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Social exclusion in public policies and the micropolitics of an association founded by migrants

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Abstract

The theme of social exclusion has gained visibility in recent years through political discourse. This paper problematises the issue of social exclusion by analysing the counter-hegemonic perspective grounded on the policies of an association, a civil society organization, in Portugal, facilitated by migrants and their descendants. The analysis is the result of a participatory research based on the collection of documentation and semi-structured interviews. The hegemonic discourse on social exclusion was analysed through empirical data from the perspective of those who inhabit and/or intervene in a neighbourhood that is the object of public policies targeting the so-called 'excluded'. Several paradoxes were identified between the social exclusion discourse conveyed in public policies and in the micropolitics of this association. The approach, goals and working methods that characterise the micropolitics of the association may contribute to the emergence of new forms of singularisation, through adult education initiatives.

Keywords: social exclusion, migrants, public policies, micropolitics, adult education



Introduction

In recent decades, the issue of social exclusion has emerged and gained visibility, largely through the political discourse of supranational and national institutions, thus becoming the social issue par excellence (Castel, 1995). Since social exclusion is a recurrent and apparently consensual theme within social and political domains, it seems relevant to adopt a critical perspective with a view to defining its nature. Thus, this paper seeks to problematise the theme of social exclusion through the analysis of the counter-hegemonic perspective inherent to the micropolitics of a civil society association, founded and promoted by migrants and descendants of migrants.

The paper stems from empirical data produced in the context of participatory research, conducted in Portugal, on the training and work of the expert by experience in the *Cova da Moura* neighbourhood, in the field of social and community work. The analysis is a snapshot of the theme of social exclusion, based on the perspective of people living and working in a working-class neighbourhood inhabited by immigrants and their descendants. The empirical data underpinning the analysis was obtained through semi-structured interviews and documentation collection.

The research was conducted within the scope of Education Sciences, more specifically in the field of adult education. A critical perspective was adopted, considering hegemonic discourse as an ideological instrument at the service of dominant economic, social and cultural forces, with the purpose of legitimising and perpetuating a social system based on inequalities (Canário, 2005; Freire, 1978; 1980). The research focused on the analysis of alternative practices, which may be deemed counter-hegemonic.

In the approach adopted, the hegemonic discourse regarding social exclusion in public policies is an obstacle to the understanding of the social world since it omits the structural and institutional factors responsible for the marginalisation, discrimination and segregation processes of individuals and groups (Canário, 2005; Freire, 1978; 1980). Thus, it is important to identify and analyse the micropolitics of civil society groups to understand the issue of social inequality in its complexity. These micropolitics, coupled with the usually silenced and invisible perspective of working class individuals, migrants and their descendants, may allow for the emergence of counter-hegemonic practices and discourses, which are essential for social change (Sousa Santos, 2007).

We understand discourse as organized forms of communication (verbal, written, non-verbal, visual) on a given subject, carried out in a social, political and cultural context, with the aim of informing, exposing and persuading. Discourse is a meaning-producing activity that expresses the social, cultural and ideological positions of the individuals involved, both explicitly and implicitly.

The empirical data refer to the terms 'work in tandem' and 'expert by experience', the meaning of which is important to clarify. Work in tandem consists of an activity conducted by two individuals – the expert by experience and the academic expert. The expert by experience is someone with life experience in a given domain (Cavaco, 2018; McLaughlin, 2009), who has undertaken specific training, based on a reflection of their own life experience, geared towards the exercise of activities, through work in tandem. The academic expert is someone who holds an academic qualification in a given area. In the field of health and social work, the emergence of the expert by experience and the academic expert stemmed from a recognition of the complexity of the individual's intervention, experience and singularity, and power to act. Work in tandem is based on a collaborative dynamic between these two professionals who acknowledge the importance of complementarity between academic and experiential knowledge for effective interventions with other people (Cavaco, 2018). Thus, they might 'help each other,

growing together in the common effort to understand the reality they seek to transform' (Freire, 1978, p. 11).

The paper is structured into five parts. The first presents a brief contextualisation of the *Bairros Críticos* [Critical Neighbourhoods] Programme of the *Cova da Moura* neighbourhood and the *Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude*. The second focuses on theoretical elements regarding the narrative on social exclusion. The third is related to the conceptual dimensions of micropolitics resulting from civil society initiatives, framed by the field of adult education. The methodology of the research is presented and justified in the fourth part and the fifth presents and analyses the empirical data resulting from the research.

Contextualisation - Elements

The contextual elements regarding the *Cova da Moura* neighbourhood and the *Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude* came from research (the sources are indicated) and from the testimony of the participants with whom the interviews were conducted. The information on the Critical Neighbourhoods Programme came from the analysis of legal documents and research carried out in the field.

Origins of the Cova da Moura Neighbourhood

In the mid-twentieth century, housing peaked in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon, with the construction of illegal neighbourhoods in unoccupied or deprived areas on the outskirts of the city of Lisbon. The construction of poor housing and socio-cultural ghettos (Cardoso & Perista, 1994; Coimbra & Menezes, 2009) are associated with poverty and the migration phenomenon. The 'appropriation of urban space' (Cardoso & Perista, 1994, p. 102) is the result of the poverty and inequalities that condition the particular social groups in their access to housing in city centres. An individual's place of residence is a potential inequality factor, for example, in the search for employment, access to transport and public services. Individuals in this situation carry the weight of the space they occupy (Byrne, 1999). The occupation and construction of illegal neighbourhoods are evident phenomena arising from the denial of the 'right to the city' (Wildemeersch & Lages, 2018), that is, the right to affordable housing in spaces with habitable conditions, including the provision of basic physical, social and cultural infrastructures for a dignified life.

