



THE RIGHT TO THE CITY CENTRE

Urban culturalization strategies as modelers of the uses of historic city centres

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ABSTRACT

The development of a symbolic urban economy reinforces the importance of historic city centres as spaces of aesthetic and cultural consumption. Urban culturalization strategies adapt them to uses and perceptions that target specific classes of consumers, generating gentrification effects. Elaborating on a research on the Jardins Efémeros Festival in Viseu (Portugal), this article explores how its programmatic agenda and connection with local politics reconfigures the city centre by generating new balances and dissonances between the ideal of city proposed by the cultural intervention, the reframing of space for aesthetic and experiential consumption, and the local community's expectations and interests.

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1. Introduction

The notion of a culturalized city is not a new one. The production of public space, the relationships that take place in it, and the meanings attributed to it have always been mediated by culture, understood as a set of expressions used to produce meaning. The shaping of public space thus depends on the ways in which individuals and political and economic forces manipulate symbolic languages and features, alongside other traditionally economic factors, such as labour and capital (Zukin, 1995). However, it is the way in which culturalization is enacted that makes this discussion relevant. Keeping in mind that culture affects urban life in multiple ways, we refer to urban culturalization as a type of cultural presence and modulation that establishes eminently affective and sensitive relationships between individuals and public space, which becomes a site for aesthetic and experiential consumption (Reckwitz, 2017).

1.1. *Urban Culturalization Strategies in Historic City Centres*

The tendency towards an aesthetic valorization of urban space is related to more general movements found in the neoliberal schema, such as the rise of a symbolic economy (Zukin, 1995). These movements are based on the deliberate staging of urban space as a site for the consumption of the city and its symbols. This consumption is inherently aesthetic and experiential and is in line with Lipovetsky's (2017) notion of hyper consumption: the consumption of cultural goods is no longer primarily determined by the creation of personal or social difference, but by fluctuating individual criteria, and is translated into an experience that is valuable in and of itself (Lipovetsky and Serroy, 2018).

This scenario spills over into the city and public space, inevitably changing its physical and social fabric. In a context of urban competition, cities must respond to the search for authenticity. This can be based on local and idiosyncratic characteristics and values, but also on the local adaptation of globalized models of cultural development that convey the idea of authenticity. In any case, this search is usually achieved through the creation of a common visual language and an aesthetic ambience that invites conviviality, hedonism, and the sharing of new experiences in the public space.

Urban culturalization strategies play an active role in the production and consumption of space. While acknowledging that cities have always been cultural, urban culturalization refers "specifically to a reflexive stance to urban culture" (Reckwitz, 2017, p. 179) and is based on the concentric articulation of three elements: semiotization (enhancement of symbolic qualities of space), reflexive historicization (appreciation of the historical aspects of the city), and affective aestheticization (reinforcement of aesthetic ambiances in the urban space). These strategies become systematic, self-fulfilling, and self-reinforcing as creative industries are clustered in culturalized cities, as an educated middle class of workers and tourists is mobilized by the search for a cultural and aesthetic consumption of place, and as local policies respond to these demands through the local adaptation of ideals and models of urban development associated with the creative city agenda (Florida, 2005; Landry and Bianchini, 1995). As a result, urban space is styled to fit an image coveted by a particular class of consumers and investors, fostering the rise of a new "urban high culture" (Reckwitz, 2017, p. 186).

Historic city centres have become the main stage for a stylized and culturalized production and consumption of public space. These centres are put into a contradictory position within culturalization strategies. While they generally encapsulate a large part of a city's heritage and landmarks, city centres are also the most vulnerable to the effects of urban, economic, technological, and social changes (Elnokaly & Elseragy, 2013). As a result, on the one hand, they are a marginalized, deflated, and degraded space, whose importance in everyday urban life is diminishing. On the other, they are defined as repositories of a collective urban identity (Peixoto, 2003; Fortuna, 2006), wherein lies the potential for the city's distinctiveness. These views are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary: the perception of the city centre as a "disfigured space" (Ferreira, 2010, p. 46.) is the basis for its idealization as a place of memory and identity, justifying institutional efforts and investments in its revitalization. Most often, however, this idealization of the city centre refers to the reclaiming of certain attributes and abstract

concepts such as citizenship, belonging, or even the very concept of public space as a common place of discussion and civic life, that may never have existed, or at least not as they are presented in institutional speeches and urban regeneration projects (Peixoto, 2003). In this sense, the historic city centre becomes more than a place; it becomes an idea, and even an event (Nunes, 2019), often tailored to the demands and references of a class of consumers who consider the city centre as a marketplace of experiences (Peixoto, 2004). From this perspective, culturalization strategies applied to historic city centres could ultimately contribute to the marginalization of certain spaces, the privatization of others, and the exclusion of certain segments of the local population. This framework points to a pertinent and complex discussion about the right to the public space of historic city centres and its egalitarian use.

