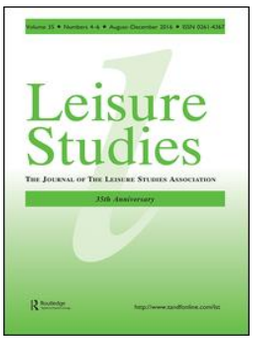

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The Erasmus Corner: place-making of a sanitised nightlife spot in the Bairro Alto (Lisbon, Portugal)

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ABSTRACT

Nightlife economic activity has emerged as a key strategy in the regeneration of historical quarters. The case of the Bairro Alto district (Lisbon) exhibits a more gradual and distinct development caused by the marginal and transgressive practices of nightlife visitors, who have resisted its gentrification for decades. Some areas in the Bairro Alto (specially the upper side) have maintained their dangerous character and marginalisation for several years, even after the 2008 urban reform programme. It is only recently, with the growing presence of Erasmus students in Bairro Alto, that the upper side has finally become safe and sanitised through leisure activities. In this article, the interplay of several social actors (foreign students, municipal authorities, night-time entrepreneurs and Erasmus organisers) explains the process of place-making regarding the new Erasmus Corner. The spatial colonisation of this spot has accelerated social cleansing of the upper side of the neighbourhood, concluding the district's night-time pacification.

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Gentrification; Lisbon; Erasmus students; place-making; urban change; nightlife

Introduction

This paper aims to analyse the process of place-making in the so-called Erasmus Corner, a new, socially sanitised nightlife spot for foreign college students (Erasmus), which has recently emerged in a formerly dangerous area of the historical neighbourhood of Bairro Alto. The study presented here is the result of almost two years of observational fieldwork in the district and 24 in-depth interviews carried out between September 2013 and July 2015, and also based on our own experiences as visitors and residents for the last 10 years. The fieldwork was focused on the Erasmus students' gathering space and was mainly characterised by its non-obstructive, observational nature (Lee, 2000; Webb, Campbell, Schwarts, & Sechrest, 2001). Therefore, inductive techniques such as Pétonnet's 'floating observation' (1982) served to identify settings, actors and institutions involved in the local Erasmus urban space. Some exploratory informal interviews were carried out to better understand local and micro-local environments and thereby recognise new issues to be further explored in the in-depth interviews. Informants were approached in the field and in the case of former international students, they were contacted through the snowball sampling technique, together generating a set of 24 in-depth interviews with selected individuals.

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Additionally, the shifting of the gathering space for international students some years ago, as well as the recent past of danger in the district, attracted our attention and led us to carry out a more historically sensitive case study in the Erasmus Corner. The historical reconstruction of the district's nightlife is strongly supported by the narratives of our different informants, several local journalistic pieces and our own knowledge as witnesses of Bairro Alto's urban transformation. The first and second authors are foreigners but have lived almost permanently in Lisbon for the last 10 years (the first author actually lived in the Bairro Alto for a year in 2008). The third is Portuguese and local, and lived in the Bairro Alto for 6 years (between 1997 and 2002). We have all frequented the Bairro Alto together at night since 2006, which awakened our interest in the reconfiguration of the district. Indeed, in spite of its reputation as a nightlife district, very little attention has been paid to the Bairro Alto in geographical, sociological or anthropological literature, and only the work of Mendes (2013, 2014) and Costa (2013) is featured in English. As a consequence, when informants' narratives and academic literature are not enough to understand the social processes described in the text, we use local newspapers, cultural magazines and websites as sources of direct information about the district's events and environment in a particular period. The sources were chosen according to their ability to transmit the neighbourhood's ambiance from an additional and detailed perspective. Rare journalistic pieces met this requirement when the notoriety of the Bairro Alto is involved.

Erasmus students and Lisbon's urban change

Erasmus students are higher education students that live abroad (for an average of 6 months) within an area that includes the 28 EU member states, plus the Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey. The sojourn of these young students (the average age is 22.5) is based on bilateral exchange agreements between faculties approved by the European Commission, assuring academic equivalence and funding a scholarship programme. However, the scarcity of Erasmus grants means that students' families must fund the stay themselves: as mobile young university students with educational and socio-economic backgrounds slightly above their countries' average (Souto-Otero, 2008), Erasmus students are considered a 'migratory elite' (Musgrove, 1963).

Erasmus students have been a growing presence in the last decades in Lisbon, the capital and largest city region of Portugal. Between 2000 and 2013, the yearly Erasmus population coming to Lisbon grew from 1024 to 3942 with a total accumulation of around 30,000 for the period (62% of them in the last 5 years).[1] Their pressure on the leisure and housing markets brought several urban processes of transformation to the central city districts (Malet Calvo, 2013), accompanying the growing tourist industry in the city (Nofre, 2013; Tulumello, 2015). The most important literature dealing with the impact of students on the urban form conceived the term 'studentification' – borrowed from 'gentrification' – to describe the housing transformations caused by the growing presence of students in particular UK neighbourhoods (Sage, Smith, & Hubbard, 2012; Smith, 2005; Smith & Hubbard, 2014). However, international students in Lisbon inhabit an extended dispersed area, forming dense clusters in strategic places, such as nightlife and college areas, but without the foreseeable segregation patterns expected from the studentification perspective (Munro & Livingston, 2012; Smith, 2008, 2009). As Collins (2010) suggested in his study of South Korean international students in Auckland (New Zealand), 'There are serious limitations to the focus of student geographies on the notion of studentification' (p. 950). In this sense, the exclusive focus on housing disregards the recognition of several other outcomes arising from students' presence in urban settings. Therefore, the specific sector of student accommodation and entertainment (night-time leisure, housing supply and/or organised sightseeing) overlaps with some processes related to gentrification and urban change, such as marginal gentrification as we will see later.

