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Spaces for bohemian life in Lisbon

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This paper will address the spaces of so-called “bohemian life” in Lisbon between 1917 and 1927, focusing on their spatial localisation within the city, as well as on the organisation and the functions of their interior space, their representation in the press, literature and iconography.

Bohemianism is a social and cultural phenomenon that arose in an urban context in the great European cities, originally in Paris, by the end of the first half of the 19th century. In Lisbon, albeit with a different chronology and with clear adaptations to the local context, the French bohemian ideals and practices were appropriated, readapted, re-read and implemented.

Night was the favoured time for bohemian socialisation, which involved going to places such as restaurants, cafés and clubs, where one could talk, smoke, listen to music, maybe even dance, gamble, eat and drink until late into the night. By the end of the 19th century, night-time in Lisbon was described as a territory of misery, crime and conspiracy. By night, public spaces were taken over by marginal groups, vagabonds and prostitutes. Bohemian Lisbon was associated mainly with vagrancy and a lack of professional (or respectable) occupation, leading to a criminal life. Taverns were the place for bohemian socialisation, characterised by the consumption of alcoholic beverages and gambling, associated with crime and vice. These were of course popular places, in which the working classes could also be found.

Before long, these “marginal bohemians” started to include artists, writers, poets, painters, actors and musicians, but also high-born students or carefree aristocrats mingling with the rest. Bohemian life became progressively dissociated from the idea of escaping the discipline of work and became tolerated as a form of deserved leisure, a sign of modernity and civilisation for educated men. No more than a decade later, the image of Lisbon by night was completely different: in the early 20th century night-time began to “offer many more attractions than daytime. Those who go to sleep by nightfall lose the best of their time, pass by their century without living it.”¹ The new Lisbon bohemians were described as talented men, full of wit, who gathered to have fun, to go out to places where they could eat, drink and gamble. They are mentioned as “sportsmen of the night” and theirs was a civilised bohemia.

A civilised bohemia called for new spaces. In the beginning of the 20th century, a new kind of establishment opened to the public and became associated with a bohemian life, imposing itself on Lisbon’s nightlife. These new spaces tried to distance themselves from the popular bohemia of taverns, seeking a more sophisticated image, ridding bohemia of its more transgressive characteristics and being regarded as a form of innocent and civilised entertainment, instead of a marginal and decadent lifestyle. The bohemian thus became the bon vivant, displaying a spirit of enjoyment and harmless joy, for whom the consumption of

¹ LOBO DA SERRA, “O irlandês dos olhos de porcelana” in: *O Domingo Ilustrado*, 8/11/1925, p. 7.

alcohol was preferably associated with a degree of refinement and sophistication. Drunkenness was regarded as a trait of uncivilised people, of the old bohemia of the taverns.

These establishments associated with bohemian life were often called “night clubs”, “dancing clubs”, or simply “clubs” or “cabarets”. The lack of a Portuguese term bears witness, firstly, to the fact that this was an imported phenomenon; secondly, it also emphasises its cosmopolitan nature, following a trend of bigger and most central European cities. Furthermore, it reflects the relative novelty these establishments represented. In the course of the 1920s, the term “clube”, a Portuguese appropriation of the English word “club”, gradually gained in popularity.

One can understand why these establishments’ businessmen were fonder of the term “club”, since it was already a familiar expression, associated with a vast reality. Also, its larger scope dissociated it from the derogatory connotation of the term “cabaret”, connected to a much more libertine and dissolute reality. The appropriation of the English word “club” carried with it a certain element of distinction evocative of gentlemen’s clubs, which made their appearance in 19th-century Portugal.