1.2. The Right to the City Centre

The concept of the right to the city is attracting growing interest everywhere, whether in academia, public policy, or even activist movements (Purcell, 2014). This inevitably leads to multiple understandings and formulations of what this right entails. In this paper, we understand it as first articulated by Lefebvre: the transformation and demand for a renewed access to urban life as a socially grounded practice (Lefebvre, 2012, pp. 108-111). At the heart of this demand are the articulated and collective interests and claims of mobilized citizens, residents, and everyday users of space, rather than those of urban planners and political and economic forces. Most views agree that it is the everyday experience of using and inhabiting urban space that gives one the right to the city (Purcell, 2014). However, the different, uneven, and sometimes contradictory forces that shape public space raise the question of whether this right is actually exercised and by whom.

The city is the way it is used (Reckwitz, 2017). The categorization of space as experience stems from a comprehensive perspective that includes meanings, perceptions, and symbolic aspects in the processes of producing space (Schmid, 2012; Uriarte, 2014). In this sense, everyday life plays a central role in qualifying, limiting and defining the meanings and uses of space. According to the Lefebvre's (1991) theory of production of space, there are three main elements to it: spatial practice, representations of space and representational space. The first element refers to the material dimensions of social interactions and networks, including the social and economic processes through which space is produced and reproduced, in conjunction with the other two elements defined by the author (Leary, 2009). Of Lefebvre's triad, spatial practice is perhaps the most tangible, corresponding to the category of "perceived space" - one can see it, feel it, manipulate it. The second element - representations of space - arises from the social practices and power relations that model and define space. It refers to a space "conceived", codified to create dominant representations and uses. Finally, representational space refers to the dimensions in which the material order resulting from the previous two elements gains meaning and symbolism. It relates to the materiality of space, but also to the ways in which inhabitants make a symbolic use of it, making it a "lived space". According to Carp (2008), representational spaces include both collective and private experiences and places, as well as the subjective and intersubjective experiences of living and using these spaces. However, the author describes it as a dominated and passively experienced space, as it is shaped by forces, networks, and struggles that "the imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39).

In this perspective, urban space consists not only of the concrete materiality that constitutes it, but it is also a concept in thought and a lived experience (Lefebvre, 2012; Schmid, 2012). The city is made by the continuous juxtaposition of all these elements and acts of negotiation that modulate space and enter a relationship (of contradiction or continuity) with the planned.

Even though Lefebvre (2012) places the everyday user of space at the centre of these acts of negotiation, urban space is still defined and subjected to a neoliberal framework that often alienates it from the social appropriations and connections necessary to exercise the right to the city. Culturalization strategies fit into this model of a neoliberal organization of the city and its experience. Dominated by an economic system that increasingly values symbolic production and consumption, urban space and its functional, social, economic, and political organization become objects of an active culturalization

(Reckwitz, 2017) that reinforces the city's role as a centre for the production and consumption of experiences and atmospheres, curated and shaped to meet the demands of a particular class of users. Indeed, these strategies can be mobilized by a wide range of actors, from policy makers to economic interest groups, to cultural agents and even civic movements. Depending on how they are mobilized, they can either provide a sense of agency to community groups or take on a normative and dominant quality. Since the city is a class phenomenon (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2008), its reorganization around the ideal of a culturally dynamic and creative city does not occur without social tensions between local communities relocated as a result of urban regeneration projects, minority groups seeking spaces for representation, and classes demanding some kind of sanitized intervention in the urban space.

According to Lefebvre (2012), the historically formed city is no longer lived, but exists only as an object of cultural and aesthetic consumption. This is particularly evident in historic city centres, where specific culturalization strategies are used to promote an aestheticized experience of space. Because of their history and heritage, these centres are an essential part of the culturally motivated urban tourism market (Vinuesa & Torralba, 2010; Duxbury and Richards, 2019). Urban culturalization strategies aim to recentralize these areas and make them attractive to visitors and tourists, whose use of space intersects with the daily routines of residents and workers. The aestheticization and festivalization of space are among the main devices used to culturalize city centres (Bennett et al., 2014). The first refers to the more general trends associated with the gentrification of historic city centres and is expressed in measures such as the rehabilitation of buildings or the aesthetic enhancement of streets and squares (Queirós et al., 2020). It stems from a discursive and strategic dimension that attributes an undeniable importance to these spaces as spaces of identity and memory. The second aspect relates to the intensifying relations between culture, city, and economy, which result, on the one hand, from the individual demands of people who interpret urban space as a place of recreation and spectacle, and, on the other, from the political and economic need to reactivate certain socio-economic dynamics by encouraging this interpretation. This manifests itself in the promotion of festivals and events that can either draw on local practises and heritage or take up global formats and trends.

