



The regeneration of Mouraria.

An innovative systemic, strategic and participatory approach to the co-working of urban space

Alessandra Milito

*Dipartimento di Ingegneria Civile e Ambientale,
Università degli Studi di Perugia*

alexmilito1997@libero.it

ABSTRACT

Between 2011 and 2014, a process of urban and social regeneration took place in the historic neighborhood of Mouraria in Lisbon. This initiative embraced an interdisciplinary, systemic, participatory, and experimental approach. The regenerative process was guided by strategic choices, such as the centrality of public space, the integration of physical and social dimensions, and the involvement of local communities. Through a widespread, bottom-up, and place-based action, developed upon a few clear and simple strategic lines, extensive results were achieved. This approach overturned the intervention paradigm on existing structures, combining municipal and local interests and including residents in the co-elaboration of the urban and social space. This article aims to provide an overview by examining population engagement strategies, the key actors through which various forms of participation were activated, the new roles adopted by planning and architecture, and the possibilities for preserving sociocultural heritage in urban regeneration.

Keywords: Urban regeneration, innovative approach, public space, participation.

Thematic clusters: 1. City and project. **Topic 3:** Urban design and public space.

Introduction

The process of urban and social regeneration that took place in the historic neighborhood of Mouraria in Lisbon between 2011 and 2014 targeted an area characterized by poverty, vulnerability, and stigmatization, which had previously been subject to ineffective urban policies. This experience unfolded through innovative approaches and visions that implied the reconfiguration of relations between the administration and the population, the strategically re-hierarchization of intervention priorities and the broadening of the spheres of action for all the stakeholders involved.

This process follows the guidelines of the Carta Estratégica de Lisboa 2010-2024, thus strategies and interventions have an integrated character, cover different fields of action and intersect different approaches in order to link territorial regeneration with social and cultural measures, while promoting the local economy. Beyond physical interventions, the goal is to stimulate changes across a diverse spectrum, fostering transformation in lifestyles and the neighborhood's image, where urban public space and culture act as driving forces. This approach seeks to combine requalification and revitalization, reintegrating Mouraria into the dynamics of the city through a decentralized and democratized urban process, that involves the participation of the local population based on essential guidelines set by the municipal administration.

According to a progressive vision, the objectives of the process are articulated in a short-term component, which intervenes in urgent issues and gives credibility to the municipal intentions, and a long-term component, of a more strategic nature, aimed at ensuring the durability of the regeneration outcomes over time (Magalhães, 2008).

Given the deep economic crisis faced by Portugal during the neighborhood's regeneration, the Câmara aims to limit the resources invested and instead create tools and conditions to stimulate private investments. This represents a profound shift in strategy, with the Câmara primarily focusing on regenerating public spaces, creating safety conditions, and streamlining bureaucratic procedures. To achieve this without the guarantee of financial resources, the Câmara provides itself a library of short and medium-term projects that allow for the evaluation of all possibilities and the beginning of actions even with a very limited budget (Masbounji, 2013).

The planned interventions are developed both in the physical and in the socio-economic plan, as these domains influence each other and overlap in reality. As highlighted by Ferri (2012), this complementary approach is evident in the guiding plans of the process: the QREN Mouraria, which aims at redeveloping public spaces, restoring buildings of historical and cultural interest, and establishing a territorial framework to support the tourism process through predominantly physical interventions, and the PDCM, which integrates the QREN by implementing social action projects. The QREN contemplates interventions from external entities to the district, primarily following a top-down logic with the objective of territorial promotion to attract investments and tourism. The PDCM, on the other hand, is structured internally within the neighbourhood and acts from within through training, qualification and social promotion of the area. The strategies and policies of one plan correspond to those of the other, in continuous feedback that makes each vision correspond to a counter-vision. This allows the creation of a planning discourse between the administration and the population, which contributes to the definition of intervention priorities by mediating between what is perceived as most urgent by the inhabitants and the short-term objectives of the Câmara. The plans then, with different modalities and purposes, converge at the moment of action.

Accompanying these plans are implementation tools such as the Orçamento Participativo and the BIP-ZIP program, which serve as mechanisms for the dissemination and voting of urban intervention proposals by the population.



