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Abstract

This article starts from the premise of the city as a complex, transdisciplinary and democratic space fashioned by several agents, from the State Authority actions to private interests that influence architects and urbanists actions, and considering citizens as a principal agent. We focus on the problematization of the public space understood as the public dimension of the city: the space for the manifestation of diverse forms of citizenship, the space of coexistence and stage of economic and social conflicts. The article focuses on the work of art activism groups operating in the rescue of this space denied by neoliberal urbanism, primary translators of this hegemonic scenario which is sold us. Thus, the intention of this paper is to analyze artistic interventions as urbanistic instruments of a transformation of the character of residual spaces. We understand that this scene introduces itself as a worldwide tendency. This investigation is based on the analysis of events produced in the city of Aracaju, Brazil, such as the Sarau Debaixo, Clandestino, Batalha do Octógono and Som de Calçada, which have been important pieces on the resignification of residual spaces in the city.

Keywords: Residual spaces; Public space; Urban art; Urbanism; Aracaju

1 Introduction

It is crucial to provoke reflection and discussion on the issue of urban public space and its political sense related to democracy and social justice. In this work, we have considered public space as the place for exercising democracy, allowing citizens expressions and revindication about public decisions. The geographer Edward Soja (2008) said that territoriality is a cultural phenomenon, multidimensional and collective, and therefore, public space is built through places of production that nurture dissemblance expressions. It is thus troubling the ease with which have been treated in daily life as in our speeches the various forms of denial and fear of public spaces. In unequal societies such as the Brazilian, it is imperative the existence of public spaces where differences and conflicts are established and made visible. Otherwise, we will always have a fragile democracy. Public space holds transformative possibilities. It has a political potential that must be brought about.

This article aims to demonstrate the transformative capacity of artistic appropriations of the public places and their collaboration in the weaving of the city, more specifically in the reversal of residual public spaces. These occupations, however, while promoting vitality to local people, are still scenarios ignored by urban management, often suffering reprisals. The present work displays an investigation about four of such formalizations existing in the city of Aracaju, Brazil, for its important role in the occupation of public space and art democratization, besides being instruments for the transformation of the character of residual spaces.

For this goal, several interviews were held with the organizers, cultural collectives, music bands and art groups which have worked or acted in the last years in Aracaju, in addition to the collection of testimonials from spectators who participated in these movements. Publications in online social networks - the medium through which these collectives are organized and disseminated - were also of vital importance for the analysis of their action.

2 The transformation of the residual public space as a democratic area

According to the geographer Ester Limonad (2005), the possibility of transformation depends on new planning strategies and another way of building the city. The author refers to the manifesto launched at the International Colloquium "El Futuro de las Ciudades", held in 2004 in Guadalajara, Mexico, signed by experts as the Catalan urbanists Jordi Borja and Oriol Bohigas. The manifesto stands

against the real estate industry and in favor of urbanism that defends public interests as well as the social commitment and the effective citizens' action.

For architects Rogers and Gumuchdjian (2005), the post-industrial city depends on citizen participation, i.e., the creation of a "creative citizenship" to deal with problems ignored by the public sector, creating an identity, urban culture. For this urban culture to manifest, dense and interactive environments, creative public spaces, safe and inclusive to encourage interaction, are required.

These two concepts contrast with the reality of urbanistic actions that insist on the production of empty spaces, from traditional public spaces such as squares and commercial streets left at times determined to residual spaces of the urban design, empty and underutilized land or spaces resulting from the production of large road structures and urban zoning policies. As fruits of development planning, those sites contradict the public space's goal to support life in common. These neglected areas often represent unsafe places without any vitality.

To these spaces to acquire the status of place - that is, of the "concrete manifestation of human habitation" (Norberg-Schulz, 2008, p.71, our translation), the collaborative action from a sensitive reading has played a key role as a form of resistance to this urban neoliberal. The uses of a sensitive art as a political action works on transgression as a way of "disturbing" the reassuring image of public space. Groups and urban collectives have manifested in their work searching to claim their cities. Sometimes, it is precisely in the residual space, where there is a gap between the control by the State and private sectors, that less wealthy inhabitants or social activists can have a voice. At the same time, while activating their citizen role, these groups carry out appropriations even if temporary, able to resignify these places.

