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## Lisbon vs Porto: Contrasts in Urban Art Public Management

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### Abstract

As a worldwide growing trend, graffiti and urban or street art are now part of many cities' action programs. Lisbon and Porto local governments are investing their efforts into managing these practices — clearly separating graffiti from different art forms — creating cleaning brigades to erase graffiti and other spontaneous interventions and at the same time promoting urban art by legalizing murals and supporting street artists. As a way to promote themselves as creative and artistic cities, Lisbon and Porto created two programs that support street art: Urban Art Gallery<sup>1</sup> in Lisbon and Urban Art Program<sup>2</sup> in Porto.

In this article two PHD students collaborate to analyze the development of urban art in both Lisbon and Porto, mainly focusing on the last decade; to analyze the contrasts on the public management of urban art; and to observe the influence it may have on the artistic landscape of both cities.

### Keywords

graffiti; urban art; street art; murals; visuality; cultural management

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1 Galeria de Arte Urbana, also known as GAU

2 Programa de Arte Urbana

### 1. Introduction

Urban Art is considered one of the most important artistic movements of the 21st century and Portugal is not behind on this trend. Many of its cities are real open air galleries or museums and Portuguese artists — like Vhils, Bordallo II and Mr. Dheo — are acknowledged all over the world. The two major cities of Portugal — Lisbon and Porto — have invested a lot of their efforts fighting graffiti and other spontaneous interventions, legitimizing urban art,

legalizing murals and supporting street artists. In the past decade urban art is also being used by cities to self-promote as creative and artistic.

In Lisbon, Urban Art Gallery (GAU) has supported dozens of legal murals and allowed for the painting of several others by private agents. Porto's Urban Art Program started a few years later but has since funded several murals and authorized artistic events by private businesses.

This analysis starts from the assumption that there is a difference between graffiti and other practices considered more communicative and aesthetically consensual. We consider on the one hand street art or urban art as pictorial interventions with communicative intentions and on the other graffiti as mostly calligraphic interventions: tags, throwies and pieces. We start out from this rough separation considering these artifacts regardless of the context in which they were produced, following authors like Bengtson (2020) and Schacter (2014), and focusing on the aura of spontaneity and illegality, the perception that these images are accessible and ephemeral, created in the urban public space without complying with a certain set of rules and regulations.

As for the public official discourse, the preferred concept is clearly Urban Art usually used in the context of art world and cultural heritage, whereas graffiti is associated with vandalism, dirt and crime.

The line that separates graffiti from urban art or street art, is reinforced by the cities' urban management strategies, whether they apply to a building or façade, to a neighborhood or to the whole municipality. The same organizations that erase tags or other forms of graffiti promote the execution of murals on a smaller or larger scale and organize events and festivals programmed and based on this cultural axis.

This article presents a timeline of the various initiatives related to urban art developed by both municipalities in the last decade. Thus, seeking to analyze and question the relationship between the strategies of urban visual space promoted by street art or urban art and the local policies that regulate the territories in which they intervene and with which they dialogue.

## 2. 2010—2020: Urban Art management in Lisbon

The city of Lisbon is an obvious case of the dual strategy that takes different steps towards graffiti — especially the illegal interventions — and street art or urban art. This was assumed right from the creation of the Urban Art Gallery (Galeria de Arte Urbana — GAU), a structure to support and promote urban art, part of the City Council's Cultural Heritage Department. This is clear in the presentation of the project that claims to have as its main mission

the promotion of graffiti and street art in Lisbon, within an authorized framework and according to a perspective of respect for heritage and landscape values, as opposed to illegal acts of vandalism that attack the City<sup>1</sup>

Urban Art Gallery (or GAU) was founded in 2008 as a result of a graffiti and other illegal interventions removal campaign, especially in the Bairro Alto area, which, being a nightlife district frequented by many young people and close to the Fine Arts Faculty, tends to be the object of multiple spontaneous interventions, since the origins of graffiti in Portugal, between the 80s and 90s. GAU was created in the structure of the Cultural Heritage Department, initially based on a negotiation between this erasure operation and the creation of a set of panels where it would be allowed to paint freely.

