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**RECONIZING DIFFERENCE AND CLAIMING  
POLITICAL AGENCY OVER THE URBAN SPACE  
SOCIAL SPATIAL PRACTICES AT TERRAS DA COSTA,  
SOUTH OF LISBON**

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## **RECONIZING DIFFERENCE AND CLAIMING POLITICAL AGENCY OVER THE URBAN SPACE**

### **Social spatial practices at Terras da Costa, south of Lisbon**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

In this article I discuss a range of socio-spatial practices that worked/works at a self-produced neighbourhood south of Lisbon, Terras da Costa, aimed at supporting a process to fight social and spatial injustice and to improve dwellers agency in the decision making processes related to the place, through emancipatory education pedagogies, the creation of common space integrating a community kitchen, the guarantee of access to common infrastructures such as running water and legal electricity, the support of collective forms of organization, and the opening up of a space of communication between dwellers and local authorities.

Terras da Costa dwellers live under unsuitable housing and urban conditions, being denied the access to infrastructural common goods as tap water, sewage, electricity and qualified public space. Due to shortage of public housing policies, people with low income are unable to find response regarding accommodation, enduring involuntary clustering, in other words, experiencing structural spatial segregation. Moreover, their specific position within Portuguese society—as members of a Roma community and emigrants from Cape Vert, a country formerly colonized by Portugal—render them target to an instituted pattern of housing discrimination, associated with a concealed structural racism rooted on the persistence of colonial forms of organizing spatial and social relations.

These set of practices operating in collaboration with Terras da Costa dwellers were able to open up a communication space between the community and local authorities allowing it to have a political voice; to undermine the biased representations of the place contributing to diminish its marginalization; to ameliorate living conditions at the neighbourhood through the construction of a common space and the legal provision of tap water and electric power; to support some residents political empowerment. Moreover, the possibility of a participatory rehousing process in the near future is on the table.

Nevertheless, all these are small achievements that won't overturn the structural inequalities imposed upon the residents. Such a change would require to alter the mechanisms through which society contains and supports the institutional conditions that produce and reproduce social inequality, namely "the social division of labor; relative power to decide institutional actions, or to change the incentives faced by large numbers of people; the establishment and enforcement of hegemonic norms" (Young (2005) 2009, 275).

**KEYWORDS:** spatial injustice; politics of positional difference; spatial practices; informal territories.

## 1. SITUATED ARCHITECTURE PRACTICES

“Acting to build ‘another world’ will continue to have limited impact as long as we don’t give ourselves the means, individually within our reach, to reinvest urban space collectively, ecologically and politically; as long as this space stays desubjectivated by our absence.” (Petcou, Petrescu 2007, 321)

Architecture practices can significantly influence our modes of living together, a challenge forced upon us by all places, those “constellations of processes” which confronts us with the unavoidable negotiation of “throwntogetherness” “And if places pose the question of togetherness in the sense of juxtaposition (throwntogetherness), they also demand the challenge of the negotiation of those wider relations within which they are constituted” (Massey 2008, 187). These issues are particularly relevant to address marginalized places, formed and reproduced by structural socio-spatial injustices.

Over the past 40 years, European cities have been deregulated by neoliberal policies that reinforced socio-spatial inequality and urban fragmentation, leading to the privatization of public spaces, infrastructures and services. While the last years of economic generalized deceleration have acted as a catalyst to the deterioration both of living conditions and of traditional forms of representative democracy practically everywhere around Europe, they also led to the energization of new political solidarities that propose new ways of reclaiming the right to the city through experimental forms of socio-spatial organization.

Within this context there’s been a reconsideration of architecture both as an epistemology and a practice. Several experiences have been supporting processes to fight spatial injustice, the construction of a Common Space beyond the one socially and politically instituted and established. New (or not so new but now commonly performed) methodological apparatus include an emphasis on processes, a situated approach, collective work, often with the active collaboration of the local communities, the use of open source platforms and new technologies to enhance communication and dialogue as an architectural tool.

In this article I discuss a range of socio-spatial practices that worked/works at a self-produced neighbourhood south of Lisbon, aimed at supporting a process to fight social and spatial injustice and to improve dwellers agency in the decision making processes related to the place, through emancipatory education pedagogies, the creation of common space integrating a community kitchen, the guarantee of access to common infrastructures such as running water and legal electricity, the support of collective forms of organization, and the opening up of a space of communication between dwellers and local authorities. My position is that of a scholar and practitioner of situated spatial practices; and as a researcher regularly present at that neighbourhood since October 2015.

## 2. SPATIAL INJUSTICES AT TERRAS DA COSTA NEIGHBOURHOOD

### 2.1. Terras da Costa Neighbourhood

The neighbourhood of Terras da Costa is a self-produced<sup>1</sup> settlement located at Costa da Caparica, in the municipality of Almada, South of Lisbon. Costa da Caparica, a coastal city in the South bank of Tejo, was originally a fishermen village, which, due to its extensive coastline—40 kilometres of sandy beaches just south of Lisbon—became a seaside resort

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<sup>1</sup>The notion of self-produced settlement transpires from Lefebvre’s understanding of geographical space as socially produced. Terras da Costa neighbourhood is not served by public infrastructure; houses were self-built. The space was actively produced by residents; and undirectly produced by the absent allocation of public resources on their materialization.

in the 1960s, and latter, with the demographic growth and outer development of Lisbon, evolved into a dormitory town marked by poor quality housing blocks.