Both devices promote forms of spatial organization grounded in the city centre's configuration as a place of consumption (Bennett et al., 2014), adapting it to the logics and demands they both create and respond to. However, this type of urban regeneration is not without its limitations. These devices and strategies reinforce the status of the city centre as a space for consumption and display, especially for a qualified middle class that relates to the public space through an aesthetically and symbolically based appropriation. In this sense, the culturalization of the city centre takes place through the correspondence of its forms and functions to the consumption habits of a social class that uses it in an eminently cultural way. These uses are becoming increasingly important and justify an institutionalized investment in the concentration and projection of the aesthetic values of space, in the meanings attributed to it and in its animation through cultural activities.

If the right to the city refers not only to material conquests, but also to the egalitarian use of its resources (Lefebvre, 2012), then the strategies of urban culturalization of historic city centres justify a discussion about the nature and extension of that right. At stake here is still the right to inhabit, use and appropriate space, and to have a voice about how the city is shaped, organized, and used. However, we are also talking about places that play a decisive and strategic role in defining and projecting attractive and dynamic images of city, and that are, by the means of culturalization strategies, politically and economically adapted to the criteria of an experiential, symbolic and aesthetic economy. That adaptation often overrides the original functions of space and very often results in staged configurations of its use, practices, and value. In this sense, culturalization strategies can be seen as a kind of selective or exclusionary mechanism, insofar as they are planned, operated, and directed towards a particular kind of cultural use of space, to the detriment of the daily routines, networks and social practices of a local community that often has very little or no influence on the imposing and conditioning culturalization devices. The question arises: is the culturalized planning, organization, use and appropriation of the city

centre the privilege of a cultural, political, and technical elite, or is it within the reach of the local community?

2. Design and Methodology

This paper explores the notion of the right to the city centre by analysing urban culturalization strategies aimed at the historic centre of the city of Viseu (Portugal), focusing in particular the festival *Jardins Efémeros*. The research questions how these devices affect the design of the city centre and how they are perceived by local community members, enabling or hindering their right to the city centre. We suggest that culturalization strategies and devices such as the festival have an ambivalent quality: while they represent an opportunity for a kind of spatial appropriation that escapes the logic of a neoliberal and privatized consumption of space, they also reinforce it by restricting and excluding certain practices and appropriations.

The research takes on a phenomenologically inspired approach that allows the observation of the perceptions and experiences of the community of the historic city centre in relation to the festival and other strategies of urban culturalization in Viseu. As this method deals with the ways phenomena are experienced by individuals, it provides a suitable framework for analysing the descriptions, opinions, and insights expressed by individuals, as well as for their critical reflection (Merleau-Ponty, 1999; Jopling, 1996; Manen, 2007; Getz, 2007). By questioning the way subjects perceive the festival, the meaning they ascribe to it and to the experiences it offers, as well as the way this device changes and manipulates the everyday use of space, different interpretations regarding its production logics, imaginaries, and modulations come to the surface, as well as the question of who has the right to make them, granting us access to contested notions of the right to the city centre (Bardin, 2019).

Nonetheless, we acknowledge the contingent nature of the festival and the broader culturalization strategies of which it is an integral part, as well as of the thoughts and perceptions of the local community. This recognition helps us navigate an object that is simultaneously part of the territory in which it operates, and subject to external dynamics. Similarly, while the interviewees' personal perceptions of the festival and other culturalization strategies provide a rich insight into how these processes affect their lives and routines, they also have their limitations. It is necessary to recognize that they depend on different perspectives, levels of compromise, and orders of value among those involved (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006), whose contradictions and discourses are constantly being adjusted (Callon, 1986).

The results presented are based on qualitative research whose empirical material consists of direct observation, document research (municipal plans and laws and festival catalogues), and long interviews with political actors (1), independent cultural workers (5), festival organizers and staff (5), and members of the community of residents (15) and workers (15) of the historic centre¹. Throughout the article, we use some of their testimonies to illustrate specific arguments, while more general statements are supported by the data in the accompanying figures.