However, despite the apparent array of different connotations and the fact that the places bore different titles, on a daily basis the terms of both “cabaret” and “club” seemed to appear undifferentiated as a way of naming these night-time entertainment spots, linked to modernity: “Clubs are cabarets. [...] There are no boundaries between one and the other. Their businessmen are the same and it is incomprehensible why certain individuals attend one and oppose the other...”²

“Cabaret” was not always used in the derogatory sense, however. Frequently its use translated a recognition of the cosmopolitanism and modernity of these places: “All around the world wherever life is led with elegance and refinement, [...] the dancing is the most modern and the most differentiating place of this truly dynamic and intense 20th century. [...] The dancing, with its night-time characteristics, with its magical expression, fully colourful and furnished with lights, with women with mouths on fire, between champagne and ‘jazz’ chords – the ‘dancing’, the ‘cabaret’, is, nowadays, a necessity of contemporary civilisation.”³

On the other hand, the expression “clube” or “club” can be used to designate quite opposite realities. In 1927, Félix Correia would define the “cosmopolitan ‘clubs’” characteristic of Lisbon’s nightlife as follows: “What is quintessential in a ‘club’ is this attractive trinity: the woman, the dance and the ‘champagne’ [...]. Such is the exterior of the ‘club’. For its soul lies behind such charms: it is in the wheel that the owners call of fortune and the partners of misfortune.”⁴

This “attractive trinity”, along with gambling regarded as both the essence and the “raison d’être” of the clubs in the Portuguese capital, is repeated in other authors’ definitions of the aforementioned places. In the novel *Nome de Guerra*, written by Almada Negreiros in 1925, (although not published until 1938), the same factors can be found: “What we call ‘clubs’ are

² A.F.G., “Século XX” in: *Contemporânea*, 3rd series, no. 3, Jul.-Oct. 1926, p. 137.

³ “Gente que se diverte” in: *Notícias Ilustrado*, 17/02/1929, p. 20.

⁴ Félix CORREIA, “Crónicas de Verão: As noites de Lisboa depois da meia-noite nos “clubs” bairristas e nos “clubs” cosmopolitas” in: *Diário de Lisboa*, 13/07/1927, p. 14.

establishments which remain open all night long, in which the main drive is gambling.[...] Whoever seeks distractions may choose between gambling, the buffet and dancing. Everything is well organised, from the facade to the tables. You can find girls, some paid by the club, others volunteering, who ensure that the room is always well frequented.”⁵

Such entertainment places were limited to a specific urban geography, which earned them a different denomination: they could also be called “downtown clubs” due to their location within the city, mainly in the area demarcated by Restauradores, the south of Portas de Santo Antão street (at the time named Eugénio dos Santos street), Calçada da Glória and the surroundings of Parque Mayer. This area of Lisbon had been recently spatially transformed and reorganised. Both the public places and buildings suffered interventions attempting to adapt an 18th-century space to the needs of the 20th century, in a process seeking mostly modernisation. Such transformations, changing space and urban organisation, also transformed its dynamics, function and centrality.

The works that took place in Avenida reconfigured the position of the Restauradores area within the city’s functional map. Lisbon had expanded along the riverbank until the middle of the 19th century, but by then its centre was strongly focused northwards, with the opening and progressive occupation of Avenida da Liberdade, Marquês de Pombal and its ramifications in Avenidas Novas. The downtown area gradually started to lose its residential character to host a series of concentrated services and commerce areas, with several leisure and entertainment places. It was home to food establishments, the National Theatre, several cinemas and the Coliseu dos Recreios, among others. This was to be the favoured areas for nightclubs, which wished to be associated with the image of modernity and progress, benefiting from the central location of the area and the already existing establishments.

Image 1: “Tourist”: “Planta de Lisboa”, Lisbon: Libanio da Silva, 1924. Source: Gabinete de Estudos Oisiponenses

Image 2: Idem, detail – Location of the clubs

Table 1: List of clubs

A very close chronology of the existence of these clubs can be observed. Club Maxim’s and Club dos Patos (the only one located further away, in a location possibly associated with its historic presence as well as its proximity to the São Luís Theatre and the opera house São Carlos) were open before the Great War as casinos, gradually introducing diversity into their services so as to reach a wider public in a way that might camouflage their original purpose, despite this being maintained. During the war, both clubs remained open, along with other gambling establishments, which thrived in Lisbon, despite pressure for a curfew, the political and social unrest and the economic crisis at the time.

