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Culture in the Cities
Present and Future
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CULTURE IN THE CITIES
Present and Future

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In recent decades, European cultural policies have become inseparable from urban policies, with culture becoming both the new promotional tool for cities aiming to be ‘creative’ (Vanolo, 2008; Vivant, 2009) and the source of unprecedented real estate profits (Zukin, 1982; Piraud, 2017a). This new alliance is underpinned more fundamentally by the emergence of capitalism that is both urbanized (Harvey, 1985) and cultural (Scott, 2014), born, among other things, from the absorption of the critical movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999). Contemporary cultural and urban policies appear henceforth to be profoundly shaped by the recognition and institutionalization of counter-cultural critiques and practices. In addition to the emergence of a “new spirit of capitalism”, this cultural metamorphosis of capitalism is very concretely manifested in the evolution of forms of urban production, both in such processes as gentrification (Lees, Slater, Wyly, 2013) but also, as we will argue, in the evolution of urban aesthetics and, more broadly, new forms of economic valuation (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2017; 2020).

In those transformations of the capitalist city, the whereabouts of the spatial and political institutionalization of former squats and other sites of what has been coined “alternative culture” (Pattaroni and Piraud, 2020) appears as a heuristic analytical entry (Pruijt, 2003; Martinez, 2014). It reveals, among other, the contradictions pervading the encounter between critical practices, cultural and urban policies and more broadly, the commodification of urban environments. Despite their critical heritage (Allavena, 2020), institutionalized alternative cultural centers are now part of the ordinary landscapes of European cities, praised by the ideologues of the “Creative City” (Keil et Boudreau, 2010) as an expression of the creative vivacity of cities and their “street level culture” (Florida, 2004, p. 122). Nested mostly in former industrial wastelands (Andres and Gresillon, 2011), they have become obligatory stops on tourist routes as an original and legitimized change of scenery alongside heritage castles, picturesque alleys and contemporary art museums. The insertion of such spaces, heirs of the counter-cultures of the 1960s and 1970s, into the landscape and economic order of the contemporary city was made possible by a slow “domestication” process of their subversive potential regarding the political and spatial established order (Pattaroni, 2020). In this article, we propose to revisit this process of domestication, which not only contributed to neutralize the critical character of their aesthetics and socio-spatial organization but also to fully integrate them into the public and private financialization of urban production.

We will focus in particular on an exemplary case located in Lisbon, the famous Lx Factory (LXF), praised in the brochures of Easy Jet and often cited as an example of entrepreneurial success throughout Europe by promoters of “creative cities”. Unlike cities in northern Europe, such as Berlin, Amsterdam or even Geneva, Lisbon did not experience a strong “political squat” movement, which would have

1 For example, during the consultation days on the cultural development of an industrial zone in Geneva on November 17, 2017, the case of Lx Factory was mentioned many times in the working groups as a good example of innovative public space. The members of Les Voisins, a prolific coworking space with several locations to its credit, consider Lx Factory in particular as a model for Geneva.

2 On “political squats” and the different types of squatting in Europe, see Pruijt, 2003. There has nevertheless been an important occupation movement in Lisbon in the aftermath of the 1974 military coup d’état. At that time, many uninhabited houses in Lisbon and other cities were taken by the people that lived in adjacent slums. This was conceivably the first radical gesture in which several self-organized actions in the squatting realm were endeavored. These actions played a significant role in the process that shaped the “Carnation Revolution,” as it was celebrated in the subsequent years. In order to give a legal
been the direct producer, as elsewhere, of the now well-known urban landscapes of the so-called alternative culture (colorful and graffiti-covered buildings and factories, plastered with political slogans and traces of inhabitants’ appropriation). However, despite this absent background, LXF appears at first glance, to the foreign visitor, as a fine example of the many European “alternative cultural centers”\(^3\) recognizable mostly by their visual “resistance aesthetics” and cultural programme (Cabeçadas do Carmo et al., 2014). When entering LXF, one finds DIY objects, recycled industrial furniture, graffited walls, an anarchist bookshop or yet a “bio” supermarket. This “air de famille” against a backdrop of creative effervescence is essential in the constitution of LXF as both a point of attraction for cultural policies orientated towards tourism and a new asset for financialized urban policies.\(^4\) Such as result is not a spontaneous outcome, but it was made possible by a broader process of domestication of counter-cultural objects and practices, tackling both their spatial and organizational forms.

### Investigating The Capitalist City in The Making

Investigating this case study will allow us therefore to analyze more broadly the various “investments in form” (Thevenot, 1984) necessary to perform neoliberal urban policies aimed to increase the financial and touristic attractivity of a city. In this perspective, influenced among others by an “economic sociology of convention” (Biggart and Beamish, 2003; Diaz-Bone, 2011), the capitalist capture of counterculture framework to such actions (and to keep them into control), the first government of the new regime (GovernoProvisório) acted out rapidly, providing support to the squatting campaigns (and new houses construction) through the Programme SAAL [Serviço de ApoioAmbulatório Local]. This programme made available technical and legal expertise for projects involving housing needs, facilitating the relationship between population and authorities. New laws led to the legalization of squatted houses but, on the other hand, interdicted the occupation of additional houses.

\(^3\) On the notion of “alternative cultural center,” see Carmo, 2016.

