

Urban Communication Processes in the Production of Graffiti. Heritage as an Arena for Disputes*

[English Version]

Procesos de comunicación urbana en la producción de grafitis. El patrimonio como escenario de disputas

Processos de comunicação urbana na produção de grafites. O património como cenário de disputas

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Abstract

Objective: the objective of this research is to reconstruct the socio-symbolic plot in which a particular work of graffiti in the Lavapiés neighborhood of Madrid is inscribed, in order to analyze the meanings and representations that it activates in the social imaginary. The topic is part of a broader research on cultural heritage issues. **Methodology:** the methodology used is qualitative and seeks to inscribe and understand the images in a broader historical context. **Results:** show urban communication processes that reveal tensions, resistances, and struggles in the face of the changes and transformations that took place in the dynamics of the neighborhood in question. Graffiti thus become devices with the capacity to be read and reread, generating multiple appropriations that exceed the graphic themselves and refer to the always dynamic identity of a space that is lived and discussed. **Conclusions:** it is concluded by identifying the ways in which these demonstrations operate in the public arena. On the one hand, it operates at the service of the international market for its tourist attraction and, on the other hand, as a neighborhood expression and communication, discussing policies that are detrimental to local interests and needs.

Keywords: street art; neighborhood; communication; heritage; identity.

Resumen

Objetivo: el objetivo de la presente investigación es reconstruir la trama socio simbólica en la que se inscriben un conjunto de grafitis en el barrio Lavapiés de Madrid, con el fin de analizar los sentidos y representaciones que los mismos activan en el imaginario social. El tema (y recorte) se inserta en una investigación más amplia sobre temas de patrimonio cultural. **Metodología:** la metodología utilizada es cualitativa y busca inscribir y comprender las imágenes en un contexto histórico más amplio. **Resultados:** se da cuenta de procesos de comunicación urbana que revelan tensiones, resistencias y luchas frente a los cambios y transformaciones que se fueron sucediendo en la dinámica del barrio en cuestión. Los grafitis se convierten así en dispositivos con capacidad de leerse y releerse, generando múltiples apropiaciones que exceden la gráfica propia y que refieren a la identidad siempre dinámica de un espacio que es vivido y discutido. **Conclusiones:** se concluye identificando los modos en que dichas manifestaciones operan en la escena pública, a saber: por un lado, al servicio del mercado internacional por su atractivo turístico y, por el otro, como expresión y comunicación

vecinal desde donde se discuten las políticas que van en detrimento de los intereses y necesidades locales.

Palabras-clave: arte callejero; barrio; comunicación; patrimonio; identidad.

Resumo

Objetivo: o objetivo desta pesquisa é reconstruir a trama sócio-simbólica na qual se inscreve um conjunto de grafites no bairro Lavapiés de Madrid, a fim de analisar os significados e representações que eles ativam no imaginário social. O tema (e recorte) faz parte de um projeto de pesquisa mais vasto sobre questões de património cultural. **Metodologia:** a metodologia utilizada é qualitativa e procura inscrever e compreender as imagens num contexto histórico mais amplo. **Resultados:** relatamos os processos de comunicação urbana que revelam tensões, resistências e lutas face às mudanças e transformações que tiveram lugar na dinâmica do bairro em questão. Os grafites tornam-se assim dispositivos que podem ser lidos e relidos, gerando múltiplas apropriações que vão para além dos próprios gráficos e que se referem à identidade sempre dinâmica de um espaço que é vivido e discutido. **Conclusões:** concluímos identificando as formas como estas manifestações operam na cena pública, nomeadamente: por um lado, ao serviço do mercado internacional devido à sua atração turística e, por outro, como expressão e comunicação de vizinhança a partir da qual são discutidas políticas que são prejudiciais aos interesses e necessidades locais.

Palabras-chave: arte de rua; bairro; comunicação; património; identidade.

Introduction

This article presents part of a study conducted in Madrid (Spain), in the central neighborhood of Lavapiés, on local cultural expressions and manifestations. It was conducted within the framework of a postdoctoral research grant and was part of a broader project related to "Cultural Heritage Management," by a research group with the same name, belonging to the College of Geography and History of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. The general objectives of the project include work on participatory processes in heritage management, the study of social perceptions and historical urban landscapes in the community of Madrid and other areas. Within this framework, a study was conducted in the Lavapiés area of downtown Madrid, taking into account its characteristics and particularities, which made it an urban space of interest for the research.

