: Photograph by Raposo.

It was in the context of this cultural placemaking initiative that the idea of creating a youth association arose, as young people felt the need to assert themselves to the Parish Council and say who they were. As Ruddy recalls:

> The urban art scene was definitely the driving force, yes. Otherwise, [the association] wouldn't exist. We started to have a voice. The name was Malta da Torre. Why? We were at the Parish Council when we got the funding, and we've been Malta da Torre ever since. We managed to get [other funding]: we're Malta da Torre, Malta da Torre, Malta da Torre. And that's how it stuck… (Interview in Torre, May 17, 2023)

Encouraged by Kria-te, they youth group formalized the Malta da Torre association in 2017, at a time when their responsibilities in the field of urban art (as well as in other social projects) were intensifying. This culminated in the creation of the Infinito Festival the following year. Ruddy's leadership role in this set of community actions was related to his integration into Kria-te's technical team. This allowed him to hone his skills as a cultural mediator. Joining Kria-te also opened up the possibility for Ruddy to resume his studies. Ruddy's trajectory in the world of arts and community intervention has thus allowed him to experience rewarding experiences and achieve public recognition, but also to articulate mediation strategies between young people and Kria-te, residents and the city hall, tourists and the neighborhood.

For Nikolas Rose (1999) and Soo Ah Kwon (2013), projects like Kria-te produce specific forms of youth by fostering a responsible, creative, and entrepreneurial model of self-development, aiming to transform youth energy into a strategic resource for governance. As was evident during our various visits to Kria-te, youth involvement in the initiatives developed was encouraged: this was a commitment that operated as a strategy for regulation and self-governance. Not surprisingly, some young people became community leaders and, at times, technicians within Kria-te itself. This privileged relationship allowed the Cascais City Council to access the daily issues of the neighborhood and also to mobilize the civic commitment of young people around topics of municipal interest. Art and participation thus intertwined to reinforce mechanisms of co-responsibility and community control, becoming part of the "antidote" to "dangerous social practices".

This instrumental view of youth engagement aligns with the inclusion strategy advocated by the Escolhas Program, whose neoliberal rationale conceives of youth from peripheral neighborhoods simultaneously as "problem youth" or "at-risk youth" (who must be regulated) and as "solution youth." Within this framework, public institutions take advantage of the social and symbolic capital of young people who then assume responsibility for managing conflicts and overcoming the logics of marginalization that are present in their own community (De Tommasi 2013; Raposo 2022).

Ruddy's "go-between" condition (Velho 2001: 22) is similarly present in Sky, who moves between diverse social worlds, primarily driven by the artistic projects he undertakes. With an Angolan mother and a São Toméan father, Sky moved to southern Angola as a baby, where he spent most of his childhood. He returned to live in Torre in his pre-adolescence, after visits during the holidays. The intense cold upon arrival and the time spent with his grandmother and siblings while his parents were in England marked this return in Sky's memories. Even from a distance, his parents encouraged his academic performance, reflecting the family's emphasis on education as a symbolic stepping-stone towards professional life. Sky's father, an engineer, completed higher education; his mother, a secondary school graduate, worked in school administration.

From childhood on, Sky cultivated a habit of drawing. It was only in secondary school in Cascais, however, that Sky acquired technical knowledge in the area, completing a tech-

nical-professional course in graphic design. Motivated by his parents, he returned to Angola in 2015, where he began a degree in architecture. Back in Lisbon in 2018, Sky enrolled in a degree in Visual Arts and Technologies. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic forced him to abandon his studies. Curiously, it was during this period of mandatory isolation that Sky began to fully dedicate himself to the artistic world, resuming his old habit of drawing. Participation in the organization of the Infinito Festival motivated him to dedicate himself even more to this field, when Sky realized that artistic work could provide him with alternative professional paths. Regarding this time, he says the following:

> (…) I really realized that maybe I could try an artistic career, especially since I was already part of the group that organizes the festival here in the neighborhood, the Infinito Festival. There were already some artists working. Then I came to the conclusion that maybe, yeah, this could be an alternative for me, and I started painting, I started on paper. (…) Then, seeing the artists working at the festivals, it was almost like I was identifying tools to make that transition for me to paint on a wall or on a surface that wasn't paper. (Interview in Torre, April 17, 2023)

Initially, Sky observed the work of the artists participating in the Infinito Festival, collecting the materials they abandoned — brushes, paint cans, sprays — with a view to creating his own future interventions. Since permits to paint on walls were difficult to obtain, he insisted that his colleagues from Malta da Torre provide him with a location. Hehe carried out his first urban art intervention on the wall of the Kria-te headquarters in 2020. Since then, Sky has rapidly evolved as an artist. He completed his first paid work that same year and, in 2021, won the Talent Promotion Grant awarded by the Cascais city government. Using this, Sky painted walls of buildings in his own neighborhood for the first time. Under the title "Distancing is not a loss of proximity," the two pieces Sky created in Torre highlight black hands reaching towards each other. In one hand, there's a bottle of sanitizer (which visually resembles a spray can) subtly underscoring the intersection between health protection and artistic expression. As Sky himself explains on his Instagram page: "The idea behind the piece refers to the importance of unity in difficult times, so that everything becomes easier."

Although no longer an unknown artist, Sky continues to struggle to find spaces and surfaces to create his urban art. Not surprisingly, he has specialized in painting household appliances, wooden planks, and other materials found on the street, taking advantage of the scrap metal that accumulates on the corners of Torre. These same abandoned objects gave rise to his first works exhibited in museums. This is the case with a refrigerator he painted with children from Torre, exhibited at MU.SA (Sintra Museum of Arts), and a three-wheeled motorcycle that belonged to a former fisherman from the neighborhood. Regarding this last piece, which was part of the collective exhibition "Interferences — Emerging Urban Cultures" at the renowned Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology (MAAT), Sky says:

> (…) it was funny because here I was, an African (from a generation that came after the fishermen, right?!) portraying a reality that came before mine: the life of fishing. Basically, I was

> portraying a gentleman who was probably part of that generation, since he's now in his 70s, I think. Yeah, and I went with the piece, which was called Kota Gil, which was the gentleman's name. And the piece was… well, it had portraits of him. (…) there was a profile shot and then there was a shot more from here at the level of the mouth, which was of the mustache, because all fishermen have mustaches [laughs]. (Interview at the Tower, April 17, 2023)

Some of Sky's most recent works use recycled plastic in the form of tiles as a support for his designs. The idea arose from a connection he established with Torre Plstik, an association Sky collaborates with which has a "Creative Recycling Unit" next to the neighborhood's skatepark. Here young people learn not only to skateboard, but also to transform plastic packaging lids into skateboard decks. Initiated in 2022, Torre Plstik is just one more project to add to others that are transforming the face of the neighborhood, such as Kria-te (2010), the renovation of the skatepark (2017) and the Infinito Festival (2018). These are projects that rely on the greater centrality given by the State to youth policies in the last two decades — policies that aim to counteract the logics of socio-spatial segregation, territorial stigma, and urban abandonment to which Torre continues to be exposed. Although these policies implement low-cost social welfare initiatives supported by local associations, they have also brought about transformations that are not only aesthetic, but affect how city dwellers relate to their neighborhood and, especially, their neighbors. The impact of these projects is described by Sky:

> Nowadays, it's much, much, much better. (...) Back then, perhaps there was a bit more hostility towards outsiders. (...) It doesn't mean they would hurt you, but there was always that distrust. But nowadays, due to the projects that exist here — even the issue of the neighborhood festival itself — they ended up creating more openness. Because of the gable walls and the murals, many people started coming here, and we also have the tourist route going through. So people also got used to contact with those who came from outside with a camera to take pictures. It's normal now. And that also opened things up even for those who don't come here for the gable walls, but come just because they're passing by, because it's on the way, because they have to go somewhere else and, perhaps, passing through Torre is faster. So, that made it easier for many more people from outside to enter Torre and see that it's not such a dangerous place. (Interview in Torre with Sky, April 17, 2023)