However, the broader theoretical framework of gentrification has been focused on local and neighbourhood scales, which explain *what* happens in urban change but not *how* micro-level development of places occur, such as the Erasmus Corner. On the other hand, place-making relational theories seem to contribute to better understanding these micro-processes of urban change by showing the

network of socio-spatial relationships and meanings that engage the local economy of a place (McCann, 2002; Pierce, Martin, & Murphy, 2011). Moreover, the place-making perspective and its emphasis on linking populations and place through identity, group belonging and consumption desires (Benson & Jackson, 2013; Blokland, 2009; Collins, 2005) will help us understand the specific role of Erasmus students as an advance party in conquering the Bairro Alto's nightlife. Whatever the case may be, one of the most important sectors conditioning the urban form through the growing commodification of urban student life and meanings (Chatterton, 2010) is night-time economic activity, which operates at the local, neighbourhood and place levels. Therefore, following the latest calls to develop a geography of urban nightlife (Straw, 2014; van Liempt, van Aalst, & Schwanen, 2015), the following sections present the transformations undergone by the Bairro Alto district of Lisbon over the last 40 years of its nightlife leisure tradition, focusing later on the latest developments related to the presence of Erasmus students in the area.

An introduction to the Bairro Alto

The Bairro Alto, emerging in the sixteenth century as the first modern urban grid in Lisbon, is a district historically associated with the fishing and sailing activities of the working class and with the growing influence of Jesuits over the upper class (Ferreira & Calado, 1992; Teixeira & Valle, 1999). After the terrible earthquake of 1755, aristocratic families abandoned the Bairro Alto starting a process of impoverishment that transformed the area into a low-income, yet popular neighbourhood. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the construction of taller buildings and newer streets around the old structure of the district established a sort of frontier enclosing the neighbourhood and protecting it from casual circulation (Carita, 1990). This urban privacy may be a key issue in explaining the marginal cultures, social groups and transgressive ideologies that found refuge in this urban space throughout the centuries: liberal ideas, bohemian prostitution, radical politics, gay movement, alternative and progressive music, 'urban tribes' and joint smokers. The installation of the main newspapers and printers and the rising role of cultural movements and theatre in the nineteenth century transformed the Bairro Alto into a popular and bohemian district, populated by journalists, the working class, prostitutes, radical politicians, *fado* singers,[2] sailors, writers and artists (Pavel, 2014). Even under the pressure of the Estado Novo's dictatorship (1933–1974), the Bairro Alto still functioned as a discreet exceptional space tolerated by the authorities behind the frontier of the new fascist city.

The rapid social and cultural changes introduced after the 1974 Carnation Revolution were expressed in the Bairro Alto some years later with the so-called 'movida Lisboeta' (named after a similar cultural phenomenon in Madrid, Spain, after the death of Franco). This alternative, counter-cultural agitation was led by the gay movement and involved the arrival after the dictatorship of new uses and consumption habits (Belanciano, 2009, February 27). At the same time, the middle class rediscovered the cheap, old-fashioned taverns in the Bairro Alto (the *tascas*) and also embraced the new transgressive atmosphere of the district. A particular venue was central in this new era in the neighbourhood: *Frágil*, a modern and intimate disco-pub, opened in 1982, was where the middle class came to listen to alternative and progressive music and where artists, designers, journalists and politicians met to socialise in a creative environment (Soromenho, 2014, October 7). From then on, new bars, discotheques, fashion and design shops opened their doors to take advantage of the district's low rents and inherent nightlife that included mythical catalysts, such as Hêrnani Miguel, Zé da Guiné, António Variações and Manuel Reis. However, the old habits and traditional night venues were still well represented in the 1980s; taverns and prostitutes, cheap restaurants, *fado* houses and political discussions coexisted with the new space and relevance of the gay and alternative scene in the district. In the 1980s, the Bairro Alto was a unique space in Lisbon where the low and middle classes could express themselves in an unrestrained environment, either in the new artistic and counter-cultural spaces or in the traditional taverns and venues. They shared a wild and popular experience of transgression and extravaganza with no tourists, while the upper classes still associated the district with prostitution and violence. From the 1980s on, the Bairro Alto became a night-time reference for

the young middle-class artists, intellectuals and radicals, who were starting Lisbon's urban culture of 'going to the Bairro' at night (Portas, 2007, November).

This first, significant, process of place-making analysed here was the introduction of new purposes and practices by a new cohort of visitors to the Bairro Alto. The identity of the neighbourhood starts to be reconfigured by these alternative middle classes who negotiate and struggle for the meaning of the place (McCann, 2002; Trudeau, 2006). In the following sections, we discuss the potential of the marginal gentrification and studentification literature to explain the process of place-making in the Erasmus Corner, while presenting its historical emergence.