The Neighborhood

Lavapiés is one of the oldest areas of Madrid, located in the Embajadores neighborhood, belonging to the Central District (Figure 1), whose first buildings date back to the 13th century (Peñalta-Catalán, 2010; Bonfigli, 2014). It is usually considered a "disadvantaged" (Pérez-Quintana, 2007) or "vulnerable" (Hernández-Aja, 2007) neighborhood, with a low-income level and a high percentage immigrant population.¹ Due to its central location, it features good communications with the rest of the city, is very busy because it is a residential area, as well as a place for leisure and meetings because of the variety of bars and restaurants typical of different countries, and also because of the theaters and venues that program cultural activities. Since its consolidation as a neighborhood at the end of the 17th century, the houses were built in precarious conditions (Cañedo-Rodríguez, 2009; Ruiz-Palomeque, 1989) with small dimensions, with external and shared toilets, and without ventilation. The so-called corralas, square-plan buildings with a central courtyard, optimized a layout that sought to efficiently organize and distribute the new immigrants arriving in Madrid (Schmidt, 2012). The problems of overcrowding and substandard housing persist to this day and serve to explain the neighborhood's more recent history, linked to a large population concentration and

1. According to the Municipal Register of Inhabitants of the City of Madrid (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2018) the largest foreign population in Madrid is located in the Sol and Centro districts. The Lavapiés neighborhood far exceeds the average for the city and also for the district to which it belongs.

Despite this, the renovation of the neighborhood implied strong rises in the real estate market, causing the expulsion of the traditional low-income population, unable to support themselves in the new market. In 2000, a new wave of residents with a different profile — based on a high educational level and certain purchasing power — settled in Lavapiés because of its central location, as well as because of its historical and multicultural character (Crusellas-Rodríguez, 2015). These processes of change, defined as gentrification, which have been developing in the old quarters of large cities since the second half of the 20th century (Smith, 2012) are related to the reinvestment of capital by governments and financial entities, the incorporation of a population with greater economic and cultural capital, and changes in urban spaces (Sequera, 2013).

As a consequence of the above, the image of Lavapiés as a degraded and impoverished neighborhood gradually gave way, although without disappearing, to the image of a modern, cosmopolitan neighborhood, of tourist interest and attractive to live in, more recently receiving nicknames such as "the cultural neighborhood" or the "new neighborhood of theaters" (Fanjul, 2014).

However, the counterpart of this new scenario is the emergence of neighborhood groups that, mobilized by this transforming dynamic of urban space and their own ways of life in the neighborhood, carry out concrete resistance actions such as marches, street demonstrations — including artistic creations — and the occupation of sites. They are the ones who seek to halt the advance of the gentrification process. Such is the case of various collectives, such as Lavapiés *dónde vas?* which campaigns for the right to housing and also is involved in the resolution of problems related to evictions. The Courage collective helps immigrants without residency papers who live in the neighborhood. The Eskalera Karacola² women's group who, raises issues related to the problems of the neighborhood, such as the precariousness of life and work, the right to citizenship of migrants, etc. from a feminist and self-management perspective. Other groups with diverse projects actively participate in initiatives that vindicate the alternative against the imposition of capital, and whose meeting and debate space is the Self-managed Social Center the Tabacalera.

This center was a former tobacco factory that housed thousands of women workers known as "las cigarreras" (the cigarette makers). It was temporarily ceded by the Ministry of Culture and now functions as a social center managed by neighbors and activists in the area. the Tabacalera is, for many neighborhood collectives, a place of struggle and resistance that aims to survive as a popular and self-managed group, and on the basis of the recognition of rights

2. The use of the K in the name of the group reflects the will to transgress the spelling rules, which appears directly related to the squatting of the place, without the consent of its owners, as a form of protest and visibility in the neighborhood's own territory.

(Rodríguez-Ibáñez, 2014). The tobacco factory began operating in 1809, manufacturing tobacco products. Unknowingly, it also created the portrait of Madrid's working-class society, led mainly by women.

The salaried cigarette workers became the protagonists of protest and trade union episodes due to the situation in which they lived, a consequence of the factory's unhealthy conditions and the high degree of overcrowding and mortality in the Inclusa neighborhood, where a high percentage of the factory's workers lived (Candela, 1997). After the closing of the Tabacalera in 1998, the factory was declared an Asset of Cultural Interest and was the object of a rehabilitation plan which sought to convert the building into the National Center for Visual Arts. In 2003, the Red de Colectivos de Lavapiés submitted an action project to the Ministry of Culture for the possible transfer of the Fábrica de Tabacos to the neighbors. The collective argued that the building should be used by the inhabitants of the neighborhood, mainly because of its social heritage, with the aim of housing expressions and neighborhood needs that the public administration was not able to meet.

Under this perspective, in 2010 the Tabacalera opened its doors, creating a cultural alternative with a variety of proposals aimed at meeting the demands of the neighborhood, with high neighborhood participation, organized under non-hierarchical patterns (in assemblies and committees) and interactive and self-financed, hence its name as Self-managed Social Center (CSA) (Rodríguez-Ibáñez, 2014).

