

Urban Nomads, an urban interventions' manual >

> developed through the study of how migrant communities appropriate public spaces in Lisbon in parallel with their countries of origin (provisional title)

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'Practical experience shows that there can be growth without qualitative development. (...) the development of society can only be conceived in urban life, by the realization of urban society.'

Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*

Problematic to be researched (summary)

'Urban Nomads, an urban interventions' manual' is a theoretical and practical thesis that intends to help defeating cultural boundaries and promote the social insertion of immigrant communities.

Lisbon has attracted migrants over the past decades (Falcão, 2002) from which a high percentage represents an employment target (Castro, 2008). Given the way the city's social infrastructure is designed it accommodates insufficient facilities for the social integration of these newcomers leading to social segregation (Malheiros, 2007).

Through a thorough investigation on the subject of the role of participatory and social art and architecture in urban spaces, a document with many different layers and formats will emerge. Four neighbourhoods in Lisbon will work as stages for public art/architectural interventions that will connect local people with current immigrants communities. They should be perceived as catalysts for change (muf, 2008) through the participatory appropriation of the city as a space that can contribute to the growth of a country and the emancipation of the individual within a community (Blundell Jones, 2005).

Thematic approach

The broad nature of the research subject requires an investigative methodology that will encompass a series of complementary themes leading to the gathering of the necessary information to create a Manual/Series of Tools that can be applied to similar scenarios in different cities and possibly different countries.

1. Immigration > Segregation

Though cities should be welcoming environments for immigrant communities where *'(...), a good city neighbourhood can absorb newcomers into itself, both newcomers by choice and immigrants settling by expediency, and it can protect a reasonable amount of transient population too.'* (Jacobs, 1993), reality is often less amicable. In some of Lisbon's neighbourhoods where co-habitation between locals and newcomers happens, social tensions tend to arise (Malheiros, 2007). *'(...) these ethnically cohesive communities are not always naturally cohesive as they may look to outsiders.'* (Jacobs, 1993). Through urban design one can build a link with a political diagonal (AAA, Petrescu, 2007) leading to a reduction of socio-political tensions.

2. The practice of everyday life: understanding of the city and its people > Observation

The Situationists, the most remarkable collective that analyzed the city from a social perspective, *"(...)were naturally inclined towards the goals of social geography, which opposed academic geography's reduction of the city to 'the undifferentiated state of the visible-readable realm' (...) and "Drift had to alert people to their imprisonment by routine."* (Sadler, 1999). They developed new mapping and observation techniques where the everyday life was the subject of analysis. The understanding and observation of routines, paths, social networks (Chora, 2001) is crucial for the development of responsive design.

3. Art, architecture, urban planning and participation > Inclusion

Although art and architecture are complementary disciplines, they tend to fulfil different roles, if the first does not have to carry a pragmatic layer, the latter is associated with function and purpose. In public projects though, *'(...), art is expected to take on 'functions' in the way that architecture does, for example to alleviate problems (...) or to be accessible to diverse audiences and groups of users. (...) It might be best called critical spatial practice.'* (Rendell, 2006). The role of art becomes closer to the one of architecture and, together, when layered by a social agenda, they can perform an essential role for the development of urban planning as, at the moment *'(...) the planning processes are multilayered, with community-led action still at the bottom – there is a perception that it will not be visionary.'* (Blundell Jones, Chiles, 2005).

4. Temporary Urban interventions > Mergence

According to Office of Subversive Architecture *"Public reaction to this project and other interventions of its kind has been overwhelming. Through a simple, low budget and temporary action on a specific site such projects capture the imagination and raise awareness and debate around the spaces that we often pass by without so much as a glance."* These are the tools that merge art, architecture and urban planning where different urban scales can come together with the view of directly reaching communities to merge social and spatial phenomena through successful and informative results.

Detailed proposal

A preliminary investigation on a broader version of the theme was started with my Masters' thesis, *'tempo...'* driven by the problematic *How can temporary or small scale urban interventions inform the paths of master planning? How do we reverse design scales and grow from small to large?* The aim now is to build up on the theme by narrowing down the research field.

The research will focus on four immigrant communities that live/work in Lisbon. Amadora (Cabo Verdean community); Bela-Vista (Brazilian community); Pontinha (Ukrainian community) and Martim Moniz (Chinese community merges with the prominent Indian and Pakistani communities) are the chosen neighbourhoods. In parallel, live research/interventions will happen in the countries of origin of those communities to identify strong connection points that can create a bridge between their home countries and Lisbon.

A sociological and anthropological approach that supports an architectural urban analysis will inform the research on

- > *Can small scale art/architecture/urban interventions developed for and with the participation of immigrant and local people lead to the reduction of socio-cultural clashes and to a better integration of these foreign communities?*
- > *How, as designers and through the understanding of the existing, can we transform a temporary intervention into a permanent urban asset?*
- > *Could these interventions, when developed through participation, have an impact in the reduction of criminality and lead to a better understanding and acceptance of these urban nomads by the local people?*
- > *Could public funded cultural organisations and local authorities contribute to social integration of migrant communities in the city by incorporating cultural projects with a social agenda developed with local people and not just for an educated elite?*

2. Analytical axis

2.1 An understanding of the particularities of the four chosen urban contexts, and their points of origin, through live observation and factual documentation

Not knowing how to see (Percec, 1974) is often the basis of defective design strategies that do not respond to human needs. Having a social and spatial awareness of specific contexts is crucial to the development of a responsive design. A meticulous visual documentation will allow an understanding of the differences between the uses of public spaces in Lisbon and the way in which they may differ in the countries where the target migrant people come from. The analytical observation of the everyday routines of these people, an understanding of emotional tensions that lead to segregation, language barriers, conflict of habits, homesickness, will link to the following research stage.