'That is why we think the appropriation of public space as an enabler of subversion actions, because users - the urban poor - by appropriating places can conquer different areas of fighting, leaving the place to try to appropriate the space in larger scales' (Sobarzo, 2006, p.107, our translation).

Temporary, spontaneous practices and art activism are capable of modifying urban situations and must cease to be unexplored fields by the exercise of the discipline of architecture and urbanism. Misselwitz, Oswald, and Overmeyer point out that "It will consistently be necessary - precisely in the interest of planning - to call existing formalizations into questions and subject them to an analysis of those processes that take place outside the established rules and structures" (Misselwitz; Oswald; Overmeyer, 2012, p.9).

Historically, the emergence of these processes is connected to the rise of anti-globalization movements and the spread of Internet. Already in the 1990s, political actions that approached the format of parties or artistic interventions emerged in several countries. The Street Parties, or protests parties initially held in London motorways, promoted by the group Reclaim the Streets aimed to foster a dispute of public space, which was being transferred increasingly to the use of automobiles.

However, the question of cars does not carry in itself the problem of urban design but is contained in a wider range of factors and agents shaping space. In this sense, when addressing problematic areas of the city, Ignasi de Solà-Morales refers to terrain vague as

'[...] Places seemingly forgotten, where memory of the past seems to predominate over the present. These are obsolete places in which only certain residual values seem to be maintained despite their complete disaffection of city activity. They are, finally, external, strange places, that remain of the circuits, of the productive structures' (Solà-Morales, 2002, s.p., our translation).

However, in its approach, space acquires beyond the sense of emptiness the meaning of free to represent urban strongholds uncontaminated by contemporary life and, precisely because they are unwanted by institutional circuits. Thus become an attractive body for a portion of the population - formed by committed artists, poor economic classes, and the surrounding neighborhood:

'The artists, the neighbors and the citizens disenchanted with the nervous and unstoppable life of the great city feel deeply displeased [with the renewal and urban reintegration of these spaces]. Those terrain vague seem to be the best places of their identity, of their encounter between present and past, while presenting themselves as the only uncontaminated stronghold to exercise individual or small group freedom' (Solà-Morales, 1996, p.22-23, our translation).

In this sense, even though such places are a stranger to everyday experiences which are revealed in the popular imagination as unsafe sites and lacking minimum infrastructure, residual public spaces contain a great potential for creative occupation. As stated Igor Guatelli in his approach about in-between places (defined as range and border areas, having no well-defined limits and allocations), "the residual spaces apparently unused in the cities - the leftovers - would always be open to the constant process of appropriations" (Guatelli, 2012, p.22, our translation).

Thus, social and artistic movements appropriate these spaces either for the purpose of claiming their citizen's right, their power over the public space and the street or as an option of space for the realization of leisure or artistic demonstrations. Public areas acquire a new intonation, as well as abandoned sites, terrains vagues, waste spaces become a new shelter of exhibitions, dance, and performance art.

'The public space is placed in the critical base of the art. [...] It's the real space for human living. Changes awareness. Changes the body. And art has the ability to change and transform their understanding. To the art was delegated the function of transmitting tools to the public to launch in the discovery of new perceptions of the world and the space of the world' (Ferreira, 2009, p.8, our translation).

From the appropriation of the public space, art contributes to the construction process of the city by creating tensions and questions for the city user. The artist and the spectators, interfering in the public, modify prevailing meanings, appropriating the space that belongs to them by right and shuffling established functions. It is essentially a political attitude that redefines structures determined by the hegemonic power and subverts them. As Mouffe affirmation:

'I submit that to grasp the political character of those varieties of artistic activism we need to see them as counter-hegemonic interventions whose objective is to occupy the public space in order to disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to spread, bringing to the fore its repressive character' (Mouffe, 2007, s.p.).

