

Urban Art in Padre Cruz neighbourhood



The Bairro Padre Cruz, located in the parish of Carnide in Lisbon, was initially designed as a municipal housing project in the early 1960s, when the Lisbon City Council purchased the “Quinta da Penteeira” with the aim of urbanizing the area and creating social housing for its employees. The first residents of the neighborhood were workers from different parts of Lisbon’s outskirts and other provinces in the North and Center of Portugal, all of whom were employed by the City Council, the largest employer at the time.

The first precarious constructions were known as the “luselite neighborhood” until permanent buildings were erected for the families. During this period, the first social facilities were also established, including a church, a market, a school, a social center, and a library. The construction of masonry houses only began in the 1970s, following social movements led by the so-called “community group,” an informal organization of residents with representatives from the Carnide Parish Council, local institutions, and other associations in the neighborhood. This group met to discuss issues of common interest.

The “New Neighborhood,” built in the 1990s, completed the resettlement of residents from the “luselite neighborhood.” Due to a growing population, the neighborhood lost its original configuration and became home to residents from various parts of the city, including African populations, transforming it into a multicultural area.

In recent years, several urban art projects have emerged as part of efforts to revitalize and requalify the urban space, using art as a tool for social transformation and neighborhood enhancement. These projects have provided a platform for residents to reflect their stories and experiences in public spaces. The primary initiative driving this transformation was the “MURO – Festival de Arte Urbana Lx_2016,” promoted by the Galeria de Arte Urbana (GAU) of the Lisbon City Council, in

partnership with GEBALIS and the Carnide Parish Council. This festival took place between April 30 and May 15, 2016, featuring more than 30 artists who created approximately 50 interventions across 2,500 square meters of building facades in the neighborhood.

The project was designed as an open-air urban art gallery, involving more than 30 national and international artists who were responsible for over 50 artistic interventions on building facades, covering approximately 2,500 square meters.

Simultaneously, the “Creating Change through Urban Art” project, developed by the Boutique da Cultura and Crescer a Cores associations, also contributed to the artistic revitalization of the neighborhood. This initiative, which won the BIP-ZIP program of the Lisbon City Council between 2015 and 2016, focused on social intervention with local youth, equipping them with artistic and social skills by involving them in the creation of murals. Each mural sought to capture the stories and issues of the residents on the walls, with painters invited to participate, and meals being hosted within the community. The graffiti artists adhered to an ethical code that prohibited payment for their work, with projects relying solely on logistical support, such as the provision of paints and elevation structures.

The project's goal was to create change through art, making it accessible in public spaces, streets, and homes. Initially, some residents showed resistance to the idea but, in most cases, eventually accepted it, recognizing its aesthetic value. The murals also drew external interest, attracting visitors and helping to integrate the neighborhood into the city.

Community Participation

Under the “Creating Change through Urban Art” project, 25 young residents of the neighborhood with no prior experience in mural painting, were selected to receive training and collaborate with artists in executing the works. In this process, the young participants developed artistic techniques and social skills while contributing to the neighborhood's revitalization.

Components of the Training

Social Skills:

- Teamwork: Encouraging the ability to collaborate effectively in groups
- Leadership: Developing skills to lead projects and community initiatives
- Community Belonging: Promoting active participation in activities that benefit the local community

Artistic Skills:

- Mural Painting Techniques: Practical instruction on methods and techniques for creating murals
- Collaboration with Artists: Preparation for working alongside professional artists during the execution of the murals.

The training allowed the young participants to acquire new skills, build a deeper connection with their neighborhood, and prepare to serve as tour guides for the urban art gallery. This not only promoted the neighborhood but also created opportunities for their integration into the job market.

Furthermore, the program empowered the youth by fostering social cohesion and enhancing public spaces. It gave them an active role in the creative and social transformation process, reflecting their experiences, concerns, and community identity.

In the case of the "MURO – Urban Art Festival Lx_2016," community integration was promoted through various activities, such as photography exhibitions, cinema screenings, international conferences, performances, and street theater, directly involving the neighborhood's residents.

The youth, in particular, participated in educational and cultural activities. During the festival, workshops and urban art sessions were organized to spark interest in urban art and provide basic knowledge of painting techniques and artistic expression. Through community events such as open-air cinema, street theater, and exhibitions, young participants had the opportunity to interact with national and international artists, creating a space for exchanging experiences.

Although the "MURO" primarily relied on professional artists to execute the murals, many young participants contributed to the logistics and supported the interventions, being present during the conception and execution phases. Moreover, they had the opportunity to observe the artists' creative processes, gaining an understanding of how urban art can serve as a tool for social transformation and personal expression.

In summary, the active involvement of the local population, from conception to execution, ensured that the murals represented the experiences and narratives of the neighborhood, strengthening the connection between public art and the community.

Some examples...



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