2.2 Testimonies: existing case studies

International art/architecture practices as muf (UK), fluid (UK), coloco (FR), east (UK), atelier d'architecture autogérée (FR), EXYZt (FR/UK), public works (UK), vazio s/a (BR), urban pioneers (DE), atelier bow wow (JP), support structures (UK), osservatorio nomade (IT), map-office (HK), are some examples of urban researchers developing theoretical analysis in parallel with live participatory projects. The share of their knowledge and experience is most valuable for the success of the work methodology and the development of the urban interventions. Through visually documented visits to some of the projects by them designed, and publishable interviews to the designers and users of those spaces, relevant information will be gathered and should complement the material of the thesis.

2.3 Development of socio-spatial links: fieldwork

Community centres from the communities on focus have been identified. Their role is to facilitate the insertion of their compatriots in the host city. The activities on offer are mostly aimed at a regular group of people that exclude the native local residents. Key stakeholders will

help establishing a direct link/network with the research countries. It is crucial to develop the fieldwork with people who are keen to be involved (muf, 2009), and will act as mediators between the artist/architects and the established community.

To create a bridge between the co-existent cultures small projects/workshops /interviews/documentaries and photographic records will be organised to help identifying the local specific needs and get people involved as active participants allowing an understanding of the specific social/urban problems in those areas of Lisbon.

2.4 Collaborative construction: experimental work/urban interventions

The fieldwork results will provide the raw material for small scale urban interventions. Those should be perceived as systems that surprise and invite the users to claim ownership and adopt a participative role in the design and maintenance of those object/spaces.

These interventions aim to complement great masterplanning schemes where the users aren't normally consulted. They will make up for design flaws that could not have been avoided simply by an analytical approach to design (Rendell, muf 2006). They will respond to real social needs, rather than speculative or programmatic schemes and are the starting point for the collection of live experiments that I endeavour to pursue in the countries where I will intervene with urban work that will enhance the way public spaces are shared between different cultures through an understanding of the particularities of each nation.

All live projects follow a similar structure:

- 1) Theoretical and historical research learnt through written documentation;
- 2) Live research and documentation on the topic;
- 3) Involvement of professionals from different fields (collaborators);
- 4) Take place in urban grounds, mainly for local people;
- 5) Workshops with the users as the design develops and during the construction stages so that the design can respond to their needs;
- 6) Reflective and experimental design stages;
- 7) Collection of re-useable/derelict materials to be adapted and incorporated in the design;
- 8) Pro-active construction with children, local people and volunteers of temporary playful and didactic public interventions;
- 9) The result would have allowed architecture, art and design to merge. Each project can have a very different character, whilst still forming part of the same chain of thought from the remaining projects;
- 10) Maintenance will be done by locals;
- 11) Each project should fund the forthcoming one.

2.5 Process analysis

There will be a collaborative feedback process (similarly to what should happen during RIBA's work stage Stage M of any architecture project) between designers and users that will help enhancing the design and the methodology used in sequential project. It will inform the impact of these interventions in the social dynamics of the city's public spaces and the way in which they are being used.

3. Methodology medium

All work will be developed using the following medium as appropriate at each stage:

- > mapping
- > photography /film
- > interviews
- > workshops and outdoors exhibitions
- > live design projects
- > publications based on the developed work

Aims & Conclusions

1. Main aims

The final aim is to create an Urban Interventions Manual gathered through the compilation of theoretical and live research and that can pertinently be used in similar urban contexts where a social and cultural clash between the host residents and the immigrant communities is felt.

As a conclusion, the research should prove that these type of interventions (Art/Architecture temporary operations), that result from a full understanding of the different cultural contexts, in opposition to cultural/architectural intruders; are built up through the collaboration between local people and designers/artists, in this case specific to Lisbon, have a positive impact on the development of cities. Socially active and role players in the way urban fabrics are structured, they are the opposite of the analytical approach to masterplanning as they reflect the need for a pro-active involvement of the existing and new local dwellers.

2. Specific aims

Through the methodology drafted I intend to contribute to the:

- > socio-cultural integration of migrant communities in an active and participative way, in order to enhance the way public spaces are used through the design and making process of the urban interventions,
- > improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the target people in order to decrease criminality and violence levels through the projects developed throughout the live research,
- > accessibility and inclusion of art and architecture within local communities, as a means of creating social links,
- > awareness of the city (Lisbon, in this case) as a shared space, a social playground full of opportunities for socio-cultural bounds,
- > share of knowledge about one's surrounding territories, cultural context and local communities,
- > promotion of a layered design process that emphasizes the importance of consultation and participation as a tool to create better design strategies that respond to the real needs of existing communities.

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