According to the memoirs of journalist Reinaldo Ferreira, the first cabaret in Lisbon was the Palace Club, which opened its doors during the war: “Hence came the day [...] that opened in Lisbon the first real cabaret – a mix between a dancing club and a casino: the Palace [...]. Until

⁵ Almada NEGREIROS, Nome de Guerra, Lisboa 1972, p. 14.

then – to the night timers who wanted to wreak havoc and make folly, there was no offer of other centres of expansion [...].”⁶

Many texts portraying these clubs regarded the new habits as a consequence of the war: they emerged in the period prior to and during the war, and they developed as innovative and modern spaces featuring jazz bands and modern dancing in the post-war period. After the war, tensions cooled down and there was a willingness to recover from the sacrifices that had been made. These factors served as a justification for the lust for pleasure encouraged at the time and allowed these places to emerge. But it was also the vertigo of mechanical speed, the technological innovations that allowed more time to be dedicated to leisure, and the routines and custom-changing progress that favoured the affirmation of these clubs, mirroring what took place all throughout Europe.

The number of clubs in operation peaked in 1920, as a result of an increasing trend dating back to 1917. The number of clubs then gradually decreased until 1925. In 1926, numbers were on the rise again, as a result of several establishments re-opening. In 1927, the effects of the gambling repression law of 1926 were noticeable and resulted in a progressive closing down of such places until the 1930s, at which point only two remained open.

Within this overall context, we must bear in mind the sporadic closures, occurring as a consequence of several issues: some closed down because of police investigations aimed at gambling repression (more common during 1920, 1923 and from 1925 to 1927); others were closed by the owners themselves, temporarily ceasing activity for refurbishment or during the summer, due to a lack of costumers. Nightlife was declared as only starting “in the beginning of the winter, when from the beaches and the spas returns all that which the capital possesses of greatest elegance, when [...] society life begins.”⁷ One of the activity peaks, widely documented by the press, consisted in the carnival festivities, which were of such importance that they justified the authorisation to re-open clubs closed down by the authorities due to illegal gambling. Other celebrations, such as New Year’s Eve and thematic parties organised throughout the year, also marked the existence of these clubs. Thus, it was not only the chronology of their existence that dictated their rhythm, but also daily life and seasonal events.

Clubs were, above all, a place for informal socialisation, both mundane and urban, amongst the many others in existence, which rose or consolidated their position within the capital’s hierarchy of worldly sociability. The activities that took place here were not exclusive to such locations; instead, they were common to other spaces, whether they were aimed at the same sort of people or at other social groups. The clubs were places of social gathering in which public figures of the time partook in conversation, smoking, dancing, gambling, eating and drinking all through the night whilst watching a small performance. These practices can be traced back to ancient social habits and are not novel in themselves.⁸ Modernisation and innovation in these places came forth in the unique way in which they brought together the

⁶ Reinaldo FERREIRA, *Memórias de um Ex-Morfinómano*, Lisboa 2006 [1st ed: 1933], pp. 82-83.

⁷ Augusto NAVARRO, *Uma Rapariga Moderna*, Porto 1926, p. 7.

⁸ See Maria Alexandre LOUSADA, *Espaços de sociabilidade em Lisboa: finais do século XVIII a 1834*, Lisboa 1995.

several practices that formed this sort of sociability as well as the bohemian, euphoric, liberating and transgressive environment lived within these clubs.