From this point of view, the artistic manifestations that occur in public spaces, including residual areas, intermediate these relations of space's reappropriation by the user. The creation of a new meaning for a given space occurs from a new perception brought about by a singular experience, never before associated with the forms and dimensions of a particular urban space. This factor does not depend on the time of effectiveness of the artistic proposal, because, whether with a temporary or permanent character, it is from the construction of a new meaning in the user's perception that the artistic intervention transforms the place.

Thus, Aracaju - the capital of the state of Sergipe, Brazil - is also part of this process of artistic resistance.

The discovery of an oil field in Carmópolis in the 1960s and the installation of a Petrobras headquarter in Aracaju were responsible for the first works of urban expansion in the city. The 1980s are a milestone in such extension: "with the mangrove landfill existing at the mouth of the Sergipe and Poxim rivers, creating a new neighborhood, Coroa do Meio, and the construction of a bridge over the Poxim River, integrating the new neighborhood to the area of 13 de Julho Beach" (Nascimento, 2010, s.p., our translation). Thus the city enters a cycle by extensive engineering works with the construction of bridges and viaducts sewing neighborhoods and favoring the automobile transport.

'[...] driven by government action [...] and also stemming from intervention in the construction market. The sum of these strategies configures a dispersed and fragmented territory, from main access axes and practices such as the production of closed horizontal condominiums and popular housing estates far from the main center' (França and Rezende, 2010, p.2, our translation).

In this context, the city is being claimed by its inhabitants, groups, collectives, and artists who demand access to culture and the city. This can be seen in the pamphlet below (Figure 1), which contains the text entitled "Cultural-political Manifesto in Defense of Culture and the city of Aracaju" and was distributed during the anniversary of the town in 2015:



Fig. 1: Pamphlet "Cultural-Political Manifesto in Defense of Culture and the City of Aracaju". Source: Manifesto 2015, distributed on the anniversary of the city.

In the city of Aracaju, artistic manifestations such as 'Sarau Debaixo', 'Som da Calçada', 'Batalha do Octógono' and 'Clandestino' play an important role in the appropriation of the urban residual space. These groups reveal an active participation of the inhabitants of the city in front of the underutilization of the public space and temporarily transform the space, rather remnant, into place.

3 "Every floor will be a stage, every wall will be mural, every city will be poetry"¹

'Clandestino' is an event organized by the Sergipe band Renegades of Punk. They make itinerant musical presentations in different public places of the city, from squares to viaducts shoals. The organizers said they started holding these events in 2012, and the action was not unheard in Aracaju. "The Clandestino proposal had existed for 20 years, when the city's oldest punks rallied, rented equipment, occupied squares, pulled the energy from the pole and played" (Alves, 2012, s.p., our translation). From the do-it-yourself (DIY) philosophy, Clandestino proposes the direct action promoted by the city users through independent organizations which can produce experiences of public spaces occupation:

'[...] the idea of occupying the city and re-signifying public spaces came to the fore. We've always seen this as a positive and somewhat political point - as the event is. It's a statement. The city belongs to @ll [sic] and occupy (mainly) the center and some squares and spaces forgotten or "invisible" ended up becoming part of the proposal of the event. That's itinerant for that too' (Rodrigues, 2017, s.p., our translation).

The emergence of cultural collectives and interventions in Aracaju increased, however, from the days of June of 2013, when a part of the population used the streets to protest. This was the case of the Sarau de Baixo, which appeared in September 2013. On the third Tuesday of every month, in the basement of the Jornalista Carvalho Déda viaduct, there was an artistic-cultural show organized by the collective 'Sarau de Baixo'. In the words of one member of the group, Pedro Bomba:

'[...] In June of 2013, there was that process of the journeys of June, several drives. And most of the demonstrations ended under the overpass of D.I.A., terminal D.I.A. There was also space where there were some confrontations with the police, then these fights, and the finalization of the acts, and the acts themselves served for us to know' [sic] (Bomba, 2017, s.p., our translation).