These spaces and groups are just a few examples that reveal daily construction interests and neighborhood practices that represent tensions, conflicts, and dissonances in the face of official policies linked to the logic of the market.

In this context, and as part of the aforementioned project, a series of investigations were conducted in Lavapiés, which have already been published, and which included, on the one hand, a discursive analysis of the news about the neighborhood constructed by the graphic press — local and national — (Giacomasso, 2019) and, on the other, a study of social perceptions around heritage values identified from the work carried out with the local actors themselves (Giacomasso and Castillo-Mena, 2022).

With the aim of continuing to delve into other dimensions, this article proposes to reconstruct the socio-symbolic plot in which a set of images of the neighborhood are inscribed to produce new knowledge about the meanings and disputes that are communicated/expressed through them. Specifically, it deals with eight works on graffiti (four analyzed separately and another four jointly due to their location) that appear in the public space, that were created at different times and by different authors, and that become significant and characteristic elements of the neighborhood in question.

For its approach, a theoretical perspective based on urban communication is proposed as a multidisciplinary field of study on the transformations that the growth of cities brings about (Cuesta-Moreno and Meléndez-Labrador, 2017). It allows, in the terms of Reguillo (1995), for understanding the ways of inhabiting the plots of the cities in which tensions and negotiations occur between multiple groups that bid for social senses. For this reason, urban communication is recovered as a universe of the mediations that it inevitably expresses and with which it produces subjectivities (Álvarez-Pedrosian, 2018). In this framework, a dialogue will be held with authors who analyze the symbolic constructions that are exhibited in the spaces of the city, and who communicate meanings with different intentions. Thus, graffiti becomes a creative expression that reveals social and recreational aspects (Falconí, 1996), political constructions (Chacón-Cervera and Cuesta-Moreno, 2013) and forms of collective communication (Abreu, 2003) in permanent rewriting (Silveira, 2006).

Graffiti and its Link with Urban Space, Memory, and Cultural Heritage

Graffiti, as an expression of urban art, is understood in this work in the terms of Juan Chacón Cervera and Oscar Cuesta Moreno (2013) as "interaction, creation, and transformation of worlds, where the political realm is a fundamental axis in the constitution of subjectivities" (p. 65). These authors maintain that, like any artistic expression, graffiti has the ability to represent different relationships and dynamics —social and cultural— as well as communicate and signify something through its semiotic content.

Promoting an analysis of the representations that graffiti and their images activate in the imagination of those who live and walk through the neighborhood, from a communicational perspective, allows for a renewed reading of issues related to identity processes, collective memory, and disputes. Likewise, a study of this type makes it possible to deepen the reflection on the place of graffiti as a social practice, as a testimony and as a visual device that has the capacity to interact and challenge.

The term graffiti has been extensively analyzed and delimited through a set of characteristics that define it as:

A messy, ironic, and irresponsible voice that seduces due to its belonging to the urban environment in constant construction and in permanent boiling (...) Hence its freedom and self-assurance. (...) Words, signs, lines (...) harmonic distribution of one or more meanings in a linear/intertwined/superimposed order. (...) Discourse that is there now, but can be erased, crossed out, superimposed,

recycled (...) That is why the sense of provisional means the sense of collective construction. It is done, it is being done, it will continue to be done. It is read, recycled, rewritten, renounced (...) The city, with its intersection of knowledge, actions and feelings, facilitates the margins for the co-creation of a reflective, ironic, mischievous discourse (...) The city is, then, the one that writes and reads at the same time. That is why graffiti is the discourse of urban space. (Paulinelli, 2002, p. 81)

When it was decided to work with this topic, the concept of graffiti presented some challenges, in principle, the choice of images as they did not correspond directly to the elements and characteristics with which the ideas about graffiti were defined and delimited. The limits of what graffiti is and is not, is rethought here based on its social uses and meanings within a unique cultural space. For this reason, an approach to these limitations is sought that is not exhausted in the space of the clandestine and anonymous world, but rather transcends it. In this sense, the interest in works on graffiti is inscribed in their understanding as a testimony of reflections and multiple interpretations (in dialogue, in contradiction, in dispute, or harmony) and the relationship of those graffiti with memory and local identities.

The choice of graffiti for this work was made knowing that they allow the articulation of three fundamental axes: communication in urban space, memory, and cultural heritage.