Fig.1 Manifesto for voting on a proposal in the 2015 Orçamento Participativo. Source: (2015) Lisboa (Lisbon), 15, 49.

1. The centrality of the public space

Of primary importance in the regeneration process is urban intervention on public space, both in terms of its physical aspects and its forms of use and appropriation, through the reworking and attribution of images and meanings.

The physical rehabilitation of the territory, including the construction of new buildings and facilities, as well as improved accessibility and freedom of movement within and around the neighborhood, stimulates new modes of utilization by residents and external visitors.

From the beginning of the process, the boundaries of the neighbourhood are redefined with the symbolic and socio-spatial intention of breaking down the barriers that 'confine' Mouraria and lead to its closure.

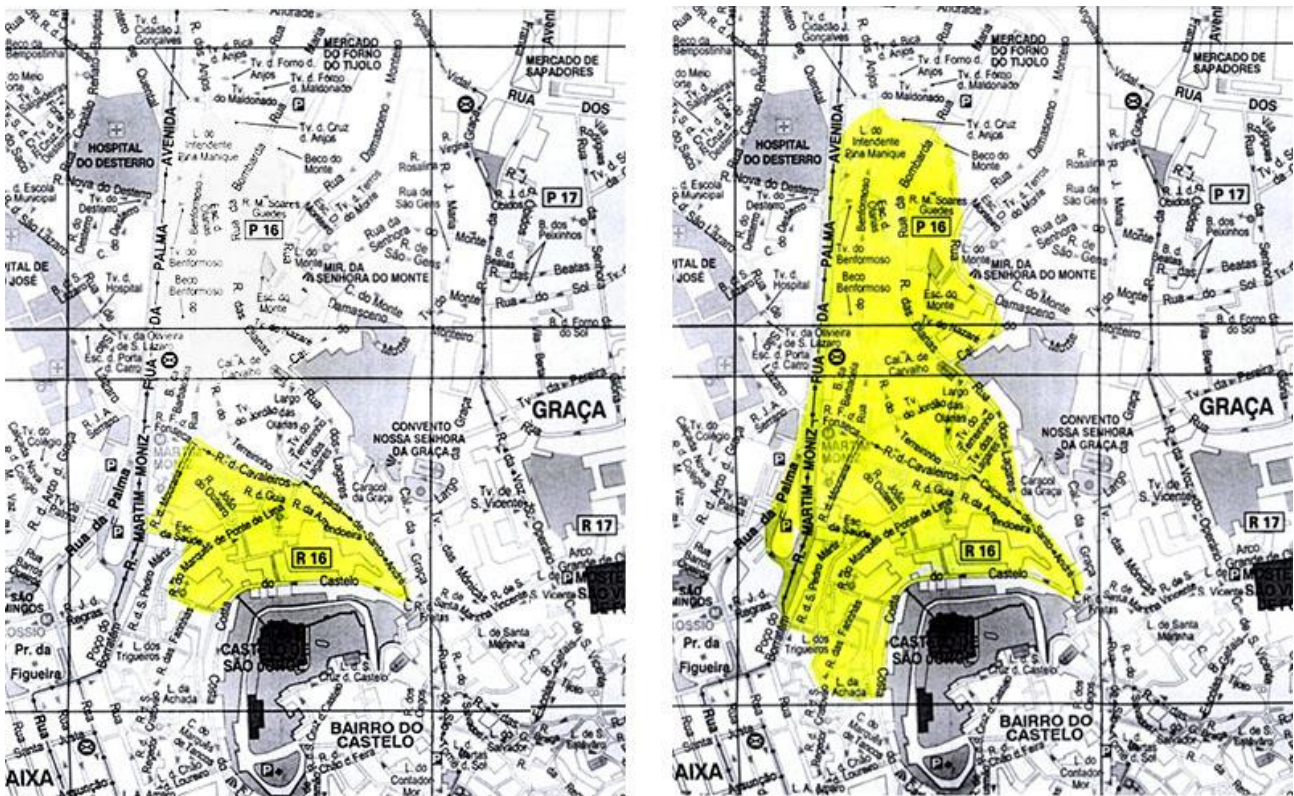


Fig.2 The territory identified as Mouraria, before and after the regenerative process. Source: MENEZES, M. & PEREIRA, A. (2013). *Avaliar programas de desenvolvimento comunitário. Lisboa* 4-5

