

Methodological Proposals and Critical Responses for the Study of Graffiti and Street Art: The project StreetArtCEI

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Abstract

This article describes a on-going research project that blurs the frontiers between dominant and marginal cultures, their social practices, visual symbologies, and aesthetic manifestations, in the unstable space of the city, by discovering, collecting and preserving graffiti and street art works in middle range cities of Northern Portugal. Using the conceptual tools of intercultural studies, StreetArtCEI awakens tourists and inhabitants alike to the symbolic power of self- and hetero-marginalized aesthetical stances, organized by routes that reflect the social-cultural geography of the city. The methodology of the project includes the collection and study of both illegal art works in marginal sites; and of art works ratified and commissioned by private and public institutions, in tourist spots and high-end streets. The article analyses critically the feedback obtained from local authorities, the media and the community, and proposes several topics for further consideration.

StreetartCEI thrives inside of a paradox built by itself, as a public institution led project that, at same time, collects, preserves and legitimizes cultural products which damage public and private property. We highlight the media's interest for the economic potential of the project, as well as for the aesthetic appeal of the artists' techniques, readily transformed into recognized canonical authors. Concerning the reception by local powers, we emphasise their swift investment in the creation of tailor-made local routes of graffiti and street art, that is, in artworks whose deletion those authorities are sponsoring at the same time. This apparent paradox by local institutions reproduces the common need for domestication of irreverence and commodification of the illegal, a paradox that all intervenient actors are aware of. StreetArtCEI's intercultural action takes place in a borderzone between the legal and the illegal, where researchers play the role of mediating agents, creating new discursive fields in permanent intersection.

Introduction

In the fall of 2017, the Centre for Intercultural Studies of the Polytechnic of Porto (CEI, P.PORTO) launched the project StreetArtCEI – Routes of Graffiti and Street Art in Porto and Northern Portugal. Initially, fieldwork in the streets of Porto and other cities and villages of Northern Portugal intended simply to create routes inspired by canonical literary authors who had lived or located their narratives in these territories, currently undergoing a blooming tourism demand. This research was undertaken as part of the project "TheRoute – Tourism and Heritage Routes including Ambient Intelligence with Visitants' Profile Adaptation and Context Awareness", headed by P.PORTO. However, and at the same time, researchers in the field gradually awoke to other visual and polychromous narratives, also inscribed in

the city. As a consequence, the Centre embarked on a parallel project motivated by the unexpected and anonymous art on the city walls. Resorting to the conceptual tools of cultural and intercultural studies, the StreetArtCEI project started to blur the already tenuous frontiers between dominant and marginal cultures, their practices, symbols and aesthetic manifestations, as expressions of site-specific dynamics, in the open, unstable and always ephemeral space of the city. Aware that the concept of intercultural is synonym with movement, communication, and encounter between cultures (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006; Ibanez & Saenz, 2006; Sarmento, 2010, 2014, 2016; Dervin, Gajardo & Lavanchy, 2011; Holliday, 2011, 2013; Dervin & Gross, 2016; Imbert, 2014), StreetArtCEI was established as a project that awakens visitors and inhabitants to the self-

and hetero-marginalized cultures of graffiti and street art, thus building bridges between communities, scientists, artists and economic agents. In this context, “self- and hetero-marginalized” refers to the label of marginality that both artists and public alike assign to graffiti and street art, deliberately cultivating this identity for different reasons, that range from a conservative attitude towards visual aesthetics and public order to the awareness of how what is seen as irreverent and non-conformist may become profitable and trendy.

StreetArtCEI interacts with artists, authorities and communities, to research under a critical standpoint the experience of the urban territory they inhabit and manage, tackling the effects of urban commodification and gentrification. In fact, in contemporary urban Northern Portugal, tourism is a main factor of socio-economic empowerment, decentralization and development, provided it does not become another factor of gentrification and social segregation, as responses to changing urban identities must be democratic and inclusive. Albeit peripheral, Porto and Northern Portugal are thriving geographical spaces, populated by medium-sized cities,

which epitomize a rich variety of distinct urban narratives. The polysemic visual narratives of graffiti and street art display valuable information about the citizen’s socio-spatial practices, perceptions and concerns. The project’s work methodology, therefore, involves photographing, categorizing and extracting recurrent patterns of graffiti and street art, from which urban routes emerge, not only for the delight of tourists but also – and especially – for the use and development of local communities.

The contemporary intercultural encounter is global and powered by the speed of new technologies; therefore the first output of StreetArtCEI was the construction of an open access database displaying the diversity of graffiti and street art works in Porto, satellite cities and other urban centres of Northern Portugal, organized by routes and Points of Interest (POIs). The website allows for both researchers and the public to observe and understand the messages, characteristics and representations of graffiti and street art, in their perpetual movement, free from the constraints of time, space and power.



Image 1 – Homepage of the StreetArtCEI project website.

Along the routes displayed at the StreetArtCEI project website – www.streetartcei.com – works are selected according to their aesthetic quality and inclusion in a pattern of geographical recurrence, regardless of the public recognition or, conversely, of the anonymity of the author. Thus, works become accessible to the public, whether they are irreverent and unapproved by authorities, or ratified and commissioned by institutions; whether they stand in high visibility tourist spots or in remote alleys of the outskirts. StreetArtCEI proposes a search for the art hidden in urban labyrinths and sets a race against time that washes away the ink and against populism that censors free creation. StreetArtCEI offers the privilege of knowing how to find, in the course of everyday life, the art created where and when the elusive artist decided to do so.

A Conceptual Approach to Graffiti and Street Art.

Street art develops, to a large extent, from the commonly used expression “graffiti” that emerged half a century ago in the United States, first in Philadelphia and then flourished in New York City. The practice of graffiti was developed by young people, who created an original way of expressing their identities, claiming a space for free communication in the city. For a comprehensive conceptual introduction to graffiti and street art see: Campos, 2010, 2011, 2013; Campos and Sarmiento, 2014; Stahl, 2014; Silva, 2018. American graffiti consisted of a cultural and aesthetic movement based on very particular rules, actions and techniques. The first objective of this practice was a quest for status among peers, a condition that resulted from a regular investment in the quantity and quality of street actions. Creating a pseudonym (the tag), spreading the signature and developing a stylistically complex work were the main stages in the process. The most popular examples were the New York subway trains, spray-painted by graffiti crews, which left a trace of the names and works of these young people, while circulating throughout the city (Stewart, 1989).

Graffiti and street art are often confused as both are movements of contemporary art viewed as subversive, displayed in public spaces and closely related. In general, graffiti displays the name and the territory of the author, it is a codified communicative instance that is intended to communicate with other graffitiers, regardless of public recognition. Street art is more informative and its authors

want the public to see, communicate with, and relate to their artworks. Street artists work in a very similar way to canonical artists, with aesthetical purposes, creating conceptual or stylistically disturbing works. However, they display their works outside of the private territories of galleries, thus producing free, open public exhibitions. Graffiti communicates between crews, it is an internal, secrete language, among those who are able to decipher codified signatures and appreciate writing styles. The public in general is not even able to read most graffiti, because they are contained inside the culture that produces and (de)codifies them. Street art is much more open in its communicative intentions, it communicates at a conceptual and open level with the public in general, using humour, irony, aesthetics, and the absurd.

