The right to the city: The struggle for survival of Cova da Moura[1]

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The right to the city is far more than the individual freedom to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city.

David Harvey (2008, p. 23)

Abstract

The case discusses the ongoing debate in the Greater Lisbon Area concerning the recognition of settlements that have been established during the previous decades by immigrants, mainly from former Portuguese colonies, in Lisbon and its surroundings. The case of Cova da Moura, one of these illegal settlements has a central place in the article. In that neighbourhood, a participatory experiment was put up, aimed at re-arranging an open space for common use by the inhabitants. The result of the initiative was not as positive as expected. In this paper, the question whether the experiment was a failure or not, takes a central place. While looking for an answer, different theories are used as lenses for interpretation: the 'right to the city' discourse, the understanding of dissent and the framing of policy initiatives as learning processes.

Keywords: dissensus; learning communities; participatory planning; relational space; the right to the city

Introduction

On a nice summer's day in 2014, we[2] walked from the station of Santa Cruz-Damaia, in the Greater Lisbon area, through the neighbourhood of Cova da Moura, to the home of Lieve Meersschaert. The bairro had an African ambiance. Men and women lingering in the main street. Every other house a café or a small restaurant. Cycling children swiftly avoiding holes in the pavement. Occasional bougainvillea against colourful house fronts. Grilled windows here and there. Azulejos decorating some of the house fronts. Fishmongers praising their goods. When approaching Lieve's house a surprise impinged on us. The fronts of a dozen houses, with a view on the main road bordering the neighbourhood, were painted from top to bottom with huge smurf figures against a bright blue backdrop (picture 1). When Lieve welcomed us upon arrival, she asked us: 'Did you see our wonderful achievement, when coming here?'. We thought, 'would Lieve refer to the smurfs on the houses?'. On our way to her home we had made a fuss over it, asking ourselves who allows her entire house to be painted like that? 'What does that mean?', we asked Lieve when entering her home. 'But, did you not see our garden?', she replied. 'How, what garden?', we asked her. She accompanied us to a newly built little public garden (the Entrada Sul project – The South Entrance Project), close to the smurf houses, with a few benches to rest, a shady tree, and a swing for children (picture 2). Lieve obviously was proud of it. The garden had been designed by students and established with the helping hands of many volunteers of the local association 'Moinho da Juventude' (the Mill of the Youth). It had been realized after a lasting struggle. The municipal authorities of Amadora – Cova da Moura is located on the territory of that commune – had opposed a long time against the initiative. Changes and improvements of the neighbourhood were no longer allowed. For the policy makers the neighbourhood was sentenced to death. The commune threatened with a lawsuit against the association and a damage claim of 4500€. However, the gigantesque frescos, painted at the occasion of the launching of a new smurf movie, were not challenged by the local authorities.

Picture 1   Picture 2

Lieve Meersschaert has been working in Cova da Moura as a volunteer for many years. Some years after the Carnation Revolution of 1974 she moved from Flanders (Belgium) to Portugal. She collaborated in a trade-union and co-operative for female maidservants. There she got acquainted with Cova da Moura, adjacent to Lisbon City, where many of these young women of foreign origin lived. Lieve went to live there herself in the beginning of the eighties, together with Eduardo Pontes, originally from the Azores, who had been active in the resistance against the Portuguese dictatorship in the sixties and the beginning of the seventies. From that moment onwards, their long lasting struggle for the preservation (the qualificação) of the neighbourhood, and their joint concern for the

inhabitants began. Cova da Moura was a wasteland till the end of the sixties. From then onwards former colonists coming home from Africa began to occupy the territory. Later on, in the seventies workers coming from the Cape Verde Islands and from the Portuguese inlands, settled there too. The newly arrived workers desperately looked for affordable housing. On the hills, at the borders of the city, non-used private and public terrains were squatted. The dwellers built their own houses. In the course of the years, these settlements obtained basic infrastructure like water, electricity and asphalted streets. These neighbourhoods were tolerated by the leftist authorities shortly after the revolution of 1974. This was also the case for Cova da Moura. The "Bairro Alto da Cova da Moura", with a surface of 16,5 hectares, gradually expanded to a community of 5500 inhabitants. Half of them being youngsters.

Picture 3	Picture 4	Picture 5	Picture 6

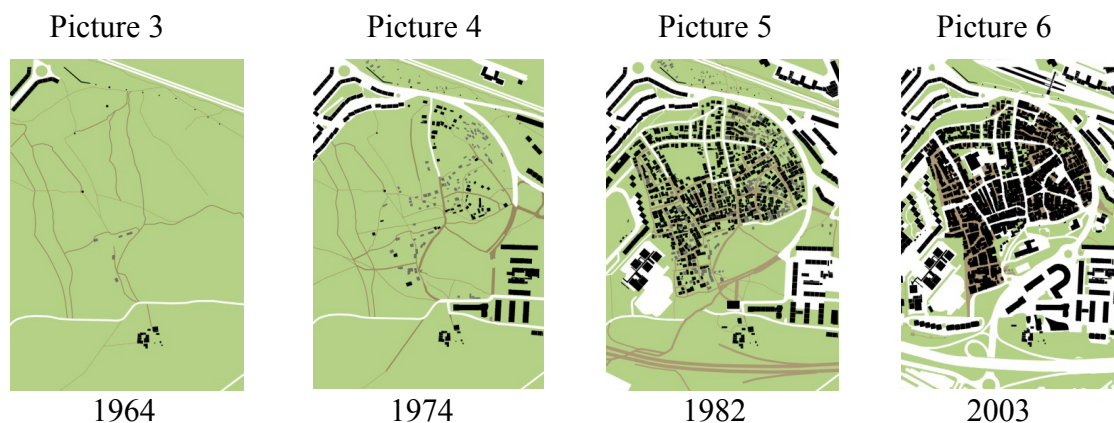| 1964	1974	1982	2003

Figure 1. Development of the neighbourhood Cova da Moura (plan by Marc Latapie) in: Raposo (2008).

