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The street as sociability space: the case of the Grand Avenues in Paris and Lisbon in the 19th century

Introduction

*Lowly, unpurposeful and random as they may appear,
sidewalk contacts are the small change
from which a city's wealth of public life may grow.*

J. Jacobs [1, p. 48]

The Street

The street is the basic element that forms a city, no matter how big it is. It unites, without touching, two spaces, private and public, one internal and one external. One for the autonomous universes (activities, services, symbolic places connected to the economy), and the other for the community utility, the co-presence, or other forms of exchanges and civility [2, p. 155].

Public spaces and their role in cities have developed and evolved to the same extent as cities, which integrate and define them, have done so. Cities as living organisms are constantly changing and their public spaces have also been transformed and adapted.

As the base form of any urban agglomeration, the streets are a public space par excellence. Their role of access, circulation and meeting have always made them places of conviviality. Since its origin, a street has been the place for encounters and interpersonal human relationships.

To talk about the street, it is first necessary to define what is meant by space. The concept of space has always

been added to an adjective, e.g., physical, political, social, economic, psychological space. Even when we define a single adjective, it comes with countless possibilities.

According to Guglielmi [3, p. 88] the concept of street goes beyond public space and can be encompassed in a place of interpenetration of spaces, where the public and the private meet. Guglielmi discusses the view of the street as a social space and as a political space

1. The street as a social space

The street appears as a stage for meetings and disagreements, where opposite actions can be seen in the sense of community. At the same time, children can be found playing, merchants selling, men and women talking, leaving school, construction workers, street performers, as well as robberies, murders, fights, begging, prostitution, to name just a few.

The community needs to know, through these public gestures, the condition of its members. And it is this notion of neighborhood that allows the classification of the street, determined by the social class of its residents and users.

Leguay (1984)¹ (after: [4, p. 11]) describes the street as a place where everyone observes, makes assumptions and interprets what they see. It is the scene of everyday life in a community where the actors play several characters while watching the show.

It is not only a natural meeting place for people; it is also intended to prepare for these meetings, regardless of their purpose.

2. The street as a political space

The street is the space inherent to public demonstrations. This statement is made in view of the countless

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¹ Leguay J.P., *La Rue au Moyen Age*, Ouest-France Université, Rennes 1984.

historical facts linking the street to social and political movements. Since ancient Greece, speeches, discussions, ceremonies, conflicts and political demonstrations have taken place on the streets. The French revolution of 1789 itself took place on the streets of Paris, with its barricades and struggles between social classes.

It serves as a meeting point for the population to demonstrate both their satisfaction and their dissatisfaction with a political regime or social conditions.

The restructuring of Paris done by Haussmann plans had many critics. They stated that the concern with the width of the roads of Paris was not a mere question of mobility and hygiene, but it was connected with the defense, since the narrow and tortuous streets of medieval time made it difficult to suppress popular riots that had become common since the Revolution.

By political manifestations we also understand the commemorative military parades, resulting from the victories and power demonstration by the countries, as a symbol of pride (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Parade 14 July 1919, Place d'Etoile, Paris (source: [5])

Il. 1. Parada 14 lipca 1919 na Placu Gwiazdy w Paryżu (źródło: [5])

In fact, and according to Gourdon [2, p. 17], thinking about the street, whatever its dimensions and variations, narrow or wide avenues, has always been thinking about two things, which are sometimes opposed and with which it is associated. The street is not multifunctional, but multi-purpose, producing articulations that are the source of antagonism and also of complementarity between public and private, where social and political spaces coexist.

And the street becomes avenue

In Greek and Roman cities, public spaces were associated with the formation of an urban space, as it was designed according to the public functions that each construction represented. Public spaces, open or outdoors, were associated with the buildings with specific functions, such as *Àgora*, for example, involved in the market, the theater, or the Roman circus, among others.

In the medieval city, the market is an open and public space par excellence, and the commercial function extends through the streets.

During the Renaissance, the square gains strength and defines itself as a public space. It is a space for meeting, political and religious manifestation, prestige and social life. Within the historical context and as a public space, the role of the street also changes and takes on the function of linking other elements that make up cities.

In the baroque centuries the Capital Cities were the absolute centers of the totalitarian power of the State and the Church. Baroque culture, in this way, would emerge as an essential instrument for the cooling of the urban masses, due to their persuasive verve, its appeal to wonder, imagination, fantasy. So it should be the city, and not the rural environment, that presents itself primarily as a great theater, a spectacle of the supernatural power of the monarch and the Church [6, p. 41].

At the beginning of the 19th century, impressed by the beauty of streets in Milan, Italy and to show his power, Napoleon wanted a triumphal route through Paris from east to west as a place of luxury, and he wanted it to bear the name of Napoleon's early victory against the Austrian army, at the Battle of Rivoli, the *Rue de Rivoli*, connecting La Place de la Concorde with the Louvre by means of the Renaissance Italian Style. An ordered arrangement of façades whose originality lay in the arcades was designed.

This monumentality, with its strict lines and extraordinary perspectival effect, matched perfectly Napoleon's desire to build a prestigious and luxurious place for promenading. And in order to ensure its exclusivity, decrees were passed banning the setting up of certain shops – such as butcher or fish shops – and shop signs were forbidden in arcades. It was a clear segregated space for a dominant class.

Although by the end of the Empire only the arcades and a few buildings had been erected, the impetus has been given and the street was to be completed in the following regimes. The extension of the road was decided by the temporary government of the Second Republic in 1848. Haussmann then took up the project and built the road to its present place and allowed different activities and businesses.

Even if it was too expensive to live in, it was possible to walk there and enjoy the street.

During the 19th century, with the industrial revolution, cities went through major changes and became more complex.

In this period, public spaces assume a new social function that goes beyond the simple exchange of information. Relationships and social events evolve. Leisure and recreation appear as a function that the city had to offer. This task fell to its public spaces.

In the post-industrial revolution era, public sidewalks, avenues and city squares become the places of conviviality, recreation and leisure for its inhabitants [7, p. 5]. The car cities started to need new places of coexistence.

With the progressive concentration of urban centers to the detriment of rural areas, the question that is quickly imposed is the adaptation of the urban fabric to the circulation function in the face of the new development of the flow of people and goods, within a city model inherited from the Middle Ages.

Fig. 2. Paris's urban plan, 1851–1870. Plan indicating the new streets, the new neighborhoods and the two large parks Bois de Boulogne and Bois de Vincennes (source: [14])

Il. 2. Plan Paryża, 1851–1870, zawierający nowe ulice, nowe dzielnice i dwa duże parki: Lasek Buloński i Las de Vincennes (źródło: [14])



Two characters profoundly marked the transformations in the spatial model of European cities: Ildelfonso Cerdà (1815–1876) in Barcelona and Georges Eugène Haussmann (1809–1891) in Paris. Despite the differences in thought, one engineer and the other a public administrator, they presented a profound vision of the city in the Industrial Age and its relationship with the new circulation problems, resulting from urban and social transformations.

Cerdà was a bridges engineer. He was commissioned by the Spanish government to carry out the expansion plan for the city of Barcelona. Its objective was to conceive a city that harmoniously combined the residential function with the circulatory function, leaving behind congested urban conditions and lack of hygiene, which favored epidemics [8, p. 3].

Cerdà publishes the first theories on urbanism in *Teoría general d'urbanisation*² in 1867 [9].

Despite never having used the term *urbanism*, Cerdà coined the term *urban* to designate in general the different types of human settlement and the term *urbanization* to designate action on the urban [10].

Haussmann, as the mayor of La Seine (1853–1870), Parisian region, directed the transformations of Paris during the Second Empire of Napoleon III. The city, with narrow and unhealthy streets, compromised economic development. With a different position from Cerdà, Haussmann does not present a direct concern with the social matters. Because of that, he was even accused of being concerned only with the maintenance of order. His plans facilitated the control of social manifestations by the army of Napoleon III, with the great dimensions of the avenues and the destruction of the small streets conducive to barricades. However, it can be said that there was a permanent attention, on his part, in valuing the great monuments of Paris, allowing a perspective view through the great avenues [11].

Paris and the “Grands Boulevards”

*Les boulevards sont aujourd'hui pour Paris ce que fut le Grand Canal à Venise*³.

H. de Balzac [12]

In 1801, Paris had 540,000 inhabitants, in 1846 this number increased to 1,050,000 inhabitants. In 1849 a new cholera epidemic killed nearly 19,000 people from all social classes. In 1853 Napoleon III, faced with an economic and political crisis, hired Haussmann to develop the Urban Commission designed by the emperor, and to implement a major reform in the capital. Haussmann went beyond the issue of beautifying the city and proposed public services as city cleaning, sewer and piped water systems, as well as a new traffic design.

According to Salgueiro [13, pp. 23, 24], Paris assumed its capital image at the end of the 19th century, after successive policies for the work of new urbanism and architecture, mainly under Napoleon III and the “Haussmannization” of the city. The simplistic view that saw in the opening of the boulevards only an act of control over popular manifestations, begins to give rise to studies on the responses that the general remodeling of the city gave to previous representations and pressing urban problems of health and circulation (Fig. 2).

Modern Paris needed paved streets, garbage collection, wooded squares, parks, running water, theaters, schools, sewers, transport, standardized buildings with stone façades, public and private lighting and security. Regardless of any ideology or speculation inherent in this process, the city would offer new living conditions to the population.

To this end, strict rules were created for new buildings on the banks of the avenues, respecting the perspective that was part of the city's beautification. One of these rules determined that the buildings had the entrance to the apartments, independently of those of the places of

² *General theory of urbanism* (free transl. by D. Gaudiot).

³ *The boulevards are for Paris today the same as the Big Channel was to Venice* (free transl. by D. Gaudiot).



Fig. 3. Boulevard Poissonnière, Paris, winter, 1930. View indicating the new urban furniture and presence of coffee shops highlighting the axis of Grand Boulevard (source: Association Française de Presse, [17])

Il. 3. Bulwar Poissonnière w Paryżu zimą 1930.

Widok przedstawia elementy nowej małej architektury i kawiarnie podkreślające oś Wielkiego Bulwaru (źródło: Association Française de Presse, [17])



Fig. 4. Paris during *La Belle Époque*. Axis view of a Boulevard de la Madeleine with cars and chariots and people sharing the new social space (source: X Phot, [19])

Il. 4. Paryż w okresie *La Belle Époque*.

Widok osi Boulevard de la Madeleine z samochodami i powozami oraz ludźmi dzielącymi nową przestrzeń społeczną (źródło: X Phot, [19])

commerce or professional activities. These were generally located on the ground floor, maintaining the connection between street-housing-commerce. The feeling of the street endured within a different scale of dimensions.

A huge number of buildings were demolished to make way for great avenues that allowed the articulation between the city's circulatory and urban functions. The streets have become avenues, with housing, commerce and services and thus places of socialization for the population.

Nevertheless, the new avenues democratic side was only for the "promenades". The prices of the real state became unavailable to the low and middle classes. They were forced to move from their houses at the avenues to adjacent streets or peripheral areas of the capital.

The "Haussmannian" space is the public space – the street, the sidewalk, and the squares – the space for mobility. The originality of this project is in the concept of the circulation and breathing system, which superimposes hierarchical meshes, belonging to a star network. This design does not result in a homogeneous space, since the social division between east and west, between periphery and center is accentuated, but the idea of a city by sectors has not yet been adopted. The hierarchy of the communications system changes the order of values [15, p. 77].

According to Renom [16, p. 80], for industrialized cities, the 19th century is one of growth, modernization, extension and eventually the movement of traditional services (market, cemetery, schools, hospital, water supply, public lighting) and creating new services. The "promenade" is created; public leisure spaces are decorated and adorned with gardens. People dressed in their best clothes and went for walks on the avenues on foot or in their cars. The concern with the personal image increased more and more (Fig. 3).

Unlike the old medieval and Renaissance streets, the great avenues proved to be an open, friendly tool for socialization and they accelerated acculturation for immigrants, whether they came from rural areas, from other cities or from other countries, as well as nomads and people from different social classes. These public spaces created new

conditions of sociability. Their large size allowed the meeting between workers, employees, bosses, artists, professionals and the entire population, from different social levels, from workers, the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy [18].

In fact, the *Grands Boulevards* have gradually become the symbol of the *Belle Époque*, a period of peace, prosperity and carefree. These arteries of Paris were the main place in terms of entertainment and tourism, attracting the entire population to a new form of socialization proposed by the use of the street as a social and political urban space [17] (Fig. 4).

Thus, Paris becomes a city different from other European cities, as it is the first one that undergoes intense reforms to adapt to the new economic and social conditions, and for having built a new urban space, more compatible with the new times, and the new bourgeois society.

In this sense, the street, now with another physical dimension, is obviously an extraordinary instrument of cohesion among individuals, even if some describe its disadvantages, instead of its merits. A place of emotions, encounters, movements, shocks and events, it is the place par excellence, at the beginning of this century, where the exchange of ideas takes place in the face of cultural and social miscegenation.

It is the scenario that prepares for urbanism and modern architecture.

This Paris that was born from the works of the Second Empire, the "Haussmannian" Paris, has, according to some authors, the ability to become an example and model, not only for other French cities, but also for many other more distant ones, such as Lisbon, Cairo or Rio de Janeiro.

The plans of the cities that began to be implemented at that time, brought a logic of structuring, allowing the rise

and emergence of new practices and forms in the landscape, as well as places of sociability.

The great avenues proposed as sanitation and traffic solutions have become the new places of sociability that have survived until today.

Lisbon and the “Avenida da Liberdade”

In Lisbon, Haussmann’s influence will be present in the Grande Plan of the Rossio public promenade, known as the *Avenida da Liberdade* plan of 1879, by eng. Frederico Ressano Garcia.

The opposition of the population was felt since this project would put an end to *Passeio Público*, which was on a par with Chiado, the center of Lisbon’s social life. The *Passeio Público* was created after the earthquake of 1755, when much of the city of Lisbon was destroyed and its reconstruction was slow and prolonged within a daring urban plan [20].

In the 2nd half of the 19th century, Europe began to witness the internationalization of economies, a consequence of the industrial revolution, which represented a challenge for the urban world, in the sense of thinking about the requalification of cities so that they could benefit from the fruits of this experience of globalization. Lisbon, as a center of commerce, feels the need to adapt to these new demands.

The industrialization of urban equipment in the 19th century is inseparable from the creation of modern urbanism and the strategic character that urban intervention takes on in solving urban problems in the qualification of cities.

Wide streets were considered essential for urban healthiness, endowing the city with voluminous masses of air in movement to keep out miasmatic emanations, in the view of prophylactic medicine of the 2nd half of the last century. Modern urban infrastructures, not only in terms of transport, but also considering drainage and water supply



Lisboa, Avenida da Liberdade.

139,

Fig. 5. Avenida da Liberdade in the late 19th century. The greenery draws the path with lines of trees and large sidewalks on both sides of the avenue.

The obelisk in the center dominates the view as a vertical element

composing the main axis with the roads and the people movement (source: Museum Hallwyl, [23])

Il. 5. Avenida da Liberdade pod koniec XIX w. Zieleń rozciąga się szpalerami drzew po obu stronach alei.

W widoku dominuje znajdujący się pośrodku obelisk

– pionowy element komponujący główną oś z drogami i ruchem ludzi (źródło: Hallwylska museet, [23])



Fig. 6. Promenade at Avenida da Liberdade, beginning of the 20th century.

The greenery and the urban furniture made the walk more enjoyable and inviting to the population (photo by J. Benoliel, source: [24])

Il. 6. Promenada przy Avenida da Liberdade na początku XX w. Zielen i elementy małej miejskiej architektury sprawiły, że spacer stał się przyjemniejszy i bardziej zachęcający dla ludności (fot. J. Benoliel, źródło: [24])

equipment, imposed new constraints on road design and discipline in their use. The rectilinear, regular and wide layout of public roads provided the ideal of a pleasant city for urbanism in the 2nd half of the 19th century [21].

A importância axial no desenvolvimento de Lisboa do projecto da Avenida da Liberdade e das Avenidas Novas deve, ainda que sumariamente, ser referenciada no quadro geral do notável crescimento da cidade nos últimos anos do século XIX, traduzido sobretudo na criação de numerosos bairros periféricos, uns de iniciativa camarária – entre os quais se salientam o da Estefânia e o de Campo de Ourique, ambos projectados por Ressaño Garcia no início dos anos de 1880⁴ [22, p. 14].

It is in this scenario that, in 1879 Frederico Ressaño Garcia, the protagonist of Lisbon's progressive urban revolution, trained by the École des Ponts et Chaussées at Paris, and an admirer of Haussmann's work, presented the project for "Grande Avenida do Passeio Público do Rossio: Avenida da Liberdade Plan", as an integral part of the Capital improvement plan [7, p. 17].

The avenue should be 90 m wide, 1,000 m long, starting at Praça dos Restauradores and ending at a large circular square, 200 m in diameter that would be called Praça Marquês de Pombal. Crossing two parishes, S. José (to the south) and Coração de Jesus (to the north). The streets of Salitre and Manuel Jesus Coelho marked the height of the border.

Unlike the neo-urbanist reasons for the Paris reform, faced with the problem of hygiene and riot control, Lisbon's need was for an expansion of the city. The area to

the north of Lisbon, that is, the region above the low zone and the Castle, was until the end of the 18th century a rural area, consisting of small farms, some noble houses and access roads to the city [7, p. 17].

The decision to open a boulevard in the extension of that garden corresponds effectively, not only to the creation of another urbanizable area, but to an urbanistic project aware of its transforming and developmental mission in the 19th century. At this point, the opening of Avenida da Liberdade coincides with the ideals of beautification in the city of Haussmann (Fig. 5).

Avenida da Liberdade thus takes the place of the old public promenade as a place of sociability and this time with a more social, democratic character, in the sense that all social classes could have access to it. Just like the *Grands Boulevards* in Paris, the greenery with exotic plants and shadow trees as well as the urban furniture attracted the population for a social walkway. The imposing width of the avenue gave it a feel of innovation and development. The modernism was coming and the people wanted to be a part of it.

The geographical expansion of the city attracts great wealth, which builds its palaces there. The beauty of the gardens and buildings, as well as the monumental width and a modern character attracts the population of Lisbon to the avenue for their walks where the important thing was "to see and be seen in".

The belle époque, understood as a manifestation of the Golden Age of the urban culture of the contemporary bourgeoisie, whose traditional paintings refer to Paris in the late 19th century, arrives in Lisbon. The mechanisms and behaviors of Lisbon's bourgeois sociability thus produced images of a Golden Age of social life, whose routes and veins of organic circulation were the Great Avenues (Fig. 6).

Conclusions

The end of the 19th century is marked by the transformation of cities in the face of a new urbanism generated by the consequences of the industrial revolution. The sociability spaces are outlined by urban plans in an attempt to adapt the city to modernity. Cerdá, in Barcelona and, especially Haussmann, in Paris, propose new urban arrangements to solve the new issues caused by the movement of people, machines and goods.

Relationships and social events evolve and leisure and recreation appear as a function that the city had to offer. This task fell to its public spaces that assume a new social function, in addition to a simple exchange of information.

The streets take on new dimensions to meet the demands of circulation and become wider are more inviting to social classes until then segregated.

The process to build these spaces generated the increase in the real estate market and expulsion of low and middle classes from the valued areas of the cities in favor of the wealthier, nevertheless the use of the *promenade* by different actors made it democratic.

In both Paris and Lisbon, the great avenues become elements of sociability, serving as settings for social and political, religious or simply leisure activities.

⁴ *The axial importance of the Avenida da Liberdade and Avenidas Novas project in the development of Lisbon must, even if briefly, be referenced in the general framework of the remarkable growth of the city in the last years of the 19th century, mainly translated into the creation of numerous peripheral neighborhoods, some of municipal initiative – among which the Estefânia and Campo de Ourique, both designed by Ressaño Garcia in the early 1880s, stand out (free transl. by D. Gaudiot).*

The presence of gardens and trees as new landscape elements made them healthier and inviting. The urban furniture proposed by Haussmann and repeated in Lisbon, like benches, newsstands, water-fountains and even public toilets attracted the population giving them a service.

The popular socialization could be seen in informal meetings of different social classes, increased with the proliferation of coffee shops, cinemas and the valorization of window displays, marking, in certain aspects, the beginning of the 20th century. The sociability space goes outdoors.

Translated by
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Abstract

The street as sociability space: the case of the Grand Avenues in Paris and Lisbon in the 19th century

The industrial revolution, as well as the French revolution in the 18th century, marked the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe. These two events generated two new social classes: the working class and the bourgeoisie. With the progressive concentration of these emerging classes in urban centers, to the detriment of rural areas, the movement of people, machines and goods became an essential urban function, generating new social public spaces.

This article proposes an analysis, based on a literature review, of the streets known as Grands Boulevards, proposed by George Eugène Haussmann for Paris in the middle of the 19th century, and their role as a sociability space. The aim of this article is to present similarities between the Parisian avenues and Portuguese solutions of streets in Lisbon in social and urban-design terms. The repetition of Haussmannian characteristic was seen in several cities in the world, however in the city of Lisbon it was designed on a much larger scale. The construction of a new avenue, known as

Avenida da Liberdade, for the growth and beautification of the city was inspired by Haussmann work in Paris and became a place to see and be seen in. The consumption habits of the new classes within a modern machine city, asked for different street shapes and sizes, which were designed for everyday use in order to organize the city's urban fabric. Wider, greener and equipped with urban furniture, these representative avenues both in Paris and Lisbon were more inviting and open to a diversity of social classes and their coexistence, until then segregated at public spaces.

Key words: avenues, street, Hausmmann, sociability, public space

Streszczenie

Ulica jako przestrzeń życia społecznego. Wielkie aleje w XIX-wiecznym Paryżu i Lizbonie

Rewolucja przemysłowa wraz z rewolucją francuską w XVIII w. wyznaczyły granice okresu przejścia od systemu feudalnego do kapitalistycznego w Europie. Obie rewolucje przyczyniły się do powstania dwóch warstw społecznych: klasy robotniczej i burżuazji. Wraz z postępującą koncentracją w centrach miast tych świeżo powstałych klas oraz ubytkiem ludności na wsi, przepływ ludzi, maszyn i towarów stał się jedną z zasadniczych funkcji miejskich, przyczyniając się do tworzenia nowych przestrzeni publicznych o społecznym charakterze.

W artykule przedstawiono – opartą na studiach bibliograficznych – analizę ulic znanych jako Grands Boulevards, zaprojektowanych przez barona George'a Eugène'a Haussmanna dla Paryża w połowie XIX w., oraz rozważania na temat ich roli w tworzeniu publicznej przestrzeni społecznej. Zanalizowano także wzorowaną na nich lizbońską Avenida da Liberdade. Głównym celem pracy było wykazanie podobieństw pomiędzy rozwiązaniami paryskimi i tymi zastosowanymi już na znacznie większą skalę w stolicy Portugalii, zarówno w formie urbanistycznej, jak i socjalnej. Nowe aleje związane były bowiem z rozwojem urbanistycznym i upiększaniem stolic Francji i Portugalii, ale stały się również miejscem, w którym obserwowano i było się widzianym w sensie społecznym. Nowe zwyczaje nowych klas społecznych w nowoczesnym mieście wymagały odmiennych układów i rozwiązań ulic, projektowanych do codziennego funkcjonowania w uporządkowanej strukturze urbanistycznej. Szersze, pełne zieleni i wyposażone w elementy małej architektury reprezentacyjne ulice zarówno w Paryżu, jak i w Lizbonie stały się miejscem zapraszającym i otwartym na współ-egzystencję i łączenie zróżnicowanych klas społecznych, dotychczas często od siebie odizolowanych.

Słowa kluczowe: aleje, ulica, Haussmann, społeczność, przestrzeń publiczna