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SOCIAL COHESION AND RESILIENCE THROUGH CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

A Place-Based Approach



Social Cohesion and Resilience through Citizen Engagement

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9. Community engagement in urban regeneration: highlights from the ‘Sê Bairrista’ project in Marvila (Lisbon)

Roberto Falanga, Mafalda Corrêa Nunes and Henrique Chaves

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The growth of the world population living in urban contexts is considered one of the twenty-first century’s most impactful changes. In Europe, more than two thirds of the population live in urban agglomerations. This phenomenon brings to the fore new challenges for tackling urban poverty, exclusion and marginalization of the most vulnerable communities. Recent data indicate that reduced social mobility and labour market prospects particularly affect vulnerable social groups (Keeley 2015). Moreover, the number of poor and at-risk-of-poverty people has increased, with income inequality in OECD countries at its highest level for the past half century (OECD 2023). Against this backdrop, international agencies have called for strong policy solutions based, *inter alia*, on integrated approaches to urban regeneration in deprived areas (UN 2015; EU 2016).

Within its cohesion policies framework, the EU has been supporting and funding regenerative initiatives aimed at combating urban disparities since the end of the Second World War. EU regeneration schemes build on a long tradition of urban policies directed at the reconstruction (mostly in the 1950s), revitalization (mostly in the 1960s), renewal (mostly in the 1970s) and redevelopment (mostly in the 1980s) of cities. More recently, EU investments have triggered in place-based socio-territorial cohesion interventions, which are deemed to stimulate job creation, competitiveness, economic growth, quality of life and sustainable development (Barca 2009). Within this framework, urban regeneration has taken centre stage to improve physical and social environments through reconfigured institutional arrangements from the national scale upwards to supranational agencies, and downwards to regional and local powers.

Urban regeneration goals are frequently pursued through the action of local partnerships composed of multiple agents, and including local community members. As recently echoed by the new Urban Agenda for the EU, there is a growing belief that urban regeneration practices can help “reduce poverty and improve the inclusion of people in poverty or at risk of poverty in deprived neighbourhoods” (EU 2016). Nevertheless, concerns arise as to the sharing of power in making decisions related to urban change and whether the outputs can be sustained over time by the engaged actors (Harding 1997; Roberts 2000).

Bearing in mind the complex set of issues connected to the design and implementation of participatory approaches to the regeneration of deprived urban areas, our chapter focuses on the activities carried out within the ‘Sê Bairrista’ project in the Marvila district of Lisbon. We pay special attention to the area called ‘4 Crescente’, which comprises four neighbourhoods that share physical and social issues related to long-term urban underdevelopment. In the face of that, communities have increasingly demonstrated motivation to play an active role in changing the urban environment they live in.

The chapter is structured according to the analysis of the results provided by the authors in the monitoring and evaluation of the ‘Sê Bairrista’ project, with a focus on the role of social cohesion and place attachment. Both dimensions were grasped through the development of the project, which was officially inaugurated in 2020. To this end, we adopted a multi-method approach consisting of participatory observation and pre-post survey questionnaires with householders. The main findings show that community engagement in regeneration initiatives can make a significant difference in enhancing social cohesion and place attachment. Nevertheless, considering the structural problems of deprived urban areas, this sort of initiative should be implemented within long-term plans addressing the multi-layered and multi-faceted causes of urban deprivation in specific neighbourhoods.

9.2 URBAN REGENERATION INITIATIVES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Issues related to poverty, exclusion and marginalization are connected to the physical and symbolic boundaries that demarcate community ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ (Sibley 1995). The permeability of social boundaries within increasingly urbanized settlements today escalates and accelerates socio-economic and spatial inequalities, which challenge our understanding of current urban phenomena (Healey 2013; Peck and Theodore 2010). In this regard, Loïc Wacquant has coined the concept of ‘territorial stigmatization’ to make sense of low levels of education and income, unemployment and inadequate housing in specific urban areas (Wacquant 2014). Other scholars have similarly referred to phenomena of social exclusion, (racial) segregation

and displacement (Soja 2009), which all contribute to the unequal distribution of burdens and benefits within the city (Fainstein 2005). Moreover, social housing neighbourhoods often represent spaces of powerful stigmatization leading to increased marginalization of local communities (Amin 2005).

Practices of urban regeneration are expected to improve the physical and social conditions of specific urban areas, and increasingly rely on the active participation of local communities. In central neighbourhoods, culture-led approaches are often used to promote ephemeral (e.g., events and festivals) and/or permanent interventions (e.g., cultural and creative infrastructures). For its association with a set of new urban values such as ‘liveability’, ‘attractivity’ and ‘creativity’, culture-led regeneration has become a newly marketable asset of urban historical landscapes (Bianchini and Parkinson 1993). However, city (re)branding operations often show controversial results for places and communities, with spreading phenomena of forced and/or spontaneous displacement of poor tenants (Evans 2003).