The economic crisis by the end of the seventies caused high unemployment. The permanent structural and cultural marginalisation of the population created poverty, drug trade with youngsters from the neighbourhood operating as drug couriers, with related violence. The police treated them hard. Old colonial prejudices against the population, mainly originating from Cape Verde, were again fuelled. Cova da Moura obtained a dangerous reputation. Some local and national media portrayed it as a no-go zone. Lieve Meersschaert and Eduardo Pontes, together with volunteers, established the 'Moinho da Juventude' (the Windmill of the Youth) in the beginning of the eighties. The initiative, that in the first place was orientated towards the support of young children and adolescents, developed further into a successful community centre with a day nursery, a youth work initiative, a social restaurant, a library, a recording studio for video and audio, and a cultural centre. The Moinho revitalized the Kola San Jon and the Batuque traditions of the Cape Verde migrants. Adolescents experimented with hip-hop and rap music. Throughout the years, the association employed dozens of inhabitants in several projects, often financially supported by the European Union. Eventually, also these hopeful aspects of Cova da Moura came into view, giving inhabitants a positive self-image and increased the liveability of the neighbourhood (Miguel & Sardo, 2013).

Yet, also the inevitable occurred: other associations active in the bairro, reflecting similar and different values and interests, were competing for the same resources[3]. However, the tensions between these associations were mainly due to the different political conceptions on how to safeguard the neigbourhood. Ever since the bairro was established it faced local and national controversy[4]. In the beginning of the eighties, the

municipality was still in favour of improving the neighbourhood. Later on, there was increasing pressure, by private and public landowners, to demolish Cova da Moura. In the eighties and the nineties, the Greater Lisbon Area, rapidly expanded. Land at the outskirts, that originally had little market value, became attractive for speculators and urban developers. In 1995 the first PDM (a planning tool at municipal level) designated Cova da Moura as an area in need for recovery. In 2000 the municipality entrusted a private enterprise with the task of making the first 'Plan for Cova da Moura'. The team suggested to demolish circa 80% of the area. Resistance followed this proposal. The 'neighbourhood commission', assembling four local organisations, was set up in 2002. New hopes emerged, when in 2007 the 'Initiative for Critical Neighbourhoods' (Initiativa Bairros Críticos) was set-up by the former Secretary of State for Cities and Planning (2005-2009) João Ferrão (Ascensão, 2013, 2016). This initiative intended to experiment with the renewal of these critical urban quarters in a combined technological and participatory approach. Cova da Moura was selected as one of the three pilot cases. However, the 2008 financial crisis resulted into new austerity programmes, which eventually prevented the Initiative for Critical Neighbourhoods (Bairros Criticos) to be implemented. The controversy about the future of Cova da Moura continues until today, and the demolition plan keeps swinging over the bairro as the sword of Damocles.

In spite of this, supporters of the conservation and improvement of Cova da Moura within and without the bairro energetically continued to take action. Different students of the Faculty of Architecture of the Lisbon University had in previous years committed themselves to the survival of Cova da Moura, often under the supervision of professor Isabel Raposo (2008). In 2012 a new research project was initiated by Julia Carolino and Joana Pestana Lages, respectively an anthropologist and an architect, both operating in the same Faculty of Architecture. Their project-proposal was recognized and funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Scientific and Technological Research (FCT)[5]. An interdisciplinary team of researchers was established[6]. The 'research by design' project, named 'Exploring the contributions of relational space for promoting the right to the city' would be shaped around proposals for the redevelopment of a square in the Cova da Moura neighbourhood, the Largo Santa Filomena. The general objective of the research project was formulated as follows:

> (..) the research looks at and experiments with new forms of articulating academic knowledge with initiatives by other social actors in order to fill the gap between largely abstract insights regarding the right to transform ourselves while transforming our space and the concrete actions undertaken in particular territories. The project engages experimentally with the issue of legalization and urban qualification in an area of illegal genesis in Greater Lisbon (Bairro da Cova da Moura), exploring the potential of relational approaches to space and of multidisciplinary collaboration (between anthropology, architecture and urbanism) for formulating alternatives to the dominant conceptions of space, place and social process that inform neoliberal policies as a general trend, and having in mind specifically the qualification agenda of Cova da Moura. (Relational space proposal, 2012)