The process of commercial and marginal gentrification in the Bairro Alto

The process of gentrification in the area grew during the 1990s and 2000s when the city of Lisbon hosted three major events, the European Capital of Culture in 1994, the Expo World Fair in 1998 and the UEFA Eurocup in 2004. Those events were preceded by huge local urban transformations that invigorated the return of the middle class to the inner city and also attracted the first significant tourist influxes to Lisbon (Ferreira, 2004; Rodrigues, 2010; Salgueiro, 2001). The nightlife and cultural vitality of the area during the 1980s were used strategically by Lisbon's City Council (CML, its Portuguese initials) as a mechanism for urban marketing and revitalisation, as had been done in many other urban areas worldwide (Zukin, 1995). The 1997 Urbanisation Plan for Bairro Alto and Bica (PUNHAB) favoured the substitution of traditional venues and shops by creative activities and night-time industries, such as antiques, restaurants, bookshops, art galleries, bars and fashion boutiques (Vale, 2009). This clear process of commercial gentrification (Kloosterman & Van Der Leun, 1999) transformed the Bairro Alto into a cultural cluster (Balula, 2010; Costa, 2013), attracting an increasing – but still modest – number of Lisbon residents, suburban Portuguese and tourists to the area (made easy by the arrival of the metro in the lower part of the district in 1998). At the same time, a new residential cohort of marginal gentrifiers with low economic capital was attracted to the district during the 1990s: students, young workers and qualified migrants (mostly single people, single-parent families and childless couples) with high levels of cultural capital as well as precarious and temporary jobs. These populations belonging to the less privileged middle class avoided the suburban enclaves, pursuing the experience of living in a traditional but trendy central district, and occupying non-rehabilitated old central buildings at a low cost (Mendes, 2013). As many authors have stressed (Ley, 1996; Rose, 1984), marginal gentrification entails a stage of freedom, social mixing and emancipation previous to capital reinvestment in an urban area. The alternative cultural atmosphere cultivated by the marginal gentrifiers will nourish the value of new residential products, closing the gentrification cycle with the progressive arrival of wealthier inhabitants and consumers (Mendes, 2014).

However, in spite of this early process of commercial and residential gentrification, and the public efforts to turn the area into an appealing district to visit at night, the middle class and tourists still frequented other places in the city at those times, especially two reputable nightlife areas that had sprung up along the city's riverside: in 1995, the *Docas* in Alcântara opened in a former industrial area and in 1998, a whole new district was built to host the Expo World Fair. Both areas had bars, restaurants and discotheques, which provided a safe, clean and distinctive atmosphere, diametrically opposed to the Bairro Alto environment, which was still an 'undomesticated' popular neighbourhood. In this sense, the Bairro Alto had experienced two parallel phenomena during the 1990s: (1) the opening of more iconic spaces following the inertia of the 1980s movement – especially in gay and underground venues – that maintained the Bairro Alto as the benchmark alternative district and (2) the confrontation between urban tribes, such as skinheads and punks, and also the noticeably growing presence of drug dealers that generated a sense of urban insecurity in some areas (Pujadas, 2001, pp. 131, 132). Moreover, a large number of alternative young middle-class people from all over Lisbon started to come to the Bairro Alto to visit the alternative venues with live music, to smoke hashish in public and to meet with friends in the old-fashioned, incredibly cheap *tascas*. This population cohort, characterised by alternative lifestyles and a desire to consume underground culture, started to coexist

with other (more marginal) populations in the night-time setting of the Bairro Alto (De Jesus, 2013, September 24). As a consequence, young, low-income Lisbon residents felt excluded from one of their traditional leisure areas, reacting sometimes with violence against middle-class newcomers and foreigners. In fact, until recently, muggings were part of the ritual of middle-class youth discovering Bairro Alto nightlife, as reported in the ethnographic account of Cabêdo Sanches and Martins (2003).

Summarising, consolidation of the Bairro Alto – at least some parts of it – as an alternative area to go at night attracted drug dealers and a heterogeneous population of youth from all over the city and suburban areas that resulted in some inter-class and cultural conflicts over the appropriation of leisure space. Thus, the first wave of gentrification in the Bairro Alto throughout the 1990s coexisted with a wild and often insecure atmosphere in some areas at night, an ambiance inherited from the transgressive habits of the 1980s and new types of consumption, such as smoking hashish in urban spaces. Although some political interventions tried to consolidate the commercial gentrification of the Bairro Alto based on both nightlife and culture, the marginal lifestyles and consumption habits shared by transgressive visitors prevented overexploitation and mainstreaming of the Bairro Alto's nightlife for more than two decades. In this sense, it could be said that from the place-making perspective, marginal gentrifiers (inhabitants and consumers) were pioneers in the process of attributing a new canon of sense and identity to the Bairro Alto. As part of this process, the subsequent arrival of Erasmus students to the Bairro Alto, seeking their own place for night-time leisure and entertainment, lay the groundwork for the peaceful clean-up of the district's urban environment.