GAU's action becomes more visible in the city after its collaboration with CRONO festival, which, between 2010 and 2011, brought to Lisbon artists such as Os Gêmeos (BR) and Blu (IT) for initiatives like the creation of large-scale artworks in vacant buildings in the center of the city, on a high-circulation avenue. These works undoubtedly mark a key moment in the visibility of urban art in the city and in its international characterization as an 'urban art friendly' city.

In the following years, a set of relevant initiatives in the field of urban art in Lisbon can be highlighted, such as *Às 5 no mercado* [At 5 in the market], which transformed a car park into an art gallery, turning a normally dehumanized and gray space into a place of life and color<sup>2</sup>; the *Rostos do Muro Azul* [Blue Wall Faces] project, which has the merit of bringing together a wide range of artists and addressing mental health issues, bringing out the usually restricted reality of a psychiatric hospital, which thus becomes visible to the public through the artists' interventions; the inclusion of a set of urban art works in Lisbon in the Google Art

1 - Translated from Portuguese, from GAUs official website: <http://gau.cm-lisboa.pt/muro.html>

2 - Following the popular argument used by artists and institutions, supported by theories like the non-places from anthropologist Marc Augé (2012) that defines spaces such as parking lots, highways, malls, refugee camps or airports as non-places.



Rostos do Muro Azul, 2012: artist EIME (PT). Source: GAU



Às 5 no Mercado, 2014: artist MAR (PT). Source: GAU

project.

In 2016, the first edition of the MURO Festival, organized by GAU, took place. This festival aims not only to promote urban art in Lisbon but also to involve the communities and transform some peripheral territories, namely city housing projects whose external perception is generally negative. The festival has already had 4 editions: 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2021. It maintains the same type of programming based on large-scale painting, especially in buildings blind walls, workshops, concerts<sup>3</sup>, exhibitions and guided tours. According to the organization itself, one of the main objectives of the festival is:

*to promote Urban Art in Lisbon, through creation and production of new works in public space, promoting its authors, national and foreign. With each edition, MURO\_LX intervenes in a single parish of the city, providing the discovery of a new territory through art, revealing its material and intangible heritage, in close cooperation with artists and also with communities, institutions and local agents.<sup>4</sup>*

Between 2012 and 2018 GAU also published *GAU*, a free distribution magazine that featured stories about these initiatives and similar others, a calendar of related events, interviews with artists and other useful information on urban art in Lisbon and nearby cities. The Gallery has also been promoting competitions for the decoration of equipment in the city for some time (glass recycling containers, garbage collection trucks, etc.) and more recently has started to make available on its website a repository of collected and catalogued images of urban art in the city of Lisbon, many of them already missing on site. The constant participation

3 - In 2021s edition there were no concerts due to the pandemic crisis imposed restrictions.

4 - Festivals official website:  
<https://www.festivalmuro.pt/festival/>

of this team in national and international academic events must also be highlighted.

In addition to GAU's own initiatives, the structure establishes regular partnerships with other organizations, among which we can highlight Gebalis — Municipal company that manages the Councils' housing projects, parish councils, festivals and events<sup>5</sup>, artists' collectives, other city councils, especially in the metropolitan area of Lisbon and, perhaps most importantly, with the Underdogs Gallery. This gallery, founded in 2010 by artist Vhils, has also played a very important role in Lisbon's visual landscape, promoting the creation of large murals through a program that the organization itself defines as a public art program in close coordination with GAU, namely regarding legal and logistical issues, where the institutional support of the City Council is crucial.