The consolidation of guided tours and the Infinito Urban Art Festival was very important in mitigating the effects of socio-spatial segregation and territorial stigma in the Torre neighborhood. The festival began in 2018, the year Cascais was chosen as the European Youth Capital, at a time when the city council was seeking youth cultural projects capable of promoting a positive and socially responsible image of the municipality. The experience of young people in organizing street art events in previous years, which resulted in the creation of the Malta da Torre Association, contributed to the Infinito Festival being selected to receive support from the local government. During the festival, which lasted eight days, eight street art murals were created by eight artists. Eight concerts were also held — the distinc-

tive feature of the festival that helps explain its name, as shown in the festival's promotional video: "…an 8 that is full of symbolism and represents infinity… Because art has no end!"[19]

The success of the Infinito Festival led to this urban art initiative being supported by the Cascais city council in subsequent years. While it was clear to the municipality that the festival helped to project a distinctive brand for Cascais by transforming a formerly neglected neighborhood into an attractive territory for national and international visitors, its community governance component is no less important. In this sense, the Festival's aim is to subject the creativity of young people to the needs (and values) of state power, where cohesion and social control of public space merge into a single rationality. The premises of this neoliberal urbanism can be identified in the discourse of the current mayor of Cascais at the time of the organization of the 2nd edition of the Infinito Festival in 2020:

> Ultimately, it's about taking advantage not only of the creative and cultural aspects, but also a whole range of other values that are absolutely fundamental to ensuring greater territorial cohesion, allowing for greater social cohesion, where ultimately there is a closer relationship between citizens. This year, the particularity of the festival's theme is multiculturalism (...).[20]

After expanding to other neighborhoods in the municipality between 2020 and 2023,[21] the Infinito festival returned to its base in Torre in 2024. In that year, eight artists, organized in pairs, created four new works in the neighborhood. In these seven years of street art interventions throughout the municipality of Cascais, Ruddy and Sky have established themselves as central figures of the Malta da Torre Association, maintaining the autonomy of a festival that navigates between institutional recognition and fidelity to its community origins.

MEMORIES, STORIES, AND EXPERIENCES IN DISPUTE: SYMBOLIC NARRATIVES IN A STREET ART TOUR

Street art tours in Torre began shortly after the first urban art murals were created, back in 2016. The training as tour guides that Ruddy and other young people received from a company specialized in the field — *ImpacTrip* — helped make the project viable. The youths began offering to guide tourists through the Malta da Torre Association, with the support of Kria-te. Lasting about an hour and a half and with a mostly foreign audience, the tours are led by Ruddy and other young people from the neighborhood. Partnerships with local tourism companies allow them to maintain a full schedule, especially in the summer, generating an important source of income for the guides.

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19 Check out the Infinito Festival's Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/p/BjC4kGNgc7s/

20 To listen to the full speech, visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8RymQchlKU.

21 Over the years, the festival has brought street art to different neighborhoods in Cascais while also maintaining interventions in Torre and has diversified in terms of its mediums and performance spaces. In addition to gable walls, staircases, retaining walls, schools, and a skatepark have also been painted. In 2022, the Festival's actions focused on eight schools. In 2023, Infinito occupied a park in the center of the municipality, with open-air murals created by eight artists.