As highlighted by Tulumello (2016), the objective is to overcome the social segregation and isolation, resulting from the compact and introverted urban configuration of the neighborhood, through incorporation and intervention in the border areas. The intention is to reconnect the neighborhood with the city not only physically, but also by adopting identity and symbolic themes that transport the tradition of Mouraria into a space that goes beyond the original one and is more visible, more accessible and more connected to urban dynamics. In addition, for the acquired inhabitants, being able to recognize and participate in cultural elements and dynamics that are increasingly appreciated and valorized instills a sense of pride and belonging that helps overcome the historical stigma associated with the neighborhood.

In this context, it is possible to place an example of strategic action implemented by the municipal administration, namely the relocation of the mayor's office and the commencement of the regeneration process in Largo do Intendente. This symbolic act signifies unity of the new defined area, as the Largo becomes a symbol of the neighborhood's regeneration, even though it was not originally part of it. Moreover, this action attracts significant attention to an area that was previously feared and unknown to the rest of the city, influencing the presence of trafficking and illicit activities and stimulating the interest of local residents, restoring their trust in a tangible and active administration. The timely redevelopment of public spaces further reinforces this perception, serving as another strategic action that encourages private investments in the revitalization of surrounding buildings. It is then a tangible and visible demonstration of the transformation process affecting the neighbourhood, lending credibility to the municipality's work. Camara's change of approach is thus manifest: the citizen is rediscovered as a resource, to be heard and empowered rather than controlled, and so receives new possibilities and new dignity. This changes the role of planning, which is no longer a rigid tool to define the sequence and every other aspect of the interventions to be carried out, but rather a framework around which the discourse of regeneration is articulated together with the population, supported by intermediary actors.



Fig.3 Largo do Intendente, a public space that has become iconic following its regeneration. Own photo.

As argued by Ferri (2012), the visibility of the regeneration project's progress, and the consequent credibility and trust towards the public administration are essential elements for the involvement and participation of the residents. To achieve this visibility, the Câmara, in addition to intervening mainly on public space, focusing public resources on spaces that would otherwise have no other funding possibilities, carries out a multitude of small-scale bottom-up interventions. These small interventions have the advantage of being more flexible, more adaptable to a hyperlocal reality that requires less effort to reach a common agreement, being easier to control and posing lower economic risks. They are dispersed throughout the concerned territory, exploiting the porous nature of the original urban fabric. They act as strategic hotspots for the representation and construction of a collective identity (Mendes, Padilla & Azevedo, 2016), connected by a reticular, highly permeable, meaningful, and recognizable public space.

Moreover, these types of interventions have the capacity to act as catalysts for the emergence of similar initiatives, private and community-driven, further multiplying the impacts on both the visibility and active participation of local actors, achieving through a multitude of small changes a large-scale transformation. The construction of spaces is no longer seen as a definitive technical solution to the territory's problems but rather as an initial push for a process that will unfold in both physical and community dimensions and that has value and importance in relation to the effects it generates on the residents' lives. In fact, the main result of these interventions is the creation of prerequisites for the development of other projects, both material and immaterial, aimed at the common goal of improving the territory in the most diverse fields. There is a pursuit of continuity in the development of capacities and the strengthening of the community: the regenerated space becomes itself the 'regenerating pole' of the neighbourhood.

The development of these interventions in public space materializes the actions of associations that promote activities aimed at making the intervention areas, as well as the neighborhood in general, more frequented. Together with the population, the social space is transformed, creating new connections between places and

people. This implies a stimulation of new behaviors within public space, achieved through informing and empowering residents and through the reappropriation of territories: those who generate this new space will naturally tend to take better care of it. Furthermore, by increasing well-being and the use of public space, civil security within the neighborhood is promoted, without resorting to repressive and control strategies.

