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Unveiling the intersections between tourism industry and student mobility

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have shown how student circuits of consumption are mediated by the interest of commercial actors. However, little attention has been paid to the connections between international student stays and the tourism sector: how they intersect with each other? Our fieldwork in Lisbon (Portugal) showed the central role of student organizations in commercializing the leisure time of international students, approaching them to ‘circuits of travel’ and consumption populated also by tourists. Filling a gap in the literature, we conceptualize international students as consumers surrounded by entertainment industries, pointing out the centrality of touristic infrastructures and destination marketing in articulating their stays. Therefore, we argue that these organizations, in their partnership with tourism and leisure sectors, are contributing to the socio-spatial segregation between local and international students.

KEYWORDS: international student mobility; touristification; travelling; ethnography; Lisbon.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization, internationalization and the commodification of higher education has turned attracting international students into an imperative both for Higher Education

Institutions and for the strategic goal of countries striving to compete in the context of the global knowledge-based economy (Verger et al., 2016). However, international students are first and foremost social actors who interact in time and space with an assorted variety of institutions and imaginaries in transnational 'circuits of travel' (Amit, 2007), that they share with other mobile populations such as tourists and lifestyle migrants. In fact, the expansion of higher education produces a significant phenomenon: learning abroad (knowledge, skills, languages) is no longer the exclusive activity of international students but has become central for many migrants and tourists (Pitman et al., 2010; King & Raghuram, 2013). The reverse also holds true: students are no longer 'just studying'. The activities, lifestyles and contexts they frequent are growing increasingly complex and intricate, challenging the former borders between study and work, production and consumption, migration and tourism (Robertson, 2014; King and Gardiner, 2015). International students have lately been considered as relevant consumers in their host destinations (Author, 2018), contributing to sustaining the leisure economy (as youth), the tourism economy (as international visitors) and the knowledge economy (as students).

Following the literature of student migration, it seems that the allure of mobility lies at the crossroads of different interests and processes, including not just materialistic factors but also global consumption demands, urban lifestyle motivations and subjective travelling imaginaries (Xu et al., 2009). Consequently, international students increasingly view host destinations as the core of a wider cross-cultural, educational and stimulating experience that reaches beyond the perspective of gaining academic knowledge or better employment prospects. In parallel, post-industrial urban branding and the marketization of cities promoted by local governments, the tourism industry and tour operators converged with the internationalization efforts of universities: educational supply and campuses have

correspondingly been transformed into additional assets for the global relevance of many destinations (Scott, 2014). In other words, the education and tourism industries feed off each other to supply a destination experience directed at young consumers jointly sustaining the commercialization of both student and tourist lifestyles. In addition, the rationale of neoliberalism has spread into campuses over the last decades: the shifting in university governance towards financial interest and competitiveness; the transformation of students into consumers; the uncritical assumption of globalization economic outcomes. This alignment of university with the logics and goals of market (the neoliberal university) is particularly noticeable among the practices and imaginaries of international students as they are more exposed to the global economy of knowledge, leisure and travel, and also represent one of the most profitable ‘customers’ for both universities and destinations. In this sense, economic and political actors directly involved in the lives of international students have prioritized during the last decades consumerism over academic values (Brooks et al., 2016) and sociospatial segregation over multi-cultural contact (Andersson et al., 2012; Fincher and Shaw, 2009).

Following the works of Chatterton (2010), Collins (2010) and Author (2018) about the commodification of student social worlds, and the several studies pointing at the simultaneity of consumerism and self-segregation in campuses (Brooks et al., 2016; Andersson et al., 2012; Fincher and Shaw, 2009), we centred our questions around the contact points we found during our fieldwork between international students’ organizations and the tourism-entertainment industry: What role do student associations play in organizing leisure for international students and directing them to particular venues? Do international students differ from tourists in their ways of experiencing and consuming Lisbon? Previous studies have shown how student circuits of consumption are usually mediated by the interest of commercial actors (Chatterton, 1999; Author et al., 2018), which leads to our central question: Are the tourism

industry and the student associations collaborating in controlling and commercializing the leisure time of international students in Lisbon? And, if so, are these collaborations either transforming the functioning of student associations or interfering with the social integration of international students in the host country? In the following sections we will try to unravel the institutional practices, the student agencies and the global imaginaries that sustain the interfaces between tourism industry and student mobility in the current mobility-centered late-capitalism.