\(^4\) The name itself alludes to a long and ambiguous past: one thinks, of course, of the industry that used to flourish within these walls, but also of Warhol’s famous “Factory”. Meanwhile, the abbreviation of the name of the city of Lisbon, LX, refers more or less implicitly to the hypermobility of this creative class navigating between the coworking spaces of the metropoles.

is not the \(a\ posteriori\) consequence of neoliberal policies but rather an \(a\ priori\) condition of their deployment. A careful description of the way LXF is commodified, using among other things an alternative kind of aesthetics to produce economic value, appears therefore as an opportunity to empirically grasp the way capitalist urbanization proceeds by formatting places and people. Emancipatory along oppressive effects are thus embedded in those relational reconfigurations. We rejoin here the claim that to build up a meaningful and critique analysis of the whereabouts of contemporary capitalist urbanization, it does not suffice to unveil the somehow abstract political economy constraints on “urban environment” (Farias, 2011; MacFarlane, 2011). On the contrary, as Farias aptly suggests, it is necessary to describe and understand how such constraints perform in situation: “Thus, by looking at cities, we can learn more about capitalism as a form of life, although not as a global abstract logic imposing its forms into local spaces, but as a concrete process assuming multiple forms even within a city” (Farias, 2011, p. 368). As Marc Breviglieri argues in his powerful analysis of the transformation of Lisbon’s city center during the last decade, even if the important critical posture of David Harvey is essential to grasp the broader capitalist transformation, it does not really account for the spatial, economical and anthropological metamorphosis of the urban fabric (Breviglieri, 2019). Among others, the critical vectors raised in the 1970s and 1980s are nowadays vastly integrated into the urban production through projects explicitly promoting social cohesion, the diversification of publics and experiences or, more broadly, the fight against exclusion (Breviglieri, 2019, p. 5). Hence, to understand the contemporary forms of oppression and alienation of the capitalist city, one needs to follow carefully the way critique and potentially subversive entities are nowadays recollected in this new capitalist order. As the idea of experience is central to this renewed capitalism, we can start with a description of the localization and appearance of LXF.

### An Experience of The Commodified Counterculture

Located in the (quasi)former working-class neighborhood of Alcântara, between railway lines...
and under the gigantic April 25th Bridge, the huge 19th century’s industrial buildings of the LXF are now a reference point for urban life in Lisbon. A good example of Florida’s “recipe for success”, LXF brings together cultural activities, shared offices, shops, coworking areas and cafes. All of this explicitly plays on the patrimonialization of industrial wasteland: listed as a building complex of municipal interest, the site carefully stages “historical” vestiges of the previous activity developed in this place (including different types of machines, printers, and other objects) while enhancing its walls with street art. The territory of Lx Factory is announced by a cheerful sign with illuminated letters made of light bulbs, reminding the entrance of a cabaret. However, the passer-by who is caught by this illuminated invitation quickly comes up against a uniformed security guard controlling the entrances, to which is added a surveillance camera used to monitor both the entrance and the ATM machine. Once inside, the Friday night visitor will find a jumble of people, cafes, terraces, live music, and container-kiosk selling art, architecture, and design magazines in several languages. “Ethnic” (i.e., exoticized) clothing, second-hand books, light garlands, pastries, design or occasional objects and souvenirs are scrutinized and consumed by a slow and polyglot (largely French-speaking) crowd that contrasts with the surrounding neighborhood. The place looks like a neighborhood within a neighborhood, with roads, sidewalks, parking lots, cafes, stores, and restaurants and this is what is praised by visitors.

Each mural is highlighted and signed. The buildings bear the traces of the history of multiple lived experiences, such as this hole in the facade that was later transformed into a large window.

The inquiry of this article took place before the COVID-19 Pandemic and one must note that the LXF site is undergoing, in 2021-2022, important transformations. Nevertheless, the general argument of this article still holds and one could even argue that the current changes are the result of increased financialization of the whole project (spatial remodeling, new venues such as an “alternative” Hotel, ...).

In reference, of course, to Richard Florida, whose work forged and popularized the idea of the “creative class” and its impact on urban development (Florida, 2004).

As commented on TripAdvisor on November 2021: “We visited LX Factory on a Sunday with my wife and the family of our brasilian friends who lives in Lisboa. Was a very good experience, because the space has the cosmopolitan atmosphere of other European great cities like London or Berlin”.

On the idea of touristic policies as politics of “enchantment”, i.e the “engineered production” (Winkin, 2002) of urban experiences where the consumerist dimension is carefully euphemized see Réau&Poupeau, 2007.

The Touristic Thrust of Commodification

LXF appears hence as a convivial place created to consume products and atmospheres of a culture that is rooted in the aesthetic but also the consumption habits of the broader European alternative culture. As such, it is more broadly part of the systematic commodification of the different experiences composing what can be labelled as the production of an “enacted” city of Lisbon that figures in the collec-
tive imagination and tourist guides. In fact, as we get closer to this city, we encounter the stereotypical symbols (the historic districts, the fado, the pastéis de nata) transformed and sold in every corner of the city as merchandise. And when the tourists pursue their quest for authenticity or “cultural difference” – as “even in mass tourism, even when everybody is coming on a charter flight, they still may be in search of some cultural difference” (Fainstein, 2007) – they finally come across wastelands and margins of the city that have also been transformed: docks that are no longer occupied by fishermen, but by party-goers and nightclubs, old factories now occupied by “creative people”. As it is well known in tourism studies (Cohen, 1988), this touristic longing for authenticity and singularity, constantly doomed to failure, induces a continuous process of enlisting the margins of the cities and subordinate sectors of activity in the landscapes of urban consumption. It thus gives one major impetus to the commodification of alternative culture, i.e., more fundamentally, the commodification of a domesticated difference - instead of its negation - as a central feature of contemporary capitalism and its valuation of experience (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2020) and surprise (Hutter, 2011).