The ambition of this paper, is not to evaluate to what extent the objectives have been realized. The present contribution should be considered an attempt to deepen and to articulate our vision on participatory and emancipatory practices in the context of the "struggle for the city". 'Producing new knowledge also means inventing a new idiomatic form that facilitates translation between empirical stories and philosophical discourses' (Vandenabeele, Reyskens & Wildemeersch, 2011, p. 205). In line with this, we consider the present paper predominantly as a theoretical reflection on an empirical case. In this contribution we do not elaborate the methodology of the case study. This is done

elsewhere (Lages, Wildemeersch, Carolino, Braga & Veiga, 2017), where a systematic description is given of the rigorous data collection and interpretation of the research project. In the current contribution we present the reflections that emerged from the interactions between the invited external expert (first author) and the project researchers (represented here by the second author). These reflections are a further interpretation of the concrete experiences, against the background of educational, political, sociological and geographical theories on participation, democracy, collective learning and urban development. We hereby respond to the invitation by Rob Evans Kurantowitz and Lucio-Villegas (2015, p. 10) 'to reflect on the "squeezed" and "crowded" concept op community and the different roles that it can play in people's daily lives, either as a place of shelter or as a place of confrontation and debate'. In addition, such reflections can be 'doors and openings into thinking about other spaces where adult education takes place' (Evans, et al., 2015, p. 10).

The right to the city

In an impressive essay titled *The Right to the City*, the British social-geographer David Harvey (2008) describes how the development of capitalism and processes of urban development historically coincide. In doing so, he followed the footsteps of the illustrious French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre who in 1968 published *Le droit à la ville*, a work that has had an important resonance among social scientists ever since. In his historic overview, Harvey analyses how cities, from the midst of the 19th century, with Paris as a famous example, developed into spaces of systematic added-value creation.

> Capitalists have to produce a surplus product in order to produce surplus value; this in turn must be reinvested in order to generate more surplus value. The result of continued reinvestment is the expansion of surplus production (..) paralleled by the growth path of urbanization under capitalism. (Harvey, 2008, p. 24)

Such dynamics results into a permanent search for opportunities to make profit. Cities have played a crucial role in the development and renewal of capitalism. This implied the 'creative destruction' of urban infrastructure such as popular neighbourhoods, industrial and cultural heritage. That did not happen without conflict and struggle. In order to enable large scale, expensive development projects for the better-off citizens, poor people were often massively removed from their so-called unhealthy homes. Under the guise of sanitation, entire neighbourhoods were radically demolished. Such urban renewal increasingly encountered resistance, from the favelas in Brazil, to the slums in India and the popular quarters in China, the US and Europe. Today, all over the world social movements resist against these developments. They claim "the right to the city": the right to affordable homes in a habitable environment, with squares, parks and public transport accessible to all. The right to the city is a right for everyone, as an alternative for the right of the elites to direct urban renewal from their own position of privilege.

> The right to the city, as it is now constituted, is too narrowly confined, restricted in most cases to a small political and economic elite who are in a position to shape cities more and more after their own desires. (Harvey, 2010, p. 38)

In order to break the dominance of these elites a democratization of the public space is necessary. This implies: the right to re-appropriate spaces for collective purpose, that threaten to be privatized (Leontidou, 2010).

In line with Lefebvre (1968) and Harvey (2010), critical social scientists have made diverse analyses of this struggle for the city. This was also the case for the researchers we mentioned above. Their project is a part of GESTUAL (Grupo de Estudos Socio-Territoriais, Urbanos e de Acçao Local), an interdisciplinary study centre at the Faculty of Architecture of the Lisbon University. GESTUAL has for many years been engaged in the discussion about the conservation of Cova da Moura. The issue of the "qualificaçao" (the recognition) of the neighbourhood has been, ever since its initial establishment, the subject of a dramatic political controversy going in different directions, depending on the shifts in social, economic and political developments and power balances. In the beginning period, shortly after the Portuguese revolution of 1974, the new political regime responded with silent tolerance to the emergence of such settlements. From the nineties onwards, the pressure to demolish them increased, together with the rise of neoliberal politics (Ascensão, 2013; Valente, 2015). This brought the commune of Amadora, where Cova da Moura is located, to plan the tearing down of a major part of the quarter, a consequence of the Special Rehousing Plan (Plano Especial de Realojamento) at the national level. This provoked a lot of protest, but also the development of alternative plans, that raised much media attention. The ones who prefer Cova da Moura to be demolished, consider it a "clandestine territory", of "illegal genesis", produced out of the state's regulatory framework (Relational space research proposal, 2012, p. 4). The ones who want the neighbourhood to survive, consider an official recognition (qualifição) a sign of the state's commitment to put an end to social inequality and poverty. This controversy symbolizes the continued conflicts in the commune and in Portuguese society at large about the question 'who has the right to the city: the landlords, the property owners, the occupants, the authorities, the local associations? And, to what extent and in what proportion?' (Relational space research proposal, 2012, p. 4). Over the years, GESTUAL has supported the majority of the inhabitants and their associations who have struggled for the recognition of their neighbourhood. Today, the neighbourhood still survives, mainly thanks to the continued creative commitment of community associations, of external supporters like GESTUAL, and a shifting degree of lenience on behalf of the authorities[7].