1. ERASMUS STUDENTS: FROM ACADEMIC MOBILITY TO THE CIRCUITS OF TRAVEL

Student mobility has been examined by different research traditions and literatures: Erasmus students, Student Migration and Tourism Studies. The first set of studies on the Erasmus programme –often funded by the European Commission- adopted an institutional perspective, contributing to resolving operational issues (Teichler, 2004), highlighting the programme’s success (Teichler and Janson, 2007), or analysing the socioeconomic background of student families (Souto-Otero, 2008). More relevant to our case study is the research that addressed the patterns of social segregation between local and Erasmus students (Van Mol and Michielsen, 2015), which lead to the creation of exclusive communities of foreign students, also known as ‘Erasmus bubbles’ (Earls, 2018), a well-known topic in tourism studies (the host – guest sociability gap). In this sense, while some authors already pointed at the relevance of Erasmus students as tourists and consumers (Cairns, 2017; Author, 2018), this literature remains dependant on quantitative statistical trends that overlook

students' role as travelers and provide no clues as to the nature of their lives abroad, including their patterns of tourism consumption and their lives in the host countries.

Unlike the previous approach, in which students are recipients of institutional policies, the student migration literature displays more acute conceptualizations of student experiences, putting forward more qualitative and contextualized studies (King & Raghuram, 2013; Frandberg, 2014). Although not centred only on student migration, the scholarship of Vered Amit, accurately depicted the existing contact points between tourism and education in contemporary global mobility (Amit, 2007, 2014), through the concept of 'circuits of travel'. Amit's concept serves to bring together the complexities and interdependences of the large number of social actors, processes and institutions involved in the lives of international students (including the tourism sector): the industries that foster and enable the traveling, the agency and life-transitions of young students, the urban infrastructures that make transnational mobility possible, and the imaginaries that nourish the desire to consume places as destinations.

Finally, the tourism literature recognizes the desire for culture, leisure and experiences as one of the main motivators for studying abroad (Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe, 2008, Lesjak et al., 2015) while pointing out how the branded images of destinations are key to understanding the student willingness to travel (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Forsey & Low, 2014). Other contributions from the tourism literature that have been central to exploring and analysing our data were the approaches to the political economy of tourism (Mosedale, 2016; Bianchi, 2018) which explores the neo-liberal power dynamics embedded in global touristic development, especially regarding the place of work, workers and capitalist accumulation in touristic sites and enclaves (Baum, 2015; Morell, 2018). Particularly illustrative for our case study were the works on entertainment staff in the leisure resorts (Pagliarin, 2017), the

‘vocational training’ of apprentices in the hospitality industry (Bakkevig Dagsland et al., 2015) and the concept of ‘affective labour’ (Farrugia et al., 2018), that helped us to understand the functioning of student association members and volunteers. As in the case of young persons in tourism resorts (Bell, 2008; Hesse et al., 2012), alcohol consumption in programmed leisure contexts during the stays of international students has proven a central factor, particularly when stimulated by the partnership between student associations and the leisure sector, as we shall see later. Following all these references, it seems clear that touristic infrastructures, destination marketing and leisure practices are central to understanding how student migration intersects with consumerism in the context of international student stays.

However, the literature still contains segmented perspectives about international students, which constitutes a drawback to understanding the integration of the many factors explaining their mobilities in the context of the global industry of travel. In this sense, how can we separate educational goals from tourist-oriented activities and imaginaries in the case, for instance, of an international student who travels to take a language course? International student fascination for the visited culture and its local music, for example, cannot be disassociated from the practical, educational endeavor of traveling to learn the language that conceives and produces this music and culture. Language, culture, landscapes, food and many other experiential inputs belong to the universe of senses and images of any destination as projected through global culture and are shared, consumed (and co-produced) by students, tourists, migrants, educators, marketers and other social actors through a network of industrial and performative practices. Precisely by understanding this idea very well, planners and marketers produce and deliver to the public packaged destinations in which leisure, culture, gastronomy and accommodation are perfectly integrated into a unique brand all the while academic texts hardly present the different components of destination as integrated

experiences. In this sense, most part of the literature based on surveys still push respondents (either students or tourists) to point separately at factors and aspects that are fluid in their minds and united in their practices. For instance, the vital projects of Brazilian students coming to Portugal (Iorio, 2020) integrate at the same time idealistic notions about a shared Lusophony culture, the search for European universities' prestige and the migrant practice of fleeing the country's former far-right government, among other factors. Other exceptions are the ethnographic works produced in tourist sites after long-term sustained observations and analysis (Picard, 2011; Andrews, 2011; Salazar, 2010). Their use of ethnographic methodologies, as in the present study, seems to facilitate the epistemological task of bringing together the many institutional, experiential, and material dimensions producing a world-system of circulation populated by international students, tourists or lifestyle migrants. In keeping with arguments and methodological orientations, the next section presents the context of our empirical study, the qualitative methodologies we deployed and the research questions that will articulate our arguments.