To understand the impact of tourism on the city’s production, we have to measure its weight in a country strongly marked by the economic crisis of the late 2000s. In 2017, Portugal was the leading destination...
in Europe according to the World Travel Awards\(^9\) and the share of tourism in the country’s GDP doubled in 10 years, rising from 9% in 2008 to 17% in 2018.\(^{10}\) This increased economic weight offered a dominant and unprecedented role to the political and financial players involved in the transformation of urban environments according to visitors’ expectations (instead of the inhabitant’s). As Luis Mendes argues, the municipality has opted since the 2000s for an urban promotion strategy targeting tourism, entrepreneurship and real-estate, to attract international capital and visitors (Mendes, 2015, 2017; Breviglieri, 2020). The crisis of 2008 accelerated this strategy and contributed to what Mendes proposes to label a “tourist gentrification” (Mendes, 2017; 2018), greatly impacting the center of Lisbon.

As suggested here, this “tourist gentrification” is not the automatic outcome of a massive influx of tourists brought exclusively by low-cost flight companies. It is the product of specific political and spatial strategies designed to attract and welcome foreign visitors and investors. We can refer here to Laurent Thévenot’s concept of “investment in forms” forged to describe the various investments (material, conventional, personal) necessary to produce the required coordination formats at the basis of any economic or political system (statistical categories, priced objects, and so on) (Thévenot, 1984). In the constitution of a tourist policy, those investments aim ambiguously at typifying a specific local culture, i.e., expressing “exotic” and even “exciting” differences that remain nonetheless recognizable for the visitor (and investor).\(^11\)

As such, LXF constitutes the last avatar of the broader process of commodification and reification of (urban) culture initiated at the end of the twentieth century: “The urban culture has become in itself a commodity, a commodity which has in fact a kind of mythological aspect. Walter Benjamin’s picture of the arcades, of sitting in the cafe, of strolling, of the flânerie, these are all cultural images which are familiar to the educated, and even not so educated, the population of the world” (Fainstein, 2007). Places of alternative culture (or, in this case, rather that have the appearance of an alternative culture) are thus becoming part of the globalized “urban culture” through a process of equating with other urban objects, particularly from the perspective of the commodified experience of tourism. In other words, their singular aesthetics are becoming one of the many facets of the typified urban forms, i.e., a typical and eagerly awaited element by those who walk around in European cities and elsewhere. Contemporary urban landscapes have been reshaped as they now integrate the ornamental markers and experiences of those alternative worlds. Informed by creative city’s prescriptions,\(^12\) the neoliberal touristification of cities, such as Lisbon, Berlin or Barcelona appears therefore as an overwhelming vector of the encapsulation of (aesthetic) forms and critical practices of countercultures in the daily urban lives and landscapes.

As suggested above, this encapsulation is not a magical product of capitalist forces. To see how it is made possible we need now turn to the various investments of forms required to secure the compatibility of those objects with the broader formats of “creative” economy and financialized urban development. In the second part of this paper, we will show how investors, managers, architects, urban planners and users actively contribute to its specificities as a market-oriented product based on the spatial and aesthetic specificities drawing from a countercultural heritage.

The Making of A Commodified Alternative Cultural Centre

The institutionalization of “alternative cultural spaces” (Carmo, 2016) has been described elsewhere in Europe, especially in cities, such as Berlin and Barcelona, where the process is more advanced (Estevens, 2017; Colombus, 2012; Andres & Grésillon, 2011). However, these descriptions rarely link the material

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\(^11\) In order to perform this neutralized difference, standardization does not work here as a mere homogenization of urban contexts, as it was criticized in the urban struggles of the 1980’s and the 1990’s. Instead, it is a form of standardization that produces a regulated and accountable diversity allowing to compose it in a financialized international market based on a “government through certification standards” (Thévenot, 2015).
\(^{12}\) Creative city policies recommend using art, culture and creativity in urban production in order to attract “creative” activities with high added value (Florida, 2004; Landry, 2008; Piraud, 2017b)
and spatial transformations that occur on site to the evolution of forms of economic valuation and tourism consumption practices. Furthermore, as argued in the introduction, LXF is not the result of institutionalization but rather an intentionally designed “post countercultural”13 product. Such a fine example of a marketed counterculture was probably made possible by the specificities of Lisbon’s urban development. Indeed, this commodification appears under the combined effect of the economic crisis, an increase in real estate pressure and the austerity measures imposed by the Troika.14 The latter has led to changes in the law on rents,15 which has drastically affected the land market in the Portuguese capital: once “unfrozen”, the rents were allowed to increase and owners had the opportunity to set short term tenure while abrogating long term contracts for renovation purposes (Mendes, 2017; Breviglieri, 2019). This flexibilization of the housing market generated important investments in the “historic” center of Lisbon, which became in the 2010s largely oriented towards tourism and new forms of economy. For Mendes, market and freedom of competition have hence been assigned a central role in the territorial and urban life organization (Mendes, 2017). A growth coalition has emerged between the State, the municipality, landowners and real estates aiming at large investments and the transformation of the built heritage into lucrative land capital (Breviglieri, 2019, p. 3). However, at the end of the 2000s, although tourism and real estate development were already a central feature of urban policies, many of the major urban real estate projects planned were suspended in Lisbon due to the 2008 crisis. It is at this moment that a real estate agency set up an original strategy of urban space valorization, taking advantage of the urban interstices and wastelands. This agency, named Mainside, invested during times of crisis in the tactical rehabilitation of buildings relying on aesthetics of wasteland nourished by the visual regime of countercultures. Mainside did not simply occupy the deindustrialized spaces left vacant: the real estate company also took up the forms developed in counter-cultural spaces and used them to transform LXF into a commercial, or even - as we will see later on - a financial asset.