Between the densely built-up seafront area of Costa da Caparica and the Fossil Cliff that geographically confines the area, lies Terras da Costa settlement, disguised amidst agricultural fields (photo 1). This area at the base of the Fossil Cliffs, known as Terras da Costa, was developed by the agricultural community. It is legally framed by the by the National Ecological and Agricultural Reserves, being owned by the Almada City Council, who rents the fields to small farmers.



Photo 1: Terras da Costa settlement

Source: Warehouse collective

Until the 1970s the site where the neighbourhood is placed was punctuated by a few authorised constructions aimed at agricultural support, and only one housing cluster, belonging to a Cape Verdean family, had been built without authorisation. After the Portuguese Carnation revolution in 1974,<sup>2</sup> the existing constructions were occupied, and some new were built, by emigrants coming from former Portuguese African colonies (Vieira, Silva 2014, 76). Around the same time, in the beginning of the 1980s, a Portuguese Roma community was also established in the area, building their housing spaces between Rua do Juncal, the limiting street of the massively built city, and the rural area. The settlement expanded from the development of these two centres, growing into a configuration formed by two main clusters with different forms and dimensions. Unlike other self-produced settlements in the Lisbon periphery, Terras da Costa density increased appreciably during the first decade of 2000, accommodating newly-arrived emigrants from former Portuguese African colonies, mainly from Cape Vert, and recently dislodged families living in the Lisbon Metro Area, unable to meet the rental housing value.

Over the years, residents have constructed their own makeshift homes there, using bricks, pieces of wood, metal sheets, cement and whatever else was available. Featured by the housing precarious character, the neighbourhood is a so-called ‘bairro de barracas’.<sup>3</sup> It became home to a multicultural community that came to encompass about 500 people around 2012<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> With the independence of African countries formerly colonized by Portugal, in 1974 and 1975 a great number of Portuguese colonial settlers returned to Portugal alongside people indigenous to those countries. In the late 1970s Portugal saw its population grow by as much as half a million. The process led to huge population increases in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, and simultaneously gave rise to a large number of informal settlements.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Bairro de barracas’ is the Portuguese designation to slum.

<sup>4</sup> These numbers were provided by Almada City Council

The male population has generally been employed in the construction industry, but at the time of writing is largely unemployed. A considerable part of the women works for cleaning companies or is employed in agriculture. Most of the adult population has low rate education, some even illiterate. A few women, aware of the resonances that learning to read and write might have in their lives, were committed to weekly attend an informal neighbourhood school that was set up at the settlement from 2012 to 2014, framed by an emancipatory pedagogic research project, the Urban Boundaries project<sup>5</sup>. They are concerned with their children education, desiring them to have higher educational levels.

Within the last few years of economic hardship in Portugal a section of the residents, facing long-term unemployment, found new routes of emigration. Last March, the cluster close to Rua do Juncal was demolished and around 150 residents displaced to social housing apartments scattered around the municipality. At the moment around 240 people inhabit the place.

The settlement is not endowed with basic infrastructure. There is only a water nozzle connected to the public water supply, an achievement granted in 2014 within the process of a Community Kitchen construction, “a tactical makeshift urban project designed to meet the local community’s primary demand —running water” (Braga 2015, 142). Until then residents used to fetch water from a public fountain about one kilometer away from the neighborhood, bearing it in containers in wheelbarrows or above their head. That was a treacherous journey during rainy periods, when the dirt paths become muddy. Houses are still not served by piped water or sewage system, while surrounding farms do have irrigation systems. Nevertheless most part has a bathroom with sanitary ware, using water stowed in containers that drains to cesspits.

Dwellers used to access electricity through improvised illicit schemes, since legal access was denied to the place. In May 2015, EDP, the major energy supplier in Portugal, came to the neighbourhood with a police escort to cut the cables that made the connection to the public electricity network. Since then only a part of the houses has been supplied with electricity through a power generator placed in the neighbourhood by the City Council. Interestingly, cable TV, a private service, can be legally subscribed to and paid for.

## **2.2. Spatial and social injustices at the neighbourhood**

The settlement’s existence is a controversial topic: people self-built their homes at the public owned land without authorization, and the site is part both of an agricultural reserve and an ecological protected landscape. Until the development of the process that lead to the construction of the Community Kitchen as well as to the provision of running water to the site, dwellers weren’t heard by to key stakeholders: their relation with public authorities like the City Council and the Ward Council was non-existent and the only path of communication existed under the violence of police operations.

There’s a border between Terras da Costa and Costa de Caparica, one that transcends the morphological and use differences connected to the territory. People living outside the neighbourhood don’t enter the place, even when asked to go there for professional issues. Taxi drivers refuse to enter the neighbourhood; some months ago technicians employed at an electrical fitter also withhold entering it to perform the necessary measurements in order to elaborate a requested budget. Nevertheless this border is continuously crossed by Terras da Costa residents while performing their daily life: going to work, taking their children to school, collecting groceries at the supermarket, etc..

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<sup>5</sup>The project is described in section 3.1.