The *Alto da Cova da Moura* neighbourhood, more commonly known as *Cova da Moura*, was built from the 1960s onwards through spontaneous occupation. This involved the residents' self-construction of housing and self-urbanization on abandoned private and State land. It is one of the oldest and largest areas with a migrant population within the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon. With approximately six thousand inhabitants (Gomes, 2019), the population has doubled since the 1980s. A highly significant number of the neighbourhood's inhabitants are migrants or descendants of migrants from African countries, colonised by Portugal between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries (Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe, Angola). Among the inhabitants there are also migrants and their descendants from the northern and central regions of Portugal and other countries (Eastern Europe, Brazil, etc.). The growth of the neighbourhood was concomitant with an increase in migratory movements due to factors of a social, economic and political nature (Mendes, 2008). Poverty in these individuals' homelands is one of the

motives for their migration (Morrice, 2019). In addition to these factors, decolonization, war and political persecution are also reasons for migration (Mendes, 2008).

The *Cova da Moura* neighbourhood is characterised by multiculturalism, solidarity and the power to act. In the struggle for the right to decent housing, to the city, and to a 'place' (Jorge & Carolino, 2019), in recent decades its inhabitants have opposed the various attempts to demolish the neighbourhood and relocate the residents to public housing, in dispersed areas far from the city centre. The neighbourhood appears to be a place of life and belonging, self-produced by its inhabitants who call for the improvement of its infrastructures and housing conditions.

In 1978, the inhabitants organised themselves collectively and elected a Residents' Committee. The collective organisation arose from the awareness of their rights to a dignified life and the need to vindicate these rights from the public entities responsible for the neighbourhood's infrastructures (running water, sewerage systems, electricity, street works, etc.). There are currently three active associations in the neighbourhood with the mission of promoting the improvement of residents' living conditions: the Social Solidarity Association, *O Clube* (founded in 1980); the *Moinho da Juventude Cultural Association* (officially founded in 1987, but active from 1984); and the *Associação de Moradores do Bairro Alto da Cova da Moura* (founded in 1996). The research presented in this paper focuses on the *Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude*, better known as 'Moinho', a term that is adopted hereinafter.

Civil Society in the Cova da Moura Neighbourhood

The *Moinho* is a non-governmental, non-profit organization, created and managed by residents located in the *Cova da Moura* neighbourhood. Upon its legal recognition as a Private Social Solidarity Institution, the integration of non-residents into its governing bodies became a requirement. The *Moinho's* intervention is anchored on a set of key pillars: interculturality, communication, joy, gender, respect for convictions, cooperation, empowerment, environment, creativity, persistence, quality, efficiency, effectiveness and solidarity. Based on these guiding principles, the *Moinho* promotes global and sustainable community development aimed at improving the living conditions of the neighbourhood's inhabitants through the organisation of activities in the social, educational, cultural, sports, professional, economic, legal and urbanistic fields.

By way of example, the following projects designed and implemented by the *Moinho* are particularly noteworthy: *PULO* (parent training and accompaniment for families), *Gabinete de apoio social* [Social Support Office], *Creche Familiar* [Family Nursery] (nanny service, with extended opening hours for babies and children), *Creche e Jardim de Infância* [Nursery and Kindergarten] (for children aged between 4 months and 5 years), the *Centro de Atividades de Tempos Livres* [Leisure Centre] (activities and accompaniment for children and youths from 6 to 18 years of age), *Cantina Social* [Social Canteen] (meal services for the more financially disadvantaged members of the neighbourhood and surrounding neighbourhoods), *Kova M Estudio* (studio where young people from the neighbourhood produce and edit music), *Cidadania Participativa* [Participatory Citizenship] (community intervention project seeking to cover the population in a situation of socioeconomic fragility through a decentralised intervention in areas such as health, documentation, domestic violence, support for ex-convicts, and also to promote healthy ageing), *Gabinete de Integração Socioprofissional* [Socio-professional Integration Office] (support and accompaniment of integrated professional and training insertion paths), *Gabinete de Apoio à Documentação* [Documentation Support Office] (formal documentation support for migrants).

A significant part of the *Moinho's* interventions target children and youths and currently cover over 500 children and young people. The Association develops its intervention with the financial support of the State (through co-operation agreements, applications to funded and co-funded projects), with levies, the provision of services, and the support of both private and corporate sponsors, at domestic and international levels. It is often the first institution with which immigrant citizens come into contact, which reinforces and justifies the need for its action since it is a reference in this field at the national level.

Through its intervention, the *Moinho* seeks to assume a political dimension of a critical nature, which is evident in three lines of action: firstly, its action is based on a model of integrated and sustainable local and community development, grounded on the recognition of the residents' culture, knowledge and skills; secondly, it seeks to secure the continuity of the neighbourhood in the location upon which it was built and opposes the demolition attempts of governmental bodies; thirdly, it promotes and vindicates improvements in the neighbourhood to ensure the residents' 'right to the city' (Wildemeersch & Lages, 2018) and to a dignified life. The *Moinho's* action, in line with the thinking of Paulo Freire (1978; 1980), adopts a political and critical positioning geared towards social change and the construction of a fairer world with less oppression, through *conscientization*. The *Moinho* aims to promote the *conscientization* of the residents of the neighbourhood as political education, providing access to resources and stimulating critical thinking, so that they can, both individually and collectively, observe, analyse and define action and act to bring about change.

The *Moinho* makes its policy known through goals, keystones, organisation and functioning methods, work methodologies and the lexicon used. In its practice, it seeks to ensure coherence, continuity and comprehensiveness. In the last three decades, the *Moinho* has promoted a diverse range of social and cultural dynamics with educational potential within the community, with families, children, young people, adults and senior citizens, and sometimes by means of intergenerational initiatives. Many of these initiatives were designed and implemented through work in tandem between an expert by experience and an academic expert.