We accompanied one of these visits by about twenty Australians, guided by Ruddy. Starting from the Kria-te headquarters, and with the support of the young Rute as a translator, the began with a historical overview about urban art in the neighborhood:

> Welcome to the Torre Urban Art Gallery. This all started in 2016, when the whole neighborhood had been vandalized and was in need of redevelopment. Whenever the Parish Council came to paint the walls, the young people would come and paint over them. Imagine the whole neighborhood like this [shows three graffiti tags],[22] all over. So, together with the Parish Council, the best way we found to stop them from painting over it again was through urban art. (…) In 2016, in 4 months, a neighborhood that was completely vandalized already had 11 murals. And we started seeing people from outside coming to visit our community. Before, it was just us, almost nobody came. It was a very closed neighborhood. (Recording, June 11, 2023)

Acceptance of the street art murals was widespread, as, according to Ruddy, "all the residents wanted to have a painting on their building." The next steps were applying in 2017 for a project — Mundar — from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. This secured funding to create two more paintings, and, a year later, for organizing the Infinito Festival.

The first mural visited on the tour was also the first one put up as part of the festival. Created by Tamara Alves, the work depicts a young man embracing a wolf, whose crown, as Ruddy stated, "represents that we are the kings of our own story." With the inscription "*We Can Be Heroes*" (quoting David Bowie) tattooed on the young man's arm, the work was presented by the artist as a way to counter "the message in the neighborhoods that everyone's destiny sometimes seems to be predetermined."[23]

We walked through the streets of Torre until we stopped in front of a painting depicting two boys — one of African origin and the other Roma — playing football. This had been created by the Brazilian artist Shay Costoya. It was the first time she had done a mural of that size and it was based on a photograph taken by a resident of the neighborhood. Ruddy pointed out:

> Since we were given the opportunity to change our community, we also give opportunities to less established artists to create their projects. This is a photo taken by our audiovisual monitor that symbolizes two young people from the community, one of Roma ethnicity and the other African, playing ball. There aren't many drawings for children here, so the younger ones were asking for a scene for them. (Recording, June 11, 2023)

Created in 2016, the mural was completed in just 3 days. At the time, there was only one scaffold for all the artists. Starting with the first edition of the Infinito Festival in 2018, Malta da Torre received support that allowed them to guarantee better conditions: more time — eight days — and remuneration for the artists.

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22 The spray-painted graffiti read: 404 Torre Ciy, Portugal I love you and Fuck the Police.

23 See https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/17927210023093122/.

African references also appear in other street art murals, highlighting the strong presence of this population in the neighborhood. One example is a large-scale image of a Black woman dressed in traditional African attire, her body and face adorned with abstract paintings inspired by cultural symbols of the continent. On her shoulder, the number 404 stands out, a symbol of belonging for young people in the Torre neighborhood. Created by the Portuguese artist Smile, this work aimed to represent the people who came from Africa to live on that street.



Figure 4. Smile Mural Source: Photograph by Raposo.

We continued our journey until we stopped in front of a work by the Brazilian *writer*[24] Utopia. Composed of tiles, it depicts an old fisherman with a pipe in his mouth and turned towards the sea, his gaze fixed on the horizon, fondly recalling his days of hard work. Ruddy explains that the fisherman's eyes are made of shards of glass, which makes them change color according to the light. He also commented on the influence of the fishermen on the life of the neighborhood:

24 The term "writer" refers to graffiti artists who maintain a link with hip-hop culture, as is the case with Smile. There are other artists whose connection to urban art or street art comes from other fields, however, such as illustration, design, tattooing, or muralism.