To a large portion of Costa de Caparica residents the settlement is invisible; or, when visible, faced with dissatisfaction and suspicion, stemming from rooted prejudices towards unauthorized “precarious” urban areas. The former chairman of Costa de Caparica parish council, interviewed by a national newspaper, *Sol*, in 2011, stated that “anyone can take shelter there, there is a total lack of control of unauthorized inhabited spaces”<sup>6</sup>. Another manifestation of this stigmatized gaze was the way it was policed, being target of ongoing violent interventions. Associated with drug trafficking, violence and as shelter to felons until not long ago, the neighbourhood representation was marked by negativity, and by the desire to turn it into an absence. Terras da Costa biased conception is inscribed within a specific representation of self-produced territories—commonly denominated as clandestine, illegal, degraded—a pervasive conception conveyed not only by the media, but also by political discourses; molding national housing policies. It’s a type of representation that attributes to the diversified settlements, and concurrently to their inhabitants a unique and crystalized identity; and which assumes an isomorphism between the territory and those who live there. To poor housing conditions are linearly associated weak social conditions, and residents attributed deviant and criminal behaviours. Moreover, this stigmatized representation is assumed as a mirror of reality, when in fact it is part of a history of socially produced discourses; it’s not a presentation of the territory *as it is*, but its representation. As we have learned from feminist representation critique stereotyping, or causing something/someone to become invisible are two modes of representation through which power relations can be created and consolidated. As Rosalyn Deutsche asserted in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* “[v]isual space is, in the first instance, a set of social relations; it is never innocent, nor does it merely reflect, either directly or through contrived mediations, ‘real’ social relations located elsewhere” (1996, p. 197). Therefore the need to question forms of representation—under what preconditions, and what interests are involved—which are is always constituted by acts of differentiation. The stigmatized representations of Terras da Costa constitute expressions of “oppressive encounter[s] with difference—the relegation of other subjectivities to positions of subordination or invisibility” (1996, p. 198).

Terras da Costa dwellers suffer from severe spatial and social injustice. Peter Marcuse considers that spatial injustice is manifested according to two cardinal forms: the unequal allocation of resources over space; and spatial segregation, the involuntary confinement of any group to a limited space (Marcuse 2009). Members of this community endures both forms of spatial injustice. They live under unsuitable housing and urban conditions, being denied the access to infrastructural common goods as tap water, sewage, electricity and qualified public space. Due to shortage of public housing policies, people with low income are unable to find response regarding accommodation, enduring involuntary clustering, in other words, experiencing structural spatial segregation. Moreover, their specific position within Portuguese society—as members of a Roma community and emigrants from Cape Vert, a country formerly colonized by Portugal—render them target to an instituted pattern of housing discrimination, associated with a concealed structural racism rooted on the persistence of colonial forms of organizing spatial and social relations.

Continuing to follow the author I consider that spatial injustices can’t be removed from the historical, social and political contexts in which they exist. Social injustices, by their side, always have a spatial aspect, thus cannot be addressed without also addressing it. Following Lefèbvre understanding of the social production of geographic space, I consider that the spatial dimension of social injustice is a product of the production and reproduction of that

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<sup>6</sup><http://sol.sapo.pt/noticia/22708/presidente-da-junta-alerta-para-crescimento-da-constru%C3%A7%C3%A3o-clandestina-na-costa-da-caparica>

social injustice; and simultaneously that this spatial dimension also reinforces social injustice. Continuing this line of reasoning, I conclude that spatial solutions are necessary though not sufficient to solve spatial injustices; and also that addressing spatial injustice can be a significant contribution to social justice, still it will always have limits unless the social injustice which underlies the creation of spatial injustice is also addressed. Finally, to achieve spatial justice is necessary to address structural social inequalities.

Iris Marion Young politics of positional difference are associated with the status meaning of occupational positions, and the normalization of attributes that count as qualifications for them. This theoretical apparatus “concentrates on issues of structural inequality”. According to the author, “the major structural axes in modern societies include: the social division of labor; relative power to decide institutional actions, or to change the incentives faced by large numbers of people; the establishment and enforcement of hegemonic norms.” And “[e]ven in the absence of formally discriminatory laws and rules, adherence to body aesthetics, struggles over power, and other dynamics of differentiation, will tend to reproduce given categorical inequalities unless institutions take explicit action to counteract such tendencies (Young (2005) 2009, 275-276).

Terras da Costa dwellers are victims of a structural process of racialization, which “normalize body aesthetics, determine that physical, dirty or servile work is most appropriate for members of certain groups, produce and reproduce segregation of members of these racialized groups, and render deviant the comportments and habits of these segregated persons in relation to dominant norms of respectability” (Young (2005) 2009, 279). This stigmatization and stereotyping expresses both in public images and in the way some people react to some others. “With segregation, the stigma of racialized bodies and denigrated labor marks space itself and the people who grow up and live in neighborhoods” (Young (2005) 2009, 280). As I see it, following Boaventura de Sousa Santos, the stigma of black people in Portugal has its origins on the country colonial past; and its present embedded manifestations are rooted in the endurance of colonial forms of organizing social relations and modes of representing racial difference.

### **3. Situated socio-spatial practices at Terras da Costa**

Along the last seven years diverse socio-spatial practices embodying a situated approach, have been working within this territory, committed to support a process to fight social and spatial injustice with the involvement of dwellers, and to reinforce their agency in the decision making processes related to the place.

#### **3.1. Urban boundaries research project**

The Urban Boundaries movement emerged from an intersubjective relationship established between researchers, educators, artists, and residents during the course of a social project—D.A.R. à Costa-Tr@nsFormArte—that took place at the neighbourhood from 2007 to 2009 aimed to enhance social cohesion; and civic participation, guided by the notion of social justice<sup>7</sup>. This informal civic movement was created in 2009 both by those who developed the project and residents living at the neighbourhood and in the surrounding areas; and continued to search for alternatives for the settlement social and urban consolidation and the improvement of adult literacy. Three years after, from this movement developed into a research project. Investigators and residents wanted to find a formal mode of association; still they found some obstacles, as part of the residents were

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<sup>7</sup><http://daracosta2009.blogspot.pt/>

legally ineligible to integrate any association or cooperative once they were undocumented, with no guaranteed right of legal residence in Portugal. From this impasse came out the idea of a research project; this would allow them to continue their investigation desires and ongoing activities, enlarging their scope.