LXF was hence formally constituted in 2007 by Mainside Investments.16 It is located in the former 18th-19th century industrial area of Alcântara, famous for powerful proletarian and anarchist syndicates. At the turn of the Century, Alcântara was the object of a vast urban revitalization project called Alcântara XXI.17 Due to public controversies18 and, later on, to the 2008 global economic crisis, only a small part of the whole plan went forward.19 Taking advantage of the void created by this context, Mainside became interested in an available plot of land and tried to make a profit out of it. Unlike the other investors in the Alcântara XXI project, Mainside decided to adopt a different strategy: not to demolish

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13 On the concept of “post-counterculture,” used to designate the domesticated form of counterculture compatible with contemporary cultural policies and creative capitalism, see Piraud&Pattaroni, 2020.
15 The law on rents has remained almost unchanged from the middle of the 20th century to 2012 (small changes were made at several points in time, including during the period of the revolution, around 1974), which resulted in almost no investment being made in buildings to rent after April 1974 (by 2015 there were approximately 7,000 buildings in precarious conditions or in ruins [ACCIAIUOLI 2015: 649-653, 668]). A recent law, dated from 2012 and revised in 2014, seeks to create rules for the necessary renovation of the city (Law No. 31/12, Diário da República, I Series, No. 157, of August 14, 2012, revised and updated by Law No. 79/2014, Diário da República, Series I, No. 245, of December 19, 2014). These rules are intended to allow for an increase in rents, considering it as the solution to the abandonment that has occurred over the last decades. However, this causes the eviction of the traditional trade and residents, who are replaced by hotels and tourist apartments (rented at much higher prices).
16 The holding Mainside Investments - SGPS SA is composed of several affiliated companies. One of them - Catumbel, a real estate company - has acquired control of the land, while Lx Factory - another real estate company affiliated to Catumbel - used to ensure the daily management of LXF. All the other companies are real estate agencies mainly dedicated to “equipment management” and “urban rehabilitation works” (Baptista, 2013a). As can be seen from Mainside’s website (http://mainside.pt), the concerned buildings are all located in the central area of Lisbon: they are purchased in a decaying condition and - after the necessary rehabilitation work - resold as housing, hotels or offices.
17 Alcântara XXI had an intervention area of 400,500 m2 (Henriques 2005). It was an impressive real estate project signed by renowned architects, such as Álvaro Siza Vieira, Aires Mateus or Jean Nouvel, the idea being to erase most of the remains of the past industrial life while preserving just one or two elements that could work as symbols of the past history.
18 The project was violating the rules of the Municipal Master Plan: the building towers proposed by the architect Siza Vieira did not meet the current height limits (105m).
19 The projects designed by the architects Frederico Valssassina and Aires Mateus.
the existing buildings and build new ones, but rather to reuse and rehabilitate these pre-existing buildings and the surrounding outdoor space to temporarily sublet spaces for stores and offices.

**A Contemporary Tale of Loft Living**

This use of industrial buildings appears as a sort of contemporary and profit-oriented replay of the famous New York loft transformation described by Sharon Zukin in her classic book, *Loft Living*. In the 1970’s artists without much money were able to transform industrial abandoned or unused spaces into what later became distinctive Lofts, commodified at prices far exceeding the means of the first pioneers (Zukin, 1982). To a certain extent, the commodification process that interests us here resembles this New York dynamic. LXF’s “decoration” – based on the reuse and exhibition of old and recycled objects (such as furniture or industrial machines) – is related to a kind of architecture practice based on the reuse and rehabilitation of pre-existing buildings, explicitly addressing the history of their lives (e.g., degraded walls with multiple layers of ink peeling off, graffiti and holes). The aesthetics of recycling and nostalgia is thus present in the objects, memories and architecture of the building itself. A tenant of LXF sums up its atmosphere as “the perfect marriage between luxury and decadence”, saying that this is the reason that convinced him to come and work here. The difference of the transformation process of the 1970s and 1980s is that the whole process is handled by professionals (real estates and designers) and that it benefits from the multiplied leverage effect of new forms of capitalism, which have arisen from already decades of marketing such industrial past.

Hence the case of LXF goes on a step further and presents a much more integrated process of commodification, exemplary of the expanded capitalist production of the city, which is promoting and capitalizing on a systematic production of a ludic and lucrative diversification of urban experience, enrolling among other what was once the subversive margins of the counterculture.

According to the owner of Mainside, the engineer José Carlos Carvalho, LXF implies a “concept” articulated around a “lifestyle” based on a “creative and entrepreneurial atmosphere”, in the sense of a fusion between leisure and work. Carvalho defends the idea that, for this to happen, it was necessary to create a spatial “cluster” capable of promoting a closer relationship between individuals, companies and events (Carvalho, 2009, pp. 115, 179). Thus, on its website, LXF presents itself in the following terms:

An urban fragment, kept hidden for years, is now returned to the city in the form of LXF. A creative island occupied by corporations and professionals of the industry serves also as stage for a diverse set of happenings related to fashion, publicity, communication, fine arts, architecture, music, etc., attracting numerous visitors to rediscover Alcântara through an engaged dynamic. At LXF you can actually breathe the industrial environment at every step. A factory of experiences where intervention, thought, production is made possible. Staging ideas and products in a place belonging to everyone, for everyone.