The urban space allows one to recover the idea of the city as a material and symbolic scenario in permanent construction, crossed by political, economic, and social mediations (Reguillo, 1995, p. 22). In this sense, it is chosen to work with the idea proposed by Paulinelli (2002), for whom the city is the social space in which phenomena emerge, that configure it as a "turning point between hegemony and response, between legitimacy and representativeness" (p. 80). In it, the actors delineate traces that mark, fix, and remind them who they are, making use of space as a source of socialization (Ayala-García, 2017). For this reason, the concept of memory is also approached. It allows one to address processes of construction of "spaces of divergences and confrontations, of forgetting and silencing in which the different strategies of appropriation, reconfiguration, and recovery intervene in the mixture of voices and experiences" (Paulinelli, 2002, p. 81), aspects that other reference authors also apply to the subject (Ramos, 2011; Trouillot, 1995). And, lastly, and completely related to the first two, the notion of cultural heritage is recovered as a field where all these elements converge and enter into dialogue (García-Canclini, 1999; Prats, 2007; Rosas-Mantecón, 2005). In this sense, it has begun to be observed that the uses of the concept of cultural heritage allow addressing the changes that were experienced in relation

to the emergence of other social actors, which reveal new strategies of visibility and legitimation through their cultural manifestations. In this way, as expressed by authors such as Canclini (1999), Rotman (2000), and Morel (2007), an approach emerges that strengthens democratic and community instances with a marked participation of civil society. In this context, certain traditional and popular manifestations begin to have an emerging value and significant social recognition.

Communication as a Transversal Perspective

The theoretical approach, of the three previously developed notions, is carried out from the perspective of communication (Uranga, 2007), as it allows interpreting a set of expressions (in this case artistic visuals) within the framework of “discursive grammars” (Martín-Barbero, 2002) that manifest themselves as communicative strategies. The approach then implies understanding the complexity of communication processes as spaces of interaction between actors in which processes of production of meaning, creation and recreation of meanings and relationships are recognized. In this framework, the public becomes involved in a communication scenario — a complex, multisectoral and multiactor scenario — where the interests, demands, needs, political projects, power relations, and alliances of these same actors become visible. In this way, the scenarios of action in society, public policies, areas of action and incidence, political and cultural life can be understood as public spaces that, in turn, are complementary to each other. Hence, communication must understand precisely that complex web of meanings that include the personal, the collective, the massive and, ultimately, culture as an expression of multiple meanings.

This work seeks to overcome any simplification that reduces communication to the game of messages-senders-receivers. On the contrary, it seeks to understand the communication process as a significant whole, which is constituted by discursive networks and the interweaving of different, opposing and contradictory discourses, which reveal the conflicts and power struggles within the framework of a certain situation of communication. Seen this way, this perspective proposes communication as the articulating axis of the social, the political, and the cultural (Reguillo, 2000) and (Reguillo, 2007). It is also significant to point out what Restrepo (1999) proposes when he considers that the city, being interconnected by networks and spaces of flows, is articulated to global processes that complicate the local, which would produce new relationships with the territory, redefining the dynamics of the places.

Finally, the idea of Ortega (1995) is recovered. She states that two types of discourse are articulated in cities. One is built with “signs converted into marks of order and uniformity, by assuming the voice of power, planning the reality configuring a space between the legal, with its ordinances and laws, and the ‘confused social reality’” (1995, p. 61-62). The other space is one from which the spontaneous movement of everyday life bursts forth. Ortega says, “on that ordering city the spectacle of graffiti rises in a space — the street — that appears hyper-semiotic, where it is possible to notice a popular brand” (1995, p. 64), aspects that are also identified in the works by Martin-Barbero (1987).

Methodology

Regarding the previously explained concept and continuing with Ortega: “the visual feast of graffiti appears linked to a concrete material reality: the illegal nightlife of the streets that, in its exhibition (...) brings into play non-traditional modalities of writing” (1995, p. 65). At first sight, the common denominator seems to put graffiti on the side of the clandestine, associated with nocturnality and the anonymous format that demystifies and discusses the discourse of power. However, and as mentioned before, what characterizes our sample is the total non-correspondence with those elements that traditionally shaped the idea of graffiti. The selection presented here has a wide diversity of elements, however, common elements are presented.

First, all the interventions chosen for the elaboration of this work are found in public spaces such as shop fronts, walls and corners. Some of these spaces were provided for this purpose, breaking with the clandestine nature of their actions and articulating, in some way, these two types of speeches (mentioned above) that appear separated: the official and the alternative. Second, and directly related to the above, many of them join projects launched by different groups (neighborhood, governmental and non-governmental). Third and last, because, either directly or through interventions added later (to the original image) they show a set of disputes, claims, and peculiarities of what happens in the neighborhood.