> When I was young there were many boats here, many fishermen mending their nets, etc. Now they are almost all retired. You don't see many here anymore. You can still see on the facade [of the buildings] a lot of things that have to do with the sea. (...) Before, this place was called the Fishermen's Quarter, now it's the Tower [Torre] Quarter. (Recording, June 11, 2023)

Several murals evoke these roots linked to the sea and fishing, such as Samina's work, which portrays a fisherman's wife watching the Atlantic, waiting for her husband's return. Daniel Eime's work also refers to the neighborhood's fishing past, reproducing the face of a boat's "Captain" through a collage of hundreds of stenciled pieces. One of the most impactful works was created by ADD Fuel. It shows a *varina* — a street fishmonger — with a basket balanced on her head containing fish and silhouettes of buildings. The *varina's* skull-like face symbolizes an extinct profession, but one that, 30 years ago, was still part of the neighborhood's daily life. Ruddy says:

> Thirty years ago, we learned that a lady who sold her fish lived here. She lived here [points to the building]: a coincidence. She was helped by the son of a lady who lives there. He told us. He is the brother of the gypsy boy who is in the photograph that inspired the mural we saw. (Recording, June 11, 2023)

In unison, the tourists exclaim in astonishment: *oooohhh!* We were at one of the high points of the guided tour, where Ruddy not only unveiled the artists' creative process, but also the history of the neighborhood and the associated serendipities involved in the creative process. In this process of "informal curation" (Andron 2018), we saw Ruddy use street art murals to tell stories that evoked not only the neighborhood's fishing tradition, but, above all, its multicultural environment.



Figure 5. Street art tour in Torre. Source: Photograph by Raposo.

Despite the presence of several murals depicting racialized people, the city hall and other local institutions associated the Torre neighborhood with a memory predominantly linked to the sea in a city that seeks to celebrate this legacy. Examples of this are the toponymy give to the streets in the to Torre, the narratives promoted by the public authorities, and some of the urban art murals, namely those produced by the Muraliza Association.[25] In contrast, the street art interventions organized by the neighborhood's youth, mostly of African descent, reveal a desire to project other imagery onto the territory, exposing experiences and memories that the municipality would prefer to keep hidden.

One such intervention occurred informally when young people asked the *writer* Smile to draw a dog on the corner of Rua do Kongo, taking advantage of the artist's presence in the neighborhood in 2016 at the invitation of the Malta da Torre Association. The bull terrier appears with the inscription "Welcome to my 'hood" (in English), underlying a strong sense of local belonging. Officially called Albatross Street, Kongo Street was informally renamed by young people, highlighting the centrality of that place in youth social life. When we passed by during the tour, several young people were sitting on a wall chatting and listening to *funaná* music[26] at high volume, which led Ruddy to ask them to turn the sound down. He then said the following:

> Here we call it Kongo Street. It's the street where young people feel comfortable being. There's no traffic. Kongo means chaos. (…) There we have a drawing of a dog, which is very common in our community. There's a young man here who doesn't really like the drawings on the walls, and he really wanted this drawing. It's that boy over there! [points to a young man]. He told an artist who was painting down there, "I want a drawing of a dog on my street." The young people went to buy cans of paint, the artist came here and made the dog, which is now the logo of our association. (Recording, June 11, 2023)

Next to this drawing, a mural created during a lettering workshop organized by the Muraliza Association also references Rua do Kongo and the Torre neighborhood, incorporating the following words: happy, love, energy, family, imagination, peace, freedom, respect, cool, friendship. Unlike the bull terrier — conceived by young people who frequented the area — this workshop adopted a top-down approach, with little involvement from the residents.[27] Not surprisingly, the young people felt the need to inscribe symbols that reflected their imaginations and social origins, asking the artist to draw the animal instead.

We were nearing the end of the tourwhen, still on Rua do Kongo, Ruddy showed the tourists "the first mural to be made in our community." Featuring a bus of the "Torre – 404"

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25 Most of the murals related to the world of fishing were created by the Muraliza Association.

26 *Funaná* is a musical and dance style originating in Cape Verde, reflecting rural experiences, cultural resistance, and collective celebration.