From the onset, graffiti was oppressed by authorities, who considered it as a form of vandalism that needed to be eradicated. The attempt to identify graffiti with visual pollution and violence has accompanied the history of this urban art form, a fact that did not prevent it from gaining more and more relevance, as a highly resilient manifestation, that resisted multiple modes of control and annihilation. Soon graffiti evolved from a somewhat rudimentary language, based on the simple signature or ‘tag’, towards complex murals, rich in iconography and visual narrative. In the course of this process, authors gradually became aware of the quality and uniqueness of this language, criticized the discourse of vandalism, and chose a conceptual approach using the tools of sociology, anthropology and the visual arts. One of the pioneering books on this phenomenon, marked by an impressive photographic record, was *Subway Art*, by Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant (1984), describing the works painted on New York subway trains during the 1970s and 80s. Ironically, the authorities of this seemingly multicultural metropolis turned the eradication of graffiti from the subway into a costly moral campaign, while other social emergencies kept widely ignored (Ferrel, 1996; Austin, 2001; Dickinson, 2008; Iveson, 2009, 2010). Soon gallery owners and critics were looking upon these expressions with interest, calling graffiti writers and street artists to the galleries. This ambivalence has since then accompanied the history of the movement, fuelling an old debate as well as an identity dispute: is it art or vandalism? All things considered, graffiti and street art are forms of counter-hegemonic discourse, which question

the narratives of authorities and mainstream media, serving as strongholds of resistance. Ricardo Campos pinpoints that painting or writing in the streets, a gesture that can be quite rudimentary from the technical point of view, has the potential to become extremely meaningful from the symbolic perspective. As a communicational phenomenon, graffiti and street art are very effective: with very little means and basic grammatical formulas, it is possible to convey a symbolically powerful message. And to a great extent, they are powerful because they are illegal, unexpected and manage to elude different kinds of control and censorship (Campos, 2018: 213-14). Conversely, and following this line of reasoning, graffiti and street art lose their distinctive power when controlled by authorities, embedded in political and commercial structures, and traded with economic institutions; when they are produced to be passively seen and consumed, instead of being actively discovered and decoded.

The history of graffiti and street art is invariably linked to names such as American artists Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, who have used the streets as creative spaces, alongside their more conventional artwork. John Fekner, as well, is a multimedia artist and street artist who produced a series of stencil works of political nature in the 1970s and 80s, in the United States and beyond. In Europe, we find a group of creators who pioneered the use of aerosol as a tool for artistic activity. Gérard Zlotykamien is sometimes described as the precursor of this art in Europe. During the 1960s and 70s, this French artist produced on the streets what he called *éphémères*, simple figures inspired by the tragedy of Hiroshima. In turn, Harald Naegeli, who was a classically-trained artist, became known as the “sprayer of Zurich” for illegally painting this city with aerosol, in the 1970s and 80s. Still before the success achieved by Banksy, who would use stencil as a major technique of street art, we have the fundamental work carried out in Paris by Blek le Rat, who inspired future generations of street artists. Blek le Rat began his career in the early 80s by painting mice on the walls of Paris, using stencil techniques, before evolving into more complex images and productions.

In Portugal, graffiti and street art emerged due to the contact with a youth media culture that, in the 1980s and 90s, brought to the country practices and representations

of hip-hop culture under multiple perspectives, such as rap music, breakdance, skateboarding and, of course, graffiti and street art. This movement triggered a set of creative processes, as expressed by the first crews of break-dancers and the first examples of graffiti and street art in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon. In Portugal, graffiti and street art have also been understood as illegal and transgressive practices, although public authorities have shown a fairly tolerant attitude when compared to the situation in other countries. The relative tolerance of the authorities allowed graffiti and street art to flourish and multiply, especially in large urban centres. At the dawn of the first decade of the millennium, Lisbon witnessed a ‘boom’ in graffiti and street art, which became a central element in the urban landscape, led to a wide public debate, and reversed former measures for eradication. Former harsh policies by public authorities gave way to a very favourable context for the development of the works of a young generation of artists (Campos 2010, 2018; Campos, Brighenti & Spinelli, 2011). Nowadays, the public is frequently faced with news about the international recognition of a considerable number of Portuguese urban artists, such as Vhils, Hazul, Bordalo II, Mr.Dheo, and The Caver, with high-visibility street art interventions flourishing all over the country.

Municipalities understood the central role that these expressions played in the revitalization and international promotion of public spaces (Sequeira, 2015). The Lisbon City Council was a pioneer in this strategy when they created the Urban Art Gallery at the beginning of the second decade of the millennium, in order to promote graffiti and street art under an organized, official approach (Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2012). Results became evident in the city’s urban landscape and international promotion, as Lisbon has been recognized as one of the most relevant cities in the world as far as urban art is concerned. Other cities immediately followed the example of the capital and started promoting this artistic expression as an example of contemporaneity, cosmopolitanism and creativity. Urban art festivals and street art interventions succeeded across the country, alongside other cultural and artistic ventures that drove urban artists from the streets to art galleries and high end venues. In 2010, the Cultural Centre of Belém, in Lisbon, hosted an exhibition by Brazilian artists OSGEMEOS. In 2014, Portuguese artist Vhils exhibited his

work at the Museum of Electricity of the EDP Foundation. Between 2018 and 2019, both Porto and Lisbon hosted massively advertised exhibitions of works by Banksy, at conventional imposing venues. In 2019 and 2020, public and private institutions increasingly commission high-paid street art works for the historical centre of Porto, classified as Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 1996, in a rapidly escalating legitimization of an art form indelibly related to the streets (Silva, 2018, 2019).

The material dimension of the city is intimately related to the actual, physical production of graffiti and street art works, as they establish a dynamic and skillful dialogue with the edified and material urban environment. Urban surfaces – walls, facades, doors, sidings, outdoors, panels, showcases, street furniture, among endless other possibilities – are the resources used by artists. Therefore, works are composed not only of graphic contents, but also of the physical characteristics and textures of their supports. The urban materiality is an integral and irremovable element of the work, which must be taken into account by the observer and, crucially, by the artist. And yet, this is, at the same time, the reason for graffiti and street art's most unusual characteristic: ephemerality. The transitory character of these works is associated to their incorporation into the urban matter and to their consequent desacralization. Even time itself becomes part of the structural dimension artists confer to their aesthetic exercises. While painting a subway train, when sticking a poster, the artist is fully aware that the walls will deteriorate, that the inscriptions will be torn, erased, destroyed, and buried under other layers of the city. Graffiti and street art are short-cycle art forms, produced without expectations of eternalization and longstanding duration. They might survive for minutes, hours, days or years, because their merging into the city entails a continuous change, as the urban landscape lives in constant motion and evolution.

We are, nowadays, far from the original context of graffiti and street art. The term 'street art' leaves no room for doubt: we speak of 'art', socially recognized in its cultural and aesthetic potential by the media, municipalities, investors, academia, and institutions. Former 'vandals' have now been elevated to the category of artists. And we are also dealing with a broader expression, street art, which involves a set of plastic manifestations and techniques that go far beyond

conventional graffiti. Works that involve stencil and collage techniques, stickers, posters or aerosol murals coexist in the same space within blurred boundaries. Street art is a vast and comprehensive category that involves both informal or transgressive manifestations and commissioned or institutional works. However, this ambiguity provides an unexpected and singular character in the panorama of contemporary visual arts. The public urban space becomes the space of artistic creation or the artist's own studio. The street artist uses the paraphernalia of artistic creation and appropriates the urban territory for as long as the creative process lasts, from the few seconds of sticking a paste-up to the long hours of spray painting a mural. The city becomes a workshop open to the public, where everyone can witness the process and/or the outcome of the artistic activity, depending on the individual work processes of each artist. But even more than an open space for creation, the city also becomes an open, free exhibition space, hence, a democratic art gallery. As such, there occurs the deconstruction of the traditional role played by studios, galleries and museums in the conventional art world, within delimited, surveilled spaces. Graffiti and street art works are accessible to everybody, day and night, they become part of the city's daily routine and their audience consists of urban residents, passersby, and visitors. There is also an increasing remote audience, whose access to such messages is made through weblogs and social networks (MacDowall, 2019; Glaser, 2017). Thus, the field of visibility of graffiti and street art expands towards a more complex phenomenon from the moment that the local arena becomes a global arena with the help of multiple types of media (Campos, 2018: 215). And this turns out to be even more complex when that global ground evolves into a tourist asset for commercial consumption. At the same time, these art forms are clearly assumed as being non-canonical, desacralized, and popular: they form an aesthetical language that does not require the mastery of elitist cultural codes, nor does it follow the artistic canons perpetuated by institutions, though it does require the mastery of very specific cultural codes. This democratic side of graffiti and street art is related to the memory of cultural and artistic street movements, to former youth (counter) cultures, as well as to social and political causes, that stood at their origin.