2. CONTEXT AND METHODS

Lisbon (500,000 inhabitants, 2,800,000 including its metropolitan area), has experienced over the last decade the parallel growth of two strategic sectors for its urban economy: tourism and education, both promoted by public administrations and capitalized by private initiative. Tourism in Lisbon has grown exponentially ever since 2014, generating €14,700 million, 201,000 jobs and the 20.3% of GDP in Lisbon's Region during 2018, according to the most recent report published by Lisbon's Tourism Association (Turismo de Lisboa, 2019). All sub-sectors of activity reported sharp increases in their year-on-year figures: +37.7% in short-term rentals, +26% in restaurants, +13% in transports. The case for

Lisbon's accelerated tourism development has been connected to the many neoliberal reforms enacted by the then conservative Portuguese government (2011-2015) in order to overcome the 2008 financial crisis (Barata-Salgueiro et al., 2017; Tulumello & Allegretti, 2020). Consequently, within a few years, Lisbon began attracting massive international real-estate capital and global fund investments that took advantage of their privileged tax-free conditions in the country, converting properties into short-term residential apartments and luxury residences inaccessible to local inhabitants, which in turn led to the current housing crisis (Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2019).

However, tourists have not been the only social actors attracted to Lisbon in the last decade: lifestyle migrants, expats, digital nomads and international students are important populations within the scope of grasping how Lisbon has been imagined, produced and consumed as a destination (Author, 2018). In fact, the Lisbon City Council has for the last decade been encouraging the arrival of international students through specific programs such as 'Lisbon, Erasmus City' or 'Study in Lisbon' that helped nurture the growing influx of international students. As a result of these efforts, including the sponsoring of Lisbon by the tourism industry in the World Travel Awards¹, the attraction of international students entered a new paradigm: the traditional dominance of degree students arriving from Portuguese-speaking African countries began to be challenged by the growing presence of European students in mobility, mainly under the Erasmus Programme, and alongside Brazilians, who make up the largest foreign nationality among international students (França & Padilla, 2018). According to the DGESS-MEC², Portugal more than doubled the incoming numbers of international students over the last decade, rising from 17,900 in 2008/2009 to 58,000 in 2018/2019, which includes a 76% increase from 2014 to 2018. The great increase in the

1 <https://www.worldtravelawards.com/profile-8079-turismo-de-lisboa> (last accessed 09/11/2020)

2 Portuguese General Directorate of Higher Education

number of Erasmus contributed to the building of a network of interests in Lisbon's central districts around foreign visitors in general (tourists, lifestyle migrants, students), boosted by the many economic incentives involved in providing them with goods and services. Thus, these students circulate through particular nightlife venues which label their events as 'Erasmus parties' and collaborate with Student Associations (also labelled as 'Erasmus'), reflecting strong interfaces between the tourism industry and student mobility, as we shall detail in the following section.

This research derives from ethnography developed before the COVID-19 pandemic and thereby serves to illustrate the social practices of students and their organizations in the pre-pandemic Lisbon: thus, a kind of assessment at the end of an era of unrestrained transnational mobility. In terms of methodology, this ethnography extends in time over five years, from 2015 to 2019, including 43 in-depth interviews with students and association's staff, and countless informal conversations held during our fieldwork, in a context of participant observation. The core of our ethnographic approach was to leverage our presence among these students and staff to attend and research the many events organized by these international student associations, where we recruited the participants to our research. More specifically, from 2015 to 2019, we frequented 53 events during 10 different 'Welcoming campaigns', the promotional events and parties organized by student associations amid the seasonal arrival of students to the city (in September and in February). We selected the relevant events to go by exploring the webpages and social networks of student associations and just appear there, as most part of them (except for night clubs or dinners) were free and celebrated in open and public spaces, as we will see later. We recruited most part of our participants in the context of these events by explaining them our research purpose in spontaneous informal conversations that turn to appear easily in contexts of sociability such as

student parties and events. Among all the contacts made during the fieldwork we selected a few of them to perform in-depth interviews depending on how relevant their profile was for our research interest and also trying to balance participants by age, gender and nationality. Contact with association leaders was completely different and followed a more formal approach by email or in-person during the events where they were present. More difficult was to contact and interview volunteers (and ex-volunteers) from the associations, as they sensed their position as vulnerable and avoid contact with non-student people, as we will see later. In all cases (students, leaders, and staff) snowball sampling was also applied and interviews partially transcribed prioritizing our specific research interests.

After our fieldwork expeditions into the student's events and parties we introduced the data gathered into a CAQDAS software (Maxqda10). One of us coded and processed the data including transcription of informal conversations, fieldwork notes, photography made during the events and the promotional material of associations that we found online, creating a folder for each event. After that, we discussed our different impressions, encounters and conversations and introduced our thoughts into the software, accumulating fieldwork data and interpretations from 2015 to 2019, which finally revealed association's evolution towards consumerism, among other details that we will present later. In terms of mobile methodologies, we extensively applied the 'walking interviews' method (Holton and Riley, 2014), which proved to be useful during student night-time displacements such as pubcrawling and the regular shifting from venue to venue, assisting us in understanding how associations guide students through venues following specific circuits of consumption, as we will see later. Additionally, we analysed the digital data of five student organizations in Lisbon (mainly their Facebook accounts and websites) in order to understand their dissemination channels and communicative strategies.