Acknowledging the (un)desired consequences of culture-led regeneration, other types of initiatives have sought new balances between wealthy and poor groups through the active participation of community members. Community engagement has been developed through a wide range of tools with householders and stakeholders, who are invited to collaborate in enhancing the built and social environment by triggering new (job) opportunities in the neighbourhood (Healey 1997; Edwards 2001). (Re)activated social bonds (Healey 1998), social cohesion (Couch et al. 2003; Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012) and place attachment (Hidalgo and Hernandez 2001) are expected to become strong community assets. By being physically close, people rely on and give impetus to local networks that provide, in turn, new conditions for wider community engagement. As stressed by Falanga (2022), the connection between engagement and place attachment is all but linear, as it rather depends on whether changes are driven by either external or internal forces. When local communities ‘own’ changes, high degrees of mutual help and capacity of self-organization are found (Loeffler and Bovaird 2016). In contrast, externally driven changes can generate distress and loss of sense of control (Anton and Lawrence 2016).

The strengthening of social cohesion and place attachment through community engagement does not, however, guarantee the success of participatory approaches. According to some scholars, community engagement is often (mis)used to gain support for market-friendly service provision, which ultimately favours the interests of private stakeholders (Furbey 1999; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Cornwall 2004), which echoes unequal relations of power in neoliberal urban policies (Althusser 1977; Swyngedouw et al. 2002; Taylor 2007). In fact, participatory approaches can be disguised behind goals of justice that ultimately reinforce neoliberal urbanization at the expense of the

most vulnerable groups of society (Couch et al. 2003; Swyngedouw 2005; Harvey 1996). In doing so, householders are often portrayed as the key players of their own fate, thus shifting the public discourse from problems experienced by people and places to problems of people and places (Taylor 2007).

9.3 THE '4 CRESCENTE' AREA IN THE MARVILA DISTRICT OF LISBON

Around a decade ago, in the aftermath of the financial crisis, the Lisbon eastern riverside was targeted as a strategic area for creative and smart industries. Public and private agencies sought to refurbish the post-industrial heritage as one of the city's (re)development efforts. Empty factories and warehouses increasingly attracted the attention of 'creatives' and real estate developers, which ended up transforming radically the population living in and using this territory.

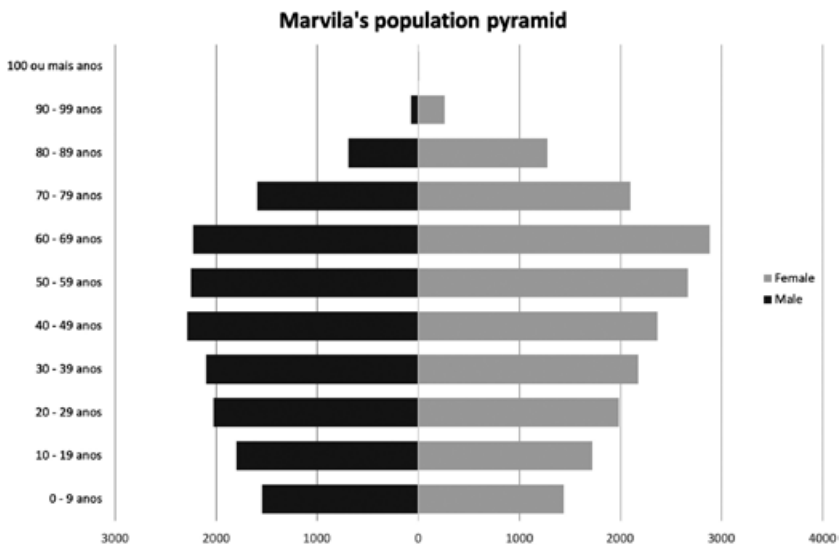


Note: The Marvila district is located within the dotted line on the map. The flag pins show the dissemination of cultural and creative agencies on the riverside. On the inner side, only a few cultural and economic activities are in place.

Source: Map retrieved from Google Maps and edited by the authors.

Figure 9.1 The Marvila district

As shown in Figure 9.1, the Marvila district shows a multi-layered and multi-faceted urban fabric. Since the mid-nineteenth century, people from all over the country have settled in this area of the city in the search for new job opportunities. New workers and their families were especially attracted by the factories located on the riverside. However, people used to live in extremely precarious housing conditions until the central government set out a comprehensive range of policies aimed at eradicating shanty towns in the city. Since the 1990s, those people have been relocated into social housing buildings, most of them built on the inner side of Marvila (Figure 9.2).



Source: INE/Censos 2021.

Figure 9.2 Local population in the Marvila district (sex cohort and age cohort)

In the last few years, the inner side of Marvila has been dramatically at odds with the wave of private-led regeneration on the riverside. Backed by poor quality public spaces and infrastructures, the inner side suffers from inadequate public transportation. In parallel, low levels of education and job occupation contribute to the urban underdevelopment of this area (Figure 9.3). Thus far, regeneration efforts have mostly targeted the city rebranding of the riverside with the aim to overcome the prevailing negative reputation of Marvila associated with urban decay and poverty (Falanga and Nunes 2021, 2022a, 2022b). On the inner side, new socio-cultural dynamics have been

attracting practitioners, policymakers and researchers, who have been keen to initiate small regeneration practices with the engagement of communities.