The Project StreetArtCEI: Methodologies and results.

StreetArtCEI was born as a spin-off of the Polytechnic of Porto's SAICT/23447 project "TheRoute – Tourism and Heritage Routes including Ambient Intelligence with Visitants' Profile Adaptation and Context Awareness", funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT); the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education; and Portugal 2020. Initially, fieldwork in the streets of Porto and other locations of Northern Portugal aimed at the creation and testing of routes inspired by literary works set or written in the region. But, at the same time, research staff embarked on a parallel project triggered by the discovery of the anonymous art on the city walls. Therefore, the StreetArtCEI project emerged, with the purpose of studying the aesthetic manifestations that pervade the open, shifting and ephemeral space of the city. Ignorance admires the whitewashed innocuous wall, because public, anonymous art intimidates those who have to resort to censorship to impose their power. By contrast, knowledge – as created and shared by StreetArtCEI – democratizes the power of discovering art in the itineraries of everyday life. StreetArtCEI collects, registers, preserves and offers, both to tourists and to the community, the irony and the beauty of graffiti and street art, in a social, cultural and scientific mission of high economic potential. Furthermore, the project complies with the mission of the Portuguese polytechnic, which revolves around education, research and dissemination of culture and knowledge, under a practical, entrepreneurial, hands-on strategy.

All over the country, graffiti and street art have become thriving assets in the creation of routes for cultural tourism, whose social and economic potential for decentralization and development has been perceived by both local authorities and tourism agencies. Porto and the region of Northern Portugal are no exception to this rule. Therefore, StreetArtCEI, albeit a scientific project, merges the collection and categorization of graffiti and street art works with the design of maps displaying access roads, public transports and general urban infrastructures, in order to create alternative, viable and widely accessible routes of cultural tourism. In brief, the project combines scientific research – disseminated through journal articles, books, dissertations, essays, and conferences – with tourist-appealing user-friendly routes. However, one must

bear in mind that the routes proposed by StreetArtCEI are non-binding, are to be experimented at will by anyone interested, whether a tourist, visitor or local. At its current stage, the project does not provide guides nor tourist packages; routes are supported by downloadable maps, and are to be followed, truncated, reinvented, subverted or forgotten by the user. The difficulties created by the impermanence of street art, however, do not invalidate the possibility of future outcomes on entrepreneurship in cultural tourism. The results of StreetArtCEI attest so, by proving the existence of areas densely and regularly populated by graffiti and street art works, likely to generate routes and attract visitors.

StreetArtCEI's website displays graffiti and street art works of high visual impact, isolated or associated by recurrence in space, both illegal and endorsed by authorities, in normally accessible streets of city centres and surrounding areas. Works are selected for their visibility and for their inclusion in a pattern of geographical recurrence along pre-existing maps, regardless of the public recognition or anonymity of the author. Specifically, in order to be included in the routes of the project, works must: a) have been captured by the project staff after October 2017, when StreetArtCEI started; b) be visible, during their variable and unpredictable life spans, to anyone with ordinary mobility, in easily accessible and generally safe places; c) integrate a pattern of geographical recurrence that justifies the creation of and/or the inclusion in a POI – Point Of Interest, of the route. The permanence of the work is not assured by the very essence of street art, however the staff tries to select supports that guarantee a minimum of stability (e.g. works painted over automobile vehicles are not included).

StreetArtCEI does not include monochromatic graffiti tags, as they are mere signatures for the demarcation of a territory, without communicative purposes beyond the restricted circle of the crew. Conversely, the project includes those signatures that combine colours, perspectives, dimensions and/or textures, i.e., that also display the evident purpose of communicating an aesthetic message to the community, decipherable by non-members of the crew, alongside the codified demarcation of the territory. StreetArtCEI's fieldwork methodology considers legal and illegal, marginal and commissioned graffiti and



Image 2 – Street art works in the city of Porto, 2019 and 2020.

street art works in equal terms, as the main purpose of the project is the creation of a significant corpus to enable further research and reflection.

By stepping out of the city centres, conducting research in peripheral outer areas, and contradicting the centripetal power of the capital, Lisbon, in the South, the project tackles the urgent issue of decentralization, while fostering the connection with local communities and municipal institutions. The cultural identity of peripheral communities is thus sanctioned through the recognition of their aesthetic, economic and tourist value by authorities and academics, as well as by their own actors and authors alike. Ultimately, these goals work in tune with the guidelines of the European Year of Cultural Heritage, celebrated in 2018, as they encourage more people to discover and engage with Europe's cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, natural and digital, and reinforce the sense of belonging to the common European space.

The research methods of StreetArtCEI involve photographing, categorizing and extracting patterns of geographical recurrence, as well as patterns of recurrence by author and by subject, from which routes of graffiti and street art emerge, for the use of visitors and local communities, as resources for education, and as an open-access database for scientific research. StreetArtCEI follows Malcolm Collier's (2001) methodological framework, when the author suggests a basic model of analysis built by steps. In the first stage, the author advises a random drift, free from rigid methodological constraints. At this stage, what is sought is to 'feel' the material, to be aware of its subtleties and standards. Researchers are aware of the first impressions stimulated by the visual material, take notes, photograph, and record emerging questions. In a second phase, more detail and systematization are required, as images are inventoried and classified into analytical categories. In a third stage, a more structured scrutiny is carried out, aiming at comparing and quantifying the material, through statistical processes that will serve to produce exact descriptions. Finally, and according to Collier, there is an interpretative search for meaning, which forces researchers to return to the image, in a denser approach supported by previously elaborated analytical grids.

Campos (2013) reminds us that visual content analysis is a method with explicit rules and generally works with a substantial number of images, systematically and rigorously (Rose, 2001; Ball and Smith, 1992). In its simplest form, StreetArtCEI apparently produces mere tables of frequency, but this type of methodology allows the researcher to explore the interrelationship between the various codes in presence (Campos, 2013: 137). As Banks (2001) points out, the meanings carried by images are highly context-dependent and often transient. Moreover, reading and decoding images presupposes the existence of meaning embedded in those same images. According to Banks, meaning is found in the processes of social construction of images, which provide them with symbolic and metaphorical characteristics. Therefore, there are two possible layers of meaning in a graffiti and street art image: the internal narrative (the story told) and the external narrative, i.e., the social context that produces the image and sustains the framework of its interpretation, when visualized. Campos (2013: 138) alludes to the semiotic resources that are a consequence of cultural history and of the cognitive resources mobilized in the creation of visual messages. The author evokes Jewitt and Oyama (2001) and their concern with social semiotics as a useful epistemological methodology for the study of images in their social context.

These approaches were applied to the process of creating the routes currently available, after a period of fieldwork in the city of Porto, satellite areas of greater Porto (Matosinhos, Vila Nova de Gaia, Vila do Conde, Senhora da Hora, Leça da Palmeira, S. Mamede Infesta, Leça do Balio, and Maia) and the nearby city of Aveiro, located 50 kms south of Porto. Collected images were later selected and georeferenced, thus generating maps that reveal patterns of spatial recurrence of graffiti and street art works. These maps were then compared with existing street maps, as well as with maps of urban transports and other public infrastructures, in order to build a set of possible pedestrian and road paths. Subsequently sections organized around an easily recognizable and widely accessible spatial axis (hence the designations of the different routes: Bolhão, Marquês, Trindade, etc) were extracted. This stage of the process generated routes that a regular visitor may walk or drive along within a period of time of less than 12 hours, under



Image 3 – Street art works in the city of Porto, 2019 and 2020.

standard access conditions. Selected POIs include all sorts of urban canvas, from a football stadium to trendy streets of the historical city centre; from murals commissioned for hiding the building site of a luxury hotel to abandoned factories; from illegal houses about to be demolished to central train and bus stations.