2.1. *Jardins Efémeros*

The festival *Jardins Efémeros* is one of those instances where a culturalized version of space is produced and consumed, with specific consequences for the lives, routines, and networks of the everyday users of space. The multidisciplinary festival has been taking place in Viseu's Historic City Centre (HCC) since 2011, occupying the most prominent squares and streets with public art, installations, performances, and other artistic practices. This intervention stems from the aforementioned ambivalence of the HCC as a disfigured space and a treasure trove of urban development. The festival is the initiative of an

¹ The interviewees whose testimonies are quoted in the text are identified as follows: H – residents; C – local business owners; and OF – festival organizers and staff. The numbers attached to each letter refers to the numeric code attributed to each interviewee in each category.

independent cultural association (Pausa Possível) and is supported by local and state funding. Its intervention in the public space of the HCC aims at its physical and social rehabilitation through creative and perceptual modulation. In this sense, the festival is only one of the ways to culturalize the urban public space. Alongside other strategies for the aesthetic qualification of public space, such as rehabilitation projects and the liberalization of opportunities and contexts for the experiential consumption of public space, the promotion of artistic interventions, festivals, and events in the HCC turns it into a scenario and object of cultural and artistic modulations that reinforce its aesthetic and symbolic qualities and reconfigure its uses (Nunes, 2019; Januário and Guerra, 2019). This is the field of action of *Jardins Efêmeros*, which constitute a privileged lens for observing the ways in which the culturalized production of public space affects the access and the right to the city centre.

3. Discussion of Results

3.1. (Mis)Representations of Place

The HCC has been redesigned to fit into a symbolic economy. It is not just a place, but an idea, based on different interpretations of what that space is, and what it could or should be. This often results in multi-layered representations of space that can both complement and contradict each other. The public space of the city centre becomes disputed and contested, as do the meanings, values, and uses associated with it. Even the definition of *historic* city centre is itself a construct, subjected to different interpretations. The notion of a historic city centre has implications for the way in which space is regulated by the Municipality: the rhythms, configurations, uses and guidelines that orient them make this space an object and an instrument of manipulation that projects the city's image based on its most distinctive values, whether they are real or produced according to an idealized and stylized urban concept. The HCC becomes a strategic asset mobilized to fit into political and economic orientations. At the same time, this has implications for the expectations of those who view the city centre as a place for leisure and experiential consumption: its definition and branding as a historic place, where convivial and aesthetic elements contribute to a welcoming atmosphere, appeals to consumers who value and define themselves based on their culturalized practices. In this sense, the HCC is a place of consumption, conviviality, and exhibition. But the city centre is also a place of daily life and work. Its classification as historic, and all the consequences that come with it, have implications for the way everyday life is experienced. The culturalized staging of the city centre as a site of shared identity, memory, and belonging subjects it to intentions, motivations, and interventions that situate it between a staged and a lived space.

This isn't a historic centre. It's the Bairro da Sé, which is what I prefer to say. The Municipality had the intention to qualify a particular space as a historic centre, but this doesn't have the characteristics of a historic centre. This is, let's say, the oldest part of the city, isn't it? No, it's not a historic centre, but it is, in fact, an older part of town. It's a neighbourhood. And it has all the qualities of a neighbourhood (H14).

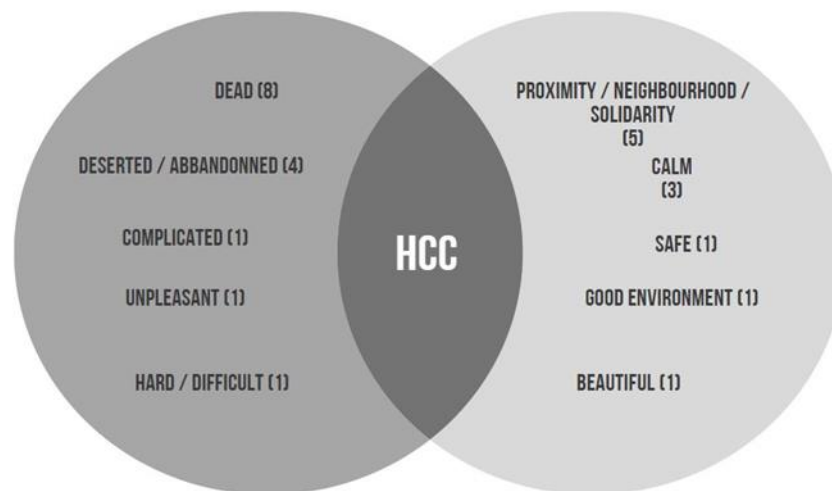
While globally the city of Viseu registers a population growth, the opposite tendency can be observed in the HCC: according to Viseu Viva, a municipal plan for the revitalization of the HCC, the area lost about 30% of its inhabitants between 2001 and 2011, the majority of whom are advanced-aged and low-income. A quarter of its buildings (628) were also found to have some degree of physical damage, requiring a sustainable rehabilitation plan that respects their original and unique qualities. In terms of the functional character of the HCC, this area has traditionally been designated for commercial activities. However, they have been gradually reduced in their established form and transformed by the presence of new businesses and commercial concepts. Although there are still traditional shops, there is an increase in the number of hostels, restaurants and bars, as well as souvenir shops. Evidently, there is a tendency to renovate and adapt the HCC to an aesthetic and culturalized consumption, not only by public policy, but also by private investment and cultural agents.