Finally, through the redevelopment and characterization of public space, along with cultural activities that take place within it, a renewed and attractive image of the neighborhood is built up: the historical and traditional context is complemented by an experimental and cosmopolitan character, a combination of extreme interest in city-branding. The newfound visibility within the urban context serves to attract tourism, investments, and new residents, supporting regeneration operations and diversifying the economic and social fabric (Moya Pellitero, 2015).

2. The forms of involvement and participation activated

In the case of the regeneration of Mouraria, the participation of the population is a fundamental strategy that allows the transformation of the neighbourhood at an intimate and profound level. This strategy enables:

- Building new connections among residents and a profoundly changed territory;
- Generating internal communication and support networks within the neighborhood, as well as connections with external entities and the public administration.
- Sharing responsibilities and costs of the regeneration project between residents and the municipality;
- Mobilizing human capital that could not solely rely on the municipality;
- Acquiring the widespread knowledge of the neighbourhood's inhabitants;
- Prioritizing interventions according to local perception;
- Discovering and implementing innovative and specific solutions to the neighborhood's issues;
- Avoiding the dispersal and replacement of the communities residing there, thereby preserving their character;
- Making the resident population responsible in the use and management practices of public spaces and ensuring long-term active engagement, providing continuity to the regenerative process.

This participatory process is based on relationships within a basic triad, consisting of:

- the “diffuse knowledge” of the population, often intermediated by associations or local key figures;
- the “expert knowledge” of the technicians who support the inhabitants in project development;
- the “public decision-maker”, which in this case corresponds to the Câmara Municipal de Lisboa.

Collaboration among these actors unfolds in different ways based on a multitude of factors, finding appropriate methodologies in each case to contribute effectively to the process, according to specific relational dynamics related to the intervention theme. As emphasized by architect L. Correia in an interview on the subject, who has cooperated in these regenerative operations with the Studio Artéria, the opportunity for participation can only occur if the administration creates suitable spaces within the process: the municipality sets goals and main regeneration paths, on which it opens up bubbles of possibilities entrusted to the community, assisted by mediating and professional figures.

The variety of participation opportunities presented by the public administration is crucial. The multiplicity of these types of services and initiatives allows for various approaches to reach different segments of the population and work on a range of small, frequent, and highly local projects. Each time, this expands the participating community, facilitating a progressive change in mentality that persists even after the initial explosive enthusiasm.

The most evident opportunities lie in the context of Mouraria Development Plan (PDCM), as described by Ferri (2012): to develop this plan, the municipality has engaged with multiple local entities for an extended period to deepen the understanding of the territory, its needs, potentials, possible connections, and the impacts of regeneration. Through this process, guidelines have been identified, agreed upon by the administration and the local population, leading to a series of bottom-up interventions, many of which have been implemented through municipal initiatives such as the Orçamento Participativo and the BIP-ZIP program. The objective is to incorporate all possible inputs for addressing identified problems, with the population participating in the selection of intervention priorities, limited only by economic constraints.

In an interview on the subject, I. Andrade, president of the Renovar a Mouraria association, explains that participatory projects often do not primarily aim to physically modify space: material transformations are punctual and have a limited impact since the work of urban redevelopment is carried out at a urban scale by the Câmara through interventions in public spaces. Such projects utilize spatial work to focus on the transformation of the population and the perception of the neighborhood. They also aim to generate and strengthen bonds among residents themselves, between residents and the territory, and between residents and institutions. The objective is to generate an active community that promotes and defends the neighborhood, actively occupies and manages public space, critically evaluates interventions in its territory, and appropriates the possibility to modify or stop anything deemed risky or harmful to the community's well-being.

As emphasized by architect Correia, it is important that the involvement of the inhabitants does not take place in an individual manner: instead, the population is guided to join a real movement, with stronger and more lasting ideals and objectives than those that would motivate individuals to participate. This is primarily achieved through the work of associations and Juntas das Freguesias, entities that possess greater capabilities for dissemination, contact, empowerment, and mobilization compared to the Câmara, as they are closer to the communities, even in a physical sense. They carry out assiduous interception work, creating communication channels through highly informal, concrete, and specific operations defined on a case-by-case basis, according to the project, the target community, and the actors' sensitivity and possibilities. This is achieved through involvement tactics aimed at specific segments of the population, highly targeted actions that become crucial in a multicultural and fragmented environment like Mouraria.