The names of participants and student associations have been anonymized. Many are still working in Lisbon's tourist and entertainment industries, and we seek to avoid harming them in any way. Interviews and conversations only started after participants were fully informed as to the purpose of the study and verbal informed consent obtained. Respondents were also assured of the confidentiality of the information obtained from the interviews and that they could refuse to answer questions or halt the interview at any point if they did not feel comfortable. In sum, our qualitative approach favoured case-centred, empirical and grounded methodologies in the field, following the epistemological traditions of naturalistic urban sociology and anthropological fieldwork (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

3. THE ERASMUS RESORT: A UNIQUE PACKAGE OF COMMERCIALIZED LEISURE AND SOCIAL SEGREGATION

In this section, we set out a case study centred on Lisbon's Erasmus students and the organizations set up to receive them. Parties and organizations labelled as 'Erasmus' are identified by the general population in Europe with a young culture of foreigners partying, travelling and having fun, as correspondingly depicted in films and popular culture. As a matter of fact, Erasmus students differ from other student populations by their participation in an intensive culture of consumption, mainly through the nightlife activities of these associations. These particularities make Erasmus student patterns of consumption especially appropriate to observing and analysing the intersections between tourism – entertainment industry and student mobility. In this section, we set out the origins and functioning of the main student associations (hereafter, SAs), which are responsible for the transformation of international student free time in Lisbon into a highly commercialized and scheduled leisure

program. It is important to state that the founders and members of the following SAs are local Portuguese students who recently returned from their Erasmus stay in another European country that seek to continue the ‘international life’ while practicing English and gaining experience in a business-like environment: the majority are students of Business, Economics, Management, Marketing or Tourism. In the following subsections, we examine the changes put into practice by these organizations and the aspects they adopted from the tourism and leisure industry, detailing: (3.1) their professionalization after a decade of close partnerships with leisure venues, (3.2) the marketing strategies used by SAs to attract students to events and venues, (3.3) the precarious conditions of workers and volunteers in the sector, and (3.4) the segregation effect prompted by these practices. All descriptions and accounts have been anonymized to protect informants.

3.1 A brief history of Lisbon’s Erasmus organizations: towards a tourist-oriented model

What we encounter in Lisbon over the last ten years is the gradual process of convergence and partnership between entertainment businesses directed at young tourists and these associations devoted to welcoming and sheltering international students. The first organization dedicated to planning and marketing parties, trips and activities directed at international students in Lisbon, Lisbon for Erasmus (LfE), started out in 2004, which also represents an important year for understanding the recent rise in the tourist profile of Lisbon. The country that year hosted the UEFA European Football Championships that crowded the city’s streets with football fans from many different European countries, especially in the Bairro Alto district, demonstrating the capital’s potential for its nightlife to cater for large number of foreigners. As with many tourism resort models, LfE provided registered students with a membership card to gain free drinks and access into some clubs along with a ‘welcome

kit' including useful items such as a map of the city and its transport network, discount coupons for different services and a cellphone card, a sort of a 'starting pack' for the 'Lisbon's experience'. Such membership cards, cellphone cards and 'welcome kits' would subsequently be provided by later organizations as a central piece of their brand image, marketing strategy and economic funding.

Another group of local students launched the Lisbon branch of the Erasmus Association for Students (EAS) in 2008, a non-profit European student organization aimed at supporting mobile students locally, helping them with their needs abroad. In the following years, two more organizations entered the competition: the Organization of Erasmus Students (OES) in 2010, and Enjoy your Erasmus (EyE) in 2013, with the latter established by former EAS members now adopting a for-profit approach. The emergence of EyE entailed the beginning of a struggle between these organizations for controlling the international student leisure market in Lisbon and emerging precisely in 2013 when the arrival of tourists achieved significant new records after Lisbon was continuously highlighted in the World Travel Awards. From then on, the SA leaders and planners started to collaborate more often with private businesses, themselves mostly launched over the last decade of tourism development. Such is the case for many of the venues and locations where student activities started to take place such as elegant wine shops, cool youth hostels and trendy nightlife clubs, a circuit of companies that cluster in Lisbon's most touristified neighbourhoods. As other studies pointed out (Author et al., 2017; Author et al., 2019), the process of transformation of districts such as the Bairro Alto into nightlife areas was concluded only when SAs started to fill bars and clubs (during weekdays) to host international parties directed to foreign students. Both sides (SAs and venues) would profit through specific agreements as we shall detail below. Henceforth, the collaboration and interdependence between the SAs and the leisure industry (especially in

the night-time sector) became deeper with associations moving from organizing parties every week to hosting parties every day in different city clubs.