At the institutional level, some examples include expanding the boundaries that delineate the urban redevelopment area, establishing an urban regeneration corporation, providing financial assistance for

rehabilitation projects, and providing tax incentives for new tenants. The HCC is also a place for investment, particularly in the urban redevelopment and hospitality sectors. Private investors are taking advantage of the financial and tax benefits to redevelop derelict buildings and repurpose them as hostels and local accommodation for visitors and students. The cultural and social qualities of HCC's streets and squares also make it a place for a vibrant nightlife, culminating in an expansion of such businesses. These qualities are also exploited and reinforced by the cultural revitalization of the HCC, which stems both from specific and institutionalized plans of local government, and from the initiative of local cultural and artistic associations and collectives. Although their actions are oriented by different guidelines, both actors consider the HCC as a stage for the promotion and projection of a dynamic and diverse image of the city and of themselves, promoting its culturalized experience.

The imaginary of the HCC thus constructed presents itself as essentially inconsistent, oscillating between the recognition of the city centre as a place of identity, memory and social vitality, and its notion as a forgotten and deflated space. This ambivalence finds resonance in the views of members of the local community. While the HCC is seen as the ex-libris or heart of the city, everyday life in the HCC is characterized by different, and sometimes contradictory qualities, that coexist in the perception of daily users (see Figure 1). The positive qualities mentioned by HCC workers and residents derive from an affective sense of belonging and ownership, rooted in everyday practices and relationships. The negative qualities refer to the changing economic trends that are leading to a transformation of the social fabric of the HCC.

Figure 1. Residents' and workers' perceptions of the HCC. Everyday users of the public space of the HCC show a multidimensional and contradictory perception of life in the city centre.



Source: interviews with residents and workers of the HCC, conducted by the author between 2019 and 2020.

Culturalization strategies play a central role in these attributions. As they intervene in the ways space is conceived, perceived, and lived, they affect the experiences that take place within it and the meanings attributed to them. Devices such as *Jardins Efémeros* strategically mobilize notions of memory, identity, and tradition, but also of modernization and adaptation to a renewed symbolic culture of consumption that generates ambiguity and negotiations. These can take into account, but not necessarily prioritize, the needs and demands of everyday users. For example, the financial instruments and tax breaks earmarked for the rehabilitation of buildings in the HCC are mostly taken up by private investors seeking to capitalize on the rental and hospitality market, and not necessarily by the older and low-income residents who ultimately need them, as the following statements show:

These houses are full of people, but they don't know us. They're students and they're... These houses that they now rehabilitate for local lodgings. (...) They're all people who come, leave... They come for a weekend, but then they go away. (...) There was a man who was buying all of these houses... He bought one in that corner, he bought this one here... He wanted mine, but I said no (H9).

There's nothing romantic about living here, I must say, despite what others may think. It's an area that is being explored in ways that aren't usual, like housing students in places that have no sound insulation. (...) There's a type of renting that is not properly regulated for. Weekends are a bit loud, especially late at night (H10).

These [financial] incentives are good. (...) Now, it's important to know to whom and what these houses are destined for! (...) Because less people come live here because the houses being rehabilitated are meant for short-term renting (H14).

