

# Resourceful Cities

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## Places made by Networks, Networks boosting Places Two examples of resourceful neighborhoods in Lisbon

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## **Abstract**

This paper is focused on two of Lisbon's neighborhoods – *Campo de Ourique* and *Telheiras* – presented as examples of how social networks publicized by the new information and communication technologies (Internet, Web 2.0) play an important role on locating territories and in reinforcing their identities.

The first case aims at showing how a traditional neighborhood with a strong spatial identity has been using social networking to promote self-image and local commerce to the metropolitan area. The second case describes how urban sprawl urbanization, with virtually no local history, has been using networks to help strengthen a recent neighbourhood identity. In both cases the analysis will present data gathered for the project “*Bairros de Lisboa, 2012*” and new data concerning the analysis of using social networks to promote and reinforce neighborhoods' identities.

As a whole, this contribution intends to demonstrate not only the relevant capacity that spatial urban communities have to provoke new dynamics leading to social innovation among them, but also the social, cultural and symbolic meaning of these communities for a sense of identity and belonging to a global city like Lisbon.

### **1. Neighbourhoods: what are they and what are they for?**

The Portuguese word for neighbourhood is *Bairro* and notwithstanding the intersection between the geographical, social and cultural components, this word refers to something that is not tangible or definable (Grafmeyer, 2006; Kokoreff, 2006). More than a concept to enclose or distinguish a small territory within the city, *Bairro* corresponds, above all, to a representation that is simultaneously spatial, social, cultural and symbolic.

On one hand this means that the word *Bairro* is applied in a free way to designate different socio-spatial contexts (Cordeiro and Figueiredo, 2012), which can be utopian and romanticized urban places, historic and authentic places (Zukin, 2010), or deprived and exclusionary urban places. On the other hand and despite its polysemy and uncertain definition, *Bairro* corresponds to a spatial concept recognized and used by everyone in an approximate way, which allows the construction of dynamic representations and targeted for action.

*Bairro* is also a fluid space with no administrative limits, nevertheless the frontiers established and recognized by their inhabitants. In fact it's through such spatial limits that a

sense of collective identity and belonging is built, which proves not only that these limits are inherent to this spatial representation, but also their social origin. Thus, *Bairro* is a place where one can observe the intersection between material and objective aspects of social life and the subjective aspects of its social and cultural representations.

In sum, it is possible to systematize a set of statements about the meaning of the word *Bairro*, i.e:

- ♣ An urban area comprising streets and buildings with architectural and temporal thickness;
- ♣ A basic unit of urban life, which does not correspond to a political-administrative definition neither to a simple physical support for a specific group;
- ♣ An area without territorial demarcation but bounded by a sense of belonging and by the collective memory and identity of its residents;
- ♣ A geographical space where different layers are overlapped, such as time, history, architecture, urban morphology, daily routines, activities, services, social classes, neighbourly relations;
- ♣ A scenario that allows the intersection between the objectivity of social life and the subjectivities of their representation.

This introductory explanation seeks to safeguard two important aspects: i) our conviction that the socio-spatial representation defined as *Bairro* contains particularities inherent to the Portuguese context; ii) our option to translate the word *Bairro* into neighbourhood to facilitate the understanding and reading of this paper, notwithstanding the cultural specificities referred.

Turning to the second question - what are the neighbourhoods for? - The answer reached is as complex as the diversity of concrete situations that can be analyzed. In fact neighbourhoods can be seen as spatial units of urban liveliness, where one can explore cultural and social dimensions such as: proximity and neighbourly relations; cooperation and mutual aid; identity and belonging construction; temporalities and daily life rhythms. But beyond all this neighbourhoods are also spatial units of intervention and governance, whose management must start from an integrated view of the whole urban territory.

Given the multiplicity of scales that the city provides, neighbourhoods allow its inhabitants to integrate into intermediate spaces of social life. At the same time it allows to observe the city life from the inside, getting a more humanized and relational image (Cordeiro, 2010). According to Lefebvre (1970) neighbourhoods are a way of organizing the time and space of

the city, being the largest of the small social groups and the lowest of the major. A neighbourhood can also be understood as a sociological unit which although it doesn't define the social reality, it is indispensable for its comprehension. Neighbourhoods are where inhabitants' space and time takes form and meaning in the urban space, generating a sense of identity and belonging.