As Joana Gomes, one of the architects working for Mainside, mentioned in an interview about the company’s projects, LXF is not looking for a particular type of public, but rather for a maximum number of visitors. The success of the whole operation is clearly linked here to a quantitative test associated with the commodification of a certain urban experience. LXF tenants are recruited, on their side, from the so-called “creative class” and constitute nowadays a standard mix of architecture and design studios, stores and restaurants, masseurs, osteopaths, yoga and dance teachers, tattoo artists, photographers, as well as organic food markets, coworking spaces, fashion studios, advertising studios and casting companies. Last but not least: an accountant and a lawyer. According to Joana Gomes, LXF is “more than just culture” because the project combines cultural activities, business and daily life, in other words, the now widespread recipe of creative capitalism.

The LXF project, which opened its doors to the public in 2008 and which was originally ephemeral

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21 Interviewed by his son Gonçalo Carvalho, as part of his Master’s thesis in Architecture, who is also one of the architects employed by Mainside (Carvalho 2009).


23 Made by the authors in November 2013.
in nature due to the contractual conditions implied by the broader rehabilitation project of the area, has gradually begun to take shape. The cultural legitimacy of LXF was, in particular, confirmed in the Lisbon Strategic Charter 2010-2024. In 2008, the Municipality of Lisbon commissioned a strategic plan for culture from a research team drawn from several professional backgrounds. In the resulting document, which includes the “Cultural Strategies for Lisbon” (Dinâmia, 2009), the relationship between “creativity” and “urban development” is highlighted. It is a document that acknowledges the importance of cultural and creative activities in the economic development of the city and where can be found several prescriptions for creating the necessary conditions to attract a competitive ‘creative class’, inspired by the approaches of Florida and Landry.  

We can see here the direct influence of “creative city” policies on the commodification of counterculture. Indeed, in this document, LXF is described as a “cultural experience” to be preserved, alongside major cultural institutions, such as the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation), the Centro Cultural de Belém or Culturgest (The Belém Cultural Center) (Costa, 2009, pp. 64, 86). Thus, the process of building equivalence, both economic and institutional, between alternative cultural objects and more traditional ones is strengthened. It is striking to observe that the main operators of the alignment of those heterogeneous cultural objects in one narrative is the “experience” they provide. This is exemplary of the importance that the notion of “experience” has recently taken in what has been coined the aesthetic or experiential turn of urban and cultural policies (Genard, 2019; Houlstan, 2020; Mattila, 2018). In the end, the successful touristic stay in Lisbon will be guaranteed by a succession of experience going from fado concerts to wandering at Bairro Alto, eating vegan food at LXF or listening to free jazz at Fábrica do Braço de Prata.

To fully grasp what is at stake in such a process, we need to focus on the new forms of economic valuation that underlie it.

The New “Economy of Enrichment”

Both the city and culture are very specific forms of merchandise. In their latest work, Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre seek to understand how certain obsolete objects can be revalued (Boltanski&Esquerre, 2017; 2020; Susen, 2018). According to them, late capitalism is characterized by an extension of the realm of merchandise and thus of value. Calling it “the economy of enrichment,” these authors describe how certain objects – including some waste products – are brought up to date by processes of requalification by generating rarity from anything, or even by creating shortages that need to be filled (Keck 2017). For these two authors, this specific form of economic valorization finds its model in art and its capacity, since Duchamp, to give an unprecedented value to everyday goods, even abandoned and damaged goods. These processes of valorization are largely based on a work of storytelling, as in the cases of patrimonialization, which recalls the historical importance of abandoned sites or forms of connection between an object and a famous person. They see this as a new form of production of market value that comes on top of the classical economic forms. They thus distinguish four models of economic valorization: a) the “standard form” involving the mass production of new objects that gradually lose their value, b) the “collection form” – at the heart of the economy of enrichment – which is based on the capacity to give a singular value to an object that is often neglected, as is the case in patrimonialization, c) the “trend form” close to the collection, but more fluctuant, which is based on fashion movements that can also give a provisional value to scrap objects, and finally, d) the “asset form”, where one anticipates the future value of the object, as in the case of wine bottles kept in the cellar.

The Building up of A Lucrative Urban Cultural Model

The history of LXF gives us an exemplary view of the coupling of the different forms of economic valuation making up “the economy of enrichment”.


25 Among many examples, the pistol with which Verlaine shot Rimbaud was sold for 435’000 euros in an auction organized by Christie’s in 2016.
After having lost their value as places of industrial production, the buildings assembled within the LXF project find a new economic life as a requalified framework for a set of activities and experiences at the heart of the creative economy (e.g., coworking spaces, designer and architect offices, organic stores). The model relies both on the patrimonialization of industrial sites and their aesthetic treatment in the now valued form of a trendy “alternative culture,” a new entry in the European collection of alternative cultural centers (although clearly one of the most commodified items).

The cycle of the different valuation form is strikingly completed in 2017 when the site is sold “ready to go” to the French commercial real estate company Keys Asset Management [KAM]! According to Jornal de Negócios, their interest is not simply in the land value of the operation, but in the “profitability of the concept that already exists there”.

The sale of LX Factory to the Keys Group, led by Pierre Mattei and Cyril Garreau, will not change the concept of space. The company bought the business for the profitability of the existing concept and not because of the land. Therefore, it will continue to be used as a space to house corporate offices, services and restaurants, and will not be replaced by a new real estate company.27

In a typical gesture of an “economy of enrichment” – that keeps putting objects back into translation chains giving them a new value each time –, the old industrial site, relooked and housing a new economy, becomes, in the end, a real “asset” worth putting into the “wallet” of financial investors. In other words, KAM bet on LXF’s ability to generate money in the medium to long term, counting on the stabilization of the trend set up by Mainside and the demand it has generated. The LXF concept, as a reenacted urban cultural model (Gobatto, 2003, p. 13-sq.), includes its architectural form, an ambiance (“a perfect marriage between luxury and decadence”) and a mode of production.