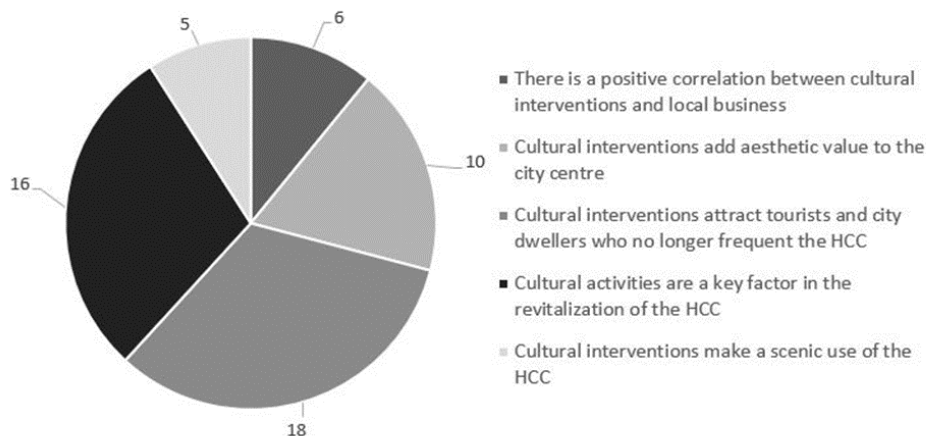
In the historic centre, right now, there's an average of hostels that we estimate between 10 and 12 local lodgings and hostels, which didn't exist about two years ago (C12).

In this sense, culturalization strategies aimed at aesthetically enhancing Viseu's city centre can be excluding and contribute to the ongoing gentrification trends observed in most European cities. While the city centre still has certain characteristics of proximity and solidarity normally associated with a "neighbourhood", it now exhibits a new set of dynamics in terms of the organization of space and everyday life. At the intersection between the daily routines of residents and workers who have used the space for decades, the circuits of those who seek a dimension of pleasure and enjoyment in the experiences offered by the HCC, and the municipal plans for the city centre, there is a clear distance between the interests of the latter and the experiences and needs of the people interviewed.

3.2. Jardins Efémeros as a Culturalization Device

In light of this discussion, urban culturalization strategies aimed at revitalising and recentralizing the HCC, especially those involving its festivalization, are not uniformly viewed as positive by local community members (see Figure 2). Regarding the relationship between cultural interventions and the public space of the city centre, most respondents value it on a functional basis, noting a positive correlation between the presence of cultural activities and interventions and the revitalising of a forgotten but central place in the city. However, these interventions are criticized for their scenic use of the HCC and their pure entertainment quality (5 cases).

Figure 2. Residents' and workers' perceptions of the cultural interventions in the HCC. Residents and workers of the HCC have scattered responses to the presence of cultural interventions in the HCC. The numbers shown refer to the number of respondents who share the mentioned opinions.

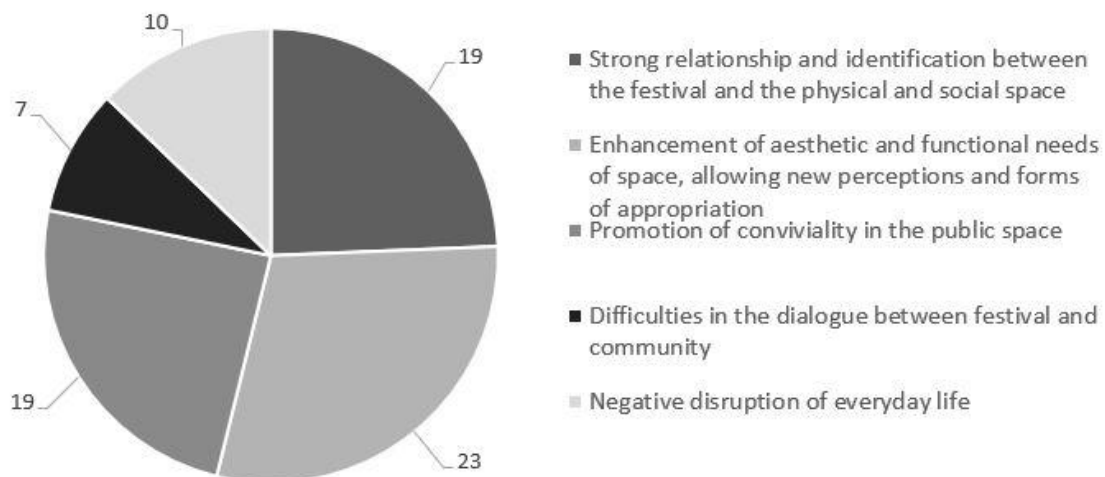


Source: interviews with residents and workers of the HCC, conducted by the author between 2019 and 2020.

Because the production and commercialization of the city, its spaces, and its heritage are usually based on the projection of a historically rich and culturally dynamic city centre, it is often the case that these strategies use the HCC merely as scenery. Here, social life and the practices that its culturalized production enables take place against the backdrop of everyday life and routines with which the curated image of the HCC does not seem to correspond. Culturalization strategies which aim to socially and culturally reinvigorate the city centre may ultimately have the opposite effect and lead to the further social deflation of the city centre. Incidentally, respondents also criticize the focus of these interventions on nightlife hotspots, such as D. Duarte Square, neglecting less central streets (5).