The emergence of the first Erasmus Corner in the Bairro Alto

In order to reproduce the night-time atmosphere of the Bairro Alto in the 2000s, a first set of interviews with local and foreign students were analysed. Based on the academic year(s) that they frequented the district, 13 interviews were selected to reconstruct Bairro Alto's environment and venues at those times. This set of interviews is composed of six women (French, Spanish, Spanish, Italian, German and Dutch) and seven men (Portuguese, German, Danish, Portuguese, Portuguese, Polish and French). The interviews were conducted via Skype in 10 cases. The students were asked for their opinion on this matter: the situation of the first Erasmus Corner, the dangerousness of the area, specific experiences in the Bairro Alto and the changes observed in the area (in cases where they came back to Lisbon in subsequent years). Following students' reports and our own observations at those times, it could be said that for these cohorts of middle-class university students (Portuguese and foreigners) until 2008, Bairro Alto nights were still a space–time of collective freedom, political transgression and controlled danger with no police patrols at all and walls full of graffiti (Carvalho, 2004, November 6). The ritual of smoking hashish and sharing bottles of alcoholic drinks with friends outside venues was the main attraction of a cheap and alternative way of life that characterised the social configuration of the Bairro Alto's young leisure-seekers at that time (Mateus, 2000). Most young people would gather in venues situated in the central part of the district, especially in Rua da Atalaia, Rua Diário de Notícias and Rua Barroca (Figure 1). The upper side of the district (from Travessa da Boa Hora upward) was still a dangerous place for young students, as the former Erasmus student Marta (Spain, academic year 2004–2005) recalls: 'You should go through this area always in big groups, never alone, and even being cautious you can have some trouble with the people there'. However, the first gathering space in the district for these pioneering and alternative Erasmus students was very close to this upper area: in front of Mezcal, a shots and cocktail bar furnished with tropical Mexican surfer decorations, and located on one of the most crowded corners of the Bairro Alto: Rua Diário das Notícias and Travessa da Água da Flor.

The reason for alternative Erasmus students meeting at this corner may be that their Portuguese peers concentrated in front of a cheap, traditional bar run by the well-known Senhor Esteves, situated on the same corner, part of the alternative route of cheap *tascas* through the Bairro Alto (Arroz Doce, As Primas, Estádio). Pedro, a Portuguese student who has frequented the Bairro Alto since 2002 remembers those times:

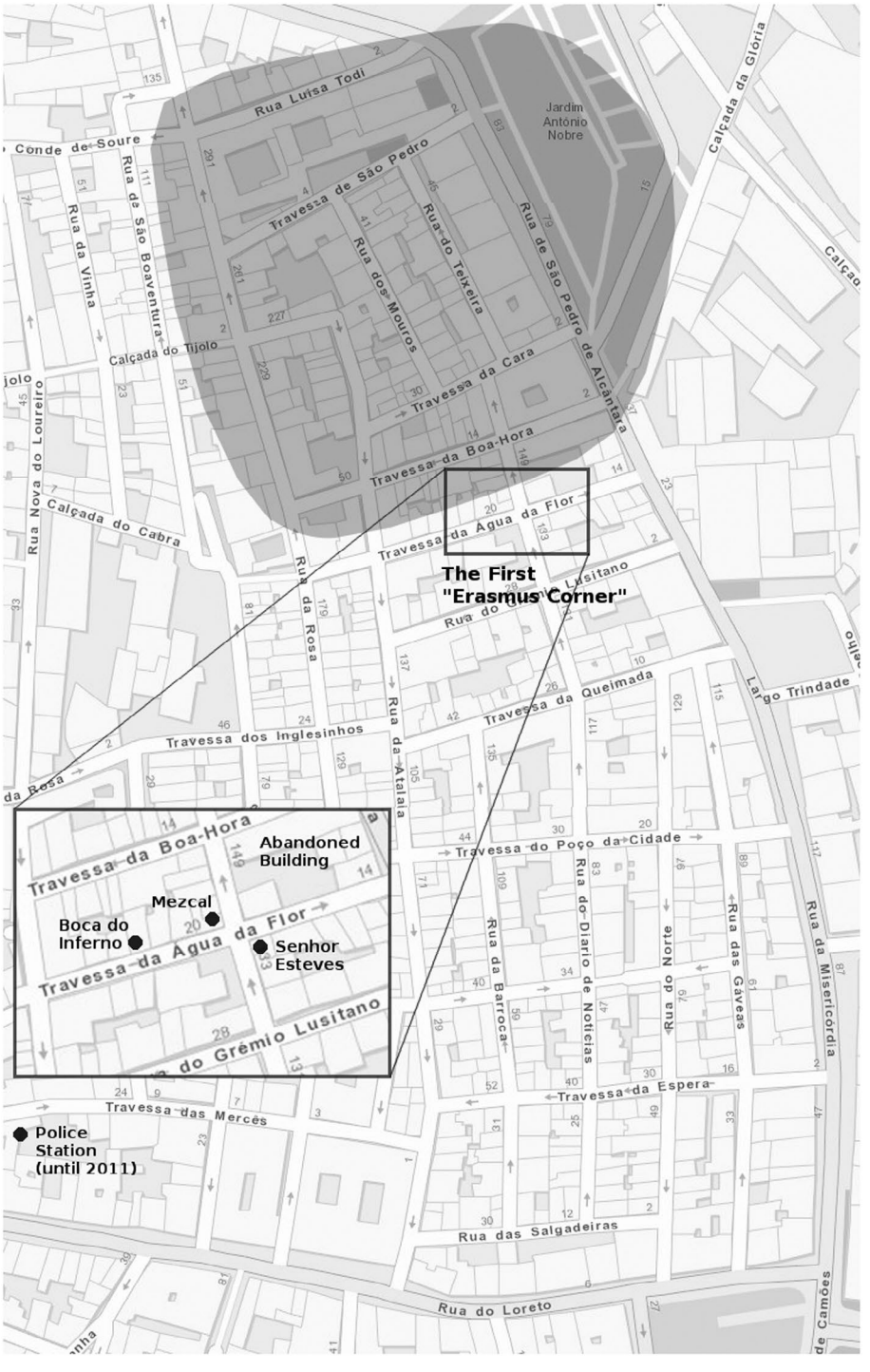

Figure 1. Bairro Alto district in the early 2000s.
Notes: In the enlarged view, the first Erasmus Corner. Grey area indicates the dangerous zone.