A space for reflection and action

The researchers, when starting their project on "Exploring the contributions of relational space for promoting the right to the city", knew very well that they would have to operate in a "post-Keynesian" context. Such context is, in line with Harvey (2010) and Lefebvre (1968), characterized by 'increased privatization of control over the urban deployment of capital surplus and the fact that excluded communities are increasingly unable to transform themselves through the transformation of the city' (Relational space research proposal, 2012, p. 4).

In spite of that insight, they hoped to be able to demonstrate, through small provisional experiments in the Largo Santa Filomena (picture 7), that the neighbourhood has important potential for an improved quality of life, and hence for the eventual right of the bairro to survive and further develop. The largo – an open space in a very densely built environment, used mainly as a car park - was selected as experimentation ground where, in deliberation with the local inhabitants, such improved quality could be

(temporarily) experienced (Lages, Veiga & Braga, 2014). The selection of the largo and the possible interventions were carefully prepared in collaboration with three local associations who, although with different degrees of scepticism, formally declared to be in favour of such experiments and to give support when needed.

Picture 7
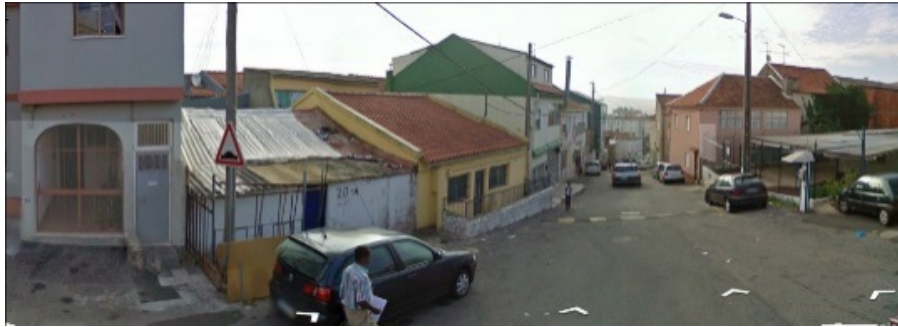
The idea was that a team composed of an anthropologist, two architects, a designer and a filmmaker, would invite neighbourhood dwellers to participate in three workshops throughout the year (picture 8). The workshops could constitute a space 'for reflection about the themes of the qualification agenda and prospects of transformation' (Relational space, 2012, p. 5). In line with this, it was hoped that creative ideas would emerge on how the largo could be transformed into a space that adds quality to the lived environment. In preparation to these workshops different activities were organised such as interviews with inhabitants in the streets, a seminar with the participating associations and the publication, at regular occasions, of a wall paper. Participatory initiatives in the context of urban planning are often top-down initiatives by local authorities, meant to bring together inhabitants and other actors such as experts and public representatives, in order to achieve *consensus* on how a space, a built environment, a road infrastructure, or a housing project can be designed and developed. Hence, the non-achievement of consensus at the end of the project, could be considered a failure. The researchers intentionally wanted to avoid such pitfall, since their aim was to create a "laboratory" or a "reflection space", rather than achieving a plan or a design which every actor was expected to agree on.

Picture 8

However, throughout the process some hope emerged, mainly within the research team, that particular concrete proposals would, with the support of a majority of the inhabitants, acquire enough legitimacy to be brought to a higher level of decision-making. In spite of the relentless efforts of the researchers, such hope was not fulfilled by the end of the project. The different proposals about a possible new design of the largo did not acquire an agreement. Suggestions to integrate the divergent ideas that came to the fore (a playground for children combined with a parking lot and a green meeting place for the inhabitants of the area) encountered strong opposition from some of the inhabitants preferring to keep the space in its original state. The main argument was that attempts to transform the largo into an agreeable meeting place, could have counter-productive effects, while creating public nuisance through the presence of loitering youth, drug trafficking, vandalism and noise inconvenience. This argument impressed quite a few of the inhabitants in the surrounding area, which resulted into an atmosphere of indecisiveness at the end of the last workshop and, among the team members, some doubts on how to evaluate the relevance of the project.

If the evaluation of relevance of the research-project, including the organisation of the workshops, would be done in terms of measurable outcomes, then the conclusion could indeed be negative, since the efforts did not yet result into concrete realisations. However, when one considers not only the product, but also the process, then the conclusion can be quite different. The research proposal stated that the workshops were expected to create a space of reflection about the themes of the qualification agenda and about prospects of transformation. Considering this objective, the positive effects seem to be rather obvious. Some theoretical insights concerning the notion of *dissensus* (dissent) may help to support such conclusion. Two authors can be inspiring in this regard: the political scientist Chantal Mouffe and the philosopher Jacques Rancière. Both authors give the notion of dissensus a central place in their work.

Changing ourselves by changing the city

Chantal Mouffe (2005) considers dissensus, not consensus, an essential aspect of democratic practice. Pluralist democracy, in her view, is related to the articulation of antagonistic perspectives by "adversaries" who each strive for hegemony, in the sense that they want to 'create order in a context of contingency' (Mouffe, 2005, p. 17). Such antagonistic perspectives are discussed in public 'arenas'. In Mouffe's view, such public arenas are democratic, on condition that the "antagonism" is transformed into "agonism".