If anyone wants to make an intervention legally, the requirements requested by GAU to authorize it are an immense list available on their website, which comprehends location and address, photographs, all the details of the work like motives, palette, materials, even the artist's portfolio and a mockup of the final result. Then all this is supposed to be evaluated by "all municipal services and entities with competence in the matter [...]" and if all opinions are positive, the Cultural Heritage Department of the City Council will issue an authorization that legitimizes the intervention". Apart from the discouraging bureaucracy there is also previous censorship regarding the contents, the works themselves. However, Hugo Cardoso, from GAU, stated that the website is out of date<sup>6</sup>, namely the page about the authorization processes. In addition, he shared an artistic intervention plan for Lisbon designed for the years 2019—2022, which presupposes the creation of free walls throughout the city, with the aim of covering all

5 - Some examples of events that promoted urban art initiatives: Festival Todos, Festival Iminente, Dias do Desassossego, Festival Silêncio.

6 - Hugo Cardoso stated this during the Urban Creativity 2021 conference in 8 July 2021. We accessed the website again in 6 October 2021 and the information is still the same: <http://gau.cm-lisboa.pt/onde-pintar.html>

the current 24 parishes. This plan is intended to reduce the bureaucratic burden on authorized intervention processes and, at the same time, reduce illegal interventions<sup>7</sup>. So the institutional discourse maintains the constant underlining of the difference between ‘art’ and ‘vandalism’, the association of spontaneous and unauthorized interventions to a context of dirt, deviant behavior, and unsafety, to the extent that this plan mentions the concern to install free painting walls in places that should be at “a certain distance” from “residential buildings, public and collective facilities, spaces for pedestrian and automobile circulation and parking, heritage and symbolic elements and values, monuments, heritage and architecturally relevant buildings, churches, cemeteries and others.”<sup>8</sup> The “out-of-sightness” length of these criteria, apart from revealing the underlying strategy for these practices, makes it virtually impossible to take shape in a city with an urban fabric as old and dense as Lisbon’s.

Returning to the period under analysis in our research, which corresponds approximately to the decade 2010—2020, regarding the interventions that the City Council removes, the responsible structure has been, until today, the Municipal Directorate of Urban Hygiene, whose task is “daily removal and cleaning of graffiti and paste-ups”<sup>9</sup>.

An internet search for news<sup>10</sup> using the terms ‘urban art’ and ‘Lisbon’ as well as ‘graffiti’ and ‘Lisbon’ returns different types of content. The news from the ‘urban art’ search are essentially about cultural promotion of events, new works by artists or the supposed positive impacts of

7 - This plan is not public and not open to scrutiny. By October 2021, from the 24 planned walls there are only 4 parishes with free walls and no information about the dedicated walls.

8 - Our translation

9 - City Hall website: <https://www.lisboa.pt/cidade/ambiente/limpeza-e-manutencao>.

10 - Search made on Google news in July 2021 from a Lisbon IP. Examples of news retrieved: <https://observador.pt/2021/02/22/metro-de-lisboa-limpou-mais-de-2-000-metros-quadrados-de-graffiti-das-estacoes/>; <https://sol.sapo.pt/artigo/693430/c-mara-remove-graffitis-em-lisboa>;

<https://www.publico.pt/2021/07/01/p3/noticia/muro-regres-sa-lisboa-forca-transformadora-arte-urbana-1968664>

social and community art projects, with no results in which the content of the news is negative. On the other hand, a search with the term ‘graffiti’ returns news of the same genre — curiously almost all with titles mentioning ‘urban art’ and not ‘graffiti’ — but it also returns a set of news with negative content. These mostly address the costs incurred by public entities to ‘erase’, ‘remove’ or ‘clean’ interventions considered to be vandalism from the walls or train and metro carriages. The term that comes up most frequently is precisely that of ‘cleaning’.