The *Moinho* works with experts by experience in the fields of migration, colonialism and poverty. These experts by experience are individuals who live in the neighbourhood and have undergone training, designed and implemented by the *Moinho* itself, with a threefold dimension: the explanation and (re)elaboration of experience and life history; the acquisition of knowledge regarding the phenomena of migration, colonialism and poverty; and knowledge acquisition and capacity building in relation to the work in tandem. The work in tandem is based on articulation, complementarity and synergy between the expert by experience and the academic expert, as well as on accompaniment. Since its foundation, the *Moinho* has resorted to work in tandem to promote intervention in all areas.

Critical Neighbourhoods Programme

Since 1974, several rehousing measures have been implemented with a view to demolishing these neighbourhoods through investment in public housing. Policymakers regard these neighbourhoods as symbols of deprivation, gaps and illegal construction, and they therefore do not fall within the hegemonic parameters and image of the city (Jorge & Carolino, 2019).

The Critical Neighbourhoods Initiative (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2005) was part of a public policy initiative for cities between 2005 and 2012, implemented in three neighbourhoods in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto (*Cova da Moura*,

Vale da Amoreira and *Lagarteiro*), as a pilot programme. This programme sought to ensure the continuity of state interventions for the qualification and rehabilitation of urban territories through what was deemed an integrated and innovative approach (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2005). The neighbourhoods of *Vale da Amoreira*, on the outskirts of Lisbon, and *Lagarteiro*, on the outskirts of Porto, are examples of neighbourhoods built by the State to rehouse families living in shanties. The *Cova da Moura* neighbourhood was built by the residents on abandoned land on the outskirts of Lisbon.

As a justification for the relevance of this measure, the Resolution of the Council of Ministers, under which it was legally framed, pinpointed the three territories of the intervention as critical neighbourhoods due to the 'concentration of social problems, to the disadvantaged and disempowered populations, to the concentration of groups most vulnerable to different forms of discrimination, to the social stigma associated with them and the blocked opportunities' (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2005, § 5). Moreover, from the legislators' perspective, these neighbourhoods represent a major risk to the quality of life and competitiveness of metropolitan areas (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2005). The document states that implementing measures in these urban spaces is a complex matter and that the results are not long-lasting.

(De)construction of the discourse on social exclusion

In this paper a critical perspective is adopted, in line with the thinking of Paulo Freire, Robert Castel and Rui Canário. It is important to analyse 'what is hidden in this discourse on exclusion and translates the social issue' (Castel, 1995, p. 13) in contemporary society. The theme of social exclusion gained popularity in the 1990s, in the context of public policies, especially in Europe (Mascareño & Carvajal, 2015). Since then, its presence has been increasingly noted in the discourse of policy makers and the media (Bouquet, 2015). This discourse is by no means anodyne, on the contrary, it might reflect political positions towards social phenomena which lead to social action in a given direction, precluding and silencing other approaches. The terms and concepts used may establish 'a linguistic action' (Guilhaumou, 2012, para. 14) influencing how the reality is understood.

The discourse on social exclusion 'reveals pitfalls both for sociological reflection and for political action' (Castel, 1995, p. 12). The term 'social exclusion' itself is used as an umbrella to encompass the diversity of poverty in the world, in other words, the great diversity of extreme situations of individuals and groups (Castel, 1995). Since it is a term that can designate a great variety of phenomena, it does not differentiate between them, perhaps, giving rise to an amalgam (Canário, 2005). We would argue that, instead of serving as a useful mental tool for the construction of scientific knowledge, it is an obstacle to its production.

In the political discourse on social exclusion, social phenomena are frequently simplified and the individuals themselves are blamed and held to account. This discourse underestimates the processes that enhance social inequality, such as the precariousness of work relationships and the fragility of social relationships (Castel, 1995). From our point of view, this narrative describes social phenomena but does not address their dynamics and causes, silencing the social and institutional mechanisms that generate social inequality and the denial of citizens' rights (Canário, 2005; Castel, 1995), which undermines an understanding of these phenomena.

There is an underlying negative meaning to this political discourse which is related to a deficit or lack of something (Castel, 1995), and this may represent a threat to the social groups who find themselves in these circumstances (Canário, 2005) owing to the

risk of stigmatization stemming from this discourse. Scapegoating, infantilization and segregation are functions associated with the capitalist economy which can give rise to dominant subjectivity and influence life in society decisively (Guattari & Rolnik, 1996). Although they substantiate welfare for those in situations of social vulnerability, it is important that public policies not replace or prevent the fight against its causes (Castel, 1995).

The expression social exclusion has a 'paradoxical meaning in that there is nothing "outside" the social' (Canário, 2005, p. 36). This expression conveys novel language, uncritically imported from the technical and political fields into the scientific field. The term is 'an object of tautological use which, in the case of the social sciences, is an epistemological obstacle to understanding the social world' (Canário, 2005, p. 36). So, as far as Canário (2005) is concerned, the terms exclusion and inclusion should be rejected as tools for analysis, as they correspond to dimensions of the same phenomenon. In the same vein, Castel (1995) expresses reservations on using the term 'exclusion' and considers that it should be replaced 'by a more appropriate concept to name and analyse the risks and current social fractures' (p. 13).

Social inequality stems from the organisation and functioning of the social structure, which is why it occurs in the 'centre of social life and not its periphery' (Castel, 1995, p. 15). From this perspective, Paulo Freire (1980) considers that marginalisation and segregation involve placing someone 'outside', 'on the sidelines', therefore, one must question 'who the author of this movement from the centre of the structure to its margin' is (pp. 73-74). In the political discourse, individuals considered marginal are defined as being on the outside of the social system, yet these people have always been on the inside (Freire, 1972). According to Freire (1972), overcoming inequalities implies changing the social structure.