These practices resulted in a specific material environment, which led those in it to partake in activities such as the consumption of food and drink while enjoying conversation (tables around the room), dancing (a dance floor in the centre) to the sound of music (on a stage or wooden platform for the musicians and artists) or gambling (in a room dedicated solely to this activity): “The main room is used as a restaurant and in the middle there is a rectangle where people dance. The musicians are in one of the edges and play anything they can get their hands on.”⁹

The restaurant was one of the main services of the clubs: Club Maxim’s, Clube dos Patos, Monumental Club, Olímpia Club, Bristol Club, Ritz Club and Club Montanha were licenced as restaurants, no information found for the remaining establishments. Clubs announced themselves as restaurants, aligning this designation with dancing, since these activities appeared to be associated with one another. The presence of a jazz band in restaurants and even in teahouses had become popular in Lisbon. These clubs had the advantage of being open until later into the night. Supper was the most widely attended meal. Eating late at night was common and widespread among different social groups and took place in several different kinds of establishments, from taverns to cafés, both in the city centre and in the surrounding areas. These places served food until late despite not being pervaded with the sophistication of the clubs. These new food establishments, whether mundane or cosmopolitan, were hailed as a sign of civilisation and progress: “A golden youth which in the old days would get drunk in taverns [...] nowadays goes to the clubs to drink beer or tea as innocent as those sold at the cafés and, in exchange for a sandwich or a goblet of Port wine, will lecture, laugh and dance with some girls, in better clothing and with a cleaner appearance.”¹⁰

Bar service accompanied the restaurant service. Clubs were mainly a place for the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Champagne was the symbol of utmost sophistication. Beer, liqueurs, peppermint schnapps, whiskey, port wine, cognac, absinthe, Pernod and other cocktails and drinks were also commonly served.

The jazz band was always present, playing all sorts of compositions, mainly ones people could dance to. The band consisted of four or five musicians and its members tended to adopt eccentric attitudes, forming a spectacle in themselves. But there were those who accused them of being sad and melancholic: “There are, alas, jazz bands so small, so soft, so technical that laughter fades away and sadness takes over.”¹¹

Dancing, along with the restaurant, bore the perfumes of modern life costumes. These were the two elements quintessential to a city aimed at civilisation and modernity: “Dancing is an element absolutely necessary in modern life. There is not one great city that can go without it. And Portugal, a country of tourism, constantly visited by foreign people, more than any other must be equipped with exemplary dancing.”¹² Modern choreographies were danced: the

⁹ Henrique ROLDÃO, “Crónica alegre” in: *O Domingo Ilustrado*, 18/01/1925, p. 3.

¹⁰ Repórter X, *A Virgem do Bristol Club*, Porto 1927, p. 140.

¹¹ “Na época do Jazz-band”, *ABC*, 8/04/1926, p. 18.

¹² Mário DOMINGUES, *O Preto do Charleston*, Lisboa 1929, p. 45.

Charleston, the foxtrot, the one-step and the shimmy, as well as the tango, the maxixe and even the waltz. The “dancing restaurant” salon was usually illuminated by several light games: there are countless references to the clubs’ electrical illumination that appeared to have been their trademark.

One interesting fact that set Lisbon clubs apart from the Paris cabaret or the German kabarett was that it was not the show itself that attracted most costumers. The shows played an almost secondary role: the ones attracting the most attention featured tango and Charleston dancers. The press announced Spanish dancers, mostly sevillanas, but also quite a few French and American songs or even Portuguese fado, sung by both women and men. It also announced “gypsy orchestras” and ventriloquists. The literature contains descriptions of erotic performances, staged after 3 am or almost at closing time by French or Spanish dancers undressing to the sound of music.

Gambling, however, remained the main attraction, to an almost unanimous chorus. The restaurant, the dancing and the shows were mostly used as camouflage for this activity. Gambling brought in the most costumers and provided the most profit. Gambling took place in all of the aforementioned clubs. In 1920, the cast of gambling places in Lisbon included Club Maxim’s, Palace Club, Club Magestic, Regaleira Club, Ritz Club, Clube dos Patos, Bristol Club, Club Internacional, Palais Royal, Olímpia Club and Club Montanha.¹³

Gambling was prohibited by the 1886 Penal Code. However, the Portuguese Administrative Code allowed councils to tax a gambling licence from any establishment, including casinos and other gambling places. One of the justifications for this was that they would contemplate only legal games, but that was not the reality. The Civil Government of Lisbon itself acknowledged the practice of illegal gambling in its city, recommending that the police repress it in clubs such as Club Maxim’s, Monumental Club, Bristol Club, Club Mayer, Ritz Club and Club Montanha.¹⁴ Gambling repression was stronger in 1920, 1923 and from 1925 to 1927. The moral debate on the danger represented by gambling to society, particular to the lower classes, would result in the decree-law 14 643 of December 1927 explicitly forbidding all forms of gambling in Portugal and defining eight special areas in which it was to be permitted: these were summer vacation places and excluded Lisbon. This would dictate the progressive closure of most of the listed clubs.