This characterization of graffiti as dirt implies that the urban space is regulated by a system that defines beforehand what is or is not allowed, classifying practices according to a set of rules. Cresswell (1992) underlines the critical “whereness” of graffiti exposing how it is seen as dirt, disorder and vandalism if done in spaces that symbolize the order and authority that regulate urban space. We see this in statements made by city councils’ officials quoted in these news, underlining the difference between graffiti and urban art and reinforcing the idea that the latter is a practice supported and promoted in specific places as an alternative to spontaneous, illegal interventions. These statements aim at legitimizing the role of GAU and promoting creative practices that support the idea of a city with a young, creative, dynamic and even rebellious ethos (Bannet-Weiser, 2011) without acknowledging the potential of spontaneity, creativity and improvisation that arise from all the diversity of illegal interventions.

In the city council’s social media, namely Facebook and Instagram, urban hygiene graffiti removal operations are sometimes shared using before and after photos and hashtags such as #higieneurbana [urban hygiene] or #artesimandalismonao [yes to art no to vandalism], which reinforce this idea of the separation between art and vandalism, as if the line that separates them was clear and objective.

The strategy adopted in Lisbon is not very different from what we can find in most urban public spaces, at least in European and American cities. There is an attempt to regulate the production of graffiti and other gestures of illegal intervention in public space and a growing promotion of so-called urban art as public art. Public art programs, notably, seem to vary a lot according to the administration



Illegal interventions in Lisbon, 2021. (authors' photographs).

of a certain city in a given period. It is possible to identify clear differences, from the outset between local mandates, or between cities in the same country, as is the case presented here, where we compare Lisbon and Porto. The balance between promoting, regulating, prohibiting and erasing is managed differently in each city, with each administration, and varies according to other aspects of public management such as the organization of large events, the influx of tourists, inscription as heritage of certain buildings or areas of cities, the social and economic situation, among others.

In general, these contrasts arise from the need that public space management agents feel to regulate what is produced and where, to protect buildings from certain materials, to convey an image of order and safety while simultaneously promoting the work of artists whose roots are often linked to the graffiti movement and subculture. Despite the clear negativity that is associated mainly with illegal graffiti, such as tags or throw ups, there is a clear concern to promote urban art, to give space to national artists and to bring international artists of recognized quality in this area, to create an image of a city associated with creativity and cultural dynamism, cosmopolitanism and openness to dialogue between different forms of expression.

City branding strategies promote cities as brands who compete not only for tourists, but for investors, establishing of multinational companies, migration of highly qualified workers, events that generate positive externalities. Urban Art is also used as a promotional strategy and creating large murals makes its impact clearer, allowing to create the sensation of monumentality that smaller-scale works do not create, making the strategy of promoting Urban Art and the city more easily evident.

In this sense, the work of both GAU and Underdogs has firmly contributed in recent years to affirm Lisbon as a creative city, Urban Art welcoming, meeting point for artists from all over the world with a dynamic and diversified urban landscape.

However, we should not ignore the possible homogenizing effect that all these initiatives may produce, particularly in the long term, and also the gentrification processes they

may promote or help promoting (Schacter, 2014). There are already areas of the city gentrified or undergoing gentrification processes, with house prices getting very high, causing many low and medium wage inhabitants to move, and thus amplifying this homogenization dynamics.

### 3. 2010—2020: Urban Art management in Porto

Porto is nowadays considered by many a mandatory visit for all the street art lovers visiting Portugal, but it hasn't been like that for long. This movement started in the city of Porto later than in the capital and went through many changes in the last 30 years, from its total prohibition and criminalization by the city council to the creation of a public urban art program that supports and finances this art form. In Portugal a legislation was created on August 23rd 2013 that considers a crime to carry out

*graffiti, postings, perforating and other forms of alteration, even if temporary, of the original characteristics of exterior surfaces of buildings (...) when such alterations are not authorized by the respective owners and licensed by the competent authorities<sup>11</sup>*

Anyone that doesn't abide by this rule will be punished with fines that go from 100€ up to 25.000€. This legislation outraged many artists, because from then on, all unauthorized graffiti and street art began to be treated as a crime, denying freedom of speech and creation. The artist Nomen says that "only approved projects can be painted and not ideas of revolution"<sup>12</sup>.