Community engagement in urban regeneration has been especially important in the so-called ‘4 Crescente’, an area composed of four small neighbourhoods located on the inner side of Marvila. Those neighbourhoods share common urban and social issues, and some recent short-term practices have triggered small urban improvements. Households have either led or actively contributed to co-produce interventions together with local associations, NGOs and local institutions. A relevant role has been played by the ‘community group’ constituted in 2009, which has driven a significant participation of local communities in steering urban change (Verheij and Corrêa Nunes 2021; Falanga 2022). Likewise, the municipal library of Marvila, which was inaugurated in 2016, has played a strategic role in the socio-cultural development of the ‘4 Crescente’ area, by promoting educational, cultural, art and tech-based activities.

Against this backdrop, the authors of this chapter have been involved in the ‘Sê Bairrista’ project, which has aimed to improve the built environment of the ‘4 Crescente’ area through the active participation of local communities. The authors have been in charge of the monitoring and evaluation of the project, thus following up on the small-scale interventions co-produced in the area, with a view to increasing place attachment and social cohesion.

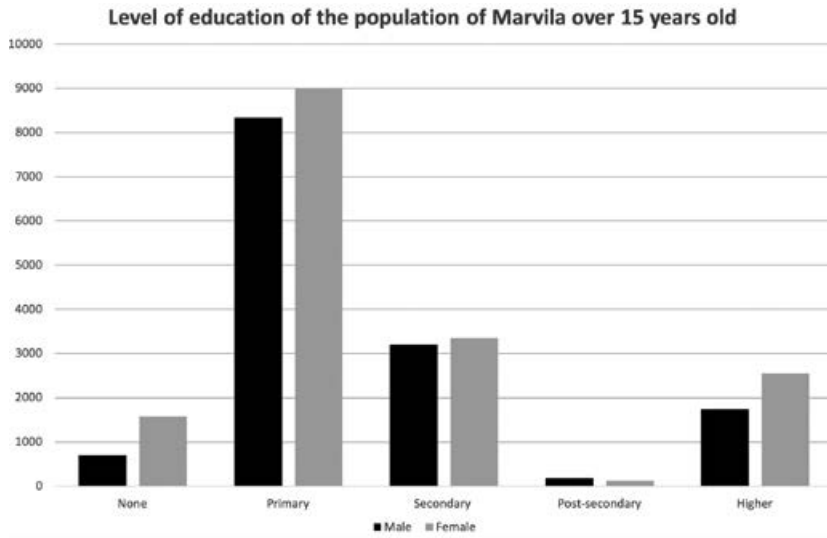
9.3.1 The ‘Sê Bairrista’ Project

The ‘Sê Bairrista’ project (project hereafter) emerges out of multiple regeneration efforts triggered by the NGO Rés do Chão, one of the organizations that has played a major role in bringing together different stakeholders and households around common goals of public space enhancement.¹ The project started in 2020 through a funding application to the Portuguese programme for social innovation ‘Portugal Inovação Social’, which manages Social European Funding.² As the project officially ended in June 2023, interventions are expected to have improved the quality of local public spaces, as well as triggered the social cohesion and place attachment of local communities.

The project was coordinated by the NGO Rés do Chão in partnership with five local institutions: the Lisbon Municipality, Marvila’s public library, ‘Gebalis’ (a municipally owned enterprise that manages Lisbon’s public housing stock), ‘PRODAC’ (a social promotion centre depending on the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa, a private institution of public utility dedicated

¹ More information at: <https://sebairrista.pt/>.

² See: <https://lisboa.portugal2020.pt/>.



Source: INE/Censos 2021.

Figure 9.3 Local population in the Marvila district (level of education of sex cohort over 15 years old)

to social inclusion and development initiatives), and the ‘4 Crescente’ community group.

The project aimed at refurbishing three small squares (‘pracetras’ in Portuguese) located at the centre of three residential blocks in the ‘4 Crescente’ area (Figure 9.4). The low quality of such public spaces was paired with a shared acknowledgement of their potential for households’ leisure time and socialization. Moreover, the lack of quality green spaces in the area motivated the project’s orientation towards a green improvement of the three pracetras.

Accordingly, the refurbishment of pracetras A, B and C was structured around both tangible and intangible purposes. By improving the built environment, the project intended to give back those spaces to community life by improving their physical, social and environmental features. By centring the project’s approach on community engagement, the aim was to foster social cohesion and place attachment by stimulating households to take the lead of small physical interventions. Alongside, the project promoted public cultural events aimed at strengthening social bonds within and outside the ‘4 Crescente’ area. The festival ‘Felizmente há Lugar!’ was prepared and organized by the project partners in collaboration with local households during the summer of 2021 (Figure 9.5). It consisted of a temporary stage in a vacant area



Note: From the left to the right: *pracet*a A, B, and C.
Source: NGO Rés do Chão.