These structures then bring together different visions and perspectives of residents, making it easier to pursue a common goal and build a participatory project. Thus, participation is meant in a collective sense, with different channels, approaches, and expectations depending on the target groups: it is obvious that involving, for example, individuals with substance abuse issues in the process holds a completely different meaning compared to direct participation in intervention design, aimed at population segments with different problems and priorities. The objective is to ensure that all residents of the neighborhood participate in regeneration, by implementing transformations within themselves and/or in the urban space.

Finally, as architect Correia argues, the creation or activation of neighborhood networks is of fundamental importance, whether they be affective, cultural, work, associative, etc. For example, by involving the inhabitants through their work environments and engaging local businesses in the implementation of interventions, these activities are interconnected and made visible. This leads to greater utilization by local residents, increased awareness of their importance, and consequently, a longer permanence in the area as they become actively operational. Another possibility arising from the presence of such networks is the ability to create initiatives directly targeted at the network itself, which individual activities would not be able to sustain. The creation and strengthening of these networks, therefore, involve the engagement and activation of local actors in the short and long term, providing them with greater strength and opening up new fields of action.

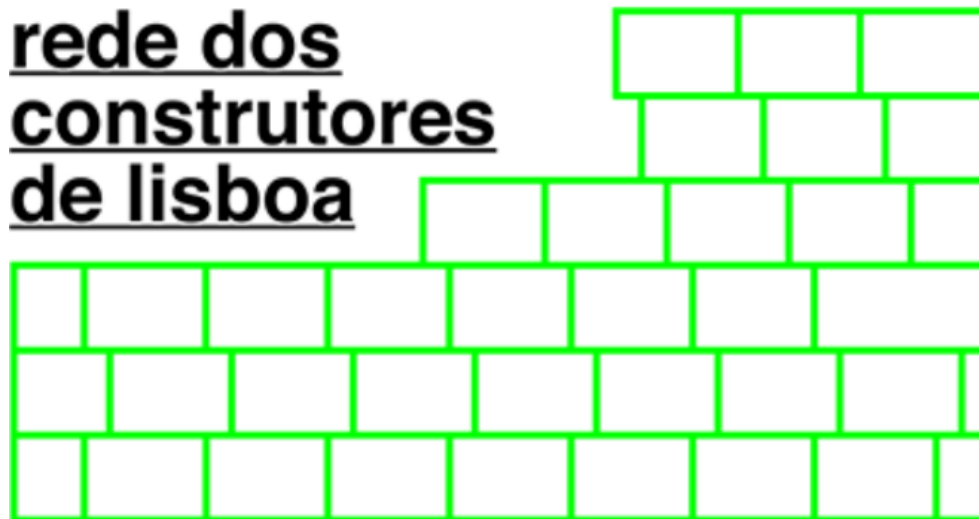


Fig.4 Logo of Rede dos Construtores de Lisboa. Source: Studio Artéria, <https://arteria.pt/work/> (Accessed: 09/04/2023).

2.1. The intermediary figures

Crucial to community participation are the mediating figures that enable it, among which there are in the first place the Juntas das Freguesias. These are local elected councils that constitute decentralized bodies of the municipal administration and act as direct intermediaries for the population in the various Freguesias. They derive from the Portuguese tradition and have always served as a point of contact between the administration and the population, thus representing a fundamental element for the municipal knowledge apparatus of the territory and enabling targeted action (Magalhães, 2008).

The Juntas das Freguesias are strengthened in their role during the neighborhood regeneration period. They gain greater resources, responsibilities, and competences, especially regarding public space, relieving the Câmara of local issues easy to handle. This allows the Freguesias to have greater local autonomy, with the Junta de Freguesia becoming a highly important mediating figure in the relationship between the Câmara and the territory and having the ability to propose and pursue a set of internally developed and/or authorized projects.