The social structure gives rise to situations that cause renegades in relation to whom the feeling of inferiority and incapacity has been 'emphasised' (Freire, 1978, p. 15). In Freire's view (1980), marginality is not a choice, these individuals are systematically denied the most basic rights. According to the author, by changing these structural mechanisms, generators of violence, perpetrators of poverty and multiple inequalities, 'the dehumanizing structure' could be transformed (Freire, 1980, p. 75). Individuals living in poverty and all those who are denied the most basic rights represent the dominated structures of society, deprived of the right to assume full citizenship, but who nevertheless consciously or unconsciously oppose those who trivialise and dehumanise them by treating them as worthless objects (Freire, 1980). Paulo Freire (1980) considers that transformation of the dehumanising structure involves critical intervention. This enables those who have been dominated and subjugated by an alienating power to free themselves and claim their rights with a critical conscience and spirit (Freire, 1980).

Micropolitics and civil society's power to take action

The approach of contemporary political philosophy is adopted to problematise political power, among other dimensions. Policies, through power and control, assume a 'social mediation function in the reorganisation of the social order, through different systems' (Junqing, 2008, p. 58). For Junqing (2008), policies can be analysed from two different, but complementary and interdependent levels, namely through macropolitics and micropolitics. Macropolitics focuses on large-scale power structures and regulation and control mechanisms, such as the organisation of the State and the mechanisms through which it exercises its power (Junqing, 2008). Micropolitics, on the other hand, is centred around small-scale power structures, as exemplified by 'the control mechanisms inherent

to social activities and everyday life' (Junqing, 2008, p. 58). Through the explicitness of the micro-political level, (re)constructed discourses and practices in certain groups, communities and organisations can be identified and analysed. This approach, that integrates both macro and micropolitics, makes it possible to (re)consider policies on the basis of diversified, heterogeneous, multiple and complex social dynamics at all levels of society and daily life.

The micropolitics (re)constructed by individuals and groups in everyday life might correspond 'to different forms of social integration' (Guattari & Rolnik, 1996, p. 11), and makes it possible to analyse the singularity of experiences constructed individually and collectively. Our interest in micropolitics stems from the enhancement of unique experience and subjectivity.

The micropolitics of groups and social movements that fight on behalf of minorities and social causes may foster the production of new forms of subjectivity (Guattari & Rolnik, 1996). These 'subjective singularization processes' (Guattari & Rolnik, 1996, p. 45), characterised by plurality and individual and collective action, can constitute resistance mechanisms against the 'general serialisation of subjectivity' process (Guattari & Rolnik, 1996, p. 45), typical of the capitalist system. Singularisation might be a disruptive process against capitalist subjectivity, asserting itself through ways of being, sensibilities and perceptions that differ from those that are more common or instituted (Guattari & Rolnik, 1996).

The diversity and complexity of challenges in contemporary society seem to require an interconnection between 'public policies and the increasingly formalised initiatives of civil society' (Fleury, 2015, p. 2). It is in this sense that Fleury (2015) considers that social intervention devoid of the active participation of individuals, without considering their power to act, is a counterproductive process. According to Fleury (2015), politicians no longer hold a monopoly over policymaking in contemporary society, as citizens are increasingly concerned with action in the public sphere. Individuals develop initiatives, design instruments, experiment, validate and disseminate them, which justifies the emergence of policies resulting from civil society action (Fleury, 2015).

Some civil society entities, namely associations, implement community intervention in locations set in urban peripheries, characterised by multiculturalism and predominantly inhabited by migrants and their descendants. For immigrants, the organisations established within the community are the preferred sites for adult education (Guo, 2015) through the dynamics that foster non-formal and informal education and experiential training. These organisations operate in very diverse areas and aim to promote the establishment of networks, culture and identity affirmation, and the development of a relational dimension. In addition, they try to play the role of transition institutions, functioning as promoters of immigrants' process of integration into society on the one hand, and as mediators between them and the host States on the other (Guo, 2015). Due to its historical commitment to social movements and social justice, the field of adult education is a structuring domain in the intervention of these civil society organizations.

Methodology

As mentioned above, this paper problematises the issue of social exclusion by analysing the counter-hegemonic perspective grounded on the policies of an association, in Portugal, facilitated by migrants and their descendants. The analysis presented in this paper is a cross-section of empirical data produced within the framework of a participatory research, conducted in Portugal, on the training and work of the expert by experience in the *Moinho*. Participatory research favours the construction of scientific

knowledge through the 'ecology of knowledge' (Sousa Santos, 2007). Hence, this research is grounded on a recognition of the importance of dialogue and the interdependence between scientific knowledge and the popular knowledge of urban migrant populations. The study adopts the perspective that the construction of scientific knowledge results from the commitment, experience and knowledge of all the actors involved, and seeks to counteract the hegemonic tendency in which 'the particular and the local does not count, it is invisible, disposable, despicable' (Sousa Santos, 2007, p. 31).

From an epistemological point of view, this participatory research is framed by the emerging paradigm since it acknowledges the twofold importance of the scientific paradigm as also a social paradigm of decent life (Sousa Santos, 1987). Against this backdrop, the study sought to involve individuals and institutions related to the issue under study, through participatory and co-constructed processes (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). This type of research is anchored on reflection, flexibility and interactivity (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). In the present participatory research, the relationships between the various agents were based on horizontality, dialogue, recognition and reciprocity. The decision to conduct this participatory research was both to ensure the construction of socially relevant scientific knowledge and to promote training processes for all those involved in order to boost each individual's power to act (Ricoeur, 2005).