Figure 9.4 Axonometric image of the three *pracet*as located within the three social housing blocks in the ‘4 Crescente’ area

close to the Marvila public library, which hosted a wide range of cultural activities. Besides bringing a new cultural offer, the festival aimed to celebrate the project’s achievements and the easing of the Covid-19 pandemic’s restrictions.

A second public festival was organized in 2023 to celebrate the final stage of the project. Departing from the learnings of the project, the festival ‘Co. Cidades’ aimed to discuss potentialities and challenges of community engagement through different urban regeneration practices in Portugal. Multiple experiences were showcased through an outdoor exhibition that highlighted the potential of community engagement in the improvement of deprived areas. Experts and practitioners were invited to comment in an open debate with multiple actors, from within and outside the ‘4 Crescente’ area (Figure 9.6).



Source: NGO Rés do Chão; photo by João Barata.

Figure 9.5 Image of a dance event that integrated the 'Felizmente Há Lugar!' festival

9.4 FINDINGS FROM PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATION AND PRE-POST SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES

The refurbishment of the three *pracetas* and the co-design of two festivals have aimed to trigger community engagement in the '4 Crescente' area. Participatory observation of all the main activities allowed recording key information on the social dynamics established throughout the project. First and foremost, we noticed that all the partners of the project have been actively involved and played different, at times complementary, roles. By sharing



Source: NGO Rés do Chão; photo by students from the D. Dinis school in Marvila.

Figure 9.6 Image of the 'Co.Cidades' festival

knowledge, proposing ideas and making available material resources, partners collaborated in horizontal and collaborative ways throughout the project. All partners acknowledged that *pracet*as A, B and C had different spatial configurations, social needs and different uses, which conditioned from the very outset the design of physical interventions to be made within the project.

Households of *praceta* A showed strong community bonds and were rather proactive in taking care of their public space. *Praceta* A was used every day for leisure time and socialization thanks to the action of (informal) community leaders living in that housing block. Over time, leaders have encouraged neighbours to take care of shared spaces, which contrasted with the uses of *praceta* B. In that public space, weaker ties were evident among households. Some

conflicts have emerged from time to time, with negative impacts on the spatial quality of the *praceta*. Community bonds in *praceta C* were relatively strong, but the square was barely used as a shared space. The space was considered unappealing by households due to its poor infrastructure that made it uninviting for social and leisure activities.

By the end of the project, significant improvements were recorded through our observation. As Figure 9.7 shows, the refurbishment of a children's playground and the painting of concrete benches by a local street artist improved the spatial quality of *praceta A*. Likewise, despite the challenges in engaging households in *praceta B* (Figure 9.8), some improvements were made in the space, which was reflected in more positive social relationships. In fact, several meetings and open debates captured the interest of households, with growing motivation to collaborate within the project. Regarding *praceta C* (Figure 9.9), a more appealing space was perceived by the local community, which started to spend more leisure time there as well as socialize thanks to the creation of two garden plots.



Source: NGO Rés do Chão; photo by João Barata.

Figure 9.7 *Picture from praceta A*



Source: NGO Rés do Chão; photo by João Barata.

Figure 9.8 Picture from *praceta B*



Source: NGO Rés do Chão; photo by João Barata.

Figure 9.9 Picture from *praceta C*

Alongside participatory observation, the monitoring and evaluation of the project relied on the results from pre-post survey questionnaires conducted by the authors of this chapter with households at the start of the project, in winter 2020/2021, and at the end of the project, in spring 2023. The application of the survey questionnaires was made on-site via a face-to-face approach in the '4 Crescente' area. By the end of the project, we took advantage of some public gatherings and events, described above, to conduct the surveys. The main goal of the survey questionnaires was to understand the impacts of the project on local communities living in the '4 Crescente' area with a focus on the enhancement of social cohesion and place attachment.

9.4.1 Socio-Demographic Characterization of Respondents

The sample of respondents to the survey questionnaires was composed of 200 randomly selected households invited to answer to closed-ended questions.³ Some of those questions aimed to characterize the socio-demographics of the '4 Crescente' area. They show the following characteristics as follows:

- Gender: female respondents were 55 per cent in the pre-survey and 56 per cent in the post-survey. Male respondents were 44 per cent in the pre-survey and 43 per cent in the post-survey.
- Age: around 55 per cent of the respondents were under 35 years old in the pre-survey, while most respondents (around 71 per cent) were over 36 years old in the post-survey.
- Ethnic group: those who identified themselves as White were predominant in both pre- and post-surveys (87 per cent and 86 per cent respectively). A slight increase of Roma respondents was registered from the pre- (6 per cent) to the post-survey (11 per cent). In contrast, a small decrease emerged among those who identified as Black, from 5 per cent in the pre-survey to 2 per cent in the post-survey. Last, 2 per cent in the pre-survey and 1 per cent in the post-survey identified themselves as Brazilian.
- Education: around 5 per cent in the pre- and 6 per cent of respondents in the post-survey were illiterate; 30 per cent in the pre- and 27 per cent in the post-survey completed the 3rd education cycle; 6 per cent in the pre- and 8 per cent in the post-survey had secondary education levels; and only 1

³ The random selection relied on a snowball technique, which prevents us from considering the sample as representative of the population living in the '4 Crescente' area. Furthermore, the random selection was applied for both the pre- and post-survey, which means that the results of the pre-post survey questionnaires should be considered as an approximation of the impacts of the project in the local population.