Individuals' perceptions of the specific case of *Jardins Efémeros* are evenly spread, fluctuating between positive and negative aspects that often contradict each other (see Figure 3). At the same time, the festival is described as establishing a solid and mutually beneficial relationship with the social and physical space of the HCC (19), and as disrupting everyday practices and routines in a detrimental way (10).

Figure 3. Residents' and workers' perceptions of the *Jardins Efémeros* festival. Residents and workers of the HCC show ambivalent insights regarding *Jardins Efémeros* and its relation to the HCC. The numbers shown refer to the number of respondents who share the mentioned opinions.



Source: interviews with residents and workers of the HCC, conducted by the author between 2019 and 2020.

Jardins Efémeros was born out of a perceived need to revitalize the social life of the city centre. As explained by the organizers of the festival,

The city was losing some relation of sociability with the population, and some pride on our buildings and our way of life was getting lost. I thought it would be nice to make a garden that would occupy all of D. Duarte Square and transform it into a living room, capable of sheltering other activities and as a means for sociability. My interest was to resume the sociability of our population through the arts. It was never an end, but a means. (OF1).

Since its beginning, the festival has sought to stimulate a perceptive transformation of the HCC, capable of generating a conviviality that counteracts the difficulty of its free and public appropriation, hindered by the increasing privatization of space consumption. In pursuing this goal, however, the action of the festival can reproduce the same dynamics that suppress the fulfilment of the right to the city centre. An example of this is the conditioning of spatial appropriation through the festival's interventions, which alter the daily routines in the HCC. One of the most important moments of the festival is the intervention in D.

Duarte Square, where space is transformed to house a "garden" that serves as a stage for other cultural activities. The site-specific structures that occupy this square for a week are a response to the perceived lack of street furniture in a square mainly dedicated to traffic and occupied by the terraces of bars and restaurants: "In Viseu there is very little space that can be inhabited or lived in at zero cost. When we go to D. Duarte Square, there isn't a place to sit except the cafés" (OF1); "We lack places here to sit except the terrace of the café, without being forced to consume" (H1). The intervention of the festival enables the free and public appropriation and experience of space by everyone. However, it also establishes practices and routines that now need to be negotiated. Residents, especially the elderly, point to the difficulties of accessing their homes due to the presence of the structure and restricted traffic, as do workers who must adjust to new schedules for loading and unloading.

At the same time, the interventions establish a continuity with privatized forms of space use. The platforms and furniture placed by *Jardins Efémeros* in places like D. Duarte and Pintor Gata Squares (See Figure 4), while intended to promote a free experience of space, ultimately reinforce the same kind of appropriation and consumption that takes place in cafés. This reinforcement also manifests itself as the undesirable residues of culturalization strategies that generate resident complaints. These include excessive noise during quiet hours, an increase in night-time activities and consumption, and the presence of an unknown and unpredictable crowd in the city centre that can destabilize the neighbourhood: "I know people here who go away to their villages because of the noise" (H4).

Figure 4. Artistic interventions in D. Duarte and Pintor Gata squares. While the artistic interventions can be used as platform for free and public appropriation of space, they can also mimic the types of consumption made in cafés, contributing to its privatization.



Source: direct observation of the festival *Jardins Efémeros* in July of 2018. Photos by the author.

In its entirety, like other culturalization strategies and devices, *Jardins Efémeros* imposes a specific view of the city centre that tends to oversimplify the nature of the community, its needs and demands. Often having a purely entertainment character and rarely involving the local community in their design, the culturally oriented events in the HCC are seen by respondents as using their everyday space as a backdrop, transforming it into a playground for a more volatile group of people who come to the HCC looking for a place to enjoy themselves. The relative increase in dynamism, while temporarily beneficial for some commercial activities in the HCC, does not necessarily fully meet the needs of the social fabric of the city centre. Furthermore, it could be argued that the sole responsibility for regenerating and revitalising decentralized and forgotten spaces in the city may be too much for cultural festivals and events.