With the administrative reform, Mouraria neighborhood, previously divided into five small Freguesias, now refers solely to the Freguesia de Santa Maria Maior, which is larger in size and has the capacity to play a more active role in the process. This results in expedited procedures that allow for quick and specific interventions in urgent cases, with small expenses, based on local support in the technical and economic fields, without burdening the work of the Câmara. The Freguesia simultaneously becomes the instrument through which the ideas, needs, and perspectives of the residents are formalized, allowing them to directly address the administrative body.

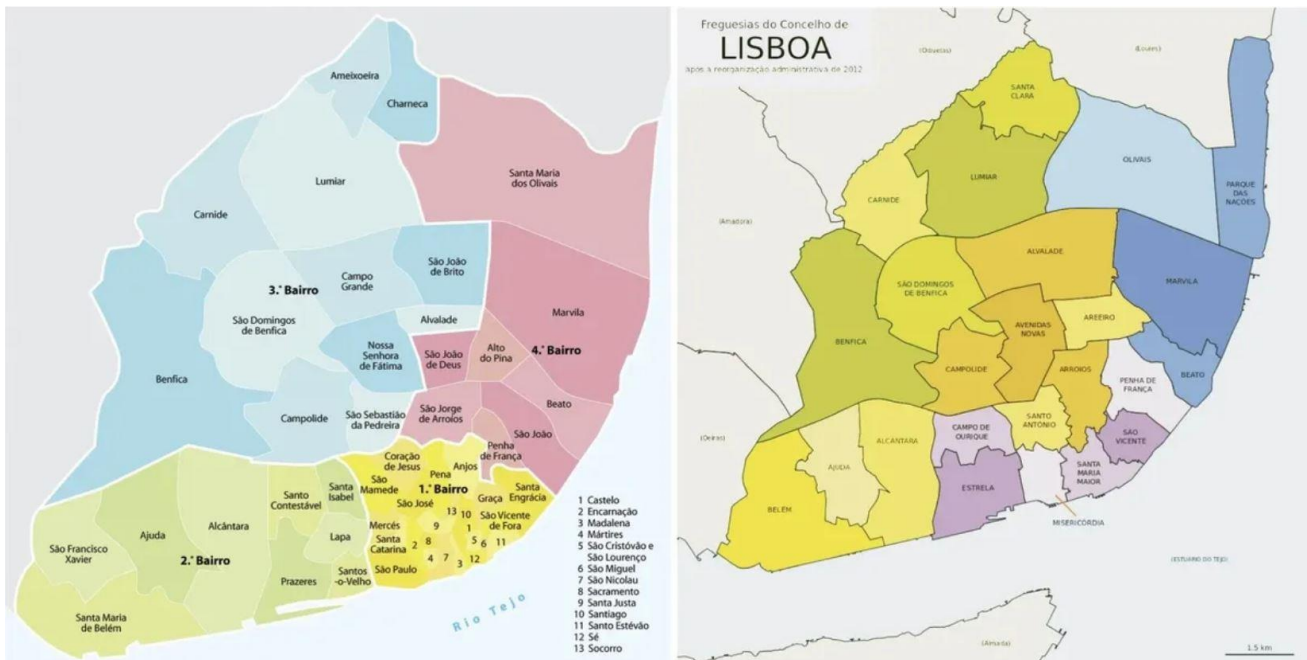


Fig.5 Distribution of Freguesias, before and after the Lisbon municipal reform of 2012. Source: Atlas Lisboa, <https://www.atlaslisboa.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Maps-freguesias-lisbon.jpg> (Accessed: 09/04/2023).

Another extremely relevant actor in this context is the associations. Given the significant issues characterizing Mouraria, the area was already a priority site for the action of NGOs before the regeneration intervention. The density of associations present and/or active in the area and their strategic potential are recognized in the urban regeneration process by the administration, which includes them in the development of the PDCM and incorporates their presence within its strategies, enhancing their capacities. The Câmara provides short-term public economic support to these associations for the three years of the process, while promoting social entrepreneurship in the long term to ensure the autonomy and continuity of their actions in the territory. The funds obtained guarantee the survival of these organizations, often proving to be more substantial than municipal funding from the very first years.