From 2012 to 2014 the Urban Boundaries research project<sup>8</sup> took place at Terras da Costa, aimed at establishing emancipatory pedagogic practices which would incorporate the social knowledge embedded in this multicultural community. Its theoretical foundation was based on the understanding of community education as the range of educational practices developed within and for the community endurance. One of researchers' goals was that the process would reinforce settlement residents' recognition of the value of their social knowledge; and that they start to make use of it as a political tool able to empower them to make decisions and solve the challenges that confront them in their daily lives. Furthermore, the project aimed at expose these daily challenges as expressions of structural injustices embedded in society. It also caution the invisibility faced by this community, focusing on their symbolic recognition by the local society and key stakeholders.

The Urban Boundaries project was implemented through a critical ethnography practice. The researchers/educators sought to establish a dialogue between the signs they wanted to study and transmit; and the signs they received from the residents, performing a situated investigation open to adjustments related to unforeseen local circumstances. This methodologic apparatus questioned the conventional roles of investigator and investigated; "the object of study"—the multicultural community—was present and participated in all project phases, from its construction, throughout its development, until its dissemination and final conclusions. This ethnographic practice was developed according to four threads: critical literacy, community life stories, multiple cartography and community mediation (including conflict mediation with local organizations and intercultural mediation).

Within the scope of the activities related to the Multiple Cartography, stands out: the conduction of a community census using a range of parameters defined by the community, followed by the organization of a democratic process to elect a neighbourhood committee; and a partnership with the Centre for Architecture, City and Territory Studies of the Lisbon Autonomous University (CEACT-UAL), focused on the realization of an academic workshop "On another coast"<sup>9</sup> that took place at the neighbourhood in June 2012.

In tandem with its academic purposes the workshop was designed to foster the imagination of possibilities concerning the future of the place. One of the students groups, mentored by atelier mob, proposed the implementation of a mediation process for engaging with all stakeholders. Dwellers, supportive of the idea, asked the studio to continue the collaboration, believing that the opening of a communication space with the City Council could lead to the resolution of their most pressing problem, lack of running water in the neighbourhood.

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<sup>8</sup>The project, supported by the Portuguese Foundation for the Science and Technology and based at the Institute of Education, Lisbon University, was coordinated by Monica Mesquita.

<sup>9</sup>See Pedro Campos Costa and Paulo Moreira. "On Another Coast", translated by Natalia Laczko. In *Jornal dos Arquitectos* 247, 88–99. 2013. Lisbon: Ordem dos Arquitectos; and Filipa Ramalheite and Sérgio Silva. "Intervenções Arquitectónicas em Espaços Informais: Três Exemplos no Concelho de Almada". In *Estudo Prévio* 5. 2014. <http://www.estudoprevio.net/artigos/43/filipa-ramalheite-sergio-silva--intervencoes-arquitectonicas-em-espacos-informais>.

### 3.2. Terras da Costa Community Kitchen

Ateliernob<sup>10</sup> accepted the challenge. They assembled with the neighbourhood representatives and members of the Urban Boundaries Project in order to delineate an action plan able to meet the place shortages: on the one hand to reconcile the relationship with public authorities, on the other to delineate a tactical procedure which would be able to ensure the provision of running water, and alongside to improve the neighbourhood common space.

A community kitchen could represent a justification for installing running water in the neighbourhood, and additionally constitute itself as a meeting place gathering other common facilities missing— a laundry area, shower rooms, a barbecue, and a space to host neighbourhood committee meetings. Tiago Saraiva, ateliernob founding partner, repeats that the idea for a community kitchen was put forward by D. Vitória, one of the earliest residents, accustomed to cook for the frequent collective meals within the neighbourhood moments of conviviality. Raúl Marques, member of the Roma community, doesn't refute this, but adjoin one other name, Mónica Mesquita, coordinator of the Urban Boundaries Project<sup>11</sup>. The community, back then engaged around the constitution of a neighbourhood committee, voted in assembly for its construction. They endorsed ateliernob tactical plan.

Architects continued the mediation process of engaging with key stakeholders, above all Almada City Council. And they were able to open a communication space between the neighbourhood committee and local political power. The local political executive, “concerned with the improvement of community living conditions in the short term while acknowledging the impossibility of swiftly enacting a rehousing process, became committed to the community kitchen project” (Braga 2015, 141). Its political support was substantial to articulate the complex legal formulations needed to build the community kitchen at the site, as well as to ensure the construction of the infrastructure necessary to get running water into the neighborhood.

It was necessary to acquire funding in order to carry out the project. Ateliernob's strategy was two-directional; gaining media visibility for the project while applying for competitions as well as grants from private foundations and cultural events. The Gulbenkian Foundation<sup>12</sup> established contact with ateliernob in the spring of 2013. In June 24th 2014, after a long period of negotiation, the Foundation finally committed to financial support, which it provided two months later through the Gulbenkian Human Development Program (Braga 2015, 141).