Erasmus [students] were more alternative and bohemian. They were much less numerous than now and got along with our crew (Portuguese students), and we brought them to our bars and spaces.

But the presence of alternative middle-class Portuguese students was not the only feature of this corner, which was not yet called Erasmus Corner. The venue 'Boca do Inferno' (Hell's Entrance) offered rock, punk and metal concerts just 10 metres away from Mezcal with a multitude of young underground people with their dogs and bottles crowding the street before and after the concerts. Additionally, in the surroundings of a ruined, abandoned building that was located between that corner and the next one, Afro-Portuguese rappers took advantage of the darkness and isolation to hide and control the area, while smoking joints, beat-boxing and battle rapping. From this area northward, the Bairro Alto was an insecure neighbourhood at night, as Portuguese students Nuno and João recall:

> It was a harsh area to go through. The upper side of Rua da Atalaia to the Miradouro was dominated by Afro-Portuguese and dealers, and you don't want [to be] there at night.

The police station was situated in the lower part of the Bairro Alto on Rua das Mercês, which left the central and upper sectors of the district to its own dynamic (Miranda, 2007, November 17). Most interviewed students remembered that when a police car passed through the streets at night, the people would start to yell, shout insults and even throw plastic cups at the car. On this urban frontier – the border of middle-class leisure in the Bairro Alto – university students, young low-income Lisbon residents from other districts, metal and punk urban tribes, alternative Erasmus students and Portuguese–African people coming from the metropolitan area shared a space of gathering, conflicts and night-time leisure. Louis, a former Erasmus student (France, academic year 2005–2006), remembers that he was robbed three times going from one bar to another at night-time: 'They would always surprise me alone in side-streets and I was forced to give them something: cigarettes, money and even my own drink'. The authors of this article were also faced with such situations from time to time. Thus, in spite of the presence of this new, distinguished group of affluent foreign consumers, insecurity in the area still prevented the district's mainstreaming.

However, as stated by Darren Smith in the first text of studentification literature, students are very similar to marginal gentrifiers: low economic capital, pioneering character, constrained position within the housing market, large amounts of cultural capital (2005, p. 77). The set of interviews analysed in this section corresponds to this profile: alternative students that frequented the district to consume and socialise in a bohemian, artistic and counter-cultural atmosphere. Likewise, in the case of alternative international students, circulation through the Bairro Alto was part of their process of transition to adulthood, a learning experience abroad that involves a desire for new experiences and lifestyles. As a consequence, their marginal patterns of consumption will certainly contribute to the future gentrification of the Bairro Alto, which paradoxically wishes to expel them, as we will see later. The work of Dana Collins on the place-making of a Philippine gay district (Collins, 2005) shows this contradiction better: gay informal sex workers attract a new international gay public that gentrifies the district, excluding their presence from the area.

In the case of the Bairro Alto, attracting larger numbers of tourists and the middle class in order to transform the district had to wait until 2008, when intervention by a key institutional actor – the CML – transformed the area into a socially controlled 'theatre of consumption' (Ritzer, 2010).

Gentrifying the Bairro Alto's nightlife: the urban plan of 2008

Over the last two decades, the 'gentrification of night-life' (Hae, 2011) has been the main strategy for the regeneration of most central districts in European post-industrial cities since urban night-time has become an important economic activity worldwide (Hadfield & Measham, 2015; Roberts & Eldridge, 2009). In Lisbon, during the 2004 UEFA Eurocup and until 2008, the Bairro Alto rapidly became an overcrowded nightlife district, creating the first significant problems of conviviality caused by the influx of night-time visitors and the subsequent complaints of neighbours about noise, filthiness, vandalism and sporadic violence in the streets – sometimes even murders (Lusa News Agency, 2008, May 22). The progressive mainstreaming of the area had made some parts of the Bairro Alto broadly attractive to the general public, which imposed significant pressure on the area, especially at night:

traditional *fado* tourists were discharged from buses, a large amount of drunken young people populated the streets until the early hours, drug dealing was growing and spreading and the hostels and guest-houses for tourists were substituting rented housing directed at locals. In 2008, the CML decided to face the excesses of night-time activity, by transforming the district into a controlled and sanitised leisure area, with the aim of attracting more tourists and stopping the violence and transgression that still predominated. In October 2008, the Plan for Integrated Intervention in the Bairro Alto was launched (Catulo, 2008, October 19), surprising the ACBA (Bairro Alto's Trade Association) with the mandatory closing of venues at 2 am (3 am at weekends). At the beginning, the ACBA was very reluctant to accept the new opening hours, but the intensity of sanitation, social control and police enforcement in the district brought them round to understanding that the reforms could attract a new, wealthy and uncomplicated clientèle, improving the reputation of the area (Costa, 2013). Under the pretext of protecting residents from excessive nightlife noise, the Plan's set of measures sought to sanitise and control the district by increasing police presence in order to attract more middle-class consumers (locals and foreigners) and to expel undesirable populations (Gillot, 2008, November 3). In this sense, the police started intense, 'random control' of Afro-Portuguese groups who traditionally wandered through the Bairro Alto at night, discouraging them from coming to the district. For some years, the picture of police chasing and repressing Afro-Portuguese joint smokers, while ignoring tourists and middle-class Portuguese doing the same, was very usual in Lisbon, as in other neoliberal nightscapes with socio-spatial segregation practices (Søgaard, 2014; Talbot, 2004, 2011). Another step was to install public surveillance cameras in 2009 and move the police station from the periphery to the centre of the district in 2011. Also, the war against graffiti and public art was especially fierce; an ambitious plan called for chasing and fining the authors and also for regularly cleaning the streets of graffiti, stencils and billboards (Lusa News Agency, 2008, October 13). Later, the CML's next battle in the Bairro Alto (this time, with the collaboration of ACBA) was against the *botelhão*, the Portuguese adaptation of the Spanish phenomenon of *botellón* ('big bottle'), which is the habit of buying bottles of alcoholic drinks to share with friends in the street. In the years following the 2008 intervention in the Bairro Alto, alternative middle-class visitors and low-budget Lisbon residents came to participate in the *botelhão*, which was also a form of protest against rising prices in the bars (Roque, 2009, October 31). However, under pressure from ACBA, in December 2011, the CML finally forced convenience stores to close at 8 pm and prohibited the sale of bottles to the street (Alemão, 2013, May 20).

Summarising, while the declared aim of the 2008 reforms was to 'attack the problems of urban space degradation and lack of security that affect the Bairro Alto' (Campos, 2009, p. 66), the consequence was the gentrification of nightlife, the social exclusion of Afro-Portuguese populations and the marginalisation of popular practices, such as the *botelhão*. In Lisbon, as in other European cities in the neoliberal era, urban governance has intensified the mechanisms of socio-spatial segregation and control in order to sanitise urban nightlife and make it safer (Shaw, 2013; Williams, 2008; Wynne & O'Connor, 1998). However, sanitation of the Bairro Alto by the authorities and its progressive conquest by new social classes coexisted with the marginality and night-time danger of the upper side for years after the 2008 public efforts, as we will see in the next section. In this sense, the reopening of the Miradouro de São Pedro de Alcântara – a public garden next to the new Erasmus Corner – in 2008 was not a coincidence: regaining the upper side of the district was a goal of Bairro Alto's gentrification, and the Erasmus students were the desired population to lead the leisure-based place-making of the area.

The new Erasmus Corner and the end of the Bairro Alto's urban frontier

The most critical event that turned the Bairro Alto into a peaceful, non-problematic area for the night-time middle-class and tourist entertainment was the shifting of the Erasmus Corner to a new location. In order to understand the emergence, consolidation and place attachment of these international students to the new Erasmus Corner, a second set of 11 interviews with diverse social actors were conducted. This set of interviews is composed of six men (German, Czech, Portuguese, Dutch, Catalan, Italian and Greek) and five women (Italian, Swedish, Greek, Polish and Portuguese). Additionally, the