Methodologically, this work is based on a qualitative perspective that approaches certain social practices in their particular contexts from a communication standpoint (Uranga, 2018). For this, data was collected through different techniques such as contextual photography. The search for data was conducted in national and local digital media as well as on Internet sites. In this sense, the authors understand that the registry is not merely a techno-methodological

resource of academic disciplines, but a complementary form of field work in social sciences. Photography was central insofar as it allowed safeguarding the design but also the context in which each work of graffiti is inserted for its subsequent analysis and, in turn, because it constitutes a vehicle, a format, in which the decisions and perceptions can be made based on researchers in a reflective process.

In terms of Guber (2020), the criteria of significance and relevance respond to the degree of openness of the researcher's view in the field work, since it is in the record that the perspective of knowledge about a given reality or particular situation.

The original photographic record has 60 photos (many of them around the same graffiti) taken during the fieldwork. However, here a corpus of eight images is selected (those that presented the best quality, framing, focus, and location) that are representative of the research interest. In relation to the participant observation, for clarification, it was carried out over a period of three months, but with the deliberate intention of surveying and systematizing at least 10 tours of the neighborhood. The constructed data are explained and presented in the reconstruction of the cases.

Results

The presentation and analysis that begins following includes not only the description and recording of the communication situation, but also a subsequent assessment of the information collected. This involves different aspects that allow for the analysis of a communication situation from the perspective of social practices, stories such as: a) the subjects that enter into relationship and that appear cleanly or implicitly in the expressions analyzed (authorship of the work, participating groups, associations involved, etc.); b) the explanation — or lack of explanation — of links (symmetrical or asymmetrical) between the different actors represented, the ways in which they manifest themselves, the construction of legitimacy, and the exercise of power; c) the production modes of meanings, the shape that the communication product adopts, the context in which it is produced, the space of emission and reception of the actors and its uses; d) the significance of communicative practices, the perceived result of this entire process and the multiplicity of relationships, the certain features that end up constituting the identity of that space, group, community or territory (Mata, 2011). These data will be interwoven with the

set of theoretical categories that were enunciated in the introduction (heritage, memory, and urban space) and that will later give rise to the discussion and conclusions.

Figure 2. Graffiti allusive to the immigrant street vendor Mame Mbaye (Graffiti 1)



This graffiti is located on the side wall of a bar on Embajadores Street in front of the San Fernando Market. It was made by the Concrete artist in the framework of the fifth edition of the C.A.L.L.E Festival in 2018. C.A.L.L.E is the Festival of artistic interventions in the public space of Lavapiés that has been taking place every year since 2013 and is promoted by the Lavapiés Merchants Association. It launched this initiative with the aim of promoting artistic creation in the neighborhood in an open and participatory way, and contributing to its enjoyment in a close and daily way, with the collaboration of the Madrid Street Art Project; an independent organization focused on creating, organizing,

producing and communicating projects and activities related to urban art, with the aim of promoting, disseminating and supporting art in the public space and its creators, in order to value it and bring it closer to all kinds of viewers³.

The image is a painting that represents immigrants in Madrid, specifically those of African origin (who mostly reside in this neighborhood), many of them do not have residence and/or work visas, and subsist through work such as that of "street vendors"; selling products on blankets on the ground of different sidewalks of urban centers. The text that accompanies the image allows anchoring its meaning related to the memory of Mame Mbaye, a Senegalese street vendor, inhabitant of Lavapiés, who died in 2018 from a heart attack after a police chase. This fact generated the complaint and demonstration of neighbors against the actions of the security forces. Likewise, in 2019, different gatherings were held to remember the street vendor. A plaque was even placed in the neighborhood in his memory, but it was removed by the government because it read "victim of institutional racism"⁴.

The situation occurred with Mame Mbaye is related to similar experiences in other large cities, both in Europe and the United States, which show tendencies toward social ethnic segregation in the urban space, with high levels of marginalization and exclusion that emerge with greater force in certain areas or neighborhoods (Schmidt, 2012). In Lavapiés, the growing presence of a foreign population has redefined, in a context of diversity, the relationships in the neighborhood, unleashing new dynamics and impacting the imagination of the native residents. On the one hand, some representations reveal prejudices and stereotypes, many of which link crime and insecurity in the neighborhood with immigration (mainly African), perceptions generated by a dominant discourse and by the media (Giacomasso, 2019). This is correlated with a series of European immigration policies that restrict the free flow of people of foreign origin and place undocumented individuals at the center of an administrative legal problem, categorized as illegal (Schmidt, 2012). On the other hand, these new dynamics generated from the migratory phenomenon have given rise to forms of sociability based on bonds of intercultural coexistence, close relationships and solidarity, which have generated the collaboration of the old settlers—through different groups—in the struggle and recognition of the rights of new residents.