This national legislation allows the municipal councils to

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11 - Legislation nº 61/2013 of August 23rd in Diário da República. Available in: <<https://dre.pt/pdf1s-dip/2013/08/16200/0509005092.pdf>>

12 - In Jornal Público, June 2013. Available at: <<http://bit.ly/1k-cUP8W>>



*"Utopia das Artes", mural by Mots, Mesk and Fedor, part of RU+A event in 2013. Photo by João Garcia.*

create their own rules so, the then city mayor, Rui Rio<sup>13</sup> (2001-2013), decided to create, in September 2013, a city tax imposing a minimum 40€ pay for anyone who would like to legalize graffiti or street art. According to the *Público*, this document makes it mandatory for

*the payment of 40 euros for the issuance of the license to paint graffiti up to eight square meters, plus five euros for each additional square meter and as much for each period of 30 days or fraction. In the Municipal Taxes Table of*

13 - President of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), a center-right liberal-conservative political party in Portugal.

*the Municipality Regulatory Code, can now be found the issuance of licenses for 'registration of graffiti, postings, perforating and other forms of alteration, even if temporary, of the original characteristics of exterior surfaces of buildings, pavements, sidewalks, is now foreseen, walls and other infrastructure'<sup>14</sup>*

This city tax, that still exists in Porto, treats urban art

14 - in Jornal Público of September 13th 2013, available at: <<https://www.publico.pt/2013/09/13/p3/noticia/camara-do-porto-quer-cobrar-pelo-menos-40-euros-para-licenciar-graffiti-1818122>>



as publicity, making it mandatory to pay every month for the license for a specific period of time. Therefore, to paint legally, artists need to get a written permission from the building owner, then submit a sketch (that has to be approved by the council) and afterwards pay these municipal taxes. In September 2013 Circus Network and IS CET - Cedofeita Viva managed to legalize the first uncommissioned big mural in Porto, paying these taxes to the city hall. The necessary money for the taxes and expenses was raised through a crowdfunding. The artists — Mots, Mesk and Fedor — painted a 150sqm in Rua Miguel Bombarda without getting any payment.

Besides the creation of this tax, Porto's council, still during Rui Rio's term, created a graffiti removing program called Brigada Anti Grafitos [Anti Graffiti Brigade]. This program was heavily criticized by artists and urban art lovers, because it erased indiscriminately all tags, throw ups, halls of fame, posters, and all the existing street art in the city of Porto.

An article on the online newspaper *P3*<sup>15</sup> states that, as a consequence of these erasings, local street artists announced a war against the city council. As a form of protest against the Brigada Anti Grafitos these artists started painting a line throughout all the walls that had just been cleaned by the brigade. What cost 3€ to the artists (price of a spray can), cost a lot more to the city. In an interview<sup>16</sup>, the mayor Rui Rio declared that the annual budget for this brigade exceeded 150.000€. Considering that most of the people who painted the walls were university freshmen or people in community service it shows that not much of this budget was spent on labor.

Evidently the council's idea was to combat — what they  
15 - in Jornal Público of March 21st 2013, available at: <<https://www.publico.pt/2013/03/21/local/noticia/nao-sera-por-falta-de-verba-que-camara-do-porto-deixa-de-limpar-graffiti-1588671>>

16 - in Jornal Público of March 21st 2013, available at: <<https://www.publico.pt/2013/03/21/local/noticia/nao-sera-por-falta-de-verba-que-camara-do-porto-deixa-de-limpar-graffiti-1588671>>

considered to be — vandalism and visual pollution, but, doing it without dialoguing with street writers and artists, it ended up having the opposite effect. While before there was a mix of small-scale graffiti writings and large masterpieces, by the end of the year 2013 all that could be seen in Porto were tags and fast throw ups.