The student associations also progressively abandoned their former structures and goals as non-profit organizations between 2015 and 2019, attracted by the allure of benefiting from the Erasmus economy and running small businesses. As we had the opportunity to verify during our fieldwork, OES was transformed into an entity specialized in student accommodation, LfE promoted welcome packs for international students (from reception at the airport to managing housing units) and with EyE emerging as the main organizer of parties and nightlife events. Therefore, the regular collaboration of SAs with the leisure and tourism industries transformed not only the equilibrium of activities they offer but also the very core of their organizational cultures, which shifted from orientating and serving the students to provisioning clients at consumption spaces. The same process has been described for UK student unions (Brooks et al., 2016) also incapable to avoid consumerist agendas and the logics of the market in neo-liberal university cities.

In 2020, two organizations stand out for their role of organizing most of the leisure and events attended by international students: EyE and EAS. The two organizations schedule an enormous number of events, parties and excursions directed at international students throughout the academic year, at least twice a day per organization, and with the greatest incidence during the seasonal months of arrival in each semester: September and February. Thus, the two organizations compete against each other to attract more students by setting competitive schedules during the so-called 'Welcome Weeks': boat parties on the city's river Tejo, walking tours through different historical areas of the city, language tandems during sunset on a hostel rooftop, welcome pub-crawls through different bars in Bairro Alto, surfing and beach days in Caparica, Sesimbra or Carcavelos, Erasmus barbecues in outdoor university

venues, trips and excursions to the Algarve, Évora, Coimbra and other tourist destinations in Portugal, cultural days in museums and art galleries, and daily international parties in the most popular venues and clubs. With just a glance at this list, we can see particular ‘circuits of travel’ (Amit, 2007) that are shared by tourists and international students (and lifestyle migrants and some expats) where to consume the same goods, infrastructures and destination images, delivered in this case by SAs to their mobile clients, the international students. In fact, opaque agreements and other forms of relationships with these private interests situate the SAs currently drifting towards a commodified model, as we will see in the next section regarding the agreements made between clubs, venues and the SAs.

3.2 Targeting international students: the social engineering and marketing strategies

This subsection details the SAs marketing strategies and persuasive techniques that have emerged (online and face-to-face) as the core means of attracting students to their events, tightening the connections and dependency between SAs and the nightlife industry, particularly through the promotion of alcohol drinking events and activities. As observed above, many works in the tourism literature have suggested that leisure and entertainment could be determinant motivations to study abroad (Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe, 2008, Lesjak et al., 2015), which is leveraged by the SAs to attract students to their organizations. According with the interviewed students and our own ethnographic experience it is almost impossible for those coming to Lisbon to avoid contact with the SAs: whether in online searches for an apartment months before traveling or the first day in the faculty, students encounter their logotypes and the smiling faces of volunteers offering help and information everywhere.

The seasonal recruiting of students has started at Iscte (a Lisbon's public university). A couple of young local students wearing EyE t-shirts, standing next to their table, address each passing student (only those that resemble 'foreigners') to tell them about the organization and hand out a brochure. Next to them, another table, this time EAS volunteers. (Fieldwork note, October 3rd, 2019).

The difficulties of avoiding the presence of SAs workers and activities encapsulates the magnetic inertia that push mobile people through the institutions, materialities and images belonging to the particular 'circuit of travel' (Amit, 2014) controlled by the SAs: the Erasmus circuit. Student associations apply face-to-face contact and online promotion to recruit and hold onto international students arriving to Lisbon within the scope of fostering loyalty to their events and activities for the entire semester. In this sense, the 'welcoming' campaign is central to these SAs in order to ensure their revenue flows, beginning with the selling of the aforementioned 'membership card' that interlinks its holders with specific circuits of consumption. As in the case of the product placement encountered in the tourism industry when building up destination images (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019), we analysed how the SAs identify and label different 'consumption cultures' among their student members: walking tours, museum visits and trips to cultural sites for the 'culture enthusiasts'; surfing days, climbing experiences and gatherings to watch football games for the 'sport lovers'; and finally, pub-crawls, *botellón* nights, 'beer pong' contests, boat parties and, of course, the every-night out visit to a specific club for the 'party animals'. As previously noted, all these activities take place with the support and benefit of tourist-oriented private businesses, both in the case of the events held in the city and in the case of trips made outside Lisbon for which SAs make agreements with transport companies, hotels, restaurants and clubs (often via all-

inclusive holiday packages). These modes of organizing the leisure time of students, which mirror the scheduling of tours and activities in vacation enclaves (Saarinen & Wall-Reinius, 2019), affect the student interpretation and understanding of the visited country, reinforcing the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry & Larsen, 2011).

One of the main motivations for those seeking international student experiences is socializing with their peers, as many studies have reported in recent decades (Lesjak et al., 2015; Gallarza et al., 2019), a predisposition capitalised on by the SAs precisely through providing the time-space for such encounters. During our fieldwork we witnessed many ‘ice breaking’ social games performed by SA members and volunteers aimed at stimulate the formation of friendships, which means that targeted students will be more likely to attend again the events of a particular SA. Establishing an atmosphere of friendship is thus central for the SAs because their core objectives involve getting as many students as possible to specific clubs at nights, which represents the most profitable activity both for these organizations and for the nightlife venues collaborating with the SAs. According to former members of SAs interviewed in this research, the agreements reached with the club vary depending on the day but the SAs often earn 20-30 percent of the tickets sold at the club entrance and 10-20 percent of the drinks served inside.