Techniques and procedures

The empirical data presented in the paper is the result of a participatory research, conducted in the neighbourhood of *Cova da Moura*, with individuals connected to the *Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude*. Various techniques were used in the participatory research, such as: document collection, participant observation, informal conversations, biographical workshops and semi-structured interviews. In the paper, the empirical data underpinning the analysis was obtained through the collection of documentation and semi-structured interviews. The collection of documents focused on the legal framework of the national *Iniciativa Bairros Críticos* programme. Three of the interviewees live in the neighbourhood of *Cova da Moura* and are connected to the *Moinho*: one of the interviewees is a founding partner of the Association and is currently involved in projects in the area of *Participatory Citizenship* (Matilde), the other is a young adult participating in the Association's projects (Bruno), and the third interviewee is a worker, an expert by experience and member of the Association's administration board (Berta). A fourth interview was also held with a technical staff member working at the Association, who works in tandem as an academic expert (Dalila).

In the semi-structured interviews, the aim was to systematise issues that had been previously addressed in informal conversations. The semi-structured interviews were conducted according to a script, previously provided to the participants, with the following themes: neighbourhood characteristics and life, migration, 'social exclusion', work in tandem and expert by experience. The interviews were guided in a flexible manner, with attention to the epistemology for listening (Berger, 2009).

The empirical data underwent a thematic content analysis (Bardin, 2018). To guarantee an interpretative content analysis, the content of the interviews was organized systematically around categories (themes) and subcategories (subthemes) already included in the interview script, and around others that emerged from the data itself. In the analysis presented in this paper, the following themes and sub-themes were considered: discourses (discourses on the neighbourhood, discourses on 'social

exclusion'), logics and disputes (disputes over space, public policies and the work of the *Moinho*).

The participatory research followed the ethical principles of research in the field of Educational Sciences (All European Academies, 2017; Sociedade Portuguesa de Ciências da Educação, 2020). The names of the interviewees are pseudonyms in order to guarantee their anonymity. The association involved was not anonymised for three reasons. First, the use of another name would not ensure anonymity, given the specific nature of its work and the terms used. Second, participatory research assumes a political dimension, which in this case aims to acknowledge and give visibility to alternative, more sustainable and fair social practices, which are usually silenced and rendered invisible. Third, the association also considers this to be an important option. This paper is the result of a collaborative writing process with all the individuals involved.

Discourses on the neighbourhood

The discourse and words contained within it are neither neutral nor anodyne, on the contrary, they define positions, based on representations of the world, associated with particular perspectives and purposes. The interviewees highlighted the non-neutrality and subjectivity of the discourse on the neighbourhood, which they consider valid for their perspective, but also for political and social perspective:

it is very hard to characterise in general terms, mainly because I have lived here for so many years which makes an objective view difficult, but also I do not think there can be objectivity in terms of characterising a neighbourhood (Matilde).

I grew up here when I was little, I don't have a very objective point of view (Bruno).

This subjectivity is important to understand the neighbourhood from the perspective of those who inhabit it, who have built and continue to build it as a habitable space, and who, as a rule, do not have a voice in the public sphere. Additionally, it might allow for the visibility of counter-hegemonic subjectivities that criticize the reductive nature of the discourse disseminated in the public arena.

Cova da Moura has been officially classified as a rundown, illegal and 'clandestine neighbourhood' (Graça & Paio, 2018). In political and public discourse, the neighbourhood is usually portrayed negatively, as 'critical', 'vulnerable', 'violent', 'clandestine', 'rundown', 'illegal'. The *Cova da Moura* neighbourhood was selected by the *Iniciativa Bairros Críticos* whose aim was to regenerate 'critical urban areas' (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2005, §4). The respective urban areas were described on the basis of problems, needs and gaps, reinforcing the negative perspective of these territories and of their inhabitants:

their concentration of social problems, the disadvantageousness and lower qualifications of their populations, the concentration of groups more vulnerable to different forms of discrimination, the social stigma associated with them and blocked opportunities (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2005, §4).

In the above discourse, the territories and their inhabitants are what constitute the social problems, without mentioning that the living and housing conditions and insufficient schooling are consequences of inequality and the asymmetric distribution of wealth, consented by the political and social systems. Furthermore, no mention is made of the positive characteristics of these territories and the people who live there. For the residents

and technical staff working at the *Moinho*, the *Cova da Moura* neighbourhood is a place of life, belonging, well-being and positive long-lasting relationships:

[The neighbourhood is a] living and dynamic territory, [where the person] public space is appropriated (Dalila).

It's more the environment that I like in the neighbourhood. I feel at home, I feel safe, being with people who are like me, people who understand me (Bruno).

For the people who have left the neighbourhood, this is their place, where they like to spend their holidays (Matilde).

As far as the sense of safety highlighted by the inhabitants is concerned, they refer to the paradoxical political and social discourse surrounding the neighbourhood. A negative image has emerged from the political and social discourse surrounding the neighbourhood which is difficult to counteract. The inhabitants are aware that the discourse produced on the neighbourhood interferes with the social construction of reality. They highlight these dimensions:

this is very interesting, this feeling of being safe, because people always say that this neighbourhood is dangerous, but this is the feeling the people here have, of feeling safe. I feel it too (Matilde).

It's a really cool neighbourhood. It's not what you think and see on television, on the contrary, everyone is nice, everyone is cool (Bruno).

These areas are deemed critical and priority cases in public policies, based on two interconnected arguments. On the one hand, it is deemed essential to promote citizenship and social cohesion, while on the other, these territories are regarded as a risk to quality of life and competitiveness in metropolitan areas. A reductionist perspective of citizenship is conveyed, as the emphasis is on social peace and economic development to the detriment of safeguarding the poorest citizens' basic rights. This is evident in the following statements:

they constitute the most urgent challenge in terms of promoting citizenship and social cohesion (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2005, §4),

they represent a considerable risk in terms of behaviours that can undermine the quality of life and competitiveness of the main metropolitan clusters (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2005, §4).