The most popular games appear to have been roulette, baccarat and French Bank: all were forbidden. Billiards, mah-jong, king and bridge were also played, but these were not quite as popular. The clubs had separated gambling areas, in which silence played an important part and bright light of the restaurant-dancing was replaced by a “grey and flat” lighting.¹⁵

Some clubs also provided barber services and had rooms set aside for newspaper reading, conferences, socio-professional dinners and homage banquets among others, bearing witness

¹³ See Irene VAQUINHAS, *Nome de Código “33856”*, Lisboa 2006, p. 32.

¹⁴ IAN-TT, ADL, GCL, 1st Rep, Cx. 404, lv. 433, “Copiador de ofícios confidenciais expedidos (03/1923-02/1929)”, 7/10/1924.

¹⁵ Repórter X, “Histórias e personagens das salas de jogo” in: ABC, 8/07/1926, p. 6.

to their multivalent character as well as their ability to adapt to the desires and needs of those who frequented them.

The clubs played host to a heterogeneous clientele, despite not including the working classes. Clubs were not restrictive or exclusive places; however, they did charge an entrance fee and products were expensive. Despite admission control, several social groups ended up together: prominent people from the political and financial arenas, aristocrats, the nouveau riche, intellectuals, artists, actors, journalists, dancers and elegant prostitutes: "Around the table are the bohemians [...]. They come from all classes and in all sorts. [...] Around them wander the 'papillons'."¹⁶

Women were generally associated with the image of "femme fatale", that of the seductress, mysterious and distant, exerting their fascination on men. The idea prevailed of only women of ill repute frequenting these establishments, considered improper for a lady, however modern and emancipated she might have been. Those who did frequent them were called "cocotas", "papillons" or "borboletas" (butterflies), since quite a few were, in fact, paid by the club owners to attract more customers, to cheer the place up, to entertain and encourage consumption.

Those who went to the clubs all found themselves in a similar state of mind, an almost mandatory one, characterised by joy, good spirits and a willingness to have a good time. "To the cabaret can only come those who are cheerful, the cabaret is the most democratic of institutions, in it we are all equal."¹⁷

Quite often, the Lisbon clubs were the subject of comparison with those of American and European cities, both in literature and in the press. This often resulted in Portuguese clubs getting negative reviews, since it was said they lacked cheerfulness, sophistication, elegance and even the excess these places were internationally renowned for.

It was night-time that truly saw these places come to life. However, night was only introduced into city life once the circulation constraints during that time were lifted and after the operating hours of establishments were extended. By 1921, the establishments allowed to operate until 4 am included Monumental Club, Club Maxim's, Palais Royal, Ritz Club and Clube dos Patos.¹⁸

Night at the clubs would begin around 8 pm and went on as late as 5 or 6 am. The first few hours were calm, with not too many people, except for a few customers and employees. By 11 pm, more people started to arrive and a few dance numbers were performed. The fun increased as the hours passed: "It was after midnight. The environment grew in tension and madness to something which even the stronger spirited ones could hardly resist."¹⁹ After midnight, those who were leaving other shows made their way towards the clubs. From 1 to 2 am was the most cheerful time, with dancing, music, "a crowd hungry for pleasure, restless

¹⁶ ROLDÃO, "Crónica alegre" (see note 8).

¹⁷ "Cabarets" in: ABC, 8/09/1927, p. 20.

¹⁸ IAN-TT, ADL, PCL/PSP, Livro 256, "Registo de Ordens de Serviço", "Ordem de Serviço n.º 48", 17/02/1921; "Ordem de Serviço n.º 51", 20/02/1921.