In some geographical routes, major streets were split between two different areas in the map and/or appear in more than one route, given the length of the street. Likewise, two streets may be grouped into a single POI when the artwork is located at their intersection and equally accessible from either street, or when those streets are so close and indistinguishable they may be said to form one single area. When necessary, the project employs commonly recognized toponyms alongside official designations for a better localization. Some pieces are registered in more than one image due to their dimensions and/or aesthetical complexity that require them to be

captured under several angles. As far as the database is concerned, data are organized in visual catalogs, specifically in the form of photo galleries, which allow the recording and preview of the artworks located along the identified POIs. Data are presented in the form of previously cataloged visual galleries, with the photographs collected by project members. The system allows a quick viewing of all the routes created, as well as the navigation throughout the photographic records, and does not require authentication. Users are offered the convenience of pre-established itineraries that rationalize their mobility along the geographical space, organized and displayed according to the most relevant POIs. Access to data is grounded on a free web-based portal optimized for desktop and mobile devices.

The project website (www.streetartcei.com) provides more than 3250 images collected up to the autumn of 2020, distributed along 13 geographical routes, organized in 30 maps and 272 POIs, as follows:

Routes in the city of Porto:

- Route of Bolhão;
- Route of Boavista;
- Route of Constituição;
- Route of the Dragon¹ – Eastside Porto;
- Route of Marquês;
- Route of S. Bento;
- Route of Trindade.

Routes in Greater Porto:

- Route of Vila do Conde;
- Route of Senhora da Hora;
- Route of Matosinhos – Leça da Palmeira;
- Route of S. Mamede Infesta – Leça do Balio;
- Route of Maia.

Route of Aveiro.

Routes by author – ‘authors’ are those artists who practice a style and a signature recognized by the community – were then organized over the existing trajectories of geographical routes, following a similar method as far as the design of maps and organization of POIs are concerned. Works by a single author are scattered along several geographical routes, maps and POIs. Therefore, geographical designations were kept, while POIs were rearranged in the new maps designed for the routes by author. The result generated 16 routes, 220 POIs and 485 images, organized as follows:

- Route of Mr.Dheo
- Route of Costah
- Route of Hazul
- Route of CheiKrew
- Route of Godmess
- Route of MyNamelsNotSem
- Route of AIEM
- Route of YouthOne
- Route of Coletivo Rua²:
 - FEDOR
 - DRAW
 - CONTRA
 - THIRD

- Route of PTKS
- Route of Rafi
- Route of TARS8TWO
- Route of Oker
- Route of Mesk
- Route of The Caver
- Route of Virus

A smaller number of artworks by an author does not imply lesser value and recognition. Renowned artists like Hazul, Mr.Dheo, YouthOne, Rafi and Vhils produce high impact artworks of considerable dimensions and technical difficulty, thereby they produce in lesser quantity while providing high-demand POIs to the respective routes. Actually, Hazul is a very special case, as he both authors commissioned, large-scale murals and small illegal artworks all over the city of Porto, as well as in other locations of Portugal and abroad, with a special presence in Paris. Conversely, authors like Costah practice the collage technique alongside classical spray-painting, therefore generating a higher number of interventions.

The website also displays articles and books authored by the research team and a clipping section containing the archives of the project’s presence on national television, radio and the printed press. Working on an easily perishable art form, StreetArtCEI functions as a virtual archive, as well. At its present stage, the website includes a digital museum reserve under the option “Archive”, with collections of works organized by location and date, all captured prior to the calendar year when the project started, donated by voluntary professionals and amateurs.

StreetArtCEI’s website and existing routes undergo constant updates and technical corrections. The next stages of the project will cover other geographical routes, such as Porto’s inner ring road area (Estrada da Circunvalação) and the nearby cities of Vila Nova de Gaia, Braga, Guimarães, Ovar, Valongo, Estarreja, Espinho and Águeda. Further authors whose routes are to be incorporated in the project are, among others, Bordalo II and Vhils. Thematic routes, yet to be completed, will include works that focus on topics like literature, the sea, social-political causes, tributes to the city, among other patterns to be recognized, extracted and analysed. Other future outputs include additional

actions of communication and dissemination, MA and PhD dissertations, educational courses in entrepreneurship for cultural tourism, professionally organized tours, the creation of an app, and an already on-going project on routes of Street Music.

To tackle the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic,

StreetArtCEI is currently developing an award-winning³ spin-off project – Street Art Against Covid – that registers the artworks that have popped up in the city of Porto whilst on lockdown. This new fieldwork campaign also compiles artworks that openly reflect on the pandemic, produced after the lockdown was lifted, such as the mural art that Vhils offered to St. John’s Hospital in Porto, in homage to

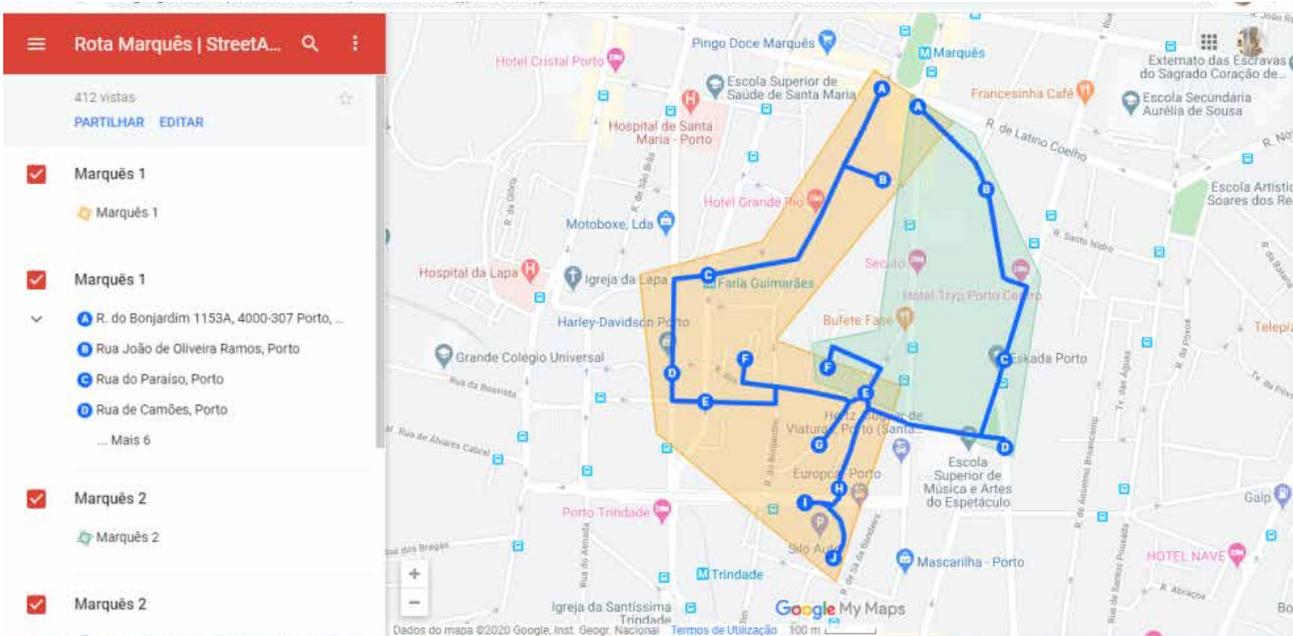


Image 4 – Route of Marquês, Porto: Map and POIs “Rua da Fábrica Social” and “Rua das Carvalheiras”.