An analysis of the empirical data reveals another paradox. The political discourse interprets citizenship as a dimension of regulation, essential for social peace and for the competitiveness of territories. The interviewees highlight cultural diversity, liveliness and solidarity as important characteristics of the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is characterised by its very young population, cultural richness, African origins, cooperation and mutual help, despite the financial hardship of its residents:

it has young people with vibrant energy and great skills [...] has a liveliness that comes from Africa. Liveliness and at the same time a lot of strength, depth and a lot of humanity [...] they support other neighbours in different ways, without making a fuss, in terms of education, health, and in terms of food. [...] There is solidarity here, there is synergy. [People] have brought really valuable cultures from Africa – from São Tome, from Cape Verde, from Angola (Matilde).

the word that best describes it is solidarity [...] it gives a good characterisation of what the experience of the people who live here is like (Dalila).

Discourse on social exclusion

In this paper, only the issue of asymmetry in the ‘right to the city’ is addressed, namely, the right to live close to one's workplace and the city centre. The interviewees criticise the political discourse in which the residents of the *Cova da Moura* neighbourhood are regarded as ‘excluded’. They believe it is essential to take the diversity of the situations in the neighbourhood into consideration instead of making simplistic generalisations, as may be seen below:

it makes no sense (Matilde).

[At the *Moinho*, we don't use] the terminology of social exclusion or social inclusion, not least because we understand it much more as a process dynamic [...] of feeling socially included or excluded is subjective and is not directly confined to an economic issue or a territorial issue [...] what may make me feel socially included, may be different for you [...] we often see this, people in very vulnerable circumstances, from a socioeconomic point of view, who don't really show that they feel particularly excluded [...] because within their own system, relationships are established and they find [...] the resources that allow them to feel included or at least not to feel excluded, both from a social and economic point of view (Dalila).

Interviewees highlighted the diversity and complexity of the structural and institutional factors that generate inequalities. However, in their view, public policies have no bearing on these factors. Therefore, they regard the political discourse as contradictory since although it identifies social problems, the policies and institutions themselves generate and perpetuate inequality:

the institutions are the cause of our exclusion (Matilde).

because inclusion means including someone, but most of the time it's excluding, so it's exclusion [...] it's only words, they are only written [...] they are things that are written, but in practice it is only written [...] I often say to my co-workers at the *Moinho* - We are not politicians, the politicians are the ones who write one thing and do another (Berta).

It is the inconsistency between the hegemonic political discourse and effective action that underlies her critical analysis. The interviewees highlight multiple historical, cultural, economic, political and social factors and phenomena of a structural and institutional nature that generate inequalities, such as: colonialism, poverty, violence, racism, segregation, asymmetries in the labour market (precariousness, low income), disparities in educational access and performance, difficulties in accessing information regarding rights, difficulties in acquiring Portuguese citizenship, asymmetries in the ‘right to the city’ (Wildemeersch & Lages, 2018), etc. It seems that, from the interviewee's perspective, these factors (re)produce and naturalise differentiated power relations which, in turn, define social and economic positions, acting as social regulation instruments with the power to decide who stays in the centre and who is relegated to the margins.

Space-related disputes

The illegal origin of the neighbourhood, built on private and state property, the lack of infrastructures and urban planning, the location and real estate speculation are factors that have conditioned its legal recognition and the creation of conditions to improve the quality and stability of the lives of its inhabitants. Over the years, several projects for the neighbourhood have emerged, almost always in an attempt to rehouse and relocate the families to more peripheral areas, which has been contested and has served to strengthen the residents' fight for the 'right to the city' (Wildemeersch & Lages, 2018).

The dispute over the occupation of space in the neighbourhood, which is on the outskirts of the city of Lisbon, with high real estate potential, is an obvious factor. The attempt to shift to the margins and remove from the centre, in this case, is also geographic. At the root of the difficulty surrounding the urban legalisation of the neighbourhood and its recognition by public entities, namely the Municipality of Amadora, was the intention to impose its demolition and relocate its inhabitants to other locations, further removed from the outskirts of Lisbon. In this case,

in a *Djunta Mô* [Cape Verdean expression meaning holding hands and mutual help] of the three associations and with the support of the parish, we managed to halt the Mayor of Amadora's project in 2002, which intended to destroy 85% of the neighbourhood (Matilde).

As the neighbourhood has not yet been legalised, there is always the fear of this occurring again. The evident competition for space has caused fear and distrust among the residents, as they are constantly aware of the real risk of being rehoused and the demolition of the neighbourhood:

the neighbourhood used to be 47 acres. Since 2009 it is only 39.5 acres. This is a consequence of political options taken on the sly [...] I'm against that (Matilde).

This reduction in the neighbourhood's space was a measure adopted at the time of its involvement in the *Iniciativa Bairros Críticos*. The 7.5 acres ceased to be part of the neighbourhood, although the residents were unaware of this. In 2011, they discovered that the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia* (charitable organisation), initially a

partner of the *Iniciativa Bairros Críticos* project, had ceased to be a part of it in 2009, and had subsequently obtained a license to build the Continuing Care Unit, reducing the land in *Cova da Moura* from 47 to 39.5 acres hectares on the title deeds (Matilde).

The Critical Neighbourhoods Initiative, designed to solve community problems, was used to legitimise the reduction of neighbourhood space and the construction of a service that does not serve the population:

it is a political balance game between the PSD [social democratic party] and the PS [socialist party], without considering the needs of the population. The Continuing Care Unit does not serve the population (of the neighbourhood). The Nursery serves the population of the neighbourhood and is a basic need (Matilde).