In this context, the phrase "Fighting for the VISA," in the analyzed graffiti, refers to residence papers, is altered with an intervention that modifies

3. Visit <https://enlavapiés.com/calle2020>

4. Lavapiés remembers the street vendor Mame Mbaye, "victim of institutional racism" (March 15, 2019). *Madridiario*, without page number. Taken from <https://www.madridiario.es/466077/lavapiés-record-al-mantero-mame-mbaye-victima-del-racismo-institucional>

the letter "S" for the "D" and changes the meaning of the phrase, being linked to the struggle of immigrants for their own "VIDA" (Life) or to survive. In this message, senses cross regarding the control and surveillance policies that operate on the "illegality" of African inhabitants and, at the same time, their unemployment that places them among the hardest hit foreign groups (Observatorio Permanente de Inmigración [OPI], 2010), and with few resources to access housing and other basic social services such as healthcare and education.

Figure 3. Graffiti Floating Identity (Graffiti 2)



This image is entitled "Floating Identity." It is a mural composed of three panels along a wall of the bar on the streets of Meson de Paredes and Miguel Servet.

It proposes a design with perspective that differs from others with a flat aesthetic. The neighborhood is characterized with detailed drawings of buildings, houses and people in a foreground outlined in front of a background in soft and smooth colors.

This work was also made within the framework of the 2018 C.A.L.L.E. festival, in this case by the collective the Inverted Wheel. The signature is written on the mural itself (Figure 4). On its website, this group defines itself as "a collective dedicated to cultural production and contemporary art education" that understands art as a "vehicle that generates dialogue and reflection, both individual and collective." They match the belief that art has potential as a "catalyst capable of forging strong bonds within a liquid and unstable society." Through their artistic practices they are committed to a "cultural democracy" capable of creating bridges that "connect people with culture and activate their participation in socio-cultural actions" (La Rueda Invertida, n.d.).

Figure 4. *Colectivo la Rueda painting the mural at the C.A.L.L.E. Festival*



Note. Taken from the newspaper El País (2018)

The text that accompanies the drawing is "What is a neighborhood without everything that makes it a neighborhood? Nothing." On its website this group takes up the words of the author Daniel Sorando, which refer to the idea of neighborhood identity and could be interpreted as a possible answer to this question: "... A neighborhood stripped of its identity is a book without content, a veiled photograph, a story without argument" (La Rueda Invertida, n.d.).

In social theory, the neighborhood is understood as a physical, social, cultural, and symbolic space where sociocultural relations are reconfigured

and redefined. As an urban and neighborhood unit, within a local context in proportion to the city, the neighborhood is the space of coexistence, it is always complex and dynamic, between various groups of action in it (Giménez, 2005). In this context, Lavapiés has been characterized by its own inhabitants as a traditional, working-class neighborhood, with an artisanal economy, a neighborhood with a lot of immigration, a place of shelter for people from different nationalities who settle through activities, trades, ties and social ties that have lasted over time (Giacomasso and Castillo-Mena, 2022). Despite other forms of sociability such as "coexistence" and "hostility" (Giménez, 2005), commonly combined and simultaneous in the dynamics of neighborhoods, mainly those with a high incidence of immigration. Lavapiés has developed fluid neighborhood interactions, although not free of conflict, as well as personal relationships and social networks of support (Schmidt, 2012).

Different groups of neighbors and associations try to preserve this identity sense of Lavapiés in the face of the threat of gentrification linked to an international tourist market, which grows strongly in large capital cities, and becomes a focus of attention for foreign investors who see the possibility of doing business in the area. The representation created by graffiti and the ideas transmitted by this group in other spaces — the internet for example — allow us to understand how this image and its text invite us to reflect on everything that has made (this place) a neighborhood that can gradually disappear due to the advances of tourism.

Figure 5. *Mural of the ape (Graffiti 3)*



This image is located on the front of a building on the corner of Embajadores and Travesía de Cabestreros streets. The artwork was made in 2019 by two artists who worked together. They created two different facades of the monkey represented. Although the artwork is not signed, one of the facades corresponds to a recognized and prestigious Spanish artist, Okuda San Miguel. His style is characterized by the creation of geometric graffiti and symbols loaded with colors that are well-identifiable and are included within the movement called pop surrealism. The other facade corresponds to the Portuguese artist, Artur Bordalo, with his interventions in relief and in recycled materials.

This artwork, by well-known artists, is the protagonist of a busy space in the neighborhood. Its location, color, design, and size generate an important visual impact. An interesting fact to mention referring to place was previously used by Okuda for another artistic production. It became a strategic location within institutional projects, especially and taking into account that the artwork was framed in the Theriomorphism IV exhibition, an international contemporary Art Fair ARCOMadrid, that since 1982 has been one of the main platforms of the art market.