In that same year, there's a big shift in perspective with the change of the council president. The new mayor, Rui Moreira (2013-present)<sup>17</sup>, showed his interest in urban art from the start, having used photos of a mural by the artist Mr. Dheo in his candidacy for mayor. It can be read, in a text published by *RTP*,

(...) Hazul, 32, Mr. Dheo, 28, and Fedor, 27, three of the *graffiters* from Porto who agreed to speak about the street paintings that during the municipal administration of Rui Rio aroused controversy and to which they expect greater openness from the new president of the municipality, Rui Moreira.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, it is possible to verify the acknowledgment of urban art by this mayor in several interviews, like in *Público* newspaper, for example:

Rui Moreira was asked during the last municipal campaign: "If you found Hazul or Mr. Dheo painting graffiti next to your house, would you call the Municipal Police or the anti-graffiti brigade?", to which Rui Moreira surprisingly answered: "Possibly, I would get my iPhone and take a photo for Instagram.

This support was verified after this candidate won the elections and began his term as mayor of Porto, creating the urban art department of the city of Porto, within

17 - Independent candidate representing "o nosso Porto"

18 - in RTP, November 2nd 2013, available at: <[https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/cultura/ate-o-turismo-do-porto-tem-a-ganhar-com-graffitis-legais-defendem-artistas\\_n692715](https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/cultura/ate-o-turismo-do-porto-tem-a-ganhar-com-graffitis-legais-defendem-artistas_n692715)>



“Ribeira Negra”, mural by Colectivo Rua and Breakone, part of Push Porto Festival 2014. Author’s photo.

Porto Lazer<sup>19</sup>. This department was responsible for the organization of a huge exhibition, featuring 19 national and 3 international artists, called Street Art Axa.

Big names of Porto street art and renowned international artists of street art are invading the building AXA. The result can be seen for a whole month, at the largest Street Art exhibition that ever took place in Porto. An event that promises to put the centre of Porto, and its most respected artists, at the centre of national and international street art!<sup>20</sup>

Fast forward to September 2014, Circus Network<sup>21</sup>, with

19 - A public-private company that administers sports and leisure events in the city.

20 - Available at <<https://streetartaxaporto.wixsite.com/streetart>>

21 - More info in <[www.circusnetwork.net](http://www.circusnetwork.net)>

the approval of the city’s Culture Department, held the first and only urban art festival in the city, called Push Porto, having painted 5 murals of different dimensions and themes, all over the city<sup>22</sup>. In the same month, the Porto City Council commissioned the first mural of the city’s Urban Art Program<sup>23</sup>, with two of the most controversial artists in Porto at the time: Hazul and Mr. Dheo. Thus, in a single month, there were more legal murals painted in Porto than in the entire previous decade, stating a clear investment by the municipality, private entities and the artists themselves.

In 2015, as an initiative of the Urban Art Program, street art tours started and two contests were held: one for the

22 - *Island of Death* by German artists Vidam and Look; *Ribeira Negra* by Colectivo Rua and Breakone; *No Justice no Peace* by the english artist Malarko; and two untitled murals by the artists Mesk and Third, and Pedro Podre.

23 - More info at: <<https://www.agoraporto.pt/animacao/programa-de-arte-urbana-do-porto>>



“Quem és Porto?”, tile mural by ±Maismenos±, part of Locomotiva Project in 2015. Author’s photo.

painting of electricity boxes on Rua das Flores and the other for the Collective Mural in Rua da Restauração. The Locomotiva event is also held, designed to revitalize the surroundings of the São Bento station, which, among other initiatives, made possible the big murals *Quem és Porto* by Maismenos, and *Clouds* by Sten&Lex, both in Rua da Madeira. Moreover, in the same year, three large murals were painted in Porto: passing the D. Luís bridge, we can find *An.fi.tri.ão*, by Frederico Draw; in Rua Nova de Alfândega, the mural *Mira*, by Daniel Eime; and in Virtudes square *Virtus*, by the artist Hazul, commissioned by the artistic school Árvore.