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<sup>10</sup>ateliernob's partners, Andreia Salavessa and Tiago Mota Saraiva, argue that the current economic situation induced by the financial crisis does not necessarily mean the decrease of architectural needs. The problem is not the lack of work but the means by which to pay for the work of a qualified professional. They are convinced that “architects need to be at the epicentre of the crisis on emerging conflict territories, even if its inhabitants do not have money to pay them.” Part of ateliernob's work is now based on an approach that redefines the architect's role, which they call *Working with the 99%*. They believe that architecture professionals should become organizers and managers of financial and funding processes, creating an essential link between public administrators, the financial systems and communities. According to Mota Saraiva, if construction processes had formerly been seen as a relationship between three parties—owner, designer(s), and builder—today, there emerges a fourth party, the funder. See <http://www.ateliernob.com/>

<sup>11</sup>Raúl Marques commented this during a conversation at a café, February 2016

<sup>12</sup> Established in 1956, the Gulbenkian Foundation has an international scope, developing its activities from its headquarters in Lisbon and its delegations in Paris and London. Its mission is to improve people's lives through the arts, charity, science and education. Alongside activities conducted directly— the Calouste Gulbenkian (CG) Museum with two permanent collections; the CG Center for Modern Art; the CG Art Library; the Music programming including resident orchestra and choir; and the Gulbenkian Instituto de Ciência, a research institute devoted to biological and biomedical research and to graduate training— the Foundation works as a third party financing in cultural and social areas and has had a major role supporting innovative projects that generate social progress and adaptability to change. See <http://gulbenkian.pt/en/the-foundation/about-us/>

Casa do Vapor<sup>13</sup>, a makeshift wooden house which embodied the material expression of a collaborative project was dismantled in the fall of 2013. Part of the wood travelled to Terras da Costa along with a group of practitioners, among whom the architects of Colectivo Warehouse<sup>14</sup> whom became co-authors of the kitchen project and provided the definite drive to its construction. The building was designed as a U-shape “modular structure enabling phased construction in pace with the securing of funds. The construction of the first unit, the kitchen, took place in March 2014” (Braga 2015, 141).

A meeting between key stakeholders took place in the makeshift kitchen in May 2014, and proved to be a decisive moment. The construction of the infrastructure to bring running water into the neighborhood was guaranteed by the Vice-Mayor.

With this guarantee, and Gulbenkian funding in hand, ateliermob and Colectivo Warehouse began to plan the next construction phase, which occurred between August and September 2014. It was an intensive process, coordinated by Colectivo Warehouse, made possible with the effective collaboration of an international group of hundreds of volunteers<sup>15</sup> (photo 2). Since it was a job concerning a wooden structure, residents, despite their work experience in the construction industry (which in Portugal corresponds especially to masonry), had a less active participation. They collaborated in the construction works they were familiar with, namely the building foundations; as well as engaging in neighbourhood cleanup campaigns. A heterogeneous team was continuously present within the neighborhood during that period, altering its relational dynamics on a temporary basis. In the end of September most of the committed European outsiders had already left. Last works were completed until November 2014, the moment when the water nozzle was settled.

The Community Kitchen inauguration party took place on the 8th of December 2014, when piped water finally reached the fountain settled in the Community Kitchen. The constructed building didn't accommodate all the facilities initially foreseen—namely showers rooms, washing tanks for the so called laundry area, and a space to host neighbourhood committee meetings—because the funding received was not enough for everything.

The neighbourhood, until then unseen both spatially and socially, became visible in the public sphere, and that has been instrumental for its survival. Any action that might prejudice the community will now be publically scrutinized. Dwellers perception concerning their situation was changed. They were seen and heard: featured in media reports; their core demand responded. Still, all this represented only a stage within a broader pathway that still needed to be traversed.

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<sup>13</sup>Casa do Vapor (Steam House) was a collaborative spatial practice that took place at Cova do Vapor—a small self-produced fishermenvillage located 3.5 kilometers north of Costa de Caparica—from April to October 2013. The project, which was materialized into a makeshift wooden house, aimed to stimulate experimental artistic practice and research at the place. To further reading see Joana Braga. 2015. “Participatory Aesthetics and Makeshift Urbanism: Cases of Guimarães, Cova do Vapor, and Terras da Costa.” In *Participatory Urbanisms: An Anthology*. Edited by Karin Shankar and Kirsten Larson. Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley. [http://www.part-urbs.com/anthology/participatory\\_aesthetics\\_and\\_makeshift\\_urbanism](http://www.part-urbs.com/anthology/participatory_aesthetics_and_makeshift_urbanism) Images at See <http://constructlab.net/projects/casa-do-vapor/>

<sup>14</sup>Colectivo Warehouse, a collective formed by Portuguese architects that back then was in process of formation

<sup>15</sup>In recent years there has emerged around Europe a movement among students and young architects towards direct engagement in collective construction processes related to makeshift architecture within the framework of relational and socio-spatial practices. Given the visibility that the project gained in networks connected to these practices, an international group of volunteers subsequently came to the site and joined the building process.



Photo 2: Terras da Costa Community Kitchen

Source: Inês Veiga

Immediately after the construction both studios were wavering towards their participation on the forthcoming stages of the necessary pathway, since they considered these would address social issues, outside of their disciplinary field. Dwellers could not claim their right to the place because the area is classified as agricultural and ecological reserve; thus a regeneration of the settlement was unthinkable. Moreover, at the time the City council was not committed to a rehousing process. Following this argument, architects considered that after the construction of the common space and the provision of piped water to the neighbourhood, their presence there was no longer justifiable.