The D.I.A. Viaduct is a recent junction in Aracaju, inaugurated in 2008 in the neighborhood of Inácio Barbosa. The reason for its construction was "to unload the traffic in the ancient DIA joints between Adélia Franco and Tancredo Neves avenues" (França, 2016, p.195, our translation), as well as favoring "the interconnection between commercial, institutional (banks and secretariats) and cultural functions (Tobias Barreto Theater and Convention Center), as well as the real estate market, on the banks of Adélia Franco Avenue and in the Jabotiana neighborhood" (França, 2016, p.195, our translation).

However, the land under this great work (according to Figure 2) is occupied only by lawns and parking pockets that remain empty, most of the days. It constitutes, in this sense, an inhospitable place for socialization, avoided by pedestrians who identify there a feeling of insecurity and discomfort.



Fig. 2: Basement of D.I.A.'s Viaduct. Source: Author, 2017.

The intervention promoted an open stage for artists from the state of Sergipe taking as their impulse the valorization of art and culture beyond private sectors and the occupation of the public space, referring to a political act of resistance. The residual space of the D.I.A.'s Viaduct was transformed into an artistic space and an area of dispute for the right to the city:

'You know, there is a big space here where you could have several things, but there are no people, people are in the houses, in the house, and the city imposing more building, and the city imposing a very deprived structure of life, right? At the same time, television imposing the policy of fear, then, 'go, you have to stay at home, careful, lock the door, do not know what, do not talk strange, you know? So here we were doing it like this: let's kick it and let's turn it all over, let's trust people, let's do it on the street and let's trust people, you know?' [sic] (Bomba, 2017, s.p., our translation).

Through the gesture of occupying and re-appropriating these places with artistic interventions, the collectives promote a critique of the current model of the city, which does not privilege spaces of socializing and sociability:

'To the city, I think it is this possibility of people being able to occupy and say that the city is not only this model that is being built of city: the houses with giant walls, isolating you from the rest of the city; The condos having everything inside, condominium already with gym, market, 'to' you do not need to leave. There are things you can enjoy out of the house, right?' [sic] (Tavares, 2017, s.p., our translation).

It is all about showing citizens their capacity to rupture with the status quo, indicating the possibility of exploring waste spaces and activating urban voids in an alternative way through art. All interventions have in common the intention of acting as stimuli for similar actions to spread in the city. An expression regularly cited by the organizers of the Sarau De baixo, "we want to be a spark", summed up this objective so that urban users could return to this place which is public in law.

'Because we used to say a lot, I even used the word retaken, which is much used by indigenous peoples, which is this thing [sic], so you return, it is the return to your land, it is the return to space that it was always yours. So we were returning to the street, as a common space, we are retaking the common space, because what the city does is expel people from the common space' (Bomba, 2017, s.p., our translation).

In this sense, residual space and the urban user recognize each other and identify themselves as renegade elements within the developmental processes of the city. Marcella Almeida, another member of the collective, affirms about the space under the viaduct: "Those rigid cement structures characterize our divergent space, our space in the struggle to re-signify a city that has forgotten us" (Prata, 2015, s.p., our translation).

Thus, the occupation of these areas promotes their re-signification through the construction of narratives initiated by the events, when inhabitants have a sensitive and unexpected contact with a space that, before such interventions, remained unwanted and invisible. The encounter of people, the exchange of experience, the confrontation between differences: everything that should be common to the public space is rescued in the residual space.

'So that's it, it's a place that was not alive, from my perspective. It is a place that did not work, it did not pulsate inside the city, it was a cold place, and from that perspective you occupy it, you open there a kind of hole and inaugurate it somehow. It was not opened on the day of the inauguration of the viaduct' (Jonnes, 2017, s.p., our translation).

Allan Jonnes, a member of the collective Sarau de Baixo, explains the re-signification of the basement of the viaduct after the realization of the saraus based on the establishment of unusual experiences of the inhabitants in that space: "[...] it got experienced, it made something other than an overpass and now it has a kind of history, even if it is very short, of something that happened there some day and 'resigned it' [sic], and now we are going to other places" (Jonnes, 2017, s.p., our translation).