In terms of participation, associations represent additional, albeit informal and non-institutional, branches of the municipality's knowledge apparatus in the neighborhood. Thanks to their dispersed and frequent presence in the territory and their possibility to refer to specific target groups, they constitute further points of the spontaneous collection of residents' requests, demands, and perspectives. By actively addressing the neighborhood's issues, they contribute to its transformation, involving or acting as becoming the interpreters of even the most vulnerable segments of the population. In fact, as highlighted by I. Andrade, associations provide a more complete picture compared to the Juntas das Freguesias, also because they reach population segments that administrative structures tend to overlook, such as non-voting members of immigrant communities and individuals in precarious situations like clandestine immigrants, homeless, drug addicts, and prostitutes. Although they do not bring the direct participation of these individuals, they manage to involve them in the process of social transformation, by improving their personal conditions, when possible, but above all by bringing their issues into the regeneration process.

Furthermore, as argued by Silva & Maia (2017), associations constitute places where the local community meets and coagulates, where inhabitants get to know each other, create bonds and networks that overcome conditions of isolation, thereby making the environment and the people who live in it familiar and thus increasing the perception of safety in the neighbourhood.



Fig 6. Covers of the local magazine Rosa Maria, nº 1, 3, 5 and 7, by the association Renovar in Mouraria.

Moreover, these structures possess the technical expertise to apply for funding to implement bottom-up projects and have networks of contacts inside and outside the area through which they stimulate visibility and frequentation of the neighbourhood and equip themselves with the human resources necessary for their action.

It is important to emphasize that, by becoming spokesmen for the inhabitants, associations require a certain reliability and responsibility, since if the community does not trust and thus support the association, it disappears. This relationship of support and control guarantees the functioning of these channels of participation, while the numerousness of structures and the variety of fields of action prevent the prevarication of one over the others and the monopolization in decision-making.

Another category of intermediary figures involves professionals who possess the expert knowledge necessary for the neighborhood's regeneration. In the process, these figures mediate between technical requirements, the intentions of the administration, and the needs and perspectives of the population. By interacting directly with the Câmara, other intermediary actors, and residents, they go beyond their purely technical field, both in the phase of elaboration of interventions relevant to their own sphere and experimentation of integrated projects in different spheres.

Finally, for the development of the process, the spontaneous initiatives of freelancers, often acting together with the local population, are also important. They lead to the overlapping of a space of experimentation and innovation on the historic Mouraria neighborhood, making it highly visible, attractive, dynamic, diverse, and rich in stimuli, generating new dynamics and new frequentations, endogenous and exogenous (Corte-Real, 2015). Moreover, these spontaneous initiatives often have an entrepreneurial nature and combine the enhancement of socio-cultural capital with profit, promoting new employment opportunities for the neighborhood's residents as well.

2.2. The role of the architect

Among the professionals carrying out the regenerative process is the architect, whose original role is subject to a major reversal and expansion.

In the realm of traditional architecture, projects concerning the physical dimension of the neighborhood do not alter its landscape and original structure. They are carried out in a punctual manner, targeting abandoned spaces and re-functionalizing and reinterpreting them, making them visible, lived-in, and attractive. As Spirito (2019) indicates, there is a clear need to "do more with less": the intervention is made on already existing elements of no interest to investors and the architect's work does not primarily concern the physical characterization of the space but rather focuses on identifying one or more functions that make it naturally frequented and inhabited after the intervention. This function is identified through the understanding of the desires, needs, and imaginations of the local community. This generates unique and original projects, thanks to the necessity to adapt to the existing, which inevitably constrains the project, and to the participation of individuals with singular sensitivities that combine with each other in an unrepeatably way and make it intimately linked to social and cultural opportunities. (Mendes, Padilla & Azevedo, 2016; Menezes, 2012).