¹⁹ DOMINGUES, O Preto do "Charleston" (see note 11), p. 25.

and loud, twisting and laughing, mostly due to the multicolour drinks than out of real joy.”²⁰ There were those who arrived only at 2 am, in order to have supper or to meet with others and until 4 am, great fun continued to be had in those clubs that remained open.

Contrary to the idea of all-night entertainment, the novel *Os Noctívagos* describes nights which, despite continuing all the way until 5 am in clubs like Maxim’s and Regaleira, were scarcely frequented after 3 am. There were a few who stayed until the very end, mostly due to weariness or excessive alcohol consumption, allowing themselves to remain until dawn. On the other hand, the spirit of the bohemian “demanded” that one thoroughly enjoy the night until the end: “4 am [...] three pale adolescents remain in their assigned positions, accomplishing their duty – the snobbish duty of not leaving the club before a half past four.”²¹

The gamblers were the ones best known for remaining in the club until later, absorbed by their alienating hobby: “[...] they are the owners of the gambling ‘clubs’, the payers, the bankers who, after going through an entire night [...], gather, little by little, in the last of the places, the one which closes the latest [...]. At noon, the gambling continues still.”²²

These descriptions of the clubs’ working hours indicate that it was likely that those who frequented them had quite a lot of time to spare. For some, nightlife meant breaking away from tradition, as well as working schedules, so as to be able to achieve greater freedom. The feeling of modernity was thus connected with never standing still, with the unpredictable, with changing habits, all of which were ensured by the clubs.

Quite a few clubs were housed in some of the city’s most exquisite buildings, places with an air of luxury and ostentation dating back to previous epochs. Some clubs re-used deserted palaces, abandoned by their former owners and now rented for new purposes. The decisive factors in this reutilisation of palaces included the luxurious and sumptuous look of the buildings as well as their surrounding environment, carved by their original use, a result of the fabulous parties and receptions that took place there not long ago, but also their privileged location.

Club Maxim’s, considered to be the “first club in the country”²³ and the “most elegant club in Lisbon”²⁴, opened before the war in a place now known as Palace Foz, a building that was first planned in the 18th century but inaugurated only in 1858. From 1910 onwards, it was bought²⁵ for renting out to several different undertakings: alongside Club Maxim’s, it was home to a cinema, photographers’ studios and even a gym, a repair shop and a pastry house.

These privileged facilities allowed Club Maxim’s to make “smart efficient use of the artistic Foz palace”, turning it into “a meeting point widely frequented by all those who enjoy having a good time without being indifferent to luxury and a tasteful environment.”²⁶

²⁰ *Idem*, p. 25-26.

²¹ João AMEAL, *Os Noctívagos: cenas da vida de Lisboa*, Lisboa 1924, p. 45.

²² Mário DOMINGUES, “Combate dos Leões” in: ABC, 6/04/1922, p. 3.

²³ “Na nossa Lisboa” in: *Diário da Manhã*, 15/01/1933, p. 3.

²⁴ “Vai ser leiloado o recheio do Maxim’s que esteve instalado no Palácio Foz”, *GEO*, s.d., vol. 4, p. 92.

²⁵ “O Palácio Foz: hoje Palácio Sucena” in: *Diário de Notícias*, 10/09/1910.

²⁶ *Notícias Ilustrado*, 28/12/1930.

Image 3: “Maxim’s: main stairway” by Carlos Vasques, s.d. (circa 1922)

Image 4: “Maxim’s: restaurant dancing”, idem

Club Maxim’s frequently used its facilities for self-promotion in the press, using pictures of the interiors in its advertisements, leaving behind a wide set of iconography sources. An example of those sources would be the pictures taken by Carlos Vasques, published in 1922, which included images of the facade as well as the “noble staircase”, the “grand hall”, the “dining room” and the “fumoir”.²⁷ In the original set of photographs²⁸, we can see the salon conventionally decorated and furnished as a gambling facility, with the roulette table in the centre. It is not surprising that the image chosen for the magazine advertisement did not show all the purposes the room could serve.