> While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. (Mouffe, 2005, p. 20)

The author emphasizes these notions of adversaries, struggle, (anta)agonism and dissensus, because, in her opinion, the idea and the practice of democracy has in recent decades been directed too strongly towards consensus and dialogue. She criticizes these notions, with respect to democratic practice, because they contribute to a 'non-conflictual political approach that is unable to pose the adequate questions' (ibid., p. 51). Consensus oriented dialogical approaches deny that politics and democracy are not in the first place about the exchange of opinions, but about a contest for power. And, 'the "dialogical" approach is far from being radical, because no radical politics can exist without

challenging existing power relations and this requires defining an adversary, which is precisely what such perspective forecloses' (Mouffe, 2005, p. 51).

At this stage, the question arises whether the workshops have created a democratic space in line with Mouffe's concepts. A positive answer to this question seems plausible. Particularly during the last workshop, the agonistic views were clearly articulated in diverging attempts to (re-)imagine the future of the largo, and by extension the future of the bairro. This observation does not contradict the ambitions of the authors of the research proposal, expecting the initiative to create a space of reflection about the themes of the qualification agenda and about prospects of transformation. On the contrary, the interventions of the architects and the designers created opportunities for the articulation of agonistic perspectives. And these opportunities were grasped, in spite of the fact that there are currently no concrete, tangible realizations. Hence, they can be considered part of a chain of democratic events, contributing to the struggle for hegemony between different actors on the issue of how to create order in the neighbourhood: on the one hand, the order of the status-quo, on the other hand, a transformed order, inspired by the imageries of researchers, designers, architects and inhabitants of the neighbourhood. The struggle for hegemony was simultaneously a struggle for legitimacy, whereby the opposing adversaries were looking for allies among the individual inhabitants and the associations in the neighbourhood. The ones favouring the status-quo thereby emphasized the "alien" character of the interventions of the researchers coming "from outside", and hence not familiar with the "real" concerns of the inhabitants and the bairro. The researchers, on the contrary, hoped to obtain legitimacy through the attractiveness of their designs opening imageries of a better life, and through the open and dialogic interaction with the inhabitants. The struggle did not come to an end after the closing of the last workshop. Like many other struggles in and around the bairro, the debate on the future of the largo continues to move in different directions. The final outcome, if there is one, will be definitely influenced by the changes taking place in the socio-cultural, economic and political power dynamics on the commune level and beyond. However, the democratic process stimulated by the research project, will not remain without significance.

Also Jacques Rancière's notion of dissensus offers inspiration to further explore the process that has taken place in and around the largo in terms of democratic practice. When observing the current state of politics Rancière (2005), just like Mouffe (2005), is sceptical about the way policy makers try to achieve consensus. The consequence of this consensus-oriented tendency is that democratic practices are curtailed and that issues that should be debated in the public sphere are relegated to the private sphere and to individualized responsibilities.

> The spontaneous practices of any government tend to shrink the public sphere, making it into its own private affair and, in so doing, relegating the inventions and sites of intervention of non-State actors to the private domain. Democracy, then, far from being the form of the life of individuals dedicated to their private pleasure, is a process of struggle against this privatization, the process of enlarging this sphere. (Rancière, 2005, p. 55)

In contrast with these privatizing tendencies, Rancière conceives of the democratic process as 'the action of subjects who reconfigure the distributions of the public and the private, the universal and the particular' (ibid., p. 62). In other words, he rejects the tendency of the police function of the State that assigns citizens to definite places in the social strata, that classifies them according to particular features (the poor, the unemployed, the non-actives). In distinction to this, he identifies politics as a movement in which political subjects reject/revoke the places and names that are imposed upon

them. To him, these moments of rejection and the attempts to articulate and live alternatives are at the heart of democratic practice.

Rancière (2010) not only situates dissensus in the political realm. He is a border crosser who theorizes and interconnects developments in diverse fields such as education, arts and politics. The binding factor between these different domains is his understanding of aesthetics. He relates aesthetics not simply to the domain of arts, but situates it broadly in the 'order of the sensible'. The order of the sensible refers to the way human beings make sense of their lived reality in different domains. Hence, in his view, politics, as well as education and arts are aesthetic activities because they relate to (the questioning of) this order of the sensible. And therefore changes in aesthetic regimes often are signals or symptoms of changes in the way we understand the social, cultural and political order. In line with his broad concept of aesthetics, Rancière considers dissensus:

> not a designation of conflict as such, but it is a specific type thereof, a conflict between *sense* and *sense*. Dissensus is a conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it, or between several sensory regimes and/or "bodies". (Rancière, 2010, p. 139)

Dissensus creates an interruption in the taken-for-granted (or natural) perception of reality. It is:

> a rupture in the relationship between sense and sense, between what is seen and what is thought, and between what is thought and what is felt. What comes to pass is a rupture in the specific configuration that allows us to stay in "our" assigned places in a given state of things. These sorts of ruptures can happen anywhere and at any time, but they can never be calculated. (Rancière, 2010, p.143).

In what way is Rancière relevant in connection with the Largo experiment? In the first place, and in different way than Mouffe, he argues that dissensus is an important aspect of a creative process, be it artistic, political or educational. Dissensus means rupture, disjunction, or interruption of the self-evident. The presence of outsiders, demonstrating alternatives for the lived environment, as was the case at the largo experiment, is in line with these ideas a legitimate act, even when it is not welcomed by some of the inhabitants. The designer and the architects presented different images of "outros largos" (other squares), or how that particular place could be turned into "another place". In doing so, they appealed to the order of the sensible, or to the imagination of the inhabitants, inviting them gently and repeatedly to consider alternative ways of living together in the public domain.