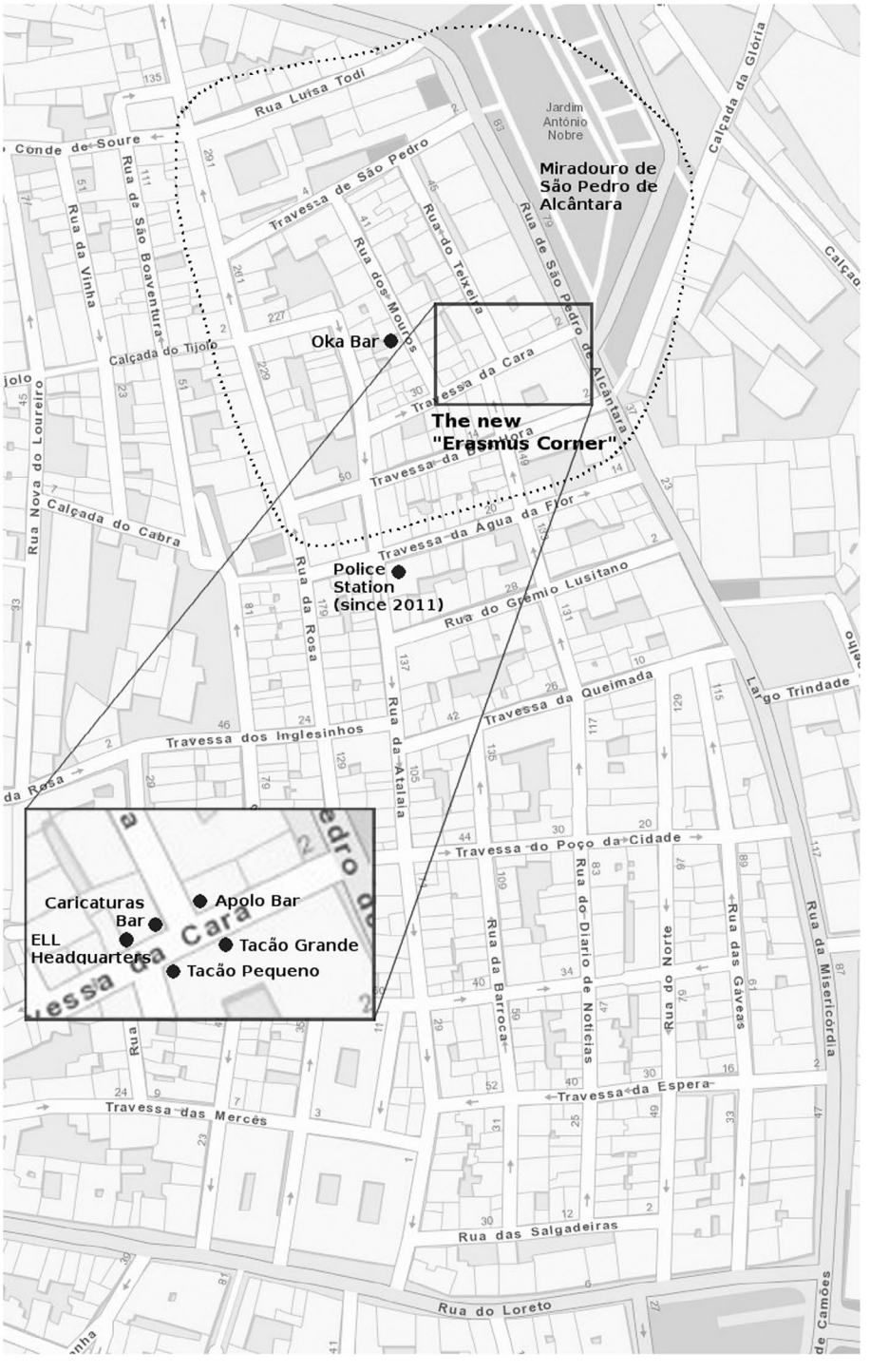

Figure 2. Bairro Alto district in 2007–2008.
Notes: In the enlarged view, the new Erasmus Corner. The former dangerous zone is encircled by a dotted line.

descriptions in this section are also based on the observational fieldwork conducted by the authors in the Bairro Alto over almost 2 years (between September 2013 and July 2015), specifically focused on the new Erasmus Corner.

As the Erasmus student population grew, their inclination to interact internally became greater (Van Mol & Michielsen, 2015), causing progressive separation of Erasmus students from their Portuguese peers regarding lifestyles. Erasmus student associations and some nightlife venues capitalised on the opportunity to satisfy the growing demand of Erasmus students' profitable consumption habits, as in other urban contexts (Chatterton & Hollands, 2003). André Martins, co-founder of the Erasmus Students' Network (ESN) and currently CEO of its commercial break up, Erasmus Life Lisbon (ELL), remembers the shift:

> At the beginning Erasmus gathered around Mezcal, but then in 2007, Caricaturas Bar started to offer good drink promotions for international students prompting them to frequent this new corner.

After that, the ESN – whose headquarters in the Bairro Alto were granted by the CML – negotiated with Apolo Bar (in front of Caricaturas) to offer promotions for Erasmus students, which they agreed to, and the phenomenon of 'special student deals' became unstoppable. Thus, the original, spontaneous Erasmus Corner moved to a new location at the junction of Travessa da Cara, Diário de Notícias and Rua do Teixeira, opening up the unappealing and insecure drug dealing area to the circulation of an increasing number of foreigners and middle-class students (Figure 2). However, domestication of this new space situated beyond the frontier of middle-class urban leisure was a slow and difficult process. Adan Cassan, a Catalan-Argentinian worker in Lisbon, currently a DJ in Bairro Alto's Club Carib, looked back to 2006 and recognised that this area was quite problematic before the arrival of Erasmus:

In those years, I frequented the Oka Bar in Rua dos Mouros, a Brazilian place with live music very close to the current Erasmus Corner. But going through Travessa da Cara to get to the bar was very unpleasant; there were just a few people and they look bad [meaning aggressively] and sometimes say something to you.

Heitor Frúgoli, Jr. in his ethnographic account of the Rua Barroca in the Bairro Alto attested to the danger of the area between Atalaia and Travessa da Cara in 2007, 2009 and 2011: 'for greater occurrence of fights, robberies and selling of illicit substances' (2013, p. 5). Indeed, in those first years of the new Erasmus Corner, Travessa da Cara was still a busy area for drug dealing, especially due to its connection with Rua Atalaia, as students were very reluctant to go through this section. As the authors remember, it was necessary to leave the Corner immediately after the bars closed because other populations came to the area to carry out robberies. In those times, the conquest of the new territory by the Erasmus students emulated the Bairro Alto's transgressive local tradition of public art (Campos, 2009), and they covered the new Erasmus Corner walls with tags and signatures to immortalise their spatialised collective identities.