In fact, after a few editions of 'Sarau de Baixo', the D.I.A.'s Viaduct transmuted from the condition of residual space, strange to the productive circuits of the city, to an attractive space for the accomplishment of artistic interventions. The continuity of the use of this space by the collective for more than two years was important to become a suitable place for these appropriations as was the case of 'Batalha do Octógono'.

'Batalha do Octógono' is an MCs contest that are part of the rap music scene in Sergipe, organized by the Collective 'Delta Nove Rap Home'. Poetry contests are then performed and enrolled rappers compete for awards. Among the event's five editions, four of them took place under the D.I.A's Viaduct, intending to perpetuate the use of space as a cultural point of dissemination of the hip hop scene and encourage the appropriation of the public space.

Other public areas in the city were also re-signified within this proposal of artistic interventions. 'Som de Calçada', as its name suggests, began with the occupation of a sidewalk, which borders Cinelândia beach, in Atalaia neighborhood. At first, it consisted only of a group of friends gathered to play music together. Over time, the event grew, and more people began to participate, so that the sidewalk was not enough: it now occupies a part of a large parking lot next to the sidewalk, as shown in Figure 3.



Fig. 3: Som de Calçada. Source: Vicente Otávio, 2015.

Today 'Som de Calçada' represents an action in favor of cultural occupations and the right to the city, as pointed out by Luan Pinheiro, one of the founders of the event:

'[...] the most important, in my point of view, is the occupation of the city, of the public spaces. Because for me, it is not enough for the government to stop and become a point of sale for drugs. If the population uses and occupies space, space automatically becomes less dangerous. And nothing better than art to occupy a place' [sic] (Pinheiro, 2017, s.p., our translation).

It is interesting to note that, from the perspective of spectators who participated in at least one of the mentioned events, the lines converge to a positive estrangement: the discovery of a living and active environment in a space they once considered empty and inhospitable. About his first encounter with 'Som de Calçada', the Architect Igor Queiroz says:

'It was mid-2013 and the project still did not have the proportion it has today, there were few people playing their instruments, in a free way, without charging those who remained there admiring the music and only this factor already captivated me, at that moment I stopped my bike and I stayed there for a long time, which I hardly did, because there was no attraction there because it was only a parking' (Queiroz, 2017, s.p., our translation).

Another transformation perceived from such appropriations was that the localities became much more democratic areas, attracting different urban residents profiles. "People from several different tribes come together and stay there for a common purpose: to enjoy music, to meet friends, to have fun" (Carigé, 2017, s.p., our translation), reported by a theater student and resident of the city of Sao Paulo, David Yuri Carigé, from his experience in the event in Aracaju. Also, the student of architecture and urbanism Petrucio Argolo noticed both in the 'Som' and in the 'Sarau de Baixo':

It is also possible to note that a large part of the visitors from a marginalized part of the city use these spaces with the frequency of events and that they would probably not attend other leisure spaces - because they require an entrance fee or because they do not feel comfortable as a visiting minority (Argolo, 2017, s.p., our translation).

Spectators acknowledged their own ability to collectively build interventions while acting in the construction of the public space. Through this visible reversal promoted by the artistic appropriations and the collective discourse, a new kind of empathy from spectators for space was strengthened at each new edition, bringing a new meaning to residual spaces. This was pointed out by Heitor Gabriel Morais, a student of architecture, about his experience at the 'Sarau de Baixo':

'The D.I.A's Viaduct always composed one of the most recurrent scenes in my head when I think of Aracaju, when I think of my house, for spending a lot of time on the porch watching the city move and time pass. He was always there, conveying fear and coldness, memories of friends who had been mugged, the times I sweated to have to go to the terminal on foot, which means crossing it, and how everything could be different.

Today, after the experience of the Sarau, that even having an end, when I return to my balcony I see a completely new viaduct, even if the scene is completely old, in the rough. I can still see the graphite marks on the thick columns, which remind me of the floor, scratched with poetry, of chalk, and everyone who stepped on it. I see the space that the crowd inhabited on the other side, I can smell the striking, the looks, the kiss, the energy. The side of the viaduct remains the same, but my sarau, between eight columns, and a raised that has become marquee for our dreams, still lives on the side of there. It still lives in my memory and reappears every time I look down my porch. The meetings are over, but the 'Sarau de Baixo' has, yes, long life in the hearts of those who attended or saw the window of the bus that leaves the terminal' [sic] (Morais, 2017, s.p., our translation).