It is, however, not clear to what extent these events have really brought a rupture in the minds and hearts of the participants and the wider community. This local community is, just like many other ones, not a homogeneous community. Different visions on the future of the bairro exist. These visions are articulated by three different associations, who initially were prepared to engage in the research experiment. During the process the commitment of the associations was different. The Moinho participated regularly in the workshops and fully supported the initiative. The two other associations were restrained in their participation. One of them sent classes of pre-school children to one of the workshops to experience, with their teachers, playful ways of making sense and use of the largo. The other association showed little interest during the workshops. The participants at the workshops were mainly women, free playing children, and older men. They were committed in different ways: the children enthusiastically made use of the playful opportunities offered, some older men helped to construct the artefacts, some women expressed their expectations about the future of the largo as a meeting place for

women and children. At a certain workshop, the popular Kola San Jon folklore group gave a performance that attracted a bigger audience. Younger men, however, were mostly absent, or observed from a distance what was going on. Their interest seemed to relate mainly to the preservation of enough space for their cars being newly acquired status symbols. One of the younger, male inhabitants explicitly opposed against the transformation of the largo, arguing that it would create disturbance.

The general impression, after the workshops was one of ambivalence. Some people and associations were clearly in favour, others remained indifferent or silent, and still others expressed their disagreement. Eventually, it was hard to know whether the initiatives had really taken the participants away from their comfort zone. Following Rancière's suggestions, it is indeed hard to predict, whether such ruptures have taken place, since they can happen anywhere and at any time.

> There is no reason why the production of a shock produced by two heterogeneous forms of the sensible ought to yield an understanding of the state of the world, and none why understanding the latter ought to produce a decision to change it. There is no straight path from the viewing of a spectacle to an understanding of the state of the world, and none from intellectual awareness to political action. (Rancière , 2010, p. 143)

So, as mentioned before, it remains unsure if the attempts have triggered a desire for change among a majority of the inhabitants of the surrounding area. What the experiment shows is that there is indeed dissensus on the future of the bairro, also reflecting in various ways the divergent views in the wider community and beyond. The struggle for hegemony continues.

Spaces of hope and learning

In his book *Spaces of Hope* David Harvey (2001) researches whether experiments, like the one in the Largo Santa Filomena, can be considered as alternatives for the dominant forms of urban development that have the creation of surplus value as their primary motive. Are such experiments spaces of hope? In his search for responses Harvey presents, amongst others, some ideas of the Brazilian-American philosopher Roberto Unger (2000a & 2000b). Also this author resists the "there is no alternative" discourse that characterizes present-day neoliberal politics. Alternatives should, in his view be investigated, not in the sense of utopias, but through many concrete, experimental steps and practical arrangements. These many experiments should contribute to what Unger calls 'a high energy democracy' (Unger, 2002a, p. 7).

> Such a democracy unites a high level of popular political mobilization with the acceleration of reform experiments. It sharpens the contrast and the contest among alternative projects for society. It tends toward a combination of the attributes of representative and of direct democracy. (Unger, 2002a, p. 7)

A basic idea related to this is that we can only realize institutional change, when we also change ourselves, and vice versa, that we can only change ourselves, when changing institutions. 'Our greatest achievements in science, in art and in politics arise from our disposition to subvert ourselves: to turn, for better or for worse, against ourselves' (Unger, 2002b, p. 12). Therefore Unger considers such democratic experiments also as important reflective experiences.

This approach reminds me of the recent framing of local or regional policies as learning processes. In that particular policy context a discourse on "smart cities",

"learning cities" and "learning regions" has emerged (Longworth & Osborne, 2010). Although such discourses seem attractive, since they emphasize the mobilization of human resources as the most important contribution to the solution of present-day challenges on local, regional and even larger scales, such humanistic framing of social change fails to consider the contradictions that neoliberal society continues to produce, as exemplified in processes of urban development. Therefore, if one wants to consider "learning" or 'education'', as an important factor in coping with challenges such as urban renewal, climate change, or social exclusion, more inspiration can be found in authors who do not neglect the contradictions and power struggles that go together with various attempts of creating social change. Exemplary in this sense is the contribution of Mathias Finger & José Asùn (2001) who relativize the humanistic development ideas that remain uncritical about the contradictions it produces. Humanizing development, whether through participatory practices or through enhancing collective learning, is pointless when development's value in itself is not questioned. And that is exactly what Plumb, Leverman and McGray (2007) do when they criticize the discourse on learning cities, against the backdrop of "a planet of slums". They argue that, in order 'to advance our understanding of the learning city, we must abandon individualized, essentialized and typologized notions of adult learning that lie at the crux of the learning city's most common formulations' (Plumb et al., 2007, p. 37). As an alternative to the dominant discourse, they present a view on learning cities that:

> opens the possibility for transformative action that might begin to address the disastrous urban developments of contemporary times. Understanding the complex intertwining of human learning and urban development, and, in particular, how this intertwining has resulted in the violent and divided forms of urbanity that prevail in our contemporary world, can open possibilities for positing critical, emancipatory and transformative requirements for urban development. (Plumb et al., 2007, p. 46-47)

This sounds very much like what the Moinho da Juventude, together with partners such as GESTUAL, has tried to do for decades now in "Cova da Moura: The creation of spaces of hope and learning".