Some months later they reviewed their position and decided to form a multi-disciplinary team engaging an anthropologist and an expertise in community organization, in order to continue the process addressing both social and spatial issues: support the formalization of the neighbourhood committee into a neighbourhood association; perform a diagnosis of the actual and desired housing conditions, and eventually design the procedures for a participatory rehousing process. In order to render sustainable the continuation of their work, they resolved to apply again to funding from the Gulbenkian Human Development Program. That was a complex and lengthy process: first it was required that the Almada City Council would formally support the project, in other words, the City Council would have to commit with the possibility of developing a participatory rehousing process; then, it demanded to convince the Foundation board of directors of the scale of its social relevance. This new grant was finally released two months ago; one and a half years after the application process begin. Along this period the architects' presence was irregular, marked by scattered visits to the place; still since the winter of 2015 a new member of the team, Ana Catarino, anthropologist, began her fieldwork. And ateliermob maintained its crucial mediation role deepening the relation with the City Council and guaranteeing the neighbourhood media visibility.

Terras da Costa Community Kitchen was elected Public Building of the year 2016 within an annual competition launched by archdaily online architecture magazine<sup>16</sup> This prize boosted its media exposure and, consequently, also the neighbourhood visibility. A conveyed image that denounces its poor housing and urban conditions, but which renders inhabitants as “normal” people enduring economic predicament who claim and are entitled to improve their spatial and social conditions.

### 3.3. After the Community Kitchen Construction

Follow-up process by ateliermob multidisciplinary team and two independent researchers (Joana Braga and Joana Pestana)

#### 3.3.1. Resonances of the process

After the construction of the Community Kitchen at Terras da Costa, internal conflicts among local residents became visible, manifested through issues connected with the common management of the space. Its presence unveiled latent disputes entangled with the neighbourhood collective life. Sharing a space entails the negotiation of differences, and the collective creation of mechanisms to regulate its common management. The Community Kitchen embodied a challenge to the collective organization of the community, which if tackled could strengthen it.

Moreover, the process that led to the kitchen construction and the consequently provision of piped water exposed the possibility to change the actual conditions of the neighbourhood. Through it the disjuncture between the actual and the possible was turned visible; unrealized possibilities which had been experienced by dwellers as unrealized lacks and desires were brought to light. Thus, it enhanced dwellers imagination concerning the future of the settlement, triggering the articulation of agonistic views about this imagined future. I consider that it also produced a destabilization of the perceived “distribution of the sensible<sup>17</sup>”; one in which they are not allowed a meaningful voice in the decision-making processes concerning the social organization and spatial arrangements which condition their lives.

Nevertheless, these processes were hampered by the range of problems faced by this particular community, problems that would need to be tackled over a longer period of time and with a clear focus on addressing planning, social, cultural and labor issues, compounded by the racial prejudice it suffers. This prejudice develops into structural and symbolic forms of oppression as a concrete expression of the persistence of colonial modes of thinking; and which are almost unnoticed in the public sphere (they became naturalized) due to the perpetuation of the myth of racial tolerance among the Portuguese<sup>18</sup> (Braga 2015, 143).

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<sup>16</sup><http://boty.archdaily.com/us/2016/candidates/100511/community-kitchen-of-terras-da-costa-ateliermob-colectivo-warehouse>

<sup>17</sup>According to Rancière, the “distribution of the sensible” consists of a “generally implicit law that defines the forms of partaking by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed”. Thus, “it is always a certain sense of the sensible; the dividing-up of the world (du monde) and of people (du peuple)” that reveals “who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed.” To the philosopher, ‘dissensus’ designates a political process that creates a fissure in the sensible order by confronting the established framework of perception, thought and action with the ‘inadmissible’, working thus to introduce new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of perception (2010, 36).

<sup>18</sup> After the Estado Novo attempt to instill in the Portuguese the idea of the benignity of Portuguese colonization (in the 1950s and specially with the beginning of the war in Angola in 1961) a simplified version of lusotropicalism took over the national imagination contributing to consolidate the self-image in which the Portuguese see themselves as a

Furthermore, the spaces and equipment foreseen and not materialized under the scope of the Kitchen project induced an imbalance on the relation between the multicultural community and the architects' team. While at fieldwork I've often listen to complaints concerning the expected range of works that ended up not being done during the kitchen process. As I have referred above, these shortcomings were a necessary consequence of the insufficient amount of funding; yet that was not distinctively perceived by a section of the community, probably due to communication issues. A subliminal feeling of doubtfulness concerning their position towards the team emerged: a project had been presented to them and part of it was left undone. Concurrently the existent skepticism towards the fulfilling of other lacks and desires was reinforced.

### *3.3.2. New constraints imposed over the neighbourhood*

The neighbourhood living conditions were even more impaired in May 2015, when the existing illicit connections with the public electric infrastructure were cut by EDP distribution, a company under the umbrella of the biggest power corporate group operating in Portugal<sup>19</sup>. EDP press office argued that the cut was connected with safety issues, both concerning the families using those clandestine connections and the power network. Dwellers recognized the illegal character of their improvised schemes, still contended they had no other option, once they were not allowed to assign formal contracts with power companies because of the unauthorized status of their dwellings.

Notwithstanding, EDP distribution provides electric power to other neighbourhoods illegally implemented in the country, by way of a solution identical to the one used to provide electricity to allotments. Its press office stated at the time that the company was considering that possibility to Terras da Costa settlement, yet its actual implementation would depend upon a prior agreement with the Municipality; and added that the negotiations were already taking place.