Progressively, the entrepreneurial activity of some peripheral bars and the action of different Erasmus organisations – mainly ESN and ELL – accelerated the area's sanitation and contributed to overcrowding by foreign students. In this sense, Caricaturas Bar, Apolo Bar, Tacão Pequeno and Tacão Grande, the four bars situated on the new Erasmus Corner started to establish agreements with Erasmus organisations to offer promotions to attract an increasing number of students every night. Moreover, the ELL and the ESN started to use the garden nearby as a public space to organise activities and party games directed at international students, broadening the conquered space from the Erasmus Corner to the Miradouro de São Pedro de Alcântara. Today, there is no trace of violent robberies in the urban space. Nevertheless, some drug dealing activities still remain inside two dark bars in Travessa da Cara and in some corners of the Bairro Alto. Summarising, the place-making of the new Erasmus Corner is a product of the marginal gentrification of the 1990s and 2000s, the political intervention of the CML in 2008 and finally, the entrepreneurship of students' associations and some bars in the area still expanding today.

As a consequence, the pressure of new habits, businesses and populations has rapidly transformed the Corner – as it is briefly known – into an official, harmless, mainstream space (indicated even

on Google maps), which receives intense cleansing (to take care of any further tags or graffiti) and hundreds of visitors daily. Our observations support that the new Erasmus Corner has become an area of influence of intensive mainstream activities, such as pub crawls and shot contests, crowding the area daily with young, socio-economically solvent Europeans. Apart from them, the Corner also attracts drug dealers, tourists, pickpockets and Portuguese students who want to socialise with, or take advantage of, foreigners. However, persistent criminal activities in the Corner are generally unseen thefts and cautious drug dealing, which remain unnoticed on an average night. In terms of the Bairro Alto's nightlife, the Corner is currently one of the most crowded spaces in the entire district during the academic year, reuniting students even on rainy, winter weekdays. According to our observations, the only period when the Corner reduces its activities and population substantially is during the student holidays. According to the interviewed students and our own observations, the Erasmus Corner is considered today an intimate meeting place for the daily gathering of a broad community of foreigners: 'When I don't know what to do I just go there and I'm quite sure that I'll find somebody that I know' (Giulia, Italian student). Casual encounters are also a driving force in this space: 'The Corner is really fun because you always can go and meet anyone, and you don't know what will happen next' (Asia, Polish student).

Additionally, during our fieldwork in the Corner, we could see that students usually organise their birthdays and emotional farewell parties in the Corner to have the chance to reunite not just with their circle of intimate friends, but also with the acquaintances they made during their period abroad. In student narratives and discourses, the Corner means a familiar and everyday life space, related with the most cherished and emotional memories. Social alcoholisation, the exaltation of friendship and the diversification of students' sexual careers take place in the Corner, where any night may end 'who-knows-where'. The Corner does not exist as a legal jurisdiction – it is just a crossroads with four bars – but it is a place formed by a set of practices and affections that build shared temporary identities for foreign students in Lisbon (Tse & Waters, 2013). The celebration of a common identity is especially tangible when the Corner becomes crowded and bodies melt in the same social material: young foreigners going through a period of transition to adulthood. Moreover, for some authors, this transnational stay allows the acquisition of so-called 'mobility capital' – coming from the transformation of other capitals – since the students are upper middle-class individuals on an educational trip (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Whatever the case may be, the emotions and experiences of belonging related to this class-based collective transition to adulthood are located and sensed in spaces such as the Erasmus Corner.

Politics of place-making: Erasmus students and the city

This article shows how this historical neighbourhood (Bairro Alto), which had generally been associated with squalor and marginal populations, has recently been converted into a socially sanitised nightlife area. Erasmus students have become the ideal visitors and consumers for the Bairro Alto via the transformation of the Erasmus Corner into one of the most important points of commercialisation and mass participation in Lisbon's nightlife. Colonisation of the new space, located in a street area of no more than 150 square metres, was achieved through the massive arrival of a transnational, middle-class population of young people in a formerly dangerous area, seeking their own place of representation and consumption. In particular, the historical interplay of several actors and practices appears to be forcing the end of the Bairro Alto's upper urban frontier, and consequently transformation of the micro-local urban economy: (1) Erasmus students' consumption habits; (2) the CML strategy for sanitation of the Bairro Alto; and (3) the entrepreneurship of specific bars and Erasmus organisations. After some time of daily consumption in this particular space, exhibiting their distinct lifestyles and patterns of socialisation, this new population conquered the area, sanitising the social environment and favouring gentrification of the Bairro Alto's nightlife. The integration of gentrification perspectives with more sensitive understandings of the interplay between different actors in the place-making literature – which we attempted to do in this article – could be summarised by this quote

from Pierce: 'We do not deny the powerful structural forces of urban capital, but argue that scholars must also examine the connections through which these forces are applied if they are to empirically expose the mechanics of urban place politics' (Pierce et al., 2011, p. 56).

However, in spite of this process of space conquest, it is necessary to map and register the rich variety of social universes that are still populating the Bairro Alto's gentrified nightlife, besides Erasmus students: pub-crawlers, local older people, drug dealers, live musicians, bartenders, gay scene and local students. To discover and understand these populations and their impact on urban space and culture, it is imperative to disclose their place-making historicity and their connection to the micro-local economy. Places such as Bairro Alto's Erasmus Corner seem to reveal that beyond the work of investors and capitalists in the urban form, there is a tangled exchange between social actors, identities and consumption habits that explains the micro-foundations of urban change (Caulfield, 1989; Ley, 2003).

Notes

1. These data are collected from PORDATA, Platform 'Study in Lisbon', National Erasmus Agency (Portugal) and Eurostat, 2012.
2. *Fado* is an old urban popular musical genre included in 2011 in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists.

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