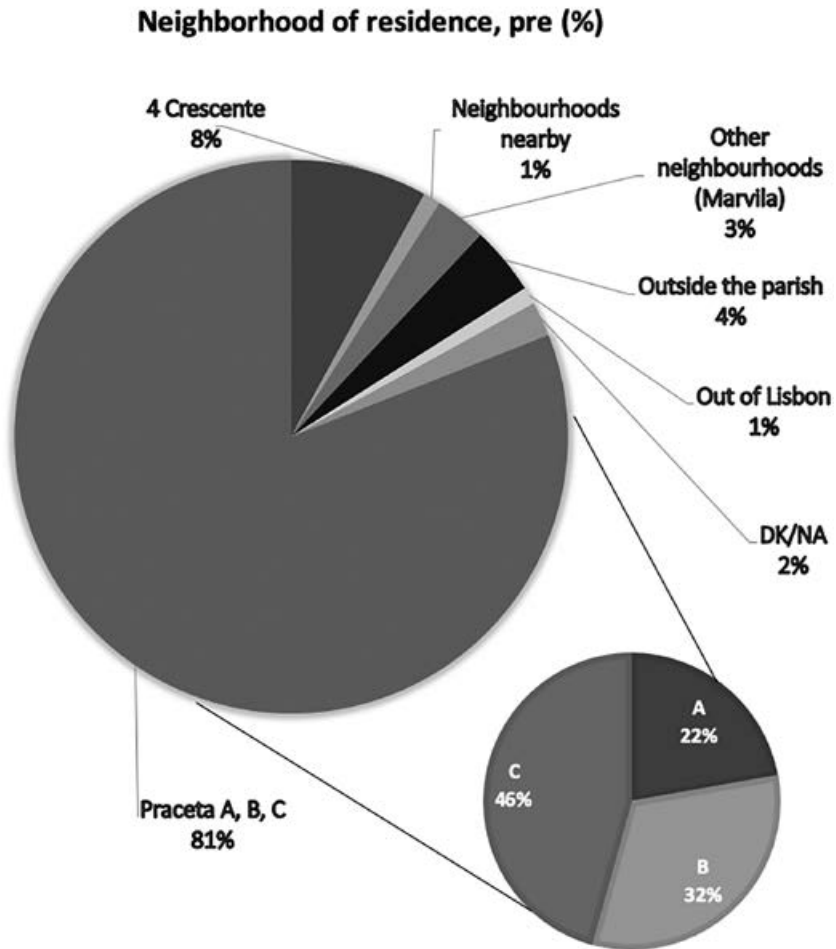
per cent in the pre- and 3 per cent in the post-survey had higher education levels. A significant change was retrieved among respondents who attended the 1st cycle, from 18 per cent in the pre- to 41 per cent in the post-survey, as well as among those who attended the 2nd cycle, from 40 per cent in the pre- and 15 per cent in the post-survey.

- Place of birth: a high percentage of respondents were born in Lisbon (58 per cent in the pre- and 43 per cent in the post-survey). Among them, roughly 20 per cent in both surveys were born in the district of Marvila. The rate of respondents born in another region of the country was 16 per cent in the pre- and 27 per cent in the post-survey, while those who were born in another country were 3 per cent in the pre- and 10 per cent in the post-survey.
- Neighbourhood of residence (Figures 9.10 and 9.11): most answers indicated more than 15 years of residence in Marvila (50 per cent in the pre- and 78 per cent in the post-survey). Around 89 per cent of the respondents lived in one of the neighbourhoods that compose the '4 Crescente' area (Alfinetes, Marquês de Abrantes, Salgadas and Chalé). Only a small percentage of respondents lived in other neighbourhoods within the Marvila district, whereas 5 per cent of the respondents in the pre-survey lived outside the district. As regards respondents living in the housing blocks of pracetas A, B and C, there was a significant decrease – from 81 per cent to 40 per cent – between the pre- and post-survey.

9.4.2 Social Cohesion and Place Attachment

The pre- and post-survey included 12 questions based on a Likert rating scale from 1 (lowest level) to 5 (highest level) covering several dimensions related to social cohesion and place attachment in the '4 Crescente' area. Overall, there was a 26 per cent increase of rated answers at levels 4 and 5, and an 18 per cent decrease of rated answers at level 3, while levels 1 and 2 reduced by 8 per cent from the pre- to the post-survey.