It’s obvious to see that, at the beginning of the Porto Urban Art Program, created during Rui Moreira’s term, a great effort was made by Porto Lazer (now called Ágora), private cultural entities and artists, for the promotion and commercialization of urban art in the city.

In the following years, the Urban Art Program slowed down (or practically stopped), regaining its action in the year of 2017, a year of municipal elections. Rui Moreira once again demonstrates his support for urban art, inviting Mr. Dheo to paint his headquarters on Avenida dos Aliados. It can be read, in the campaign website:

“Porto’s *graffiter* Mr. Dheo, one of the most renowned in Europe, recently painted the profiles of two children on the façade of the building where Rui Moreira’s candidacy centralizes his signature collection operation.”<sup>24</sup> Just like it happened in 2013, Porto’s mayor Rui Moreira, then candidate for a new term, is once again using urban art to promote himself as a modern and creative president, supporting this young practices.

24 - In the Porto, o nosso movimento website, July 1st 2017, available at: <<https://portoourossomovimento.pt/mr-dheo-pintou-mural-no-centro-de-recolha-de-assinaturas-de-rui-moreira/>>

In addition to this headquarters mural, the Urban Art Program returns to action, painting two large walls in the city — *Continuidade*, by Mots, at Mercado Ferreira Borges and *El Gato de Cobalto*, by Liquen, at Rua das Flores. At the same time, Porto Domus Social commissions the painting of two huge walls at social housings — *Mater*, by Hazul, in Bairro do Carvalhido and *Modern Religion*, by Mr. Dheo in Bairro de Francos. In addition, a contest for the painting of the façade of the Carlos Alberto Theater was won by Martinha Maia. In the same year, the tile mural by the famous contemporary artist Joana Vasconcelos emerged on the side façade of Steak&Shake restaurant in Porto's downtown. The opening of this mural was attended by several public figures from the city, including Rui Moreira. The mayor praised the work of Joana Vasconcelos, emphasizing that “public art does not have to be exclusively financed by the City Council, it can and should also be financed by private entities”<sup>25</sup>

After Rui Moreira's reelection to the presidency, similar to the years 2015 and 2016, there is again an extreme slowdown in Porto's Urban Art Program. From 2017 to 2020, zero murals were painted under this program. Only two large murals in the city are legalized, which were initiatives of private entities: *Sonha* by Add Fuel, promoted by the Portuguese Football Federation and *Homage to Health Professionals* by Vhils, promoted by the artist himself at São João Hospital.

In December of 2020, Porto's Urban Art Program opened, once again, a contest to paint in Rua da Restauração, this time choosing a base color for the drawings and paying €500 to each of the winning artists. In 2021, the year of new municipal elections, the reactivation of the Urban Art Program is again noted, and this time in great strength. In a few months, 6 initiatives are carried out by *Ágora (formerly Porto Lazer)*<sup>26</sup>.

25 - “Maior obra pública de Joana Vasconcelos está desde ontem no Porto”, unknown author, January 24th 2017, available at: <<https://www.porto.pt/pt/noticia/maior-obra-publica-de-joana-vasconcelos-esta-desde-ontem-no-porto>>

26 - Aguadeiras, by Godmess, Juntos, by Oker, The Butterfly's Burden, by Rafi, Casa das Camélias, by Third, Water Cycle, by Padure and a mural that honors the St. John popular party painted by Mariana Malhão.

There are big changes happening to the Urban Art Program, and also *Ágora* company. The management of the program is handed over to Tiago Andrade, the Entertainment Director of *Ágora*, and the artist Hazul is invited to curate several projects. Tiago Andrade claims, in Street Art and Urban Creativity Conference in July 2021, that there are actions planned for 2021, including the creation of ‘free’ murals in the city; the establishment of a partnership with the Fine Arts Faculty of the University of Porto; and the development of urban art projects in public places and gardens. He also emphasizes that “our Urban Art Program has had a wider intervention than just the *Ágora*. Other municipal companies, such as *Águas do Porto* or even *GoPorto*, have developed projects in this area, previously articulated with us.”<sup>27</sup>

Analyzing the various urban art projects of the last decade, promoted or approved by the municipality, it is easy to see a pattern. With the former mayor (Rui Rio) all and any graffiti and street art interventions were banned and erased, while with the new mayor (Rui Moreira) it is used as a tool of political promotion. In the first year of office and in the years of municipal elections (2014, 2017 and 2021) there was a big investment in urban art activities in Porto, which slowed down in subsequent years.