Club Maxim’s reputation earned it a few more years in business, saving it from the wave of closing clubs, which characterised the end of the 1920s. It is quite likely that the permissiveness shown towards gambling in this specific establishment was to some extent connected to the sums of money the Civil Government of Lisbon made from it.²⁹

Two other clubs, Club Magestic, between 1917 and 1920, and subsequently Monumental Club, until 1928, occupied the Alverca Palace, built at the end of the 17th century. It is not known when the Viscounts of Alverca abandoned the place. It is, however, known that before it became a club the palace had been used as both a high school and a furniture and art sale facility.

Between 1917 and 1919, the Alverca Palace underwent a large-scale refurbishment with the intention of hosting Club Magestic, “a first-class club, which deserves to be introduced to the best in society and where foreigners visiting the country should be able to be properly and luxuriously received.”³⁰ The work on the building did not take long to be completed: “Remodelling was undertaken with remarkable haste, in little less than a year, in the peak of the war, through several strikes, revolutions, and havoc of all sorts.”³¹

Several architectural styles were adapted in order to achieve a luxurious and exotic environment: from the Arabic patio at the entrance to the Doric style used on the first floor, all the way to the restaurant designed in the style of Louis XVI and the eclectic game room. Attention must also be drawn to the care with which the furniture was chosen, so as to suit the intended architectonic style.

As a commercial firm, Rezende Limitada intended to profit from the exploitation of the club. Therefore, Club Magestic became a highly profitable gambling room, which nevertheless also led to it being shut down in 1920.

²⁷ Contemporânea, 4, Oct. 1922, pp. 51-54.

²⁸ Lisbon photo album: Photos by Carlos Vasques, 1922, vol. IV: Maxim’s Club (35 pictures), GEO, Col. Vieira da Silva.

²⁹ In 1920 Club Maxim’s paid 4,000 escudos for its gambling license. See VAQUINHAS, Nome de Código (see note 12), p. 32.

³⁰ “Magestic Club de Lisboa” in: A Arquitectura Portuguesa, XII, 10, Oct. 1919, p. 2.

³¹ “Magestic Club de Lisboa [cont.]” in: A Arquitectura Portuguesa, XII, 11, Oct. 1919, p. 4.

Image 7: “Monumental Club: Atrium” in: *Contemporânea*, 7, January 1923, pp. 66-67

Image 8: “Monumental Club: restaurant”, *idem*

At the end of that year, the Hotel and Restaurant Society used the same premises for a new club called Monumental Club, announcing it as “an elegant meeting point [...] where high society folk might be able to meet and converse.”³² The objective was for the club to be frequented by an elite, which included industrialists, merchants, magistrates, lawyers and artists, who not only met up, but also did business, in a privileged environment that provided not just business opportunities but also a wide variety of distractions. This did not dissociate Monumental from gambling and several other activities regarded as immoral. As such, the authorities shut it down in 1928, also as a consequence of the dictatorship’s legislation on gambling.

Along with the adaptation of palaces for the establishment of clubs, buildings dating from the 1800s were also remodelled. One of these was the Bristol Club, opened by businessman Mário Freitas Ribeiro in 1917, in an ordinary building, yet with a privileged location: near both Maxim’s and Club Magestic. This was a bold and innovative refurbishment project; nevertheless in 1918 the club was inaugurated with a fin-de-siècle decoration as depicted by pictures published in the press.

Image 9: “Bristol Club: Main entrance” in *Ilustração Portuguesa*, 25/03/1918

Image 10: “Bristol Club: Ballroom”, *idem*

From 1924 to 1927, the extension, decoration and remodelling work continued. The goal was to achieve a new atmosphere, both mundane and cosmopolitan. For this, several avant-garde artists’ cooperation was sought. Some of the most remarkable works were the female nude in the main room by Almada Negreiros and a series of female nudes by Eduardo Viana: the cold, mysterious and distant feminine figure of Almada contrasting with the explicitness and closeness of Viana’s silhouettes. Both fitted into the environment the club wanted to provide, between modernity and sensuality.