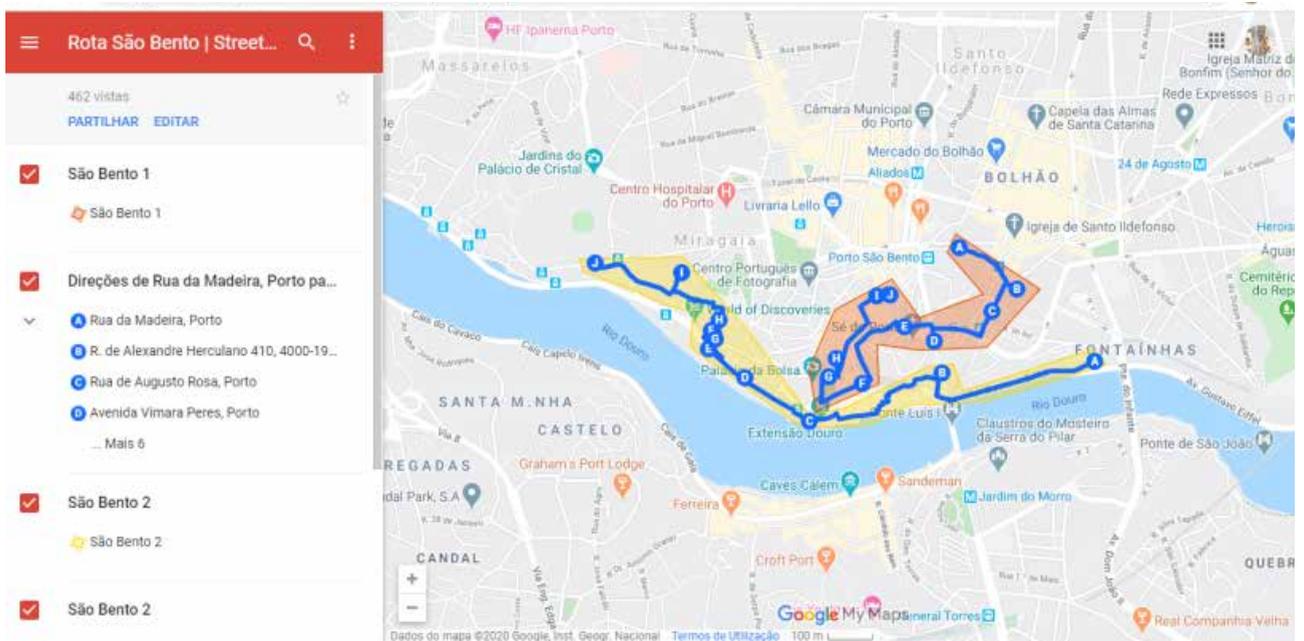


Image 5 – Route of S. Bento, Porto: Map and POI “Rua da Madeira”.

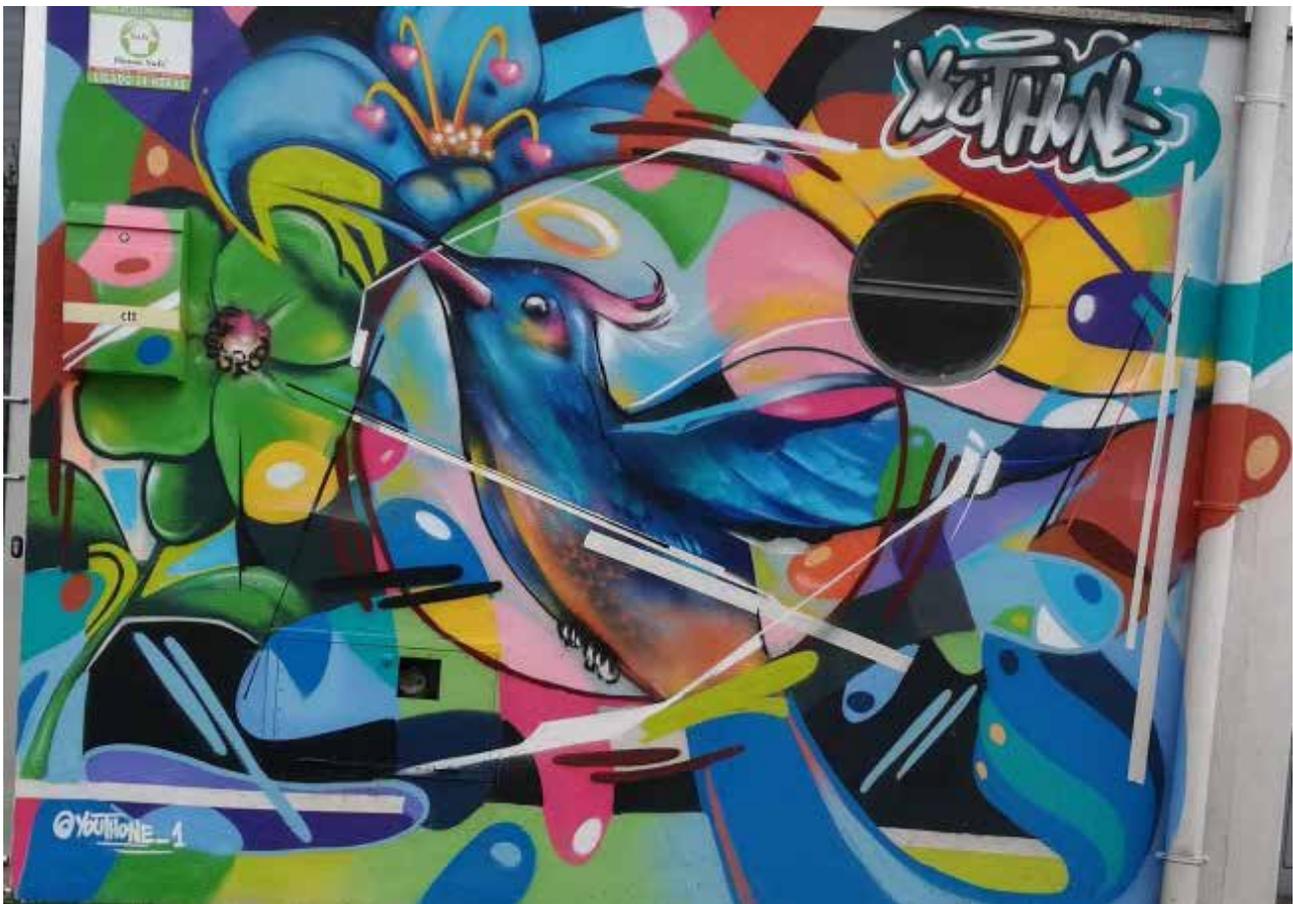
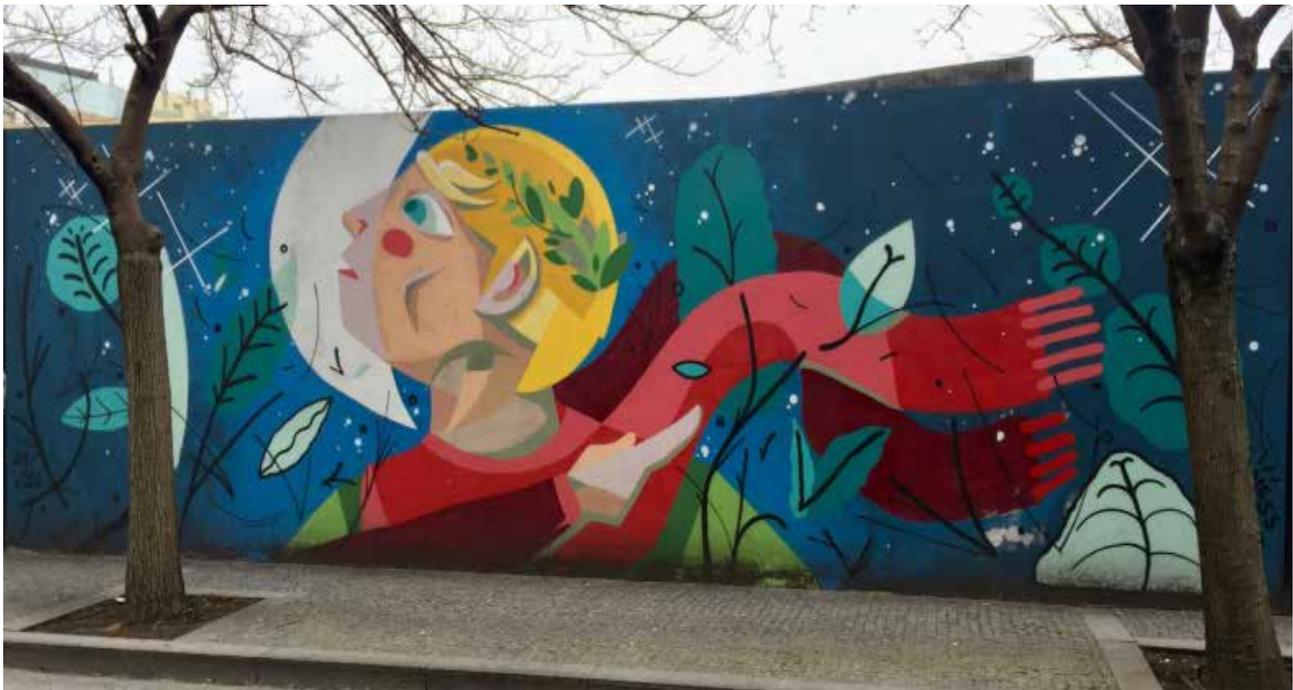