Alongside the municipal investments in urban art over the years, local artists and writers continue to paint illegally, with the City Council continuing to systematically clean these paintings. As far as this ‘cleaning’ is concerned, the difference between Rui Rio and Rui Moreira, is that the former indiscriminately erased all graffiti and street art, claiming to spend thousands of euros a year on these actions; while the second stands for a selection of what should or should not be erased, according to the cleaning department's own criteria, that is, lettering is erased and character illustrations are kept. Thus, in the eyes of those who manage these practices in the city of Porto, there is a clear distinction between urban or street art and graffiti, although the people who produce them are at times the same. It is also noted that these cleaning actions are reinforced during major events in the city and that all the

27 - From Tiago Andrade's presentation at Street Art and Urban Creativity Conference in July 2021. Available in <[https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch\\_permalink&v=839450373348254](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=839450373348254)>



Illegal collective mural in Rua Miguel Bombarda, from 2015. Author's photo.

art that is critical and political is fastly erased.

It's obvious that there has been a significant evolution in the acceptance and promotion of graffiti and urban or street art by the municipality in the last decade, nevertheless there is still a long way to go in order to create a positive dialogue between artists, communities and the municipality.

#### 4. Conclusions

From this detailed timeline of initiatives and events in both cities, it becomes clear that they both address urban art and illegal graffiti differently, whether it's applying distinctive legal framing, or simply by underlining the difference in official discourse about this subject. Public communication about these practices tends to reflect this partition and this can be seen both in official statements and in newspapers or social media, which means public institutions with political power to manage access to the public space regulate and control these forms of expression to a given extent. It is also symbolically relevant that both municipalities have the same cleaning teams dealing with clogged gutters, pests' control, collecting trash and removing unauthorized graffiti and paste-ups.

The discourse produced about urban art also displays similarities as we can see it being used by both Lisbon and Porto as a strategy of promoting the cities as brands, making it a useful tool to build an image of each city as creative, young, dynamic and attract tourists and new residents belonging to the recently praised creative class<sup>28</sup>.

Despite these common aspects, there are also clear contrasts between the management of urban art between Lisbon and Porto and they can be summed up in GAUs consistent work that stands out in a positive way. In the past decade, GAU has consistently and regularly produced great walls, organized events, established fruitful partnerships and has always demonstrated being open to dialogue with different stakeholders like artists, communities and even academic institutions.

In Porto initiatives are sparser, tending to concentrate in municipal elections' years which makes the intention of public authorities feel more questionable, especially by artists and the public. Also there are fees charged monthly to keep art on a wall, much like with advertising, making it fall further from a public art program.

28 - This concept was made popular by american author Richard Florida in 2002 in his book *The Rise of the Creative Class*.

So why are these two managements so contrasting? The differences can emerge from the fact that GAU is part of the public structure of the City Council, whereas Ágora is a public-private company, but also from the fact that, politically, Lisbon has had left wing administrations and these tend to be more supportive of arts and culture, but even also because Lisbon has, historically, been more open to different communities and cultures. Or maybe all these aspects are interconnected and all contribute to explain these contrasts. As stated before, the balance between promoting, regulating, prohibiting and erasing is managed differently in each city and good practices should always be replicated but never without scrutiny of their activity. With this in mind, it will be interesting to update this preliminary work in the near future, by assessing how these plans designed for the two cities that have now been shared, will be put into practice.

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