However, the share earned by both parts depends on the size of the group you are attracting to the club. If the organization and the PRs (public relations) are capable of making this particular party relevant for the students, this means that you are attracting not only the people who had already buy the tickets, but also an important number of friends. All these circumstances and numbers are considered to calculate the final share. (José, former EyE volunteer)

Hence, attracting clientele to clubs is central to the financial sustainability of SAs, which adopt two different strategies to attract students to these venues. Firstly, they communicate and engage via social networks (especially Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp groups) to very persistently advertise the parties: with frequent reminders and pictures of previous parties (particularly of women having fun, holding drinks in their hands). Secondly, SA PRs organize gatherings and events for the same night in order to get students drunk before going to the club parties and making it easier to convince them to continue with the group, within which students frequently start developing potential romantic or sexual interests. Both strategies were directly registered by the authors through analysis of the SAs Facebook accounts and night after night in the streets during fieldwork, at more than ten *pre-party* events in which we participated. Some of these *pre-party* events include free alcohol handed out by the organization and transported in large plastic bottles that contain a particular mix of cheap alcohol and sodas that the group consume in the street.

At the beginning students arrive at the square in groups of 2 or 3 friends and keep isolated from each other. Fifteen minutes after the official encounter time, the staff from EAS (wearing t-shirts with the organization's logotype) started the event distributing plastic cups while another guy from the organization appear from the other side of the square carrying a 5 litres plastic bottle filled with some sort of alcohol mix (Fieldwork note, October 21th 2016).

As noted above, the centrality of alcohol consumption among young people in tourism resorts has frequently been highlighted (Bell, 2008; Hesse et al., 2012), including the techniques used

by professional entertainers to encourage drinking in these contexts (Tutenges & Bøhling, 2019). These constitute the same techniques we encountered in the SA activities and events, designed to persuade international students to consume with the goal of getting them to the clubs: drinking competitions, free shots, special offers or alcohol games such as ‘beer pong’. Summarizing, the close connections built up with nightlife tourism businesses over the last decade explain the economic dependency of SAs on drinking activities and their modes of targeting and handling groups of people, as noted in previous studies on specific activities such as pub-crawling in Lisbon’s nights (Author, 2019).

3.3 The precarious conditions of the leisure sector: from volunteering to ‘affective labour’

This subsection is devoted to the status of workers, interns and volunteers in the SAs, which closely resembles the precarious conditions of workers in touristified destinations, particularly in terms of their low wages and intensive job demands (Deery & Jago, 2015; Walmsley et al., 2019). Furthermore, at the core of the SA operational functioning, producing the daily online content and organizing face-to-face activities, we came across an extremely high proportion of volunteers working for free and receiving only perks in the form of alcohol, relationships and ‘experience’. The purpose of this section is therefore to understand the different roles and labour relationships established between the SAs and the different workers and volunteers integrated into their structures. The following depiction is a product of interviews made with volunteers, ex-volunteers, staff and leaders of the four organizations (LfE, EAS, OES, EyE), with most very reluctant to address our questions regarding the income earned and worker rights. Also, it is important to note that, in keeping with the dubious financial revenues received by these organizations, informants tended to be opaque regarding most aspects of their enterprise.

At the core of these organizations, there are two roles earning salaries: the ‘leader’ or president and the administrative staff, who spend most of their working time attending students in the office, drafting budgets and organizing the logistics of events. They are both always available out of office hours to deal with any problems and unexpected circumstances arising from the many activities they organize, which means their phones ring at all times. In accordance with our experiences spending time with leaders, members and volunteers during the events and analysing the interview narratives, it seems that members and volunteers truly admire their leaders and their success in organizing / managing such a complex organization. This esteem legitimates them as leaders of the project to firmly manage European interns paid by the European Commission, who spend a semester in the organization, but especially the army of local volunteers, on which the everyday functioning of the SAs relies.

The two most important SAs (EAS and EyE) draw on pools of 30 to 45 volunteers depending on the semester, with around 20 of them more deeply committed to the project, making themselves always active and available whenever their organization requires them to reinforce the team undertaking certain activities, especially at night. They are selected through a recruitment process consisting of some questions about their motivations, a conversation in English and, finally, a live practice test with an activity to prove they can get along and be self-confident speaking and interacting with foreign strangers. After that, they are integrated into the normal functioning of the organization as staff manning the different activities, firstly accompanied by more veteran volunteers and later assuming some departmental responsibilities (partnerships, activities, IT and social networks and so forth). The reasons stated by these young local students for volunteering in the SAs mainly focus on participating in Lisbon’s international life, meeting new people, practicing English and training for their professions that, as noted above, often relate to public relations, tourism or management.

