



Street Art and Urban Creativity

Welcome Session

6-07-2017

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Diretora-Geral das Artes

Dear Vice President of the Faculty of Fine Arts, PhD Program Director, organizer and promoter of this conference, attendees, other institutional representatives, students and professionals here today;

As director of the national organization that has a mission to promote the value and support the arts in Portugal I am honored to share this moment in this event that will undertake discussion about some of the paradigmatic approaches to arts and society in our present times.

Direção-Geral das Artes (General Directorate of Arts) is a public organization from the Portuguese Ministry of Culture, that coordinates the policies of art funding for the fields of architecture, digital arts, visual arts, dance, design, photography, music and theater. We cover a diverse range of disciplines and professional activities. Among our main attributes are the management of various funding programmes to support the arts, the promotion of art and artists resident in Portugal, both across the country and abroad at an international level, the fostering of international cultural exchange and institutional cooperation, and ensuring regular and widespread access to culture as well as new audiences outreach.

We are an institution that monitors, regularly, to good extent, and for quite a few years, the arts scene. We receive a lot of

applications for projects every year, and many requests to inform the audience about such projects almost daily, and we find the area of practice and enquiry herewith at stake fairly unexplored.

Indeed, within the projects that we fund (circa 500 a year), those that are particularly devoted to street art endeavours are fairly unusual. Street art practices appear embedded in proposals of a wider scope, dedicated to cross art-forms, often mixing ephemeral performance with mixed media, “soundscapes” and visual imprinting in public space. But the applications to develop proposals that are clearly under the headline that names this international conference – urban creativity – and particularly those that affiliate with designations and groups such as street art, graffiti and street performance, or urban dance, are rare and appear to be out of context of the mainframe of the funding system that DAGARTES is responsible for managing.

We sense however, that the more artists and cultural agents are concerned with the social dimension of their work and the more they are engaged with social cohesion within the scope of urban communities, the more we find that collectives and individual practitioners are working towards opening their work to the unframed space of the city, as an alternative to galleries, theatres, and concert halls. Conventional spaces support the codes of production and reception which in

turn help to consolidate, but also to perpetuate, aesthetic fashion and creative processes that are less permeable to the effects of public intervention, so if we do not move our attention to artistic practices developing elsewhere, we may not be able to capture the change that might be undertaken in urban creative communities. And while in the funding system these practices may not have visibility, we are aware of a community of people who have been developing artistic skills, eventually to highly professionalized standards (despite their real income from this activity and institutional recognition), who are well settled and key players in the terrain.

We do sense a tension between different approaches to art and society reliant in these alternative models of working, which have a political stance, and still require that we look at them and renew perspectives which have long ago been identified - as the low art and high art distinctions for example, the popular and the elite - in the middle of other debates about social and territorial cohesion that have to some extent helped to finance and politically promote the value of street art.

A significant sign of the pertinence of this subject is that we are gathering within an international conference, in the realms of the university, with the support of the major national arts funding body for independent professionals. It is extremely stimulating that we can witness such an encounter, because in fact it reveals the consolidation of another paradigm in terms of the role and the appreciation of art, for people, for society, and for the professionals themselves.

Inherent to this gathering, so we find, is an important acknowledgement that creative propositions, emerging from organizations and often individuals or informal groups within civil society, have an innovative approach to urban space development and social experience. A space and society shaped by the hectic and sometimes chaotic design or unpredictable pulse of cityscapes, where highly fixed routines and behavioural codes overlap with variable sorts of exceptional events, economic conditions and cultural backgrounds. The street is the public space, both ruled and un-ruled, which creative endeavour is addressing to transform and to integrate in the form of both liberated and committed artistic practice.

As we can read from the topics of the conference programme, this is a theme that gathers aesthetic, social, political and economical issues that are at the forefront of various agendas, amongst which artists play a distinctive and innovative role that is here to be highlighted and debated. For our own institution this is a rich field of convergence to be closely followed and that hopefully gains the attention of more of the organizations and individuals that are working with public funding for making art a public experience.

I am particularly grateful to Pedro Soares Neves for taking the initiative to gather such a rich programme of speakers, projects and debates and challenging us to be here together under this umbrella today.

Paula Varanda