It is known that the dwelling place is a privileged space for emotional investment (Remy and Voyé, 1994) and, compared to the anonymity of the city, neighbourhoods are the place of knowledge and identification, which can become stronger through social characteristic acts as conversation, neighbourly relations or shopping. Thus, the neighbourhood becomes an important element in the construction of social ties between individuals, on the one hand, and the construction of spatial and identity links between individuals and the city, on the other, thus contradicting the anonymity and isolation of the city.

In parallel with these identifiable and integrative functions, neighbourhoods can also have an active role among different entities that manage and intervene on urban territories. As a privileged space for several investments by the community, neighbourhoods are also the privileged scenario to intervene, namely: being aware of concrete problems and identifying some needs; defining priorities for intervention; giving visibility to some actions and projects developed in place.

In fact social innovation processes and other cultural initiatives occur first and foremost at the local level and, as Moulaert says, "...locally based initiatives, often much more so than official state-led programmes, can galvanise a range of publics to engage in activities that have city-wide (if not greater) impacts on the dynamics of urban cohesion and social development." (Moulaert et al., 2010: 5). A relevant factor for the success of communitarian initiatives is the social and cultural heterogeneity of its inhabitants. At a local level, this heterogeneity not only facilitates networking with different institutions and social agents but also promotes the empowerment of the whole community.

According to Bauman (2006), in the presence of global and not controllable urban spaces, individuals tend to seek local places as welcoming and safe. However, and in times of crisis such as the one we are experiencing now, neighbourhoods can also have an added value in terms of social capital (Putnam, 1992) i.e., strong and proactive social networks, which the scale should exceed the local level. Taking this perspective, Freiler (2004) advocates the contribution of social capital to build strong neighbourhoods, interpreting this strength in

successful actions with positive effects also in other capitals, such as the economic, cultural, and symbolic ones. Thus, a strong neighbourhood should be: i) inclusive, with a strong sense of belonging, active community involvement and respecting differences; ii) vibrant, with active street life and community interaction; iii) cohesive, with a sense of mutual responsibility and reciprocity; iiiii) safe, both on an objective assessment as subjectively (Freiler, 2004).

From these perspectives, the neighbourhood can boost new and innovative dynamics in the urban territories. Nevertheless it should adopt preferably a multiscale view to allow the articulation with other urban territories and to prevent the closure on itself. In this context, the bet on using diverse networks arises as an important tool to promote diverse actions, both on local and even more global scales.

Taking all this into account, this paper develops case studies from two of Lisbon's neighbourhoods – *Campo de Ourique* and *Telheiras* – presented as examples of how social networks publicized by the new information and communication technologies play an important role on locating and promoting territories and in reinforcing their identities.

## **2. Looking at neighbourhoods through networks**

In a global network world we can see the increasing importance of the sociocultural dynamics in spatial locations as neighbourhoods. In these urban places, information and communication technology become a tool for the reinforcement of local social relationships, both in the real and in the virtual world (Light, 1999). In this sense, when a robust social capital is gathered in a neighbourhood and is combined with the use of information and communication technologies, social networks can be amplified. Through this process, it's possible to jump from a small place to the global reinforcement of local identities and to adopt strategies for boosting these places through a global tool.

The two case studies that will be presented arise within a wider study carried out between 2011 and 2012<sup>1</sup> and whose scope of analysis reached six neighbourhoods in Lisbon. From the analysis of a total population of six hundred local residents inquired, it was clear that – despite the importance of local history, urban morphology, collective memories and cultural traditions - the most important factor in a neighbourhood is “people”. Therefore, for the inhabitants' self-definition is unequivocal that what makes these spatial recognized places

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<sup>1</sup> Project “Bairros de Lisboa, 2012” developed by CEACT/UAL (Research Centre on Architecture, Cities and Territory, Lisbon Autonomous University)

are the people who live in it and their proximity relationships, laid on daily built and maintained neighbourly networks, always helpful in solving local problems. The study confirmed that social capital is determinant on the construction of social cohesion, on the search for local solutions for local problems, on the use of the available local resources to improve the life of the inhabitants. The social capital of these neighbourhoods is also a result from the social networks present in each one of them, such as friendship, family and commercial ties.