Satisfaction with the '4 Crescente' area stands out with a 35 per cent increase from the pre- to the post-survey (Figure 9.12). By disaggregating this data in pracetas A, B and C, findings show that respondents from pracetata A showed a rather neutral position in the pre-survey (around 72 per cent stood in between negative and positive answers), while respondents from pracetata B provided negative answers in the pre-survey (around 30 per cent). However, in the post-survey a more positive outlook emerged, as no negative answers were given by respondents from pracetatas A and B, the latter showing a 69 per cent increase of positive answers.



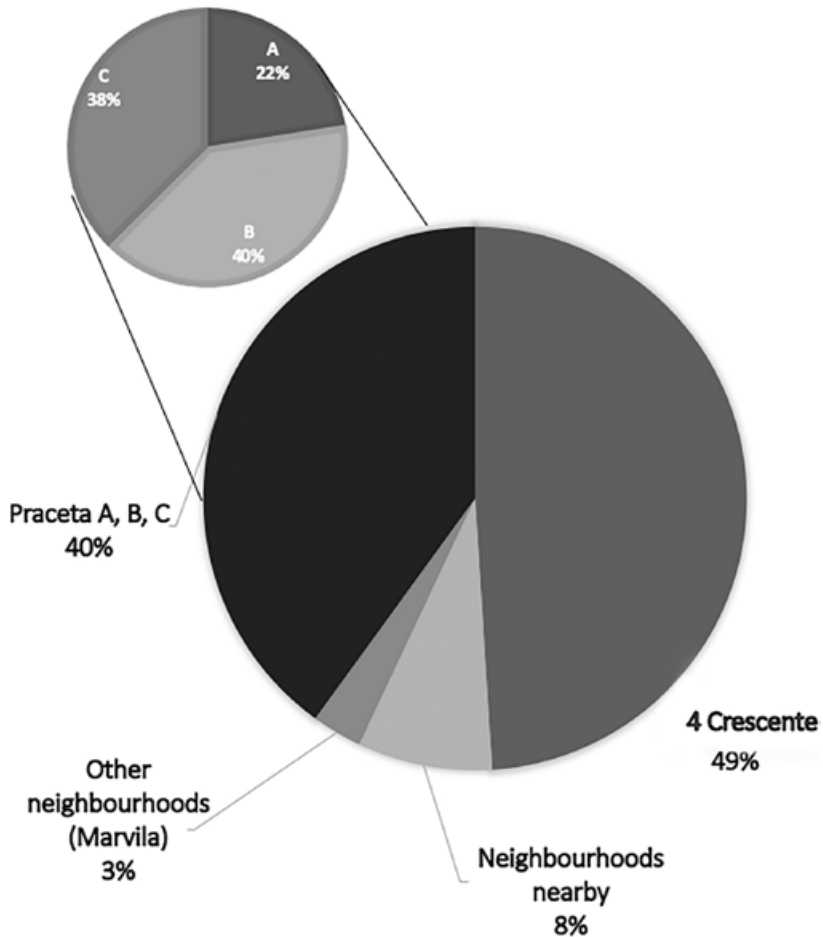
Source: Authors.

Figure 9.10 Neighbourhood of residence (pre-survey questionnaire)

As regards the quality of public space, a 32 per cent increase was registered. Moreover, a 31 per cent increase emerged as to opportunities to interact with people from other neighbourhoods (Figure 9.13).

In the pre-survey, the relationships with people from the same neighbourhoods were moderately positive (Figure 9.14). In the post-survey, the increase of positive rates reached 67 per cent from respondents in the praceta. As regards the relationships with people from other neighbourhoods, a similar

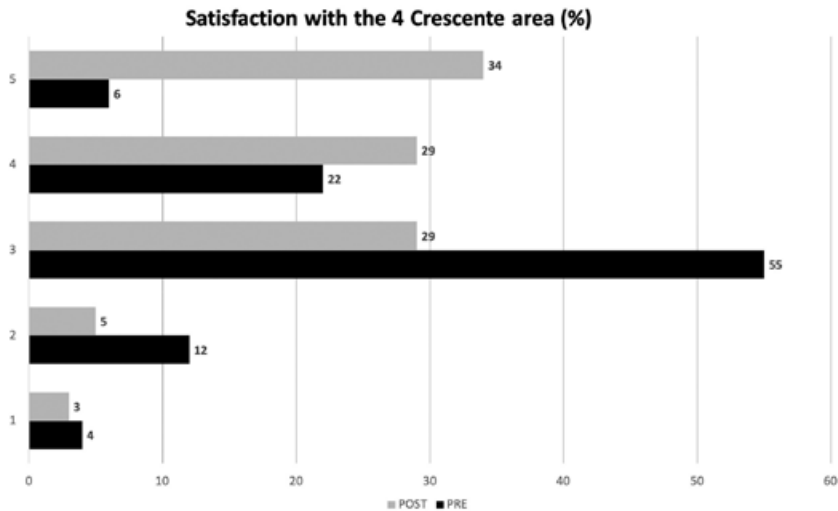
Neighborhood of residence, post (%)



Source: Authors.