However, the construction plan for the *Moinho* nursery was cut short, even though they had land, funding and an architectural project. The residents feel that this is an injustice, which undermines the credibility of public policies:

but the Mayor blocked it. He forced us to wait for the Detailed Plan within the scope of the Critical Neighbourhoods Initiative (Matilde).

The promotion and enhancement of the neighbourhood's cultural manifestations is a fundamental strand of the *Moinho's* intervention, geared towards its official recognition and dignification, personal and identity development, and the strengthening of community spirit. This has become a means of fighting against attempts to demolish the neighbourhood and for the residents to claim their 'right to a place' (Jorge & Carolino, 2019). The *Moinho* prepared an application for recognition of the *Kola de San Jon*, a traditional Cape Verdean festivity. In this manifestation, involving music, dance, lyrics and artefacts, the facilitators recreate elements of Cape Verde's cultural tradition. As a Cultural and Intangible Heritage of Portugal since 2013, culture, in particular the *Kola San Jon*, has saved the neighbourhood from demolition:

Those who are part of both the Kola and Batuque feel immense pride. I think the neighbourhood does too, the fact that it was published in the *Diário da República* [Official Gazette]. This means that the neighbourhood cannot collapse because we have Kola. (Matilde)

Batuque is a musical-choreographic expression of Cape Verde's cultural heritage, which was ostracised during the period of Portuguese colonisation. The women who perform batuque, called *batucadeiras*, define the melody, rhythm and lyrics of the songs. These songs refer to life experiences, feelings, vindications and gratitude.

Public policies –innovative interventions or imposed from the outside?

The *Iniciativa Bairros Críticos* may be noted as an example which, as an instrument of city policy, was publicised as an innovative public policy. In its framing documents, the following structuring principles are mentioned: integration, sustainability and durability, cooperation, mobilisation and participation of actors, transparency, communication and articulation, intention to generate structural impacts, innovative intervention and management models (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2005). Although designed on the basis of accumulated experience in prior public policy interventions, in practice, this programme appears to have reproduced a technocratic and welfare-based perspective. Although the aim of this public policy was to promote participation, it was designed without the intervention of the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods, as may be deduced from the following interview excerpt. The residents presented a proposal to designate the intervention areas, which was ignored:

during the *Iniciativa Bairros Críticos* project, a name that was not chosen by the residents who wanted to call it *Bairros Criativos* [Creative Neighbourhoods], but by a government body [...] We had proposed *Bairros Criativos*, but no, they opted for *Bairros Críticos*. There is a lot of creativity in our neighbourhood (Matilde).

Although the legislation on the Critical Neighbourhoods Programme foresees participation, cooperation, transparency, communication and articulation, in practice this has not been the case. The initiatives have been defined and imposed on the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, without taking their perspectives and experiences into consideration:

people from outside the neighbourhood were chosen to organise the meetings and prepare the projects [...] the most important decisions were made in the absence of the residents [...] the technical staff came from outside and made the decisions. We, the residents, could

go to the meetings, we had a vote on behalf of the Neighbourhood Committee, but there were seven coordinators and our vote did not carry any weight (Matilde).

The welfare model has been reproduced, whereby the population is the object of intervention. The attempt to impose measures that are meaningless to the residents is clear:

there were three associations in the neighbourhood and the coordinators decided that they should all merge into one and paid a university professor to prepare the Ancora Project [...] this makes no sense, because that's where the wealth resides, each association has its own dynamics (Matilde).

Interventions of a technocratic and welfare-based nature, taking residents as objects and infantilising them, disregarding their knowledge, traditions, cultures and problems, are highlighted in the interviewee's speeches. They use the argument based on the deficit and incapacity of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood:

it had to be organised by outsiders. [...] – Ah! You don't know how to collaborate! [She also adds, in a tone of irony] One institution came here to teach us all, because we didn't know... teach us how to dialogue, how to have meetings (Matilde).

Work in tandem - the expert by experience and academic expert duo

The *Moinho* aims to promote an alternative way of working to technocratic and welfare-based models. The work in tandem between the expert by experience and the academic expert is a structuring element of the *Moinho*'s policy and, as such, it has featured in all the initiatives since the beginning of its intervention. The work in tandem is the basis of the *Moinho* and is aligned with the principles of Paulo Freire and the *Juventude Operária Católica* [Catholic Youth Workers Movement]. *Conscientization* and the political dimension of the intervention are pillars of its action:

[the practices integrate] diagnosis, reflection and action [this embodies] the political dimension. Political in the broadest, most beautiful sense [...] policies drawn up in the offices of the consultants perpetuate poverty, migration... The work in tandem provides a new vision, another perspective, 'human' action' (Matilde)

The work in tandem enhances the relevance of the intervention resulting from the collaboration between the academic expert and the expert by experience, namely in terms of the actual design of intervention projects and their effective implementation (Dalila)

The dialectic relationship between theory and practice, and between scientific knowledge and knowledge resulting from experience, dimensions of Paulo Freire's thinking, function as pillars in the practices of the *Moinho*. As characteristics of work in tandem, synergy, complementarity and the joint efforts of the expert by experience and the academic expert are particularly noteworthy. Thus,

the academic expert, with his/her skills and knowledge of the international literature on the subject, formulates various hypotheses, ideas and several paths, and the expert by experience, with his/her knowledge resulting from reflected experience, try together to understand what is happening. [...] This synergistic effort is very important. (Matilde)

The *Moinho* has implemented work in tandem in all its areas of intervention in the neighbourhood, with a particular focus on poverty, migration, and the consequences of colonialism. An example of this is the work

with the *batucadeiras*, with those from the *Kola San Jon* group. These people have told the story of the importance of their culture and the repression of the colonisers before 1974 in Cape Verde themselves. [In this case,] it is because the importance of their culture was formulated, put in a context, that its recognition as Intangible Cultural Heritage became possible (Matilde).