Taking all this into account, a recent forward research was initiated concerning the analysis of using social networks to promote and reinforce neighborhoods' identities. Two neighbourhoods with contrasting characteristics were chosen. The first one, *Campo de Ourique*, is an ancient and historical neighbourhood with a very central location facing the city of Lisbon and where a spontaneous and authentic neighbourhood's life is recognized (Zukin, 2010). The second, *Telheiras*, is a recent urbanization with a relatively peripheral location facing the central city and where the intentional action of a set of residents have been creating a sense of neighbourhood and belonging that is collectively shared. Currently it can be said that if *Telheiras* is today recognized as a neighbourhood it is because intentional actions of many inhabitants made it happen.



Figure 1 - Location of Campo de Ourique and Telheiras in the city and local limits (*concelho* and *freguesia*)

The research was led by two hypothesis: a) in a globalised world, inhabitants from *Campo de Ourique* and *Telheiras* use their social capital as a local network resource to promote the neighbourhood's identity, in order to establish a different status for it in the city context and, consequently, to receive the inherent benefits; b) The use of the global network of the Internet maximizes and amplifies the image of the neighbourhood to the exterior, operating as a source of identity reinforcement.

### **2.1. *Campo de Ourique* – When networks boost the place**

*Campo de Ourique* results from an expansion plan from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, although the building construction was only finished in the 1960's. This neighbourhood is a good example of Lisbon's urban expansion in a period of population growth and was essentially a residential place for the city bourgeoisie which preferred its orthogonal streets and large apartments to the old irregular urban form from the old city centre.

In the last 50 years *Campo de Ourique* has been losing population (from 39 thousand, in the 1960's to 15 thousand in 2011) and thus, experiences a clear population aging. However, it remains one of the most desirable neighbourhoods of Lisbon to live in and housing prices dictate there some gentrification. The distinguish mark for the neighbourhood is its commercial dynamics. The capacity of local stores is much larger than the mere neighbourhood's needs. Since the late 1970's, local commerce has been changing from traditional shops to relative sophisticated stores, mainly related to fashion and fabrics and, recently, to cooking accessories and gourmet shops. In the context of the city of Lisbon *Campo de Ourique* assumes a commercial specialization status and has an image of sophistication and "glamour" and its influence goes beyond local frontiers.

This perception is related mainly to the more sophisticated and specialized trade that has developed in recent decades and has contributed not only to increase the neighbourhood visibility in the city context, but also to enhance its image as cosmopolitan and attractive space to live, visit and consume. In this perspective one has been witnessing the promotion of various initiatives aimed at boosting trade and neighbourhood services, promoted by both the municipality, either by local staff linked to trade, or through less traditional means such as taking advantage of the Internet and social networks.

An example of a local bottom-up initiative - and based on a logic of subsidiarity which takes advantage of knowledge and global resources - was the creation of a network in which participating residents, traders and consumers could promote multiple initiatives linked to the neighbourhood. Through an internet blog (<http://campodeouriqueaberto.blogspot.pt/>) *Campo de Ourique* asserted itself as 'being more than a neighbourhood': "Nothing like Campo de Ourique to find everything you need. Much more than a neighbourhood there are hundreds of shops and services at your disposal in the open and with much sympathy. (...) A world full of life that makes Campo de Ourique the right place to find everything."

Meanwhile this blog has migrated to Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/CampodeOurique>), allowing greater visibility to its contents, enabling greater interaction between all stakeholders, and even a “cyber-knowledge and communication” between them. Currently, this Facebook page has 4856 “friends” and 10 discussion groups<sup>2</sup> with open access and formed by residents, traders and “friends” of the neighbourhood, where many ideas and actions related to it are exchanged, such as the existence of a network of stores offering discounts on their products, petitions relating to matters of interest to the neighbourhood or other general information.