The most significant thing about this graffiti is not its double authorship or its size and location, but a sentence subsequently drawn on it. This addition runs in the image appealing to those traditional elements that define graffiti. It is an anonymous — and even collective — phrase that denounces one of the

main issues of dispute of the neighborhood with a statement: "Yes, the monkey gentrifies".

This intervention generated several journalistic notes that revive and reference protest and resistance processes associated with gentrification, from the imposition of an aesthetic that qualifies the neighborhood as "the coolest in the world." It encouraged the use of the territory by tourism to the detriment of its inhabitants, who were negatively impacted, for example, by the rent increases. It should be noted that the recognition of Lavapiés as the "coolest neighborhood" was carried out by the well-known British magazine *Time out*⁵ in which Lavapiés stands out first of all for "its color." A note from the newspaper *El País*, written by Begoña Gómez Urzaiz,⁶ wonders if street artwork gentrifies. It refers to the varied offer of accommodation through Airbnbs and "experiences" including the graffiti tour with guides who report on urban artwork and finish the tour by inviting visitors to write their own captions on a wall.

Figure 6. Graffiti related to the walls. (Grafiti 4)



5. see 40 Coolest Neighbourhoods in the World Right Now timeout.com

6. see https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/06/03/eps/1559569999_961348.html?id_externo_rsoc=FB_EPS_CM&fbclid=IwAR08wQLkN0jWwpA5stE5q8XxVuNS4HGxvGDC9tTjAoNJeoa6VFu6i7rmCo

This image is located at the end of *Calle Embajadores*, one of the main streets in the neighborhood. It is artwork made by the artists Mazilan and Doa Oa, although its signature does not appear in the artwork. The year it was painted is unknown. It is composed of different drawings that together show a chain of events that tell a story.

The achievement of the first images would mean a process in which there is collective appropriation of a space in which relationships and bonds of companionship would be woven. This are represented by figures who meet to celebrate, drink, dance, produce music (guitar and drum), and intervene on the wall with graffiti. In the fourth image new actors appear; two of them, with cameras and a microphone, representing the media, and two others (one with a sack and one with a briefcase with the sign of \$ and €) observing the space.

The image that follows has the first protagonists on the building, protesting and resisting the arrival of more cameras and investors. This image could be thought of as escalation of the conflict that began in the previous image and that would account for a struggle for the appropriation, use, and senses of place.

The end is the destroyed building and its wall. An image shows bricks falling on people. It represents the power of those who have economic and political capital over neighborhood interests and identities, and the ones who promote a real estate explosion of the neighborhood without paying attention to the problems from gentrification.

Figure 7. Set of four graffitis of the Tabacalera. (Graffiti 5)



On this occasion, the work was done with a set of four images of the outer perimeter of the patio of the Tabacalera on the walls of la Glorieta de Embajadores, Miguel Servet, and Mesón de Paredes streets. These are also part a project of the Subdirección General de Promoción de Bellas Artes of the Ministry of Culture and Sports, that proposed using the walls of the Tabacalera building as a space for urban art.

In a second edition of the "Proyecto Muros," the creations focused on the Urban Nature concept and its meanings as a critique of the amount of pollution and the lack of natural spaces in the neighborhood. This proposal aimed to substitute, through art — albeit metaphorically — the gray cement for the colors of nature.

However, something to highlight is the artistic work with messages of protest and rejection toward "the politicians" from Madrid. Two of them show the complaint with evictions and forced displacements which is a recurring theme in the cases previously mentioned. Even on the front door of the Tabacalera building the phrase "morios modernos" appears as an expression used against gentrification.

Among all the spaces chosen, the Tabacalera building is perhaps the one with the greatest possibility to hold a great diversity of meaning. It is not a wall, but a place with a history linked to women's work and now a center managed by neighbors with the purpose of strengthening and claiming rights. In this sense, here the ideas of memory and cultural heritage can be explicitly linked as follows: one, the transfer of the factory to the residents is part of the idea of social inheritance — a concept strongly associated to the notion of heritage; two, it exhibits alternative aspects of culture, which are not reduced to the restricted and elitist uses, but to the broad and popular ones; three, participation is arranged as an important organizational structure that fosters equitable and non-hierarchical spaces for interaction. Finally, this space is appropriated and re-purposed by social actors who take advantage of a set of discourses through different artistic works, such as graffiti.

Discussion and Conclusions

The introduction to this article anticipated subsequent communication as the theoretical perspective to analyze the proposed topic because it allows for approaching the urban context and identifying the practices and strategies used by different situated social collectives. This participates in the construction

of collective representations which define uses and actions in the city. This approach allowed the authors to think about the processes in which different devices linked to identity and memory are connected.