It's not just about throwing events, and the inhabitants and workers of the historic centre welcome them. We're not here anxiously waiting to be given things. What we want is to be involved and see something that results in continuity. Because those who come only one time will go away, and the ones who are here, who live here, those are the ones who need to be taken care of, cherished, and heard. (H10)

However, compared to other cultural interventions in the HCC, the festival is perceived differently because of the efforts made to involve residents and workers in the programme. This involvement is not only the result of formal calls to action from the local community. It is also based on the relationships built between the festival organization and the local community on the one hand, and on a perceived uninterrupted and reflexive dialogue between space, community, and artistic interventions on the other. One gets the impression that despite less positive reactions, *Jardins Efémeros* is careful not to violate the space or the community by using them only as a backdrop: "Because we are here every day, we have a relationship with these people. It's a trusting relationship that's not about aggression or using these people as puppets, but about dialogue, about rehabilitation from within" (OF1).

3.3. Culturalization as Involvement

Clearly, there is an obvious need and willingness on the part of the local community to participate in the festival's programme. Because of its proximity, longevity, and longstanding presence in the HCC, the festival's organization has built lasting relationships of trust, respect, and understanding with certain members of the local community of residents and workers. It is this quality that sets *Jardins Efémeros* apart from other cultural interventions and events at HCC: as some of the interviewees refer, unlike other cultural events that are seen as mere "parties" (C12) by the local community, the work of the festival is "carried out with the logic of a cultural, artistic, educational intervention" (H4). For this reason, "there's a greater willingness to accept [changes in everyday life] because they are integrated in that sense" (H2).

The established proximity allows for a sense of agency to be built and creates an open space for local community members to raise questions and voice misunderstandings, opinions, and suggestions. It is common for local workers to make their business premises available for artistic interventions, for residents to help and participate in programme activities, and for both to contribute their opinions and suggestions, or even propose their own interventions.

[*Jardins Efémeros* are] the only activity in Viseu that speaks with everyone: the residents, the commercial workers. One of the main characteristics of *Jardins* is the involvement of the people from Viseu in the *Jardins*. They're made for us, basically. (H1)

They ask us to actively participate. They propose to us that anything we want to present, if we want to use our space, if we want to present activities within *Jardins*, we just have to present those proposals and, because of that, we are part of it" (H2).

The rapport and proximity between festival and community make it a stage for the expression and demonstration of the latter's needs, visions, and aspirations for their lived space, constituting a platform for the exercise of the right to the city. While not all spatial needs are met and most interventions are aimed at a versed audience, individuals use the festival as an excuse to express their own ideas of what the city centre is and how it should be used and organized. Although the festival prescribes a conceived notion of the city centre that is closely linked to stylized, aestheticized and often exclusionary forms of production and consumption of space, it is also the occasion and outcome of an active and ongoing process of appropriation, discussion, and use of the city and its public space. The city centre conceived through the festival programme leads to debates on a set of ideals and values for the community and the ways of seeing and living the urban space. In this way, it promotes a kind of collective awareness of its social and physical needs and stimulates discussions directly linked to the ideas of belonging, responsibility, and citizenship.

4. Conclusion

The right to the city centre manifests itself as a continuous process, combining engagement in and resistance to strategies of urban culturalization. However, the extent to which this right is actually exercised is still up for debate. The renewed appropriation, experience, and access to the public space of the city centre is inevitably conditioned by a culturalized notion of space linked to neoliberal tendencies that define it as a place of consumption, and with which the festival *Jardins Éphémères* is inextricably linked, even as it attempts to resist them.

Indeed, the artistic interventions that the festival proposes have an ambiguous quality. The festival programme aims to revitalize the HCC in a sustainable and non-invasive way, which is ensured through an ongoing dialogue with the local community. However, as part of the culturalization strategies directed at the HCC, they reinforce some of their inherently exclusionary logics. By adhering to and promoting the aestheticized and spectacularized staging of public space, they transform it into a commodity, rather than a common good, adapted to the consumption of urban upper and middle classes. This is met with resistance from the local community, who want their lived experiences to be recognized as determining in the ways the city centre is shaped by public policy and economic trends.

In this scenario, the right to the city centre is manifested in two ways. First, through participatory engagement: the same community that rejects the excessive and imposed festivalization of the HCC gains a measure of participatory power and agency through the festival's interventions. Interestingly, the local community does not seem to be bothered by the negative effects that the increasing culturalization of the HCC brings, as long as they see something of themselves in it. Secondly, through discussion: by intervening in the ways everyday space is lived, organized and signified, these interventions become a platform for debate and dialogue, highlighting the ongoing struggle and process that constitutes the right to the city centre. The renewed access to public space and the exercise of the right to the city centre granted by the festival's intervention ultimately materialize in the disputes manifested in the discourses of the interviewees. These reflect the constantly changing socio-spatial relations, as well as their ambivalent attitude towards the increasingly culturalized conception and use of space.

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