The CV it's important, of course. It looks great to had volunteered with EAS for many companies. However, I'm doing this mainly because I'm practising English and also because it fits with my personality: walking around with students and partying with them throughout the city really fits my character (Tiago, volunteer in Events Department at EAS)

Vocational training situates them in a transitional space between volunteering and internship even while actually generating substantial earnings for the many touristic businesses that benefit from their work during the SA activities. In this sense, labour power relations and the many faces of inequality between the industry and its workers (or 'free volunteers') would seem invisible and accepted as normal by all the parties involved. As noted above, this is a common situation in many other tourism-related workplaces occupied by young people "in training" (Bianchi, 2018; Baum, 2015; Bakkevig Dagsland et al., 2015).

We cannot stop, there's always work to do in the organization. We are stressed all the time. If we are not occupied in something specific, we should advertise events in the social networks, if not, there's office work, if not, something else always show up. Apart from these occupations, all Tuesdays we have a long meeting to discuss the previous week performance and to prepare the next one and also the weekly department meetings... (Ana, volunteer in Partnerships Department at EAS)

In accordance with this logic, student organizations use team building strategies, corporate language and formal hierarchies between the members and volunteers in order to increase

communication and productivity within the organization, which is often referred to as a 'family', according to the report of our interviewees. International students are also members of this 'family', not only the staff, and volunteers are therefore expected to engage in friendly relationships with them as part of their 'affective labour' (Pagliarin, 2017). Young workers in tourist, leisure and entertainment sectors are correspondingly expected to contribute to producing enjoyable atmospheres of pleasures through ritualistic and emotional work that includes the performance of friendship and closeness with clients to encourage consumption (Farrugia et al., 2018). Getting people to the clubs during night-time activities entails the expected performance of 'affective labour': shouting party slogans, motivating students to further drink and creating a fun, daring and sexy atmosphere in order to persuade the maximum number of students to continue consuming together in particular venues. These additional 'affective labour' efforts may themselves be emotionally exhausting. In fact, most of the volunteers interviewed admit to feeling stressed and anguished when working at night, especially when dealing with large groups of, often fairly drunk, people.

In general, I enjoy partying at night with the students, but you are working at the same time, you know. I mean, you have to make them happy and engaged with the party and with the other students. You must maintain the group together and participate but you cannot be as drunk as they are, which could be awkward. But the worst part is when a guy misunderstands our care and gets annoying with the girls... (Laura, volunteer in Events Department at EAS)

In sum, the central component for the everyday functioning of SAs is the ‘affective labour’ provided through the performance of friendship and closeness by volunteers and staff, which contributes to fostering an atmosphere for students to engage in consumption.

3.4. Segregated from the locals: Building the ‘Erasmus bubble’ in imagined destinations

During our fieldwork we observed that most students attending SA events and activities were notably those who do not speak a Romance language and for whom the understanding of basic words in Portuguese (and thereby adapting to the city) might be more difficult. The declared SA mission precisely stipulates the helping of international students in their arrival processes, guiding them through the different problems and situations they may encounter when renting an apartment, opening a bank account and solving everyday tasks. In this sense, a significant initiative the most important SAs launch every semester is the ‘buddy program’, which has the goal of connecting local students with their international peers prior to the latter’s arrival. This program lies at the core of the SA mission statements and provides foreign students with the opportunity to be accompanied and informed by a local before and after their arrival to Lisbon. Local and international students submit an online application to participate in the program and the SAs filter the candidates according to different criteria (studying in the same faculty, similar age, languages spoken) and start the pairing process according to the requests from international students, especially regarding the gender of the prospective pairs. However, in a context where the SAs are offering daily a countless amount of leisure activities this program becomes obsolete: international students, when asked about the program, do not feel the need to be paired anymore in order to get to know people due to the expectation that they will succeed in achieving this at the parties and events.

When I started to search online for a room in Lisbon, I found the Facebook pages of EyE and EAS and I saw that they were organizing parties and events almost every day, so I did not feel the necessity to enrol the Buddy Program (Giulia, Italian Erasmus student).

Consequently, the intimate intercultural contact between local and international students at the individual level, fostered by the ‘buddy program’, has generally been substituted in Lisbon by the mass attendance of parties and other events where the only locals are the members and volunteers of SAs. Indeed, the student mobility literature has widely documented the inclination of international students to socialize primarily with other foreigners, especially from the same country or mother language spoken (Hendrickson et al., 2011), which leads to segregation between local and international students (Van Mol and Michielsens, 2015). Consequently, international students circulate through an ecosystem of nightlife venues, Erasmus organizations, friendship networks, student houses and companies that attend in English that are commonly known as the ‘Erasmus bubble’ (Earls, 2018), a state of isolation also very common in other groups of foreigners such as expatriates and tourists (Judd, 1999; Amit, 2015). Socio-spatial segregation between local and international students is relatively common in other university cities (Mitchell, 2012) a situation often promoted not only by a rental housing market specialized on international students but also through the existence of self-segregated student clubs and societies (Fincher and Shaw, 2009). Indeed, the overcharged agenda of daily events by Lisbon’s SAs pushes students further into frequenting foreigner-only leisure ambiances, greatly aggravating this separation. Therefore, over the last decade, SAs have contributed to promoting segregated spaces and events in Lisbon’s student culture through their professionalization as providers of leisure in partnership with the industry