Complementing Boltanski and Esquerre’s conceptual framework, which tends to be limited to a discursive approach due to their insistence on narratives, we would like here to further insist on the material and conventional “formatting” (Thévenot, 1984, 2015), necessary for these revalorizations. Indeed, the value of LXF does not only derive from a new narrative but also from a work of aesthetic recreation and layout adjusted to the practices of creative capitalism – such as the strict delimitation of coworking spaces allowing them to be assigned and rented.

In the end, the transition to the “asset” form is consecrated by the sale to a foreign consortium counting on the future profitability of this object. This sale represents the precise moment where LXF is confirmed as a commensurable equity at the international level.28 This valuation changeover depends on the object’s capacity to meet the guarantee requirements of international financial investments. No wonder that when purchasing LXF, KAM declares, in a future oriented logic of financialization (Chiapello, 2014), that even if it retains the concept, it will nevertheless consolidate the return on its investment, particularly by densifying the workplaces and integrating the site more fully into the urban and tourist consumption system (mobility and events):

The Keys intends to rehabilitate certain buildings and increase the supply of space. There will be space to accommodate more businesses, in addition to the 200 that are already there. Outside, there will also be work, particularly on the streets, to better organize traffic. In addition, Keys is betting on the location of facilities for the realization of events.29

Urban planning and its management thus become key elements of the financial value of the project, i.e. its capacity to produce profit.

At the end, LXF is transformed into one of the “assets” of Key Asset, allowing it to develop its “European portfolio”, as presented on their website:

The LX Factory is one of the most emblematic and popular sites in Lisbon. The asset consists of a mixed and innovative real estate complex, a destination for tourism, business and culture for the people of Lis-

28 Further investigation is needed to better understand the various forms of investment – i.e. accounting, rent stabilization and public efforts– aimed at making financial risk acceptable to Keys Asset Management. On the various guarantees and certification required to transform a local environment into an international financial product, see Marc Breviglieri’s analysis of “marina” production in Arab cities (Breviglieri, 2018b).
As suggested earlier, more than just narratives or accounting manipulations, a twofold aesthetic operation is at the heart of this process: the detachment of alternative aesthetics from its political project (ornamentation) and the trivialization of this aesthetics in the contemporary landscape of urban cultural consumption (aesthetic alternativization).

Making it Work: Ornamentation and Banalization of Alternative Aesthetic

One of the central forms of domestication at play in the spatial production of LXF is the use of visual counter-cultural registers emptied of their critical aims, a kind of depoliticized diffusion of the signs of countercultures and urban struggles. Such a dynamic of aesthetic and semiotic appropriations can be observed more widely in European cities (and elsewhere). These recovered practices and forms contrast with the “original” ones in the sense that the aesthetics have become, in our object of analysis, a means of economic valuation. In the squatting movement, alternative aesthetics was the product of a critical appropriation of spaces based on Do It Yourself and recycling of objects and furniture and, more broadly, an integral part of the spatial organization of collective life. This active appropriation of living spaces and the resulting aesthetic was performing an “enacted critique” of the standardization processes of urban environments and their strict division between private and public spaces (Pattaroni, 2014). In this way, aesthetics operated at the level of what Jacques Rancière calls the “division of the sensible,” that is, the practical and sensible arrangement of political and social order (Rancière, 1998).

Conversely, in the case of LXF, the aesthetic register of alternative culture has ceased to be a political operator and has become a stylistic “motif” that contributes to the narrative and the investments in form through which the new exchange value of places is produced. It is precisely in this transformation of aesthetics as the locus of a standardized difference that a mercantile (and capitalist) mode can emerge where once stood logic of political production, nourished by participatory and transformative intentions. It would therefore be wrong to interpret this diffusion of forms of the counterculture as a mere superficial manifestation; on the contrary, it is an important shift according to which a sign\(^{31}\) becomes constitutive of value and, more broadly, a means of production. Furthermore, the formatting work goes well beyond aesthetics and concerns all the layers of the production of space.

The Guaranteed Disorder: Making Heterogeneity Compatible with The Market

The challenge for these new cultural entrepreneurs is to find ways of putting heterogeneous situations and objects on an equal footing, thereby blunting the subversive character of the claimed and maintained disorders of alternative universes. According to Marc Breviglieri (2018a), this capacity to produce a regulated disorder, a monitored effervescence\(^{32}\) is at the core of what he calls a “guaranteed city,” aimed at securing a range of qualities now largely promoted either by politicians, inhabitants or investors (such as diversity, security, conviviality, sustainability and attractiveness). Thus, in appearance, LXF feeds certain heteroclitic forms and a superficial disorder: in the heterogeneous volumetric and stylistic composition of the existing buildings on-site; in the decrepit walls and neglected or poorly maintained finishing of the building construction materials; in the multitude of old objects, machines and furniture present or exposed inside the buildings (often used as an ornament); in the festive atmosphere of the “open days”; in the street market and in the diversity of all kind of events; in the chaotic way of parking the cars.

This apparent disorder is nevertheless largely regulated, and its usability and controllability are

\(^{30}\) In the words of the co-founder of Key Asset as highlighted on the website http://www.keys-am.com/actifs/lx-factory/, last consulted September 11 2020.

\(^{31}\) On this point, we agree with Kracauer, according to whom the analysis of the “discrete manifestations” of an era says more about it than the “judgments” it makes about itself (Kracauer, 1995 [1963]). Here, however, the ornament is not “its own end,” but rather a means to produce value! As such, we cannot say, as Kracauer does, that ornament loses all symbolic power (p. 69) but rather that it is instrumentalized in a market dynamic.