The researching, explaining and recording of individual and collective memory on the social and cultural dynamics of the Cape Verdean people

was carried out with academic experts who were able to put this information on the required forms, and it was a very beautiful example. The work of the experts by experience began in 1991. [...] I didn't know anything about Kola, then I began to learn, we went looking for people in Cape Verde, an anthropologist, then little by little we managed with the support of more academic experts in Portugal (Matilde).

Recognition of the experience of individuals who have lived through situations of migration and poverty and their work as experts by experience fosters integrated and sustained intervention in the neighbourhood and contributes to the fulfilment of those involved. This is highlighted by the interviewees:

this is very rewarding for me and it is very important because the expert by experience has already been through certain situations, and is able to make an analysis of the experience and help others. [Through the intervention process] 'I acquired more experience [...] More knowledge. [...] I learned a lot, really a lot. I learn every day, with each of the those I do the intervention with, I learn [...] I have many success stories and that motivates me to continue, which is a sign that I am doing well and that is important (Berta).

[The intervention of the expert by experience] is absolutely important and fundamental (Dalila).

The experience of civil society, through the De Link Association, and the recognition of the importance of experts by experience in public policies, abroad, in the field of poverty have served as a reference and an inspiration for enhancing the work accomplished by the *Moinho* in the field of adult education. The design of the training framework and the recognition and validation of acquired experience occurred

in the early 90s, when the Belgian managers of De Link, an institution for training experts by experience, came here. Experts by experience are officially recognised by the Belgian Government (Matilde).

Final considerations

In recent decades, exclusion has become the main social issue (Castel, 1995). The social visibility and apparent consensus surrounding the subject has given rise to a hegemonic perspective that seems to have contributed to the neglect and silencing of alternative perspectives. The empirical data resulting from this study with actors from a civil society association reveal the complexity of the issue and some of its inherent paradoxes. The experience, knowledge and micropolitics implemented by the residents and technical staff of the *Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude* possibly contribute to finding

alternatives to the political-normative perspective underlying public policies in the field of social exclusion.

Inequality, segregation and marginalisation are actions that place people and groups 'on the margins' of the established system (Freire, 1980), through oppression and the denial of human rights. The empirical data of this study may contribute to the analysis of how these movements from the centre of the structure to its periphery are (re)produced (Freire, 1980). In addition, they can also contribute to the understanding of certain pitfalls, generated by the hegemonic discourse, which affect political action and have consequences for sociological reflection (Castel, 1995). The experiences reported by the interviewees reveal the accountability, inferiority and segregation processes (Guattari & Rolnik, 1996) to which they are subject in their daily lives, due to the fact that they meet two conditions - being migrants and residents of a self-built neighbourhood in an urban periphery. As highlighted by the participants, these complex processes are (re)produced in everyday life, through discourses and practices conveyed by the instituted system, through what is said and what is silenced.

Political guidelines on social exclusion focus essentially on locations, groups and individuals deemed 'excluded' or at 'risk of exclusion', are silent as regards the structural and institutional factors that generate inequalities, segregation and discrimination, as shown by the *Iniciativa Bairros Críticos*. These guidelines act on the outcomes and neglect the causes of social problems, which might largely explain their ineffectiveness. Usually, they essentially use pejorative vocabulary to name these locations and describe them on the basis of problems, without referring to resources or potential (Canário, 2005; Jorge & Carolino, 2019). From a critical perspective, the interviewees reinforce the importance of acting on the causes of inequalities and oppression, considering the interdependence of the various phenomena. They highlight the effects of colonialism, the asymmetrical distribution of wealth, problems in the labour market (unemployment, precariousness and low wages), and asymmetries in human rights.

Given the complexity of social problems, it seems to us to be 'counterproductive' (Fleury, 2015) to insist on interventions that do not consider the desire, experience, knowledge and capacity of civil society to act. The *Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude*, established and run essentially by migrants and their descendants, has an intervention experience of approximately four decades in the neighbourhood of *Cova da Moura* through community intervention, with a particular focus on the education and training of children, young people, adults and seniors. This work experience translates into an intervention characterised by the singularity of its purposes, principles, organisation and functioning, working methods and lexicon, thus falling within the scope of 'micropolitics' (Guattari & Rolnik, 1996).

Moinho's micropolitics stems from its critical approach to the hegemonic strategies and processes. In this sense, *Moinho* seeks to promote global and integrated interventions, based on the experiences, knowledge and culture of the neighbourhood's residents. The recognition of residents' experience and knowledge, the training of experts by experience and the work in tandem are *Moinho* initiatives that bring to light new approaches to intervention in relation to what has been instituted, thus rendering them singularisation processes (Guattari & Rolnik, 1996). This singularisation process, triggered and implemented by the residents of the neighbourhood, aims to promote training geared towards a critical conscience and spirit (Freire, 1980), as well as to vindicate transformation of the dehumanising structure (Freire, 1980). *Moinho's* initiatives are driven by the pursuit of *conscientization* (Freire, 1980) focused on observation, analysis and transforming action towards a fairer world, thus constituting adult education processes themselves. Its intervention reveals the importance of interdependence and

complementarity between public policies and micropolitics. The micropolitics that has produced and guided its intervention for almost four decades has fostered the emergence of counter-hegemonic logics to (re)consider the city, the right to the city, the right to a place, and the intervention in self-produced territories inhabited by immigrants and their descendants.

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The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

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