27 In the photographs shared by Muraliza on social media, it is evident that few neighborhood residents -- particularly those who live on Rua do Kongo – participated in the workshop, with the audience being mostly made up of people from outside the neighborhood.

bus line (followed by a bus stop and the neighborhood's name in bomb-style lettering) the mural was conceived in 2014 by young people who informally self-organized to demand the return of the bus line. Beginning in 2012, the bus had stopped circulating in the neighborhood due to it being stoned by young residents. The decision to cease bus service was justified by the Scotturb company with the following arguments:

> (…) our buses were criminally attacked with stones that passed within centimeters of the heads and faces of passengers (…) The suspension of traffic on Rua da Torre and Rua das Caravelas allows us to move vehicles away from the area that we consider to be the most problematic. ("Cascais: violência no bairro (...)" 2012)

This interruption lasted six years, with the bus returning to service in 2018 during the 1st edition of the Infinito Festival, a victory attributed to urban art and the cultural placemaking actions organized by the neighborhood's youth.



Figure 6. Mural of the Torre bus line — 404. Source: Photograph by Raposo.

Although the "Torre — 404" bus piece is identified as the neighborhood's first street art mural, we later learned that it was painted over an earlier work of a boat. This work had been chosen by participants in a Kria-te activity, according to accounts from former project technicians, and evoked the neighborhood's historical ties to fishing. The boat painting, however, did not please a substantial portion of the young people in the neighborhood, especially those who frequented Rua do Kongo. This led to a collective mobilization to replace the old mural a few months later. The bus mural thus reveals the symbolic resistance of the neighborhood's youth against the ostracism and relegation imposed on the residents of Torre, who were left without access to public transport with the complicity of the Cascais city hall. It

also highlights the process of bottom-up visual production as conceived by the neighborhood youth themselves, which challenges the stereotypes of "incivility," "apathy," and "violence" frequently attributed to them by media and institutional discourses. Finally, the second mural can be conceived of as an act of insubordination to the hegemonic representations promoted by local power, which tend to crystallize the history of Torre as an old fishing neighborhood, erasing the memories, experiences and struggles of those who live there now.

The mural painted by Kiã, a resident of Torre, in partnership with Gonçalo Mar during the 6th edition of the Infinito Festival in 2024, is emblematic of the importance of creating strategies to dignify the neighborhood, anchored in memories and visual imaginaries forged by the young people of the neighborhood. By painting a young black man wearing a hat with the word Kongo prominently displayed and a jacket with the number 404 standing out on one of the sleeves, the artists constructed a "community counter-narrative of place" (Elliott, Thomas and Byrne 2020), mobilizing symbolisms that exalt everything from the Afro-diasporic identity present in the neighborhood to celebratory elements of the social interactions experienced there.



Figure 7. Mural by artists Kiã and Gonçalo Mar. Source: Photograph by Raposo.

In contrast to the murals that allude to the neighborhood's fishing legacy, which had little connection to the history of the young people of Torre, the *Kongo* and *404 emblems* condense references to the social origins of their families, such as blackness and Africanness, as well as elements of belonging to the neighborhood that are not expressed in the official nomenclature. At the same time, they refer to a symbolic resistance not only against collective experiences of marginalization, invisibility, and territorial stigma, but also against the accelerated urban transformations that traverse the territory, which have often been implemented without listening to or considering the demands of those who live there. We will delve deeper into these contradictions in our conclusions.