The devices of memory and identity have not yet been provided anywhere in reality. Insofar as they are part of the socio-cultural dynamics and are deeply involved in conflict, in contradiction, in the debate between submission and resistance, between the uncritical and passive assumption of an imposed reality and the explicit or botched response of this reality. (Reguillo, 1991, p. 45)

The challenge of this work was to register the graffiti in broader social processes. This was a necessary condition, since each piece of art refers to disputes that were (and are) historically constructed in the evolution of a neighborhood of multiple and rapid transformations. Its first buildings date back to the 13th century and it was considered disadvantageous due to its characteristics and low-income level. This fact allowed for the inclusion of a high percentage of immigrants and, at the end of the 1990s, it was declared a "Preferential Rehabilitation Area" (ARP), which meant a renovation of the infrastructure and urban environment and the recovery of the buildings' heritage, among other aspects.

All these transformations were shaping and reconfiguring the identity of the neighborhood, and resulted in sharp rises in the real estate market. This is not a minor fact insofar as it led to the eviction of the traditional inhabitants who were unable to meet the new costs imposed by the market. Additionally, the arrival of neighbors with economic profiles that allowed them to have access to these real estate dynamics further complicated the situation of the neighborhood's historical residents.

This latter issue is important, because it allows for understanding the dialectic between the processes of gentrification and its counterpart, the neighborhood groups that resist and argue the advance of these transforming and excluding dynamics. Within this context, the selected works of graffiti and how they communicate the different ways of inhabiting the city are rethought; that is, with which ideas characterize them and which elements are used to discuss them are analyzed.

The notion of heritage was chosen because, in its anthropological and critical sense, it allowed for the introduction of the idea of a space for disputes. In this regard, the cultural patrimony is a fighting arena. The meanings that this notion involves do not respond to a single order or logic. Just as in an area of knowledge, there are certain actors who, by means of their economic and political capital, try to impose a stance on others. This patrimony does not imply a unanimous consensus, but a space for response (Van-Zanten, 2004, p. 37) since, as a cultural good, it is "praxis, open and crossed by power relations, which can

generate the naturalization of the arbitrary, as well as the struggle to make alternative meanings emerge or recreate" (Briones, 1998, p. 6).

Although it would have been easy to adhere to the traditional idea that links heritage with restoration and tourism, this article shows a complex usage of heritage. From the public policy perspectives, projects have been conducted for the preservation of old places in the neighborhood and within this framework, tourism has been favored. There was a true interest in fostering, from these policies, the participation of the local community in this process. This was reflected in the creation of spaces for murals and graffiti; however, the interesting thing is that even in those places (the walls, corners, and store fronts intended for that purpose) the diversity of meanings of what the neighborhood should be like was evident. In their analysis, the indications of a policy of modernization and resistance against eviction, rising rents, exclusion and inequality appeared. The walls on which the graffiti appear clamor for a level playing field and there is a revaluation of what is proper and communal which has been overlooked by private interests.

The walls become the backdrops that diverse actors choose to use to highlight the conflicts experienced through graffiti. Therefore, the idea of cultural heritage makes it possible to articulate these tensions that arise from resisting the new meanings imposed by gentrification. The idea of a homogeneous, balanced, common and conflict-free cultural good is not subscribed. On the contrary, the idea that appeals to the unequal appropriation of the different actors related to the meanings contained in the graffiti is recovered. Thus, it is a significant notion in this article, because, in turn, it raises new elements to the notion itself. For example, in the processes of heritage activation or in the recovery of collective memory (and also in graffiti), decisions are at stake. Some elements are excluded, others are included. There is selection, trimming, reflection, moral values, conflict, etc. However, something different is that from traditional heritage processes graffiti are not constructions with a tendency to be preserved, they are products of a specific time, far from the idea of durability and conservation. In fact, they hinder the very idea of inheritance, transmission and sustainability in the traditional sense of the concept (normally very present in current heritage work).

The works on graffiti reviewed are situated, contextualized productions that reinvent themselves over time. These are historical processes. These works do not transcend the material, but are part of the discursive and immaterial fields. Therefore, the concept of memory, or the possibility of a photographic record that loads each image with content, becomes important here. The 2018 graffiti honoring Mame Mbaye, and the removed plaque denouncing institutionalized racism, is staging a clear protest against inequality, xenophobia, and the abuse

of power. Conflict is worldwide repeated with greater or lesser repercussions in the media (as in the case of George Floyd in the United States).

In this sense, and finally, in spite of the tourist attraction that these street artistic works also represent, they become vindictive works that serve as an impulse to listen to the voices that find on the walls a possible scenario of interlocution and that, paradoxically, are superimposed to the pre-established meanings in them, constituting opposition and contestation. These demonstrations, together with other protest activities previously mentioned, have succeeded in changing the course of some official policies, as shown in the Tabacalera building that is one of the most emblematic neighborhoods in Madrid.

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