\(^{32}\) Drawing on Sloterdijk, Dominique Boullier (2010) talks about “climatization” for this art of regulation of the effervescent crowds; see also Viot et al. 2010.
guaranteed\textsuperscript{33} aiming at the end of the day at the production of an exchange value according to the new capitalist circuits of an “economy of enrichment”. In fact, LXF is structured around a set of devices that frame the visitors and the appropriations: first of all, the presence of the security agent at the entrance is an immediate reminder that the place is privately owned. Second, the spatial distribution is clearly hierarchical, designed and managed by Mainside’s architects, and the management of the proper functioning of the spaces is finely calculated, despite its DIY aspect. The management of the “common” spaces is the responsibility of Mainside (exterior spaces, technical installations, design, and distribution of interior spaces). Only the interior of each space rented by each company, each collective or individual, is organized and decorated by its users.

According to Joana Gomes, one of the great advantages of Mainside’s strategy is that each company can create a space “in its own image”. However, Mainside’s architects always have suggestions, constraints, and the last word to say, framing the spatial transformations of their clients and companies. The management of LXF also involved the creation of a long corridor that runs lengthwise through the interior of building A,\textsuperscript{34} dividing the former open-space workers’ workrooms (suitable for all types of machines and activities) into several small spaces. This logic of spatial division/segmentation (which contrasts with the logic of “lissage” (Deleuze et Guattari, 1980) – i.e. of blurring the public and the private realms – which prevailed in squatters’ counterculture) thus adapts to a classic office structure that can accommodate as many companies as necessary and ensure the rental yield of the property. In addition, the Mainside architects have designed all the floors of the building to create a different atmosphere in each one. According to Joana Gomes, this strategy can bring the occupants of each floor closer together because of their potential collective identification with the “visual identity” specific to their floor. The result is a dual logic of spatial division to consolidate economic performance, reproducing the liberal constitution of linear boundaries\textsuperscript{35} essential for the regulation of private property, and atmospheric unification to ensure a certain social cohesion, yet a very liberal way to assemble through visual recognition (Breviglieri, 2018a). This work on ambiances is more broadly part of a real marketing strategy for the site.

It is all of these processes of spatial regulation of the activity that participate in the neutralization of the alternative aesthetic and its detachment from the political project. For José Carvalho, LXF has thus “succeeded in creating a production unit, adding to this space (full of stories of Portuguese industry) a new industrial reality, the creative industry of the 21st century. A business center provides the transaction of cultural products” (Carvalho, 2009, p. 109). He explains even more directly that the idea was to operate this space as a shopping mall to attract as many people as possible, especially by ensuring the presence of particular brands that function as flagship companies, thus reinforcing the “trend” effect. Carvalho explains that these companies have privi-

\textsuperscript{33} This is also in line with what Hartmut Rosa writes in \textit{The Uncontrollability of the World} (2020).

\textsuperscript{34} The main industrial building that the complex houses. The first four floors of Building A were characterized, before the reconversion of the LXF, by their huge, luminous open spaces with numerous circular metal columns and large East-West facing windows to allow sunlight to enter almost all day long. This building is classified as a “cultural and historical asset of great value” in the Lisbon Municipal Heritage Charter (Diário da República, 2015).

\textsuperscript{35} On the striated spaces and their linear boundaries essential for the constitution of the modern regime of private property, see Deleuze & Guattari, 1980.
ledged rental conditions (location and visibility, for example) because they help establish the “image” of the whole project, being their showcases of great importance. The engineer refers to Jeffrey Hardwick’s work on American shopping malls (Hardwick, 2010), emphasizing the importance of a store’s architectural details: lighting, signage, materials, decoration, storage, and many other elements can transform a traditional and banal store into a selling machine (Carvalho, 2009, pp. 115-16). Carvalho continues his reasoning by saying that he would classify LXF as a “fashion manipulator” because, like any other commercial establishment, its success “depends on the creation of an original image”. In this way, the typical “re-architecture” practices found in the making of LXF are positioned in a relationship of submission and dependence (with respect to each decision of transformation or desired spatial occupation) towards the owner of the building. The guarantee of profitability and, more broadly, the market value of the premises therefore strongly limits the emancipatory power sought in the spatial practices of re-architecture, and more broadly, the politically embedded aesthetics of resistance.

The Urban Condition of A Recipe that Pays off

The capitalist valorization of LXF depends not only on this work of neutralizing and encapsulating alternative aesthetics (turning it into pure ornamentation) along the guaranteed regulation of disorder but also on the broader transformations of the modes of urban consumption. In this broader “aesthetic turn” of capitalism, Mainside appears as one of many atmospheric operators specialized in the recovery of old buildings (industrial or not) for its real estate business, using the reference framework of cultural and creative industries and alternative culture to perform its real estate valorization. LXF’s recipe has been so successful that Mainside has applied it to other spaces, using a similar “spatial concept” in each new operation while ensuring the singularity of each operation by adapting the decoration to the past and the specific history of each building. The result of this strategy is Pensão Amor – an old brothel transformed into a trendy bar –, the Casa de Pasto – a traditional Portuguese eating-house of the late nineteenth century transformed into a “bistronomy” restaurant located near Cais do Sodré – or the reconversion project for Hospital do Desterro – an old hospital and monastery that would be transformed into a “cultural wellness centre” for alternative medicine, located in the popular Intendente neighborhood. It is in this serialization that the transition from trend to collection and asset was made possible, no longer a fashion phenomenon, but a production system, reproducible and marketable on an international scale. Hence, the success of LXF has led Mainside to extend its “business plan” to the scale of the city. It should be noted that the model almost resembles a franchising operation. Hence the various locations or yet branches of Mainside repeat certain formulas (urban rehabilitation, decorative use of the aesthetics of alternative culture, watered-down reinterpretation of certain historical forms of the margin). In the end, the strategy gives rise to this astonishing alternative-aesthetic of contemporary urban space, trivializing these typical singularities in the urban fabric. This alternativization produces, in return, an effect on the very organization of this fabric. As the case of LXF reveals above, to extend the profitability of alternative objects, it is necessary to ensure an urban env-

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36 For example: keeping the memory of previous uses of these buildings by adding new layers, leaving visible traces of the old ones; offering users the possibility of appropriating their own workspace; favoring the use of cheap building materials; allowing the cohabitation of architecture with artistic interventions; occupying the “common” space with terraces, ephemeral installations and occasional events (e.g., performing arts, music and street market).