Meanwhile the Municipal Civil Defence services placed a portable power generator at the neighbourhood. Media attention to this situation, possible because the neighbourhood had become visible in the public sphere; as well as the relation already established between the neighbourhood committee and the City Council, were both instrumental to the employment of that measure, which was legally admissible under the frame of social emergency. Despite the emergency nature attributed to the situation, at the time of writing, the generator is still in place, the neighbourhood continues not having legal access to power supply, although the two key stakeholders had already reached a successful agreement. Moreover, the portable generator doesn't provide energy to all the dwellings. It is located near the Community Kitchen supplying part of that aggregate; the section of the neighbourhood near Rua do Juncal, where the Roma community lived, never regained access to power supply, until its demolition in March 2016.

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tolerant, brotherly, pliable people with an ecumenical vocation. This self-imagination of a lusotropical community survived its author as well as the demise of the Portuguese empire, often being employed as a rhetorical device from an acritical and fixed perspective; in the past to legitimate Portuguese colonialism; today to perpetuate the myth of racial tolerance among the Portuguese. This might explain the small number of debates and discussions concerning racial inequality taking place in the public sphere; the issue is discursively silenced.

<sup>19</sup>EDP, Energy of Portugal, was created in 1976 through the merger of several private companies that had been nationalized in 1975, after the end of Estado Novo and forty years of dictatorship. As a state company, it was responsible for the electrification of the whole country, the modernization and extension of the electricity distribution network, the planning and construction of the national electricity generating facilities, and the establishment of a single tariff for all customers. In 1991, the Portuguese Government decided to change its legal status, from Public Company to a Public Limited Company. A few years after, a process of privatization was started, and in 2005 all the state capital had been sold.

### *3.3.3. The violence of demolitions and the shortages of conventional relocation processes*

October 2015, for the first time a Mayor of Almada City Council visited the settlement. That was a symbolical milestone: the neighbourhood was treated alike any other formal part of the municipal territory. Moreover, the Mayor announced that all inhabitants would be relocated. He stated that the section located on the boarder of the seashore construction bulk, with thirty eight dwellings, was going to be demolished in a near future, thus, its inhabitants were going to be relocated until the end of the year; the cluster “camouflaged” among agricultural fields, with fifty four dwellings, would remain in place for a few years, they would be rehoused nearby on an housing estate still to be constructed. Furthermore, The Mayor guaranteed that, unlike state driven rehousing processes framed by the Special Rehousing Programme (PER)<sup>20</sup>, all would be rehoused, even the ones with no right of legal residence in Portugal.

As I have stated above, there are divergent views concerning desired futures. Although the primary claim of all inhabitants is the recognition and fulfilling of their right to housing; a section of the community, exasperated by the years living on such urban condition, considers that the fastest response to their claims is to accede to social housing; the other inhabitants, privileging the value of the embedded social dynamics, aspires to an alternative solution, which would enable them to stay together and, be relocated in a nearby location. Most of the Roma community members supported the first solution; Portuguese migrants, Cape –Verdean, Angolan and Santomean immigrants positions are not homogeneous, some defend the first option, other the second.

The declarations made by the Mayor left disparate resonances on the community: almost all inhabiting the section, which would be demolished, were thrilled with the expectation of finally being able to accede to social hosing. There was a tense atmosphere among the other cluster inhabitants: a few, suffering from chronic ill health, were apprehensive and asked to also be considered in the rehousing process; most part was concerned with the uncertainty of the timetable stated by the Mayor, they feared to be neglected one more time.

The formal announcement of this rehousing process was performed in the end of November in a troublesome mode: two dwellings were not encompassed; and the ones contemplated would have only a week to pack their things and prepare to leave the neighbourhood. Additionally, a section didn’t want the flats attributed to them due to location issues—a woman with a chronic disease was ascribed a house distant from medical facilities with weak public transport access; a couple was located in the same block of the killer of their son; a few were concerned with the embedded social violence of the neighbourhood where the houses assign to them were located— and rejected them. The neighbourhood representatives wrote, with the support of the researchers on the field, a letter to the City Council expressing their objection to the terms of the rehousing process that was being undertaken. The process was suspended in the beginning of December.

That was an unstable period outlined by tension and doubtfulness due to the uncertainty provoked both by the suspension and the conditions of the rehousing. The conditions of a

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<sup>20</sup>PER—the Especial Rehousing Programme created enacted in 1993 was the most ambitious Portuguese public housing program targeted to rehouse people that lived in precarious conditions, in ‘barracas’, focused on the municipalities of the metropolitan areas of Oporto and Lisbon. This programme is associated with relocations in residential housing blocks with a massive occupation concentrated generally in the suburbs, in areas with no public transportations or urban equipment, leading inevitably to forms of socio-urban segregation.

relocation operation will never please all those envisaged. Nevertheless, these residents were promised a proximity approach, one that would take into consideration their particular situations. And the terms through which the process was developing, were diametrically opposed. Some of the examples described are blatant cases of procedures which don't consider the subjects affected by them.

Three months later, March 2016, the process continued and some parameters were reviewed: all the families living at the neighbourhood were considered and some of the conflicting situations were altered. The demolition endured about a week: wheeled loaders, excavators, several technicians, a few with personal protective equipment to prevent exposure to asbestos, an apparatus occupied the place. Vegetable gardens were also destroyed. Men from the other section of the neighbourhood dismantled part of the houses to keep the construction materials, which they will reuse repairing their own houses.



Photo 3: One of the neighbourhood clusters demolition  
Source: Joana Braga

The whole operation left the remaining residents concerned with their future. Would they be subjected to something alike?