This participatory approach aims to achieve a "well-being" whose definition depends on the local population, which can vary significantly depending on the place and the communities present and which eludes preconceptions and the logic of minimum standards and measures to be guaranteed, that often guide current practices. As architect Correia explains, in the regenerative process, architects often transcend the purely physical realm and find themselves in a territory of discovering their own possibilities, of what they can offer at all levels to meet the community's needs through space, and beyond. They deal with urban regeneration outside the sphere of architecture, combining different activities, for example related to design, carpentry, child education, with the social component, focusing on the development of a process of involvement and understanding of the local reality.



Fig 6. Signs from the Avenida Intendente project. Source: Studio Artéria, <https://arteria.pt/avenida-intendente/> (Accessed: 09/04/2023)

According to architect Correia, the architect's work goes beyond the final solution of the project itself and instead uses it as a way to address issues in seemingly distant fields seemingly distant from architecture, but which are actually deeply connected. The architectural sphere is closely linked to the cultural and social sphere, on which the continuity of development projects depends. Therefore, in participatory urban regeneration, it is not possible to maintain a sectoralized vision, the architect must be open to the complexity of reality and be able to manage it, engaging in work that is primarily in conversation with others.

2.3. Informality and formalization

The reality depicted within the administrative sphere is extremely clear, schematic, formal, and rigid, but does not correspond to the real world, which is full of nuances and indefinite and undefinable conditions, where activities and practices are highly spontaneous and informal. This hinders the emergence of initiatives that, while operating outside predefined categories, can constitute enrichment, evolution, and/or resolution in specific fields. These initiatives, however, constitute the heart of a participatory regeneration process, in which the implementation of territorial transformation is based on bottom-up proposals. While guided by the administration's guidelines, these proposals are characterized by the spontaneity and uncertainty of the real dynamics from which they arise. Trying to formalize these dynamics risks compromising their existence.

Nevertheless, as architect Correia highlights, formalization becomes necessary to ensure continuity for experimental mechanisms: if the set of actors that generated a particular dynamic moves, disperses, or disappears, the dynamic itself risks being lost. Similarly, the commitment to participation and listening from the Câmara and Juntas can be abandoned with changes in urban administration unless it becomes an established practice. Any informal contribution is fragile in this sense; through formalization, it is possible to institutionalize and make it permanent and replicable.

After all, everything that currently constitutes the administrative apparatus derives from what was initially experimental, informal or even alternative; this process of integration implies an advantage for the evolution of this apparatus and should coincide with its physiological development. In order for this to be possible, there is the necessity to have instruments that are flexible enough to temporarily accommodate this type of initiative, spaces in which the existence of elements without a defined profile is contemplated, allowing the integration of new experiences to be integrated into the system, rather than excluding them since they are impossible to frame.

3. Patrimonialisation: preservation or rewriting?

In the regenerative process, there is an operation to enhance the local heritage, whereby elements are selected according on contemporary needs and vision, which inevitably represents a partial interpretation of local identity (Ferri, 2012).

As highlighted by Corte-Real (2015), there is a strong criticism concerning these dynamics in the debate on the topic: territories, by receiving a new image stripped of the imperfections of reality, are transformed into large-scale commercial spaces, mere tourist attractions created through the redevelopment of public spaces, which construct an aestheticized vision of local culture. The inhabitants become observers of their own cultural identity conveyed by actors and entrepreneurs who do not belong to that community.



Fig 7. Largo da Severa. Own photo.

Patrimonialisation, after all, is nothing more than an attribution of values to selected local practices that are intended to be enhanced, and a construction of meanings associated with elements and places, carried out in this case by the rehabilitation entities, including representatives of the local population, with the aim of desired development. As argued by Moya Pellitero (2019), this operation is necessary because as the urban landscape transforms, so does the emotional and psychological ecosystem of the inhabitants, who need new imagery to bind them to the place and identify with it. On the other hand, it is not possible to produce new space, both social and physical, in a closed territory without intervening and producing transformations in the preexisting characteristics of that same space.

It is possible to conclude that the physical and symbolic reconstruction, implemented in the regeneration through patrimonialisation and reinterpretation of the preexistences, as well as the emergence of new practices, activities, and spaces, have transformed the former neighborhood. At the same time, however, they have also generated a new impetus for the reappropriation of an abandoned and problematic territory, bringing it back to the city and its inhabitants.

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