The image the Bristol Club wanted to achieve might have been the result of a plan pursuing not the financial profitability but seeking only the creation of an artistic social space, engaged with the modernist movements. However, we must bear in mind that this might have been a promotion strategy, since this was an establishment with small rooms and interiors not luxurious enough to target a wealthier clientele.

During 1925 and until 1927, the Bristol Club embarked on an unprecedented publicity campaign: a car was even licenced to travel the streets at the end of February 1927.³³ More remarkable still were the series of 30 covers by ABC magazine, of an amazing graphic quality, with illustrations signed by Jorge Barradas, created exclusively for the magazine. The invitation to the artist was extended by Minon Anahory, the director of ABC magazine, and

³² “Os grandes clubs em Lisboa como na América” in: ABC, 23/12/1920, p. 18.

³³ IAN-TT, ADL, GCL, Cx. 637, lv. 757, “Livro de Registo de Alvarás diversos (01/01/1926-27/04/1927) – Repartição de Passaportes”.

commissioned by the Bristol Club.³⁴ These illustrations depict the festive environment of the club, with which it wished to be associated. A “Bristol woman” was also promoted: she was modern, young, fashionable, with a haircut “à la garçonne”, smoked and drank, maintaining an enigmatic, irresistible, worldly and provocative air.

Contemporânea magazine declared Bristol Club to be a “rhythmic sound, colourful expression of a new aesthetic”, an “example of modern art.”³⁵ By 1926, the magazine claimed that when the work on the establishment finished it would most certainly become “as beautiful as any in the greatest cities of Europe”, meaning that, by May 1926, the work was yet to be complete. Bristol would close down a year later.

The analysis of the portrayal of these clubs allows us to understand that they assumed, mostly, three different forms. On the one hand they were portrayed as a synonym of modern urban civilisation, of a cultural change which ennobled idleness and entertainment, in a society in which progress in science and technology put the value and necessity of work in perspective, freeing the bourgeoisie from the parameters of discipline they were subjected to in their daily lives. On the other hand, clubs were accused of being a place of marginality, dens of depravation both physical and moral, corrupting, little by little, all the social classes. And then there were those who regarded clubs as a modern European phenomenon, unable to properly succeed in Lisbon.

All the attention the clubs roused in the press, at the time, shows how much impact they had in Lisbon. In literature, clubs were used as a way of representing all of urban daily life and also as a characteristic element of the city, representing the confrontation between urban and rural, tradition and modernism, libertinism and conservatism, excess and austerity, the unexpected and predictability.

Being enclosed in a specific area, clubs were also representative of it. They were part of it and shaped it, building not only its character but also that of Lisbon itself. These clubs progressively favoured and competed in the promotion of a new “spirit of the place”, understood as an individual and collective identification with a certain place, promoted by social networks, iconography, artistic representations, culture and the lifestyle associated with it.

The image of modernity provided by these clubs came up in association with a bohemian lifestyle taken on as a form of entertainment, as a valorisation of spare time and of the transgression happening within them: night schedule, jazz music, modern dancing, all these can be looked at as morally transgressive, given their exuberance, the rejection of traditional values, such as sobriety, discipline and work. Whereas gambling, alcohol consumption and illicit substance abuse, all activities related to entertainment, are effectively legal transgressions, as a result of a moralistic speech, condemning these above all else. However, what would disgrace an uneducated man and lead him into a life of crime and vice started to be seen as good and recommended to an educated man. The bohemian lifestyle positioned at

³⁴Jorge BARRADAS in: António RODRIGUES, Jorge Barradas, Lisboa 1995, p. 184.

³⁵ “O Bristol Club: manifestação de arte moderna” in: Contemporânea, serie 3, 1, May 1926, p. 52.

the margins of society was, gradually, framed by said society. The acceptance or rejection of this lifestyle depended mainly on the social status of its actor.