The measure adopted by several traders in keeping the stores opened all Saturday was another bottom-up initiative, in order to generate new dynamics of consumption for the existing trade in the neighbourhood. One of these commercial spots that is worth special mention is a kiosk with a terrace, an *Hamburgueria* located in the inner park of this neighbourhood, whose success not only attracts new consumers to other stores, as well as new publics and visitors to the entire neighbourhood. Through its Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/QuiosqueDeCampoDeOuriqueHamburgueriaDaParada>) are announced several initiatives focused on this commercial space, whose centrality can print a vitality that spreads far beyond it. Much more than a meeting place within the neighbourhood, this kiosk has become a point of interaction that attracts groups of people from different areas of the city and gives a new human colour to this neighbourhood.

In order to maximize these local bottom-up initiatives to an institutional level, the municipality has also sought to develop some cultural measures aimed at attracting new visitors. Opening the market of *Campo de Ourique* on Saturday afternoons became a way to revitalize this commercial space by attracting new merchants and consumers to use different timetables and products that usually are not sold in neighbourhood markets, as is the case of old objects, craft, books and fine arts. This is a cultural initiative clearly triggered "top-down" and resulting in a clear investment in the use of local synergies that *Campo de Ourique* potentiates.

Another important example for the creative and cultural dynamics of the neighbourhood is the existence of *Casa Fernando Pessoa* (Fernando Pessoa House), a cultural space with the purpose of honouring and promoting the work of this Portuguese poet and writer, who lived

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<sup>2</sup> Groups such as: “grow up in Campo de Ourique”; “Campo de Ourique fans”; “Buy in the traditional trade” or “Campo de Ourique tertúlia” among others.



in this neighbourhood in the last years of his life. In this cultural centre - highly visited by foreign tourists and international experts in literature - alongside the library, several initiatives are scheduled throughout the year adding symbolic value to the neighbourhood, as well as projecting it in a cultural panorama that transcends its boundaries.



Figure 2 and 3 – two perspectives from the inner park *Jardim da Parada – Campo de Ourique*

## 2.2. Telheiras – When networks (also) made the place

*Telheiras* was, until the late 1970's, a small urban spot in the periphery of the city, formed by rural villas and some buildings from an ancient convent. In the beginning of the 1970's, just before the April Revolution that ceased the dictatorial period in Portugal, the municipality decided to promote an urbanization plan in that area. The plan, clearly influenced by the principles of the Athens Charter, articulates the prior buildings with the new architecture, where the street and public spaces play an important role to promote social cohesion. *Telheiras* succeeded as a new residential model for the city and, despite its relative peripheral location, this recent neighbourhood gained centrality when the subway network arrived in 2002.

The inhabitants of *Telheiras* are mainly medium class, with a high level of satisfaction with their neighbourhood, which they consider a prestige one, by its urban quality, its excellent schools (both public and private) and commerce. The image, dating from the late 1980's, that *Telheiras* is the neighbourhood with the largest number of people with high education

degrees still remains in the collective imaginary. In fact and contradicting the social heterogeneity existing in *Campo de Ourique*, the major social homogeneity that is observed in *Telheiras* may have been relevant to increase social dynamics that reinforced the construction of the local identity which lead to the neighbourhood's representation.

According to Scott (Scott, 2006) neither cultural homogeneity nor exaggerated forms of heterogeneity seem to lead to high levels of learning and innovation in the creative field. Synergies will be best exploited through a mixture of strong and weak ties and interpersonal relationships. Bearing in mind this view, *Telheiras* can nevertheless be considered as a successful case, insofar as appealed to a sense of belonging - to a community and towards their space - as a way of enhancing interpersonal relationships and identity that helped to construct a sense of neighbourhood.

This means that while *Campo de Ourique* attracts and generates social networks and forms of creativity in a context where the sense of neighbourhood is already taken for granted, in *Telheiras* it turned out to be the specificity of its urban environment - and especially the social capital - who had to trigger creative skills that were socially oriented in order to construct a sense of neighbourhood. Currently, this sense (or representation) of neighbourhood is collectively shared and affords a boosting effect for new forms of innovation and creativity, taking more and more advantage of the consolidated social networks.