Perspectives of participation and emancipation

Given the undecidedness of the outcomes of the Largo experiment, it is rather premature to formulate definite conclusions about the effects of the participatory initiative organized by GESTUAL. It is indeed possible that this participatory event, organized by outsiders, again has some counterproductive effects: rather than stimulating the commitment of the inhabitants it could add to frustration and fatigue because no progress is made in the decision-making about the qualification of the barrio. Researchers who have observed the recent revival of the discourse on participation in policy making, claim that one cannot study participation without studying the context in which it takes place. Modes, outcomes, impacts, expected and unforeseen effects of participation, strongly change in relation to various combinations of kinds and distribution of power, kind of actors, patterns of governance in the management of the relationship between norms, social processes and environmental features (Bonetti & Villa, 2014). Hence, the evaluation of the successes and failures is a complex process that needs nuance and in-depth observations.

Similarly, in a discussion about the debate whether participatory processes should be consensus oriented or conflict oriented, Silver, Scott and Kazepov (2010) take a pragmatic and nuanced stance, on the basis of empirical observations in a variety of cases

in different geographical, cultural and political contexts. In their view no decisive answer can be given as to the impact of each of these approaches. They conclude that binary oppositions between both theoretical orientations are irrelevant, and suggest to consider conflict and consensus as moments in the political process rather than as stark, polarized alternatives. However, a more principled position regarding the conflict-consensus question, is presented by Mouffe who argues that democracy requires a 'conflictual consensus: consensus on the ethico-political values of liberty and equality for all, dissent about their interpretation' (Mouffe, 2005, p. 121). And, in line with the principle of "equality for all", it is important to take into consideration Silver, Scott and Kazepov's (2010) observation that participatory practices tend to reproduce inequality, if they are not accompanied by empowerment measures aimed to avoid mechanisms of exclusion.

> In a context of inequality, every citizen must also be empowered to participate and that entails treating them differently both because their power resources are unequal and because, without adopting a misplaced essentialism, they often have different needs. The process should provide resources and opportunities to engage at every stage and to put new issues on the agenda.(..) Citizen participation is most democratic when it gives voice to everyone, includes and empowers the weak, holds representatives, professionals and government accountable, and promotes redistribution and social justice. (Silver, Scott & Kazepov, 2010, p. 472-473)

This argument in favour of empowerment of particular groups definitely also applies to the experiment at the Largo and to the debate about the future of Cova da Moura. In this respect, it is highly relevant to point to the role of one particular organisation that, for more than thirty years now, has obtained widespread recognition, but also widespread opposition, in the defence of the right to the city. The association "Moinho da Juventude" (the Mill of the Youth), originally a neighbourhood initiative organizing social, cultural and sports activities for children and youth, broadened its scope throughout the years and became intensely involved in the debate about the qualification of Cova da Moura. It did not take a neutral stance, but strongly supported, in a variety of ways, the actions for the survival of the neighbourhood, against political, financial and racist pressures, aimed at erasing the neighbourhood. The Moinho became, with the long-lived support of committed community leaders, a highly capable organisation, engaging multiple volunteers from within and outside the neighbourhood and employing several collaborators in varied projects (pictures 9 & 10).

Picture 9

These diverse and original activities put the association in the spotlights of the national and even international media, turning the case of the qualification into a prominent public issue, thereby symbolizing the struggle for the right to the city both in Portugal and abroad. In doing so, it had to continually counter negative campaigns staged by adversaries in the national press, in political parties and in the police, picturing Cova da Moura as an ultra-dangerous scene of criminality. In spite of these often extremely negative characterizations, the Moinho could count on a big variety of supporters, which guaranteed that it could not be neglected in the debate about the future of Cova da Moura, and that any decision in that respect, will have to take into consideration the well-argued points of view of the association.

The initiative of GESTUAL to present alternative plans for the organisation of the Largo Santa Filomena has been strongly supported by the Moinho da Juventude. This collaboration is a prominent example of the fruitful connection between both organisations, and their interdependence in the development on alternative views on urban development. Hence, the question of success or failure of the Largo experiment should be considered in view of the long term commitment of the Moinho in the struggle for preservation of the quarter and the emancipation of its inhabitants. In line with this, it is important to notice that small-scale initiatives such as the largo experiment can only be successful in the long run, when they are embedded in a sustained social, cultural, educative and political commitment of community organisations that give endured support to the emancipation of disenfranchised people in their struggle for social justice. Finally, some conclusions regarding sustainable community support can be drawn, both from the Largo Santa Filomena experiment and its connection with the broader actions of the association Moinho da Juventude. First, sustainable community support often is a matter of combining different strategies in connection with the changing context and power relations: advocacy actions, challenging dominant discourses, developing alternative discourses, creating sustainable partnerships, etc., in view of achieving

democracy understood as "conflictual consensus". Second, sustainable community support requires leadership that is authentic, not oriented towards personal prestige, but in the interest of the commons. This leadership is grounded in a network of synergies and coalitions, including partners with different backgrounds, interests and contributions. Third, sustainable community support takes many years and is inevitably confronted with ups and downs, moments of motivation and demotivation and shifting power relations. It is a slow process. This long-term commitment contrasts strongly with quick-fix procedures in de-contextualized projects, that are expected to bring rapid change. Fourth, this sustainable community support is an intensive educative and socio-cultural process (van der Veen, Wildemeersch, Youngblood & Marsick, 2005). It is educative, because the participants learn by doing, in a collective attempt to preserve, but also improve the conditions in which they live. It is socio-cultural, because it strengthens the social and cultural tissue of the community. Fifth, sustainable community support is an experiment of democracy, since diverse voices are taken seriously and are invited to contribute to the development of solutions in the interest of the commons, rather than for the profit of individual actors.