### *3.3.4. The challenges imposed by taking part on the negotiation of legal electric supply*

Eight months after the removal of the illegal improvised schemes through which the neighbourhood had access to electric power, the negotiations between EDP and Almada City Council reached a conclusion.

The agreement was communicated to the settlement representatives at the Council Offices, and afterwards to all the residents in an assembly that took place at the Community Kitchen on the 4th of March 2016, involving the municipality housing councilor and a higher technician from the urban department.

The agreement between stakeholders determined that the electricity distribution company would install a provisional energy counter on the site, at Rua do Juncal. Residents would be responsible for the construction of the infrastructure from that point to the neighbourhood; the installation of a battery of counters to be located close to the Community Kitchen connected to each house; and for that connection. They would have to contract a certified company capable of doing the work.

During the assembly, technical and financial support were offered by the City Council. They were also compelled to comply with a calendar defined by the Council; and warned that even if they weren't able to meet the deadlines, which would imply a delay on the power supply, the schedule to remove the portable generator would not be adjusted. In other words, they would have none electricity provision at their homes.

Despite this instrumental assistance, the complexity of the task attributed to the residents represented a demanding challenge, constrained by the prescribed deadlines presented. Dwellers asked the researchers on field, Ana Catarino, Joana Pestana and I, to support the process; thus we formalized the ongoing support provided to the neighbourhood community, in order to be able to monitoring the process, to be present at the meetings with the City Council; and to participate in the negotiations with the construction companies.

The first obstacle to the process concerned the required conditions to receive the financial support: it could only be granted to a formal association. The formalization of the neighbourhood committee into a neighbourhood association had not been completed made. This formalization consists of a bureaucratic procedure involving several steps. Almost a year before, the association had been registered on the notary, still the registration at the tax authority and at the social security hadn't been done until that moment. In order to perform these operations the members of the direction would have to open a bank account. And this proved to be a major challenge, caused by racial inequality, as well as shortage of financial capital. Members of the Association direction were confronted with paradoxical information when visiting some bank branches: when visiting the agencies they were informed of that to open an account it was necessary a much greater amount of money than the amount set online and on information flyers. They were subject to explicit racism. A stereotyped significance was attached to their bodily characteristics—skin color, hair type, facial features—rendering them as deviant subjects. Institutional racism, apparently invisible, comes into sight in public images and in the way some people react to some others (Young (2005) 2009, 279). The bank account was finally opened, yet unfortunately it was necessary the presence and a discursive intervention of one of the researchers.

Another difficulty concerned the technical expertise needed to elaborate the set of specifications for the construction work. Neither residents nor we had the expertise needed, the support provided both by the City Council and EDP distribution was instrumental to perform this task. This undertaken—which also included the consultation of several companies, the evaluation of the budgets presented, and the establishment of a contractual relation with one—demanded a longer period of time to perform than the duration asserted by the Municipality. Several postponements had to be negotiated with local authorities.

Finally, all the process was hindered by the lack of democratic experience of the residents, consequence of suffering of systematic inequality, produced and reproduced by institutionalized “relations and processes of exploitation, marginalization, normalization that keep many people in subordinate positions” (Young (2005) 2009, 287). The members of this community have been continuously discharged from useful participation in social life, and to have a recognized political voice.

Despite being confronted with the charge of conducting the process, and the threat of being left without access to electricity, the major part of the community remained passive. After the assembly with the Council representatives, during which they were told they were responsible for the process, a few women told us—the researchers—they were relying on us to take care of that issue. Simultaneously, members of the association board were not developing efforts towards its formalization. At that moment we had to reevaluate our position: we aimed at supporting the community facing challenges associated to spatial issues, not to solve the problems for them. That would put us in a position of social assistance. But gradually a few residents took charge of the process, with our ongoing assistance; and together we managed to face the challenge. The association was finally formalized in April; the contract for the construction work was assigned at the time of writing.

#### **4. The possibility of a participatory rehousing process considering dwellers forms of life**

During these last couple of months significant achievements concerning the future of Terras da Costa community were guaranteed. The City Council finally committed with the design of a participatory rehousing process. Concurrently, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation provided the expected funding enabling ateliermob members to continue their roles as mediators: working with the City Council on the design of the process, aiming to transform it into a situated and participatory mode of conceiving and producing public driven housing estates; working with the residents as a support in internal debates and making collective decisions concerning the rehousing. Tiago Saraiva wants to guarantee that this rehousing process will relocate the population in the urban-type land of Terras da Costa, observing their Right to Place; and will allow residents to keep their system of vegetable gardens for livelihood. The architect aims to design a participatory process that takes into consideration dwellers forms of life and social dynamics.

These set of practices operating in collaboration with Terras da Costa dwellers were able to open up a communication space between the community and local authorities allowing it to have a political voice; to undermine the biased representations of the place contributing to diminish its marginalization; to ameliorate living conditions at the neighbourhood through the construction of a common space and the legal provision of tap water and electric power; to support some residents political empowerment. Moreover, the possibility of a participatory rehousing process in the near future is on the table.

Nevertheless, all these are small achievements that won't overturn the structural inequalities imposed upon the residents. Such a change would require to alter the mechanisms through which society contains and supports the institutional conditions that produce and reproduce social inequality, namely “the social division of labor; relative power to decide institutional actions, or to change the incentives faced by large numbers of people; the establishment and enforcement of hegemonic norms” (Young (2005) 2009, 275).

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