37 Lipovetsky and Serroy talk about aesthetic-emotional-based capitalism (2013, 12). It is in this broader emotional capitalism that the experience-oriented urban policies of the creative city become meaningful and performative.

38 For the time being (2022), the project is still unfinished as the COVID situation had, among others, a strong impact on urban developers like Mainside. It is interesting and highly relevant to see that it started as a Public-Private Partnership between the Municipality of Lisbon (CML), Estamo (the company that manages real estate assets of the State) and Mainside. The project is presented as a way to keep the building running without having to sale in a bad period. Tomás, Carla. 2015. “A Futura Vida Do Desterro.” Jornal Expresso, September 21, Lisboa edition. The intervention works in the building were supposed to be finished by 2013, but they didn’t until today. So, in December 2021, Mainside decided to buy the building to Estamo, stopping this way being dependent on others to move on their project. Mainside’s initial concept now changed, the plan now being to transform Desterro into a four- or five-star hotel (https://eco.sapo.pt/2022/01/13/estado-vende-antigo-hospital-do-derorro-per-105-milhoes/).

39 For an account of those different projects, see Carmo, 2016.
The Ambiguities of The “Alternativised” Urban Production and Experience

In this article, we argued that the commodification of what used to be the markers and the forms of countercultural spaces is a core operation of contemporary capitalist urban production. It is based on strategies of financial and tourist attractiveness that imply guaranteed forms of urban diversity. In this perspective, the case study of LX Factory is a highly significant example of a designed and market-oriented creative cluster forged on the aesthetic model of the “alternative centers” populating Europe. Its value lies in what it constitutes, at the same time, the apt atmospheric container of a range of creative economy and new consumer practices, and an attractive place for a diversified touristic experience. The success of the commodification process has been ratified by the international sale of the place along its “concept” to international investors, turning it into a financial asset. To produce such a place and valorize its presence in the touristic urban landscape of Lisbon, two major operations of domestication of the counterculture aesthetics and politics were necessary. The first one is what we label a process of ornamentation, where the characteristic elements of an “aesthetics of resistance” (Carmo, 2016), embedded in DIY practices and strong spatial appropriation, are separated from their subversive potential and reduced to a mere ornament. The second one is the trivialization of those designed alternative atmosphere as a typical and familiar object of contemporary urban landscapes. The domesticated form of counterculture constitutes hence one of the many “different” and commodified experiences of the touristified and creative city.

This double operation can be interpreted as some of the necessary investment in forms (Thévenot 1984) required by the new economic forms of valuation at the core of what Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre recently labeled the “economy of enrichment” (2020). In this model, at the roots of heritage policies, creative economies and many new capitalist fields, narratives allow to re-evaluate forgotten objects, abandoned places, alternative practices and so on. Their link to memories or singular experiences of the world constitutes their value in an “aesthetic-emotional” based capitalism.

This process of trivialization and collection of “alternative” places in the urban landscapes highlights the ambiguities of contemporary capitalist cities. The circulation of urban models (Guggenheim & Söderström, 2009; Breviglieri, 2019) and the requirements of a financialized urban development tend to produce homogenized built environments. At the same time, as those models are built up on the historical critiques of standardization and play out in a reshaped creative capitalism, they promote the need to entertain differences and produce commodifiable singularities. Hence, along with the generalization of creative city policies, investors and public authorities call on designers to project a more diversified urban imagination onto the built environment, capitalizing on the differentiating power of artistic practices.

As suggested throughout the article, architects and designers play an essential and ambiguous role in the articulation of the narratives and the spatial performance of those new urban assets. On one side, drawing on decades of countercultural practices and aesthetics, they contribute to an enlargement of urban forms and experience. On the other side, they play a major role in securing their embedment both in the financial system and the public policies of the guaranteed city. Hence, the analysis of the important material but also conventional formatting work (aesthetic design, spatial distribution, narratives, regulations,...) necessary to include those “alternative” objects in the neoliberal policies of Lisbon and more broadly the international market of urban investments allow to better understand the situated performance of capitalism in the making. Place based financial asset aren’t a mere question of abstract valuation and narratives, but they also imply the whole range of a spatial production.

These dynamics are not confined to Lisbon but are a global phenomenon. Since the 2000s, wooden pallets, recycled objects and “vintage” furniture arranged randomly, industrial machines, dilapidated walls and graffiti have found a new function (ornamentation) and a new public. In this new, “economy of enrichment”, where artistic singularities, narrative skills but also strong design and architectural invest-

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40 On the financialization of value and its impact on public policies, see Chiapello 2014.
ment become central features, cultural policies need
to explore and critically address their new ambigu-
ous role in urban marketing. Valuing alternative ex-
periences, as in the cultural strategy developed by
the City of Lisbon, can still open up emancipatory pro-
cesses and richer urban worlds. However, it can also
be the mere ground for opportunist private actors
who already have transformed countercultural places
as financial assets.

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