FINAL REMARKS

The artistic dynamics we ethnographically observed in the Torre neighborhood constitute a paradigmatic example of the ambivalent role of street art. On the one hand, this artistic practice can act as an instrument of urban regeneration, combating territorial stigma and affirming invisible collective memories, especially when the interventions are organized by the residents themselves through a participatory process. On the other hand, street art also functions as a privileged resource for community governance, voluntarily mobilizing young people for aesthetic policies aimed at sanitizing public space by eliminating actors and social practices that escape State control. The symbolic detachment of Torre from the stereotypes of "violent" and "problematic" represents one of the most significant effects of the Infinito Festival, which promotes a requalification that is simultaneously imagistic (through murals) and discursive (through street art tours). These cultural placemaking initiatives cannot be separated from the increased State investment in the neighborhood in terms of urban infrastructure[28] and social intervention projects aimed at youth. These have helped to mitigate the effects of socio-spatial segregation and territorial stigma. In our conversations with technicians and residents, there was a unanimous perception that the isolation to which the neighborhood was subject, as well as its bad reputation, has significantly decreased compared to ten or fifteen years ago. Currently, residents from areas neighboring Torre, mainly young people who take advantage of the new leisure areas to socialize and practice sports,[29] are now seen circulating in the neighborhood, something that did not often occur in the past. Endowed with urban infrastructure that other socially precarious neighborhoods do not possess, Torre has received investments that can be understood as resulting from "profits created by positioning" (Bourdieu 2013: 138) given its proximity to the elite housing of Cascais.

28 As mentioned earlier, the populations living in precarious self-built houses were all relocated by the turn of the millennium and the neighborhood received improvements in terms of street furniture (benches, trash cans, gardens, barbecue grill) and urban equipment: a skatepark, an amphitheater, a multi-sports court, and a playground.

29 During fieldwork, it was common for us to see children from outside the neighborhood using the skatepark, as well as young people from Torre and neighboring areas socializing in the Kria-te spaces.

This privileged location gives the neighborhood certain advantages in terms of the spatial distribution of goods, services, and urban infrastructure compared to other neighborhoods in the municipality that are equally marginalized and affected by processes of socio-spatial segregation. Aware of this hierarchy of places, the young people of Torre ironically use the expressions "sunny neighborhoods" and "shadowy neighborhoods" to distinguish the different levels of priority and public investment by the city government. Those located near the territories of the upper class, generally close to the sea, like Torre, are included in the first category. Meanwhile, other neighborhoods situated behind the highway, in less valued areas further from the center, are seen as being in the "shadow."

Kria-te plays a central role in the ongoing urban regeneration process in Torre, developing actions of social inclusion and "community empowerment" (Amin 2005) through the arts. This project not only helped in the creation of the youth association that gave rise to the Infinito Festival — Malta da Torre — but also implemented a model of community intervention that encourages young people to act as responsible citizens in solving the neighborhood's social problems.[30] The street art actions that have taken place in Torre can be understood from this perspective. Young people were encouraged to be active agents of change in their communities, promoting urban art murals as an alternative to the "vandalism" of building facades. Although street art has helped to rehabilitate the public image of the neighborhood, making it more beautiful and attractive by strengthening a sense of place among residents, these actions may also have favored the sanitization of public space through the removal of actors and social practices considered "dangerous". This, in turn, facilitates the neighborhood's governance by the local authorities and other institutions operating in the territory. In places where the State's monopoly on physical and symbolic violence is challenged, art and culture have been used as instruments of social control and "normalization of the use of public space" (Guinard and Margier 2018), acting in more subtle ways to complement punitive criminalization. Both strategies encourage certain behaviors to the detriment of others, which are seen as incompatible with the image of the virtuous and touristic city now being promoted in Lisbon. In this process, a neoliberal urbanism is imposed, in which symbols, values, and social norms are sanitized to align with the foundations of a creative and vibrant community, while dissonant memories and images are silenced or erased.

In the case of Torre, the genuine process of listening to and involving residents in defining the visual and iconographic images to be represented on the gable ends of the neighborhood's buildings allowed for an autonomous image production, representative of the memory and social origins of its inhabitants. However, urban regeneration in the neighborhood seems to place some residents — namely young people who do not fit into this new normative

30 As discussed in other studies, the Escolhas Program, to which Kria-te is linked, encourages young people to become partners in social responsibility projects in their neighborhoods, mobilizing discourses of empowerment, protagonism, entrepreneurship, and resilience to promote citizen participation aligned with the principles defined by the State. See Raposo and Aderaldo (2019); Raposo (2022).