In conclusion

This paper began with the surprising story of the houses painted with smurf figures in the Cova da Moura quarter. Every passer-by, be it on foot, with a bicycle, or by car, is overwhelmed by this image. The film-producers gave themselves the right, in agreement with the owners, to paint the houses from top to bottom with scenes from their newest production. This intervention in the appearance of the neighbourhood was accepted without reserve by the local authorities. Close to this an unused terrain, the Entrada Sul (the South Entrance), that had been turned into a small common garden by a local association for the betterment and cleaning of the environment, was forbidden by the local authorities. The reason given was that no improvements with a permanent character could be implemented, as long as no definite plan for the neighbourhood would be approved. There was a threat with a disproportional fine for the initiators. This illustrates how diverse interest groups interpret "the right to the city" differently, and which side the local authorities choose in this concrete conflict over the future of the bairro: the side of the landowners and project developers who want to make profit on a land that was a few decades ago almost without any value. The conflict over "the right to the city" has in this neighbourhood been going on for decades and remains undecided for the time being. The pressure on the neighbourhood has provisionally decreased, thanks to the current economic climate that is not favourable for new private and public development projects in this area.

The local association "the Moinho", in complex relationships with other organisations in the neighbourhood, has played an important role in the continuous struggle for the qualification of the quarter. However, such efforts could only be sustained, when supported by partners from outside the bairro. The research group of post-doc and post-graduate students that conducted the "relational space" project has contributed to these efforts, in line with previous and repeated initiatives of the GESTUAL centre at the Lisbon University, thereby taking a clear stance in the struggle for "the right to the city". The research group obtained limited resources from the Portuguese Foundation of Scientific and Technological Research (FCT), on the basis of a research proposal that was judged outstanding. After finishing the project, the researchers again obtained an excellent evaluation from the Foundation. According to the reviewers, most of the

objectives of the research had been realized. The concept 'right to the city' has been connected to a concrete struggle in the field. A process-oriented design approach was developed in dialogue with the inhabitants. Alternatives had been created for the generally asymmetric relationship between the university and social movements.

If Cova da Moura would eventually be recognized, and the uncertainty about the future of the bairro comes to an end, this will be the result of efforts that have lasted for decades of a network of organisations from within and without the neighbourhood that have connected themselves to each other. Both the Moinho and GESTUAL have not recoiled to engage in democratic participatory and emancipatory processes, whereby dissensus has played a productive role in many respects.

Notes

[1] We are very grateful for the comments given to this article by Julia Carolino and Lieve Meerrschaert to previous versions of the paper. The research project referred to in this paper has been made possible by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). Este trabalho contou com financiamento de Fundos Nacionais através da FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia no âmbito do projecto «EXPL/ATP-EUR/1772/2012

[2] The "we" in this case are the first author and his wife Moo Laforce.

[3] the two other associations were created before Moinho da Juventude. In 1978 'Commisão de Moradores do Bairro do Alto da Cova da Moura' initiated contacts with the municipality and engaged in the first infrastructure works; and in 1980, a recreational organization – "Clube Desportivo do Bairro do Alto da Cova da Moura", linked mainly to rural (Portuguese) cultural activities, was established; initially it targeted white people, yet, later on Cape Verdians became its main target group and changed its name into "Associação de Solidariedade Social". For more information see: Carolino, J. (in preparation).

[4] The story of Cova da Moura is similar to the histories of other so-called 'clandestine' neighbourhoods in the Greater Lisbon Area. A critical analysis of the policies vis-à-vis informal settlements in the Portuguese speaking landscape in Europe, Latin-America, Africa and China (Macau) is articulated by Ascensão (2013).

[5] The first author of this paper was given the role of external advisor to the research project.

[6] Project team: Julia Carólino, Joana Pestana Lages, Inês Veiga, Ana Valente, Teresa Sá, Sofia Borges. Experts: Danny Wildemeersch, Eric Hirsch, Isabel Raposo. Other researchers/team members: Joana Braga, Nádia Fernandes, Alessandro Colombo. Moreover dozens of other people were involved in seminars at different occasions. There are too many to be mentioned here, but this shows that the project went way beyond the Largo, into events at the university and elsewhere.

[7] The picture below was taken by Ugo Lorenzi and Alessandro Colombo (GESTUAL) who were the initiators of the 'Entrada Sul Project', that was finalized by Filipa Verol de Araújo. This is the project referred to in the beginning of this paper that won the Crisis Buster prize of the Triennial of Architecture.

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