



# Reconfiguring the public and the private: Noc-Noc arts festival, Guimarães, Portugal

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## Abstract

In the past decades many cities have experienced growing pressure to produce and stage cultural events of different sorts to promote themselves and improve economic development. Culture-led development often relies on significant public investment and major private-sector sponsoring. In the context of strained public finances and profound economic crisis in European peripheral countries, local community low-budget events that manage to create significant fluxes of visitors and visibility assume a particular relevance. This paper looks at the four editions (2011–2014) of Noc-Noc, an arts festival organized by a local association in the city of Guimarães, Portugal, which is based on creating transient spaces of culture by transforming numerous homes, commercial outlets and other buildings into ephemeral convivial and playful ‘public’ environments. By interviewing a sample