framework of conduct — as being "out of place" (Cresswell 1996), repressing actions and sociabilities that are not well regarded by State and other institutional actors. The desire to change the neighborhood to make it appear *cool* in the eyes of those who live outside it seems to have affected the local community spirit itself. This feeling of loss in the face of the ongoing urban transformations was confided to us by Ruddy, even as he recognizes that these transformations are linked to those he himself helped to mobilize:

> Yeah, a lot of things got lost. You want to do so many things, change so much, but when you change, you lose a bit of that identity of Torre. Many times, I'm here and I don't feel like Torre used to be like tit was anymore, you know? That more community-oriented vibe. Sometimes I even regret doing urban art. I'm only saying this now. If I had known, I wouldn't have done that thing. A lot of people are coming to live here, a lot of different types of people are coming. And that's what I wanted, but I'm like, damn… The neighborhood vibe is getting lost a lot, people are so "refined," you probably can't even play loud music anymore. They'll call the police right away. But, on the other hand, that's what I wanted, you know? But I didn't want to lose that neighborhood feel. It's strange… (Interview at the Tower, April 17, 2023)

Almost a decade after the start of street art actions in Torre, the initial enthusiasm seems to have cooled and young people are now facing some of the undesirable effects of urban regeneration, such as gentrification. With apartments for sale for €250,000 and rents that can currently reach €1,000 per month,[31] Torre has begun to attract populations with greater purchasing power, who benefit from the relatively affordable prices compared to properties in neighboring districts. The explosion of high-end real estate developments in the vicinity of the neighborhood has made it even more vulnerable to speculation, initiating a movement of replacement of the old residents.[32] Added to this is the presence of local accommodations, such as Airbnbs, already visible within Torre itself, which signal the influence of tourism on inhabited space. It is not yet known what the extent of gentrification and touristification processes will be in the neighborhood, as they are only taking their first steps. For now, these are hampered by the fact that half of the neighborhood's housing stock is for public use, mainly belonging to the municipality. However, for the neighborhood's young people, the general increase in prices[33] is already a concrete reality, forcing many to leave Torre as they move out of their parents' homes. Paradoxically, the same young people who contributed to the regeneration of Torre (both in urban and symbolic terms) through *street art*, now feel like strangers in their own neighborhood. Some are being forced to abandon it as the territory is incorporated into the new frontiers of gentrification in Lisbon.

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31 This amount is higher than the minimum wage in Portugal in 2026, which is set at 920 euros.

32 Although there are Brazilians and foreigners from Northern Europe living in Torre, most of the new residents are white, middle-class Portuguese.

33 The brutal increase in property prices, both for rent and for sale, is not a problem unique to Torre, but is widespread throughout the country and, indeed, the world. See: Mendes (2017); Sequeira and Nofre (2020).

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Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are fully included within the article, except for the full interview transcripts, which cannot be made publicly available due to ethical and confidentiality constraints and have not been deposited in any public repository or third-party platform.

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Otávio Raposo

Iscte — Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia, Lisboa, Portugal
otavio_raposo@iscte-iul.pt
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8000-6901

Pedro Varela

Iscte — Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia, Lisboa, Portugal
pedro_miguel_varela@iscte-iul.pt
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7332-8635

Lígia Ferro

Universidade do Porto, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, Porto, Portugal
lferro@letras.up.pt
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2704-4308

Jordi Nofre

Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Centro Interdisciplinar de Ciências Sociais, Lisboa, Portugal
jnofre@fcsh.unl.pt
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7367-1337

Dossier Editors

Adriana Facina
Programa de Pós-graduação em Antropologia Social, Museu Nacional, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro
http://adriana.facina2@gmail.com | https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9381-5134

Silvia Capanema
Université Sorbonne Paris Nord, pesquisadora de Pléaide/Campus Condorcet, pesquisadora bolsista CNRS CREDA-IHEAL (2024-2025)
silvia.capanema@gmail.com | https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1607-2055