One of the most important actors in this dynamic was the existence of a neighbourhood association (ART - *Associação de Residentes de Telheiras* - <http://artelheiras.wordpress.com/>) that gathered the inhabitants' interests and transformed them in local actions, such as - on a prior stage - making sure the municipality followed what the urban plan established (mainly in terms of public space) and - recently - improving life quality and neighbourhood sustainability.



Figure 4 – The headquarters of ART With several information posters – *Telheiras*

Issues related to the quality of life in the neighbourhood and its ecological sustainability has always been a shared concern among the inhabitants, helping to consolidate their sense of neighbourhood. An example is the formation of a network of information, training and debate around the Transition Movement (<http://ecotelheiras.wordpress.com/>). This Movement consists in creating several initiatives regarding a greener and more integrated with nature neighbourhood. Formally, it is a working group with links to ART – keeping a very rich and active blog - which fosters many initiatives regarding sustainability, resilience and empowerment in the community. Presently, this movement has three initiatives in progress within the neighbourhood: a community garden, a biological marketplace and regular conferences about the Transition Movement. All these activities are also shared in a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/144888152225444/>), with an open discussion group whose motto is “care for the land, care for people and share the surpluses”.

Alongside these ecological and environmental actions, the existing social networks are also often used in the promotion of numerous cultural activities taking place in the neighbourhood - cinema, theatre, music, literature, fine arts or several workshops - as well as other social actions which aim to create closer ties among neighbourhood residents, like bike rides, picnics, parties, meetings, etc. All together, these activities have helped to build a neighbourhood identity in a place that, without the existence of these social networks, could be another anonymous urban space with no sense of belonging.



Figure 5 – A central Street in *Telheiras*

In sum, the use these neighbourhoods make of social networks can be understood as what Rosenau identified by "revolution of expertise" (Rosenau, 2010). With expanded access to information and new forms to disseminate it through social networks, individuals not only become able to participate and create relevant knowledge to their community, but they can

also create local innovative and creative dynamics, which confirms the neighbourhood as the suitable scale to observe these skills.

### **Conclusion**

In the last few years, Lisbon, as other capitals, has been experiencing an increasing return to city centre neighbourhoods. This movement is strongly related to the revalorization of proximity networks, which were reinforced throughout the years by real estate and municipal policies and are, presently, being broadcasted and amplified by the use of social networks and technological tools.

Through these examples we tried to illustrate the growing importance of social networks in promoting new neighbourhood dynamics in two different spatial realities. The antiquity of *Campo de Ourique* gives it an identity recognition that not only promotes a very strong internal cohesion around the neighbourhood's representation, but also assumes a high visibility abroad. In what concerns to *Telheiras* one can watch the construction of a neighbourhood's sense through planned strategies, which generates creative synergies that reinforce the residents' sense of belonging towards their space and with the community.

In both neighbourhoods, local social networks are tools for identity reinforcement and have a continuous and reciprocal effect: on one side, neighbourhood ties strengthen local identities. On the other, local identities give value to local personal networks. When these local social dynamics gain broader visibility in a large scale network, such as the Internet, a feed-back effect is created and local networks are reinforced by global exposition. Such exposition generates a wider recognition of the neighbourhood as a distinctive place, where social and cultural valued actions take place. As a result, inhabitants from *Campo de Ourique* and *Telheiras* have a high degree of satisfaction with their neighbourhoods' prestige in the city context.

The use of blogs and Facebook as a tool of communication - for the inhabitants, for the local commerce, for cultural activities and all stakeholders with interest or capacity to intervene in the neighbourhood - is clearly seen as a way of seeking several benefits in a competitive city, but also as a way of ensuring a top place in an hypothetical "neighbourhood competition", where the sense of belonging to a specific place of the city is associated with the social and cultural characteristics of its inhabitants. Given this scenario, not only neighbourhoods can provide added value to city, but also to the quality of life of local communities.

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