Figure 9.11 Neighbourhood of residence (post-survey questionnaire)

trend emerged, with a remarkable increase of positive rates in the post-survey, as respondents in praceta A show a 44 per cent shift to the top rate.



Source: Pre-post surveys applied by authors.

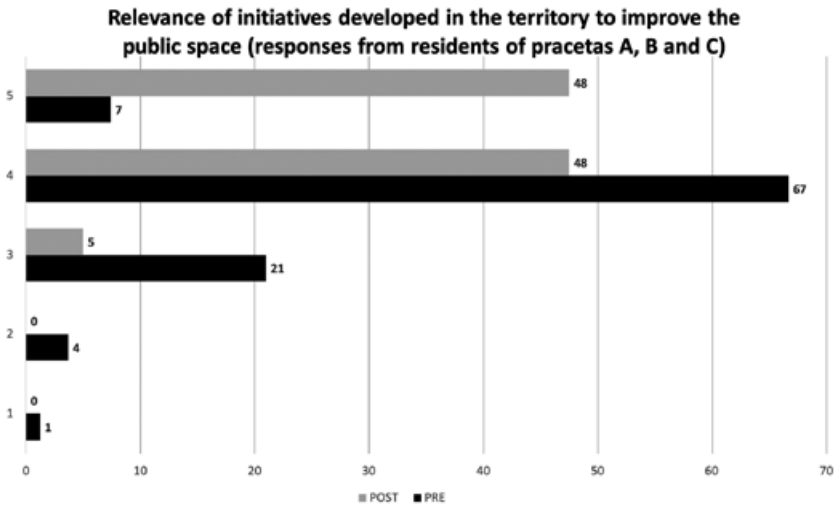
Figure 9.12 Satisfaction with the 4 Crescente area (pre-post survey questionnaires)

Participatory initiatives with citizens to improve the public space were among the most positively rated. In the pre-survey, respondents expressed a moderate enthusiasm about their engagement in such initiatives, whereas in the post-survey, 95 per cent of respondents from pracetas A, B and C were favourable to their participation, with the highest rate of positive answers given by respondents from pracetas A and B.

When asked about the use of public space, respondents showed an increase in absolute numbers from 188 (pre-survey) to 248 (post-survey) answers to multiple options – leisure time, socialization, sport, nature, work and walking. The option socialization received the greatest consensus (47 per cent), followed by leisure time (27 per cent). The option on sport decreased from 22 answers in the pre- to 15 in the post-survey. Overall, the most significant increase was registered in the option on walking, from 16 in the pre- to 44 answers in the post-survey.

9.5 STRENGTHS AND BOTTLENECKS

According to the data retrieved from the monitoring and evaluation of the ‘Sê Bairrista’ project, community engagement in urban regeneration can positively contribute to increasing social cohesion and place attachment.

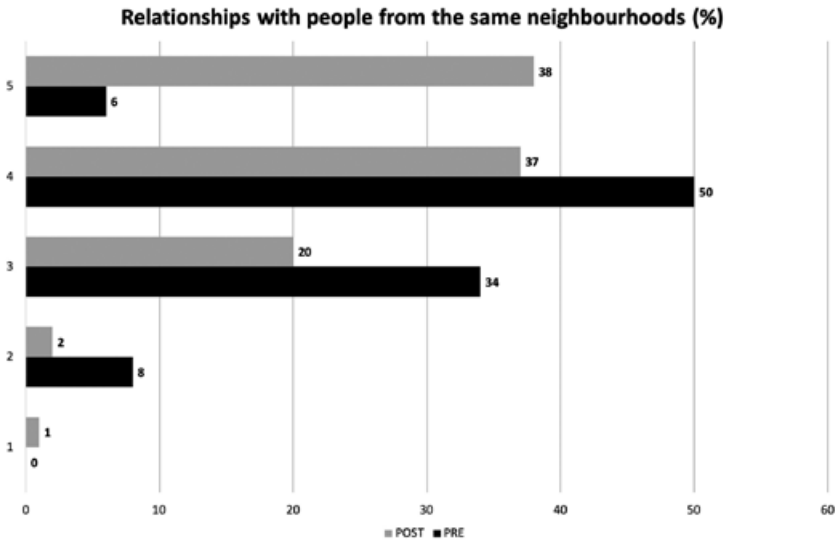


Source: Pre-post surveys applied by authors.

Figure 9.13 Relevance of initiatives developed in the territory to improve the public space (responses from residents of pracetos A, B and C (pre-post survey questionnaires)

Collected evidence in the field corroborates the findings presented above as the local communities show growing ownership of their improved public space. Households have frequently volunteered to lead physical interventions with project partners and other stakeholders. They have actively engaged in the co-creation of ideas for the improvement of the three pracetos and have offered to distribute flyers and posters related to the activities promoted within the project. Households have also made a difference whenever the project's partners identified emerging conflicts, by advancing tailored solutions in the four neighbourhoods composing the '4 Crescente' area. A significant increase in the number of participants throughout the project was noticed as well. Many people who were not used to taking part in such activities have been convinced by the good results of the project to change their attitude in the social environment. All in all, the positive results have allowed a more informed and reflexive discussion on the potentialities of urban regeneration in the '4 Crescente' area by raising awareness on multiple interests, skills and resources.