(Author, 2018). In other words, SAs failed in encouraging intercultural exchanges and in creating places of encounter between local and foreign students to help reverse the general tendency of the ‘Erasmus Bubble’ to segregation. As proved in other contexts (Andersson et al., 2012) commercial forces present on campus orientate student consumer behaviours, setting the tone for leisure, isolating local and international students, and excluding ‘alternative’ manifestations of the student being. In fact, in Lisbon many ‘alternative’ students react against this ‘Erasmus bubble’ that the SAs have deepened, trying to avoid their events as a way to overcome the segregation between locals and themselves.

I struggle to understand why many Erasmus students only meet with each other and show no interest at all for the local culture and people. They just get ridiculously drunk surrounded by locals that take advantage of them. I prefer to frequent more *authentic* places where you can get to know Portuguese people and learn about Lisbon (Franz, German Erasmus student).

These strategies of distinction among different types of Erasmus students based on *authenticity* and the willing to avoid the ‘Erasmus Bubble’ were explored elsewhere (Author, 2013). Following the manifold dimensions of disassociation between local and international students, another issue we observed during our analysis of SA activities is the reproduction of brand images created and spread by the tourism industry, that students then consume along with other foreign populations sharing the same ‘circuit of travel (Amit, 2007). Despite the apparently cool and hip advice from the SAs about ‘Lisbon’s secret places’ or the ‘authentic spots tourists don’t know about’, the bucket lists publicized by the organizations are full of common places and reproduce the same image of Lisbon and Portugal as delivered by tourism

industry. In the walking tours, cultural events and parties organized by the SAs, we encounter the exact same historical tales, folkloric notions and cultural clichés reproduced in the most mainstream tourist booklets and guides. In sum, the commercial partnerships and professionalization of SAs seem to have brought about the deepening of the ‘Erasmus Bubble’: segregation between local and international students, the convergence of tourists and students in the same circuits of travel and the commercialization of student lives.

4. CONCLUSION

Our aim in this article was to illustrate the existing contact points between the tourism industry and student mobility in tourist sites by describing the professionalization of Lisbon’s SAs over the last decade and its partnership with private venues and businesses. By using an ethnographic approach, we integrated the whole consumption trajectories experienced by these students during their stays, including touristic infrastructures, destination marketing and leisure practices. Therefore, fieldwork served to respond our research questions by showing the interdependences found between students, organizations and businesses in Lisbon’s ‘circuits of travel’ (Amit, 2007). Following our first question, seems amply demonstrated that tourism industry and SAs collaborate in controlling and commercializing the leisure time of international students in Lisbon, organizing a growing number of events and parties in partnership. Moreover, we also conveyed how these SAs have been using straightforward marketing strategies and the handling of youth drunkenness to attract students to certain venues, with whom they have commercial agreements. Connecting to our second question, seems proved that these collaborations are transforming the functioning of these SAs and interfering with students’ social integration in the host country. The SAs abandoned their

organizational culture and mission statements by commercializing international student lives and prioritizing consumption circuits over programs aimed at the social integration of students among locals.

Following previous works on the commercialization of student lives (Brooks et al., 2016, Chatterton, 2010) we can contemplate SAs as part of the global industry of travel, as they function as important actors in the commodification of international student leisure time. However, SAs are at the same time recognized as part of the university community, which implies a larger problem: their dependence and subservience to private interests (in particular to the tourism-leisure industry), jeopardize the entire community. Their presence and partnership with Higher Education Institutions worldwide is not merely a harmless manifestation of youth's need to party and socialize, but a way for private interest to colonize another social space from within. Even in the context of the neoliberal university, with the already existent confusion between institutional and educational goals of universities and the presence of private initiative and partnerships, the protection of non-profit organizations and activities should be a priority. Otherwise, the life and educational experiences of international students will continue to rely heavily on market-driven consumerist logics, including ridiculous levels of alcohol consumption and a reductionist, narrow and 'over-touristified' visions of their destinations.

Following this thought, some directions for further study should contemplate analysing the educational long-term consequences for international students that spent time with these SAs in contrast with those who followed more independent paths, especially in terms of language-learning. Recommendations for education practitioners and university leaders should include forcing SAs partners to organize primarily educational and civic activities aimed at bringing into contact international students with the grass-roots local

community organizations while disengaging from their main orientation towards consumerism and the subsequent commodification and impoverishment of international student lives.

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