Image 6 – Route of Senhora da Hora, Greater Porto, POI “Rua Augusto Fuschini” and Route of S. Mamede de Infesta/Leça do Balio, Greater Porto, POI “Rua Padre Costa”.

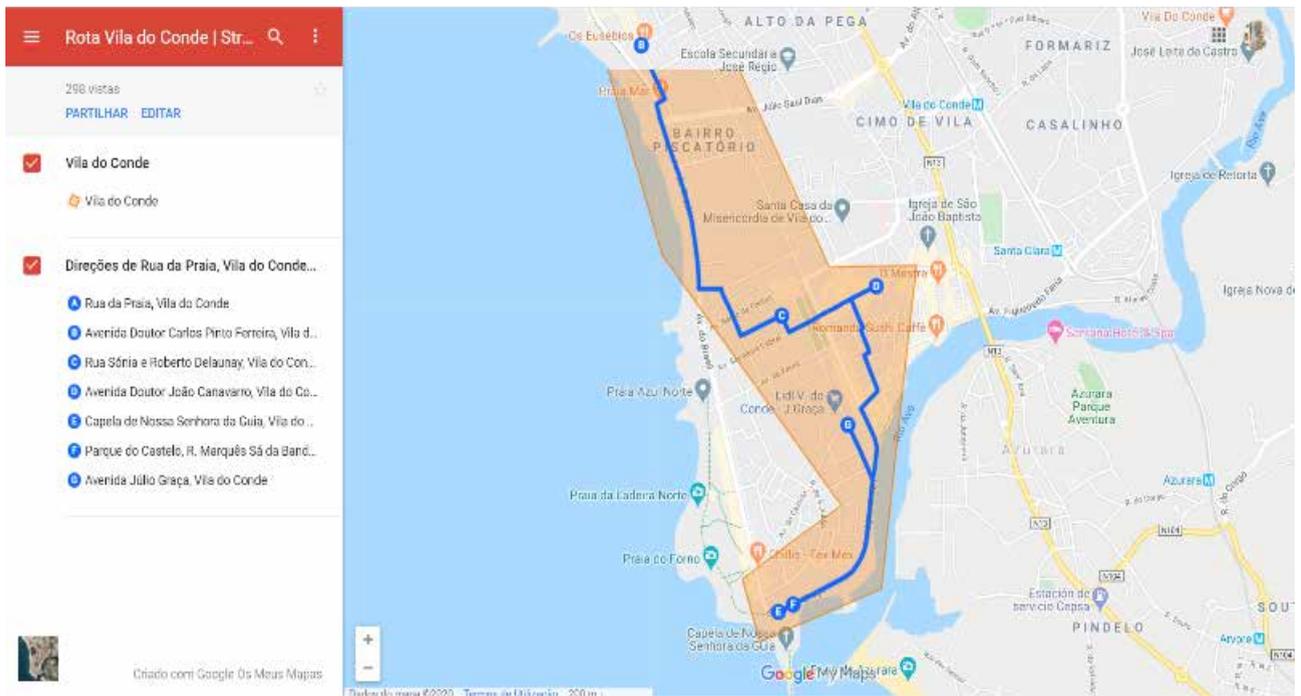


Image 7 – Route of Vila do Conde, Greater Porto: Map and POI “Mercado Municipal”.



Image 8 – Route of artist Hazul: Map and POI “Miradouro da Vitória”.

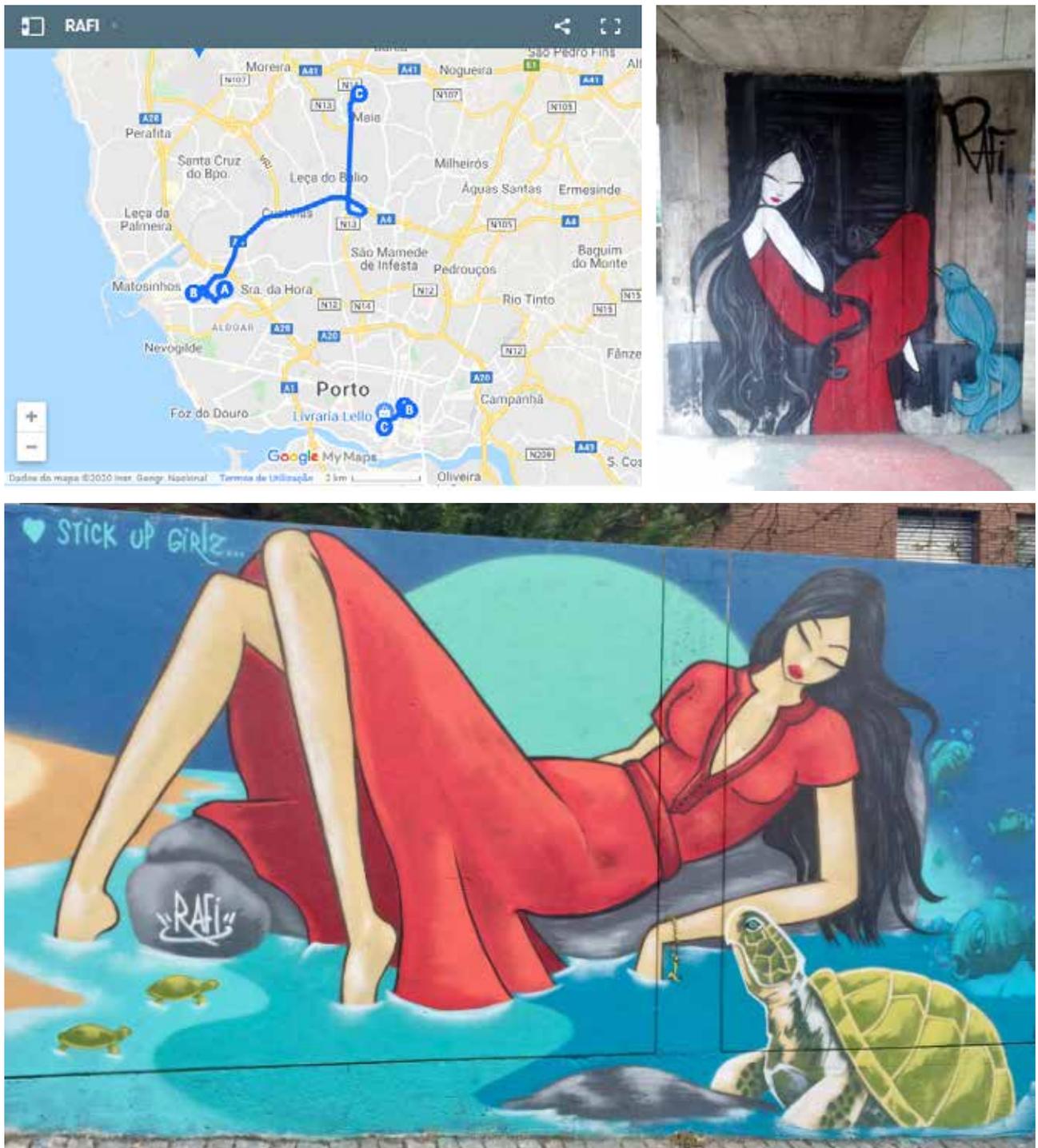


Image 9 - Route of artist Rafi: Map and POIs "Silo Auto" and "Escola Secundária Augusto Gomes".