In an attempt to systematize the strengths that emerged throughout the project, we identify first and foremost the collaboration of all partners in the project's activities, which have provided high quality conditions for community engagement. A second strength emerged from the horizontal approach



Source: Authors.

Figure 9.14 Relationships with people from the same neighbourhoods (pre-post survey questionnaires)

promoted by the coordination of the project, which has enabled all partners to know, understand and express their opinions over the action plan. In fact, the project was underpinned by shared values of social inclusion that paid attention to the effective access of all households to the expected results, regardless of people's age, gender, ethnicity and level of education. As the project pushed forward values of local sustainability, households proactively participated by making the best out of wasted materials to be reused for the sake of physical interventions. Another strength was the power of bridging the local community with agents and initiatives promoted in the rest of the city, as well as in other regions of the country, especially through the organization of the two festivals. A last remark should be made about the project's capacity to keep working through iterative test and learning loops, which allowed all participants to accumulate knowledge in a collaborative manner.

At the same time, some bottlenecks emerged along the way, which are worth mentioning to stimulate future research and practice in this field. The existence of louder 'voices' within the community should have been addressed in a more consistent way to ensure the engagement of all people, and particularly of those who already find themselves at the margins of local communities. The project experienced some difficulties in reaching some specific groups, like

children and younger people, thus hardly meeting standards of strong social inclusion in the area. Seemingly, social inclusion was limited by existing social stigmas that found some resistance from people who are less familiar with participatory settings. On a different note, the red tape has been perceived as particularly burdensome in some stages of the project, with negative impacts on partners and communities' trust towards public institutions. A final remark is made on the little knowledge that many households showed about ongoing regenerative initiatives in the area. Despite the efforts made throughout the project to disseminate information on other initiatives, we noticed both lack of interest from some community members and poor communication addressing the whole community.

9.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The 'Sê Bairrista' project leveraged community engagement in the regeneration of the '4 Crescente' area within the Marvila district of Lisbon. Against trends of long-term underdevelopment on the inner side, which contrast with private-led regeneration on the riverside of the Lisbon eastern side, this area has a continued lack of structural public intervention. Notwithstanding that, public powers increasingly seek to stimulate area-based regeneration practices by triggering community engagement in this area. In the last few years, a patchwork of urban regeneration practices has taken place via international, national and local schemes. The 'Sê Bairrista' project should be considered as one of the most recent ones, and its examination allows discussing emerging strengths and bottlenecks of community engagement in this type of regeneration initiative.

This chapter has discussed the main results of the project based on the findings retrieved from the monitoring and evaluation carried out by the authors. The project aimed at improving the quality of public spaces in the '4 Crescente' area by engaging communities in the design and implementation of small physical interventions. According to the project's rationale, community engagement should foster social cohesion and place attachment. Findings from both participatory observation and survey questionnaires provide an approximation to understanding the impacts of the project in the area, which corroborates this hypothesis. The project has successfully addressed issues related to the marginalization of local communities, mostly due to the urban underdevelopment of this area. By doing so, the project's partners have aimed to critically approach the existing stigmas that some social groups suffer within and outside the 'boundaries' of this area (Sibley 1995; Wacquant 2014; Amin 2005). Such efforts were undertaken within a highly disparate socio-economic context, with the riverside showing accelerated trends of private-led regenera-

tion and a dramatic transformation of the living population (Falanga and Nunes 2021, 2022a, 2022b).

Considering the main goals of physical and social improvement in deprived urban areas, community engagement is expected to make a significant difference in urban regeneration practices. In the ‘Sê Bairrista’ project, partners, households and other stakeholders have actively collaborated to enhance the built and social environment of the ‘4 Crescente’ area by (re)activating social bonds around common goals. A sense of ownership of the changes driven by the local communities has most likely fuelled social cohesion and place attachment (Hidalgo and Hernandez 2001; Couch et al. 2003; Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012; Falanga 2022). This project does not raise any doubt about the value of pursuing the creation of community capital, against often predatory interests and market-friendly ends disguised as participatory approaches (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Taylor 2007). Nevertheless and despite good results, it is worth stressing that short-term projects of this kind can only form part of the substantial changes required. Structural and long-term public interventions are needed to effectively address issues related to urban underdevelopment. Households show awareness of the impacts of their engagement in small-scale interventions, and structural inequalities should not remain sidelined, by calling for the state to be a key player.

We agree with Amin (2005, p. 625) when he says: “Without attention to the wider institutional and market circumstances that shape local fortunes, community-led strategies will never amount to more than a sop to the hard-pressed cities and regions, possibly even a cold towel, as state welfare support and other redistributive measures are subtly rolled back in the name of support for a community empowerment approach.”

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