GRAFFITTI IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES.

UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON THROUGHT SOCIAL HAZARD LENSES.

Fátima **Velez de Castro**

University of Coimbra/RISCOS/CEGOT

velezscastro@fl.uc.pt

Introduction, objectives and key-questions

Considering the complexity of actual world, it is desirable to reflect about several dimensions of the social risks in everyday territories. From an integrated view between social and cultural dimension, as the result of overlapping several territorial layers, we intend to reflect about the presence of graffiti in public and private spaces, in which concerns to social hazards.

The idea is to discuss the case of UNESCO World Heritage Areas phenomenon, more specifically Coimbra. Since its recognition on June 22nd, 2013, the "University of Coimbra, Alta and Sofia" have reinforced their urban centrality, which was visible in a renewed public and private interest. However, and despite that care, the University and the "Upper" have been object of intense graffiti, raising some concerns, namely: epistemological (is it a form of art or is visual pollution?), social and civic (is it a form of freedom of speech or an attack to civility?) and institutional (can the status of World Heritage Area be lost?).

Methodology and study area

As a visual geographical study, the qualitative methodological perspective of ROSE (2012), STURKEN & CARTWRIGHT (2009), based on the photographic record of still images, was considered. The case study was developed in Portugal, in the municipality of Coimbra (map 1). In specific terms, the data were collected in an area classified by UNESCO as World Heritage (map 2).
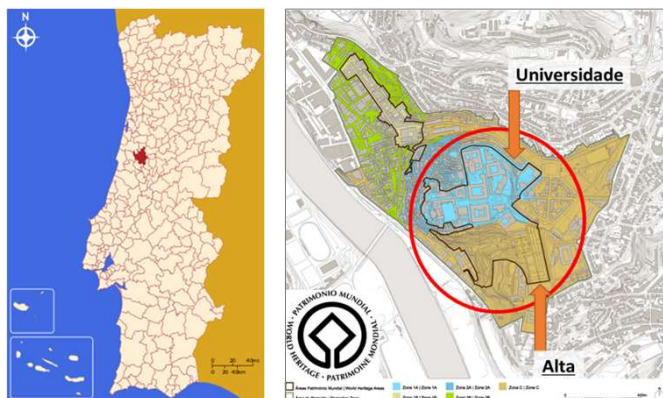
Maps 1 and 2. Location of the municipality of Coimbra in Mainland Portugal and the study area in the city of Coimbra

Source: Wikipedia (2020) and
http://www.uc.pt/ruas/monitoring/instruments/regulation (2019)

There are 3 points integrated in this classification, although the fieldwork included 2 - the University and Alta area - where the presence of graffiti is more intense and diverse.

Theoretical framing and discussion

The discussion about the use of public space has been gaining importance, with regard to the symbolic and phenomenological perspective of the construction of territories, mediated by processes of exchange, conflict and control (SOLOVOVA, MATOS and NOLASCO, 2016). With regard to the tensions derived from this, street art succeeds in bridging the individual from the collective, as a project and as a realization, with graffiti and muralism being expressions of this same interdimensionality (MOREIRA, 2016). MARTINS, PEREIRA, FORBES & MATOS (2016) state that the built heritage is part of the backdrop of our daily lives and includes not only the cultural icons and "classified places" protected by law, but also the daily landscapes, which are part of individual and collective memory, in a topophilia logic. With regard to urban spaces in the context of anthropic and social risks, VELEZ DE CASTRO & FERNANDES (2019) refers to "urbicide", understood as a slow and gradual degradation of the urban condition and urbanity. In this case, social risks intersect with the geographies of fear and distrust, since urban spaces, today faster and faster, have promoted the increase of distance (social, cultural and political) between actors, calling into question principles and values on which urbanity was based. This idea is in line with that advocated by KEVERN (1995), BECK (2015) and LOURENÇO (2015), and we believe that, in this sense, graffiti can be understood as an activity that almost always causes instability, conflicts, unease, especially if it represents a spontaneous and illicit spatial appropriation. Given the intense graffiti activity observed in this area of the city, the epistemological dimension was discussed, as it is a form of art and communication that often appropriates unhealthy spaces, reinforcing the idea of marginality. The civic dimension was also discussed, considering that graffiti is a form of freedom of expression, but that it interferes in the public and private territory, where other users consider it an attack on civism and urbanity. Finally, from the institutional point of view, the risk of the UC losing its status of "World Heritage Area" was highlighted, with negative consequences for the university (lack of income from visitors) and for local/regional tourism.

Conclusions

The consequence of a multi-territoriality, reflecting the experience of various groups in the same territory, urges reflection on how to deal with this type of social tension, in a logic of balance and well-being, in which it is possible to articulate street art, in its various expressions, with the fruitful and peaceful coexistence, both inside and outside the communities.

Bibliography:

This research is developed in: Velez de Castro, Fátima (2020), "A apropriação dos territórios quotidianos pelos grafitos". Do risco social à multiterritorialidade". *Vértices*, Instituto Federal Fulminense, Brazil (in press).

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