front-line health professionals, or the nurse smashing the virus with a club, painted by Mr.Dheo on a derelict wall in Arcozelo. The 7 routes of Street Art Against Covid are: Uptown, Boavista, Historical Centre, Eastern Porto, Douro River, Matosinhos, and NHS (in Portuguese “SNS”), this one with the artworks that pay tribute to health workers. Street Art Against Covid displays nearly 70 POIs and 260 images, in permanent update.

Critical considerations, responses and other paradoxes.

Within the specific space and timeframes of the project StreetArtCEI, the response of public authorities to graffiti and street art largely obeys a principle of inclusion, of educating the margins, overcoming chaos and minimizing disturbance. Thus, graffiti and street art are both the target of silencing mechanisms, because they are uncomfortable voices in the city, and the object of domestication strategies, sponsored by public authorities. Between silencing and domestication, these authorities manage a dubious, often contradictory attitude, acting, on the one hand, against what allegedly vandalizes the public and private space of the city and, on the other hand, trying to lead graffiti and street art into disciplined territories, framed by municipal galleries and spaces reserved inside the logic of urban planning. Such official spaces provide persecution-free territories while depriving artists of the power to use their voices and art freely in the city. The essence of graffiti and street art is a totally unsanctioned freedom of action over space. Transgression is a fundamental part of their practice and intention, a factor that is abolished by the domestication carried out by official instances. The promotion of graffiti and street art for the sake of the public cause – through contests, exhibitions, workshops, among other more or less hybrid initiatives – conveys the image of the ‘good savage’, of the artist converted to legally and socially accepted actions, producing healthy and aseptic graffiti and street art for an all-purpose consumption (Campos, 2010: 140-1).

This ambiguous compromise between many artists and a political-bureaucratic system allegedly hostile to urban subcultures has a pragmatic purpose that constitutes a challenging topic for further consideration. Artists do not convert to instituted powers, but instead employ them to their advantage, while promoting their activity and culture in general. Both parties hide this underlying conflict in a momentary relationship of mutual benefit: public

authorities forget vandalism and the persecution of illegal graffiti and street art, advocating domesticated art forms; artists omit their involvement in illegality, seeking symbolic and material dividends (Campos, 2010: 142-3). Therefore, the analysis of the legal perception of graffiti and street art under Portuguese law eventually became part of the critical reflection undertaken by the project StreetArtCEI.

Graffiti and street art are characterized by marginality in its broadest sense, as they are visual invasions of occupied or unoccupied spaces, either central or remote, by creative agents. This marginality corresponds, on the one hand, to the latent illegality of the act (criminalized or unlawful for the defense of property rights), but also to the manifestation of sociocultural elements which, as a rule, stand outside of the social mainstream, typically portraying communities with little voice in traditional media. Moreover, it is not the characterization as ‘vandalism’ or the content of the expression itself that defines the illegality of graffiti and street art, as there is legal graffiti and street art in urban planning. The establishment of a rigid concept may be an impossible task, but it cannot be ignored in this project, since it is the starting point to delimit legal consequences and to protect artworks under the fundamental freedoms of expression.

If, on the one hand, graffiti and street art are often considered a crime, an illicit act, it is also true that they are also considered a global art movement. Several street artists have come to be regarded by society as canonic artists, receiving such recognition in reputation and funding. Much through the rising economic value of works by artists such as Banksy, paintings once considered marginal and criminal began to be sold at art auctions by millions. Artists who once practiced graffiti and street art quietly, furtively, without permission, began to open studios, to sell their works on mobile supports (such as canvases and panels), and to be hired for authorized illustration of private and public properties.

Given this transitory nature between the marginal and the institutional, the legal regime and effects of graffiti and street art should be analysed under four perspectives: the artist as agent; the owner; society; and public authorities. In the light of Portuguese law, the following topics are currently being analysed by the StreetArtCEI project, in

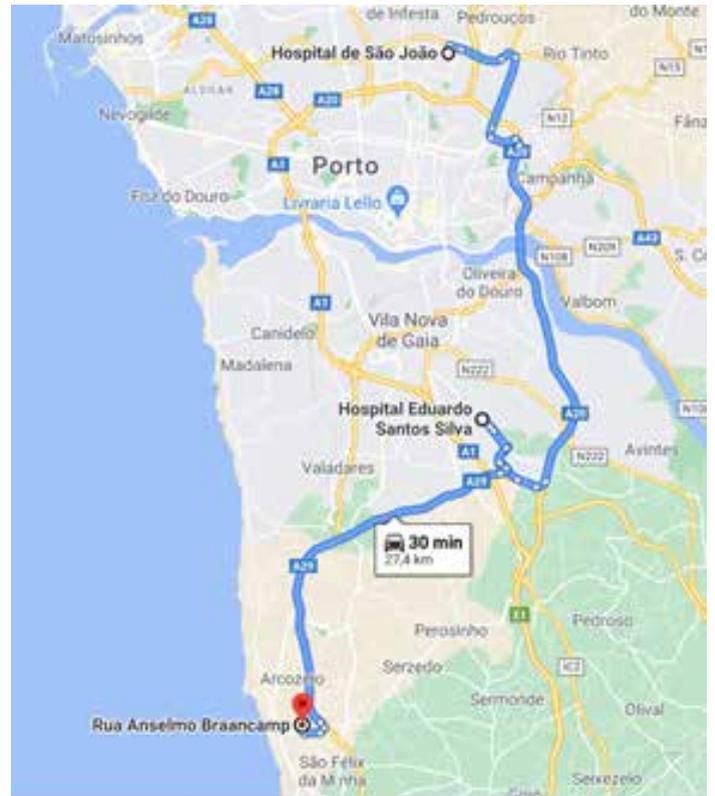


Image 10 – Route of the NHS: Map and POI “Rua Anselmo Braancamp, Arcozelo”.



Image 11 – Street art works in the city of Porto, 2019 and 2020.

collaboration with the research group of CIJE, the Centre for Legal and Economic Research at the Faculty of Law of the University of Porto (www.cije.up.pt): the legal concept of graffiti and street art, their various manifestations and agents; cultural criminology and transgressive art; penal treatment in the light of contemporary social reality; benefits for the city as compared to the severity of the transgression against protected public property; the owner's perspective, especially when there is an increase in the value of property due to graffiti and street art; the social, cultural, and economic value of artworks in public spaces and in private properties; graffiti and street art as manifestations of the right to use public space; collective experiences for the preservation of graffiti and street art in reserved places and its public protection, as part of society's cultural heritage; the preservation of graffiti and street art as a form of annihilating legal consequences; the relevance of the artist's intentions when (not) considering graffiti and street art as actual art forms; the recognition of graffiti and street art as results of the social function of property; the right to destroy or clean graffiti and street art or, conversely, the right to preserve those artworks; legal protection for artists and works, namely in terms of compensation when the work is destroyed, under intellectual property and copyright laws; appropriation of graffiti and street art by the media and advertising campaigns; the legal regime of lawful commissioned graffiti and street art on temporary and permanent supports; the regulation of official graffiti and street art sites, financed by the state or by collaborative civil funding; the preservation of artworks in their original location or their displacement to protected, legal sites.

Concerning the response to StreetArtCEI by the media and local authorities, there are some challenging paradoxes worth mentioning. As soon as the project was launched, StreetArtCEI caught the attention of the mainstream media in Portugal. The Portuguese national broadcasting corporation featured a total of six segments – one on the overall project, and five on each of the routes then available – where the reporters followed the researchers along the routes, filmed with high aesthetic quality, alternating interviews with the researchers and the best known artists on each route. The segments were broadcast on prime time television, with an audience reach of nearly half a million viewers, a significant number in Portugal. However, these

fifteen minutes of fame are worthy of reflection. The public television channel focused its reports on StreetArtCEI as a scientific research project, as much as on the artworks and street artists themselves. Rival private television channels immediately noticed the high audience share and featured segments on the same topic, by visiting and filming the same routes. However, StreetArtCEI project was never mentioned by any of them. As the project conducts research on artworks available in the public space, the outputs of StreetArtCEI have also become public, freely available for consumption, and likely to be appropriated by any group or individual. The object and its representation, as well as the artist's and the researcher's identity, have merged to a point that, in the eyes of the public, they can barely be distinguished from one another. This metonymical interpretation is fostered by StreetArtCEI's option for a free immersion into the territories under analysis and for sharing results in open access, privileging the visual media.

Once StreetArtCEI's routes started to be produced outside the main urban and tourist centres, the interest of major media groups immediately waned. Concomitantly, municipal authorities from satellite small/medium-sized cities of Greater Porto – halfway between the agglutinant urban centre and more distant towns in the countryside – began fostering contacts with the research team in order to create tailor-made routes for promoting local tourism, with the purpose of emulating the main tourist centres. However, although the initial agreement was established in order to produce routes of graffiti and street art, all these municipalities simultaneously commissioned the creation of local literature, architecture, music, gastronomy and heritage routes, among others, in addition to the aforementioned graffiti and street art routes. Eventually, the time and resources invested on those routes ended up taking precedence over graffiti and street art, as the investment in the research of mainstream art manifestations seems to be more legitimate under the eyes of local powers.

Concerning the international response to the project, access data supplied by Google Analytics show that the project's website is accessed on a daily basis by viewers not only nationwide but also across the five continents. Australia, New Zealand, the US, Brazil, Canada, India, Japan, the UK, Germany, and The Netherlands are some of the countries

appearing regularly on the project's website traffic stats. The consistent access by users based in China (including the SAR of Hong Kong and Macao), Russia, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Indonesia, grants StreetArtCEI an unforeseen political character, due to these countries' political and religious constraints to the actual practice and unmediated visualization of uncensored graffiti and street art.

All those involved in StreetArtCEI are aware that the data collected and shared might be used for law enforcement purposes. However, researchers are also aware that persecution by police forces against graffiti and street art is greatly reduced in the territories covered by the project and is much more related to educational and dissuasive actions. In fact, urban authorities understand more and more the importance of these artworks in attracting visitors to Porto and other cities in Northern Portugal, whose economies rely heavily on tourism. However, while this article is being written, Portugal is suffering the tragic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, and tourist activities have ceased on a nationwide scale, carrying with it threats of an unprecedented economic and social crisis.

In this adverse context, StreetArtCEI's paralel project Street Art Against Covid is registering and mapping the artworks that have been created all over the city of Porto during lockdown and/or about the pandemic. In theory, these artworks have a doubly transgressive nature, as they are not only testimonies to the alleged vandalism of property but also to lockdown breaches by artists. However, as previously mentioned, graffiti and street art are relatively tolerated by police forces and, furthermore, lockdown practices in Portugal were the stage for many exceptions to the law. Hence, in this current "new normal", StreetArtCEI and Street Art Against Covid demonstrate, through the international reach of their digital channels – currently safer in terms of health concerns – that the tourist potential of the region has survived and reflects the contingencies of history in the making.

Conclusions.

The object of study of StreetArtCEI is an art form created by illegal practices, and yet this project instantly attracted the attention of local authorities and of high-audience media, such as the national radio and television, the printed press, glossy magazines, tourist handouts, and news websites. Therefore, we come to the conclusion that StreetartCEI thrives inside of a paradox built by the project itself, as the Centre for Intercultural Studies of the Polytechnic of Porto is a public research and higher education institution that, at same time, collects, preserves and legitimizes cultural products which damage public and private property. As far as the reception by the media is concerned, we highlight their interest for the economic potential of the project's online routes, as well as for the aesthetic appeal of the artists' techniques, which are readily transformed into recognized signatures of canonical authors. Concerning the reception by local authorities in Porto and Northern Portugal, emphasis must be put on their swift investment in the creation of tailor-made local routes of graffiti and street art, that is, in artworks whose deletion those authorities are sponsoring at the same time. This apparent paradox by local institutions reproduces the common social need for domestication of irreverence and for commodification of the illegal, which is rooted in the silencing and/or annihilation of all that does not fit into expected models, a paradox that all intervenient actors are aware of.

Therefore, StreetArtCEI's intercultural action takes place at a threshold (Davcheva, Byram & Fay, 2011), in a borderzone (Bruner, 1996) halfway through the legal and the illegal, where researchers play the role of mediating agents between the marginal and the institutional, creating new discursive fields in permanent intersection (Tsing, 1993). Tourism and the commodification of graffiti and street art also imply the intercultural transit of this art form from the margins to the centre, from a culture of irreverence to the reverence for institutions. This transit builds another threshold in the contemporary context of gentrification of the city, as a living canvas and mutable territory (Mendes, 2018). In this emerging territory, street artists assume the role of rising stars, of well-paid managers of merchandising and personal branding. They now produce private art as a response to the commercial demand for the public artworks they once created (though they often do so in addition to unsanctioned public artworks).

This assumption might be related to the generational – hence, intercultural – alternation of left-wing, right-wing political cycles. One might even speculate that, in the future, the irreverent new marginality will be anti-graffiti and anti-street art, militating along with the most conservative sectors for the punishment of those who are now millionaire artists, believing (correctly?) to be fighting capitalism and the commodification of once marginal aesthetics. Although we respect the current methodological criteria that guide the StreetArtCEI project, we argue that, eventually, the ethical and aesthetical criteria for inclusion or exclusion in the concept of graffiti and street art should be the absence of recognition of the artwork by public, private, political, economic, and/or commercial institutions, including here the obligation of non-remuneration of the author for her/his artwork. We are however aware of how unrealistic conducting such a categorization would be in practical terms, as it would mean uncovering in each specific case whether an artist received permission, payment and/or recognition (a rather abstract concept) for the artwork.

Indeed, the aesthetics of everyday life are often associated to cities (re)built according to the capitalist logic of mass consumption (Campos, Brighenti & Spinelli, 2011: 19). Urban territories clearly became spectacular displays of the urban fabric (Highmore, 2005), commanded by commercial and political interests that transform goods into objects of visual consumption. However, graffiti and street art are not simple aesthetic performances, but performances of resistance to normative stances, a temporary disorder in the instituted structures of meaning (Campos, Brighenti & Spinelli, 2011: 26). It is therefore pertinent to conclude this article by evoking Brighenti (2007) and the notion of a social-cultural territory that combines aesthetics and politics side by side, as decisive elements for the critical conceptualization and scientific research of graffiti and street art, as inherent phenomena of contemporary urban landscapes.

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Notes

- 1 - The name derives from the designation of the stadium – Stadium of the Dragon – of the local football team – Football Club of Porto – which is the spatial axis of this route, due to the interface of high traffic main roads and public transports located close to the stadium.
- 2 - Group of artists with a distinctive style who work together, as a single entity, in the area covered by the project StreetArtCEI. Within the route of this "Collective Street" (translation of the Portuguese "Coletivo Rua") we will discriminate the works of four individual identifiable artists that compose the group.
- 3 - "Santander Universitário UNI-COVID19" Award, June 2020.