Events taking place within public areas are multiplying in the city as it is the case of 'Sarau da Quebrada' in a peripheral district of Aracaju, and the 'Ensaio Aberto' in the Cajueiros Park. Soirees arise even in other cities in the state of Sergipe as Debaixo da Caixa

D'água, in the town of Lagarto, the 'Sarau do Coreto', in the town of Simão Dias, 'Sarau do Calçadão', in Itabaiana, the 'Sarau de Fora', in Tobias Barreto and the 'Sarau Cristóvão', in the city of São Cristóvão. Facing the hegemonic privatization of the city, the collectives, bands, and groups build a resistance chain: they organize and call upon to the transforming character of art, recovering the public dimension of the city and rescuing the residual public spaces that had been denied to the residents.

4 Final considerations

Considering the various agents that act in the arrangement of the city, we verify the neglect of urban public spaces and the consequent remoteness of the population in what concerns their use. Besides, urban planning has multiplied spaces that do not prioritize collective environments, giving preference to the construction of viaducts, shopping centers, and closed condominiums, resulting in more underutilized spaces. Conversely, the occupation of the public space through artistic manifestations demonstrates the citizens' dissatisfaction with the direction of the development of the city and implants in the city a power of resistance, claiming the population interests.

The search for these activism converges to a more communitarian life, whose right to culture and the city must be democratized. In the same way, the character of the public space as a place of encounter and conflict must be resumed, starting with the residual spaces, whose existence in the cities reflects failures in the performance of current urbanism.

In Aracaju, the itinerant approach of 'Clandestino' proposes to find places throughout the city and inaugurate them as possibilities of artistic occupation. In each intervention, the band contributes to the propagation of its do-it-yourself philosophy in various parts of the city and elucidates latent potentialities present in public spaces.

The performance of the 'Sarau de Baixo' under the D.I.A. Viaduct stood out in the context of the city for the resignification promoted in that place. The 'Sarau' was the initial impulse that generated the flowering of a symbolic number of artistic interventions in the basement, such as the 'I Festival Catraca Livre', 'Arraiá das Minas', 'Baile das Bruxas', 'TransVisibility Week', 'Clandestino' and also of the 'Batalha do Octógono'. From being an inhospitable place for socialization, the viaduct's basement became a place capable of receiving different interventions.

The 'Batalha do Octógono' was an initiative designed from the beginning to reverberate the occupation of the D.I.A. Viaduct, perpetuating the use of this space as a point of culture and art in Aracaju. Although the event took place during less time than the Sarau, its action intensified the new meaning given to an area that previously was not appropriate for the population.

The situation of 'Som de Calçada', in turn, is different. In the parking lot and sidewalk of the Atalaia waterfront where the event occurs, there are no records of other artistic interventions. However, for five years, musicians and listeners occupied the region every weekend. Space is very close to this musical event, and every Sunday evening people gather in that place waiting for the festival, either to participate in the open stage or to be spectators.

In addition, we should note that all interventions are ephemeral and spontaneous organizations - at the time this work was done, some of them may no longer be performed, while many others appear day after day, the result of people who have lived these events and were inspired by them to reaffirm their citizen power and act directly in the city.

When performing in residual spaces, artistic collectives demonstrate their capacity for transforming urban environments. They are responsible for introducing new experiences in these spaces from experiences arising from creative interventions, even if carried out on a temporary basis. Such resignification occurs from the construction of new perceptions of the inhabitants concerning these places, transforming them from remnants into 'places' and recovering their role of public space in consonance with the search of collectivity and vitality in the city.

The following video presents images of the city of Aracaju and moments of the 'Sarau de Baixo'.

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¹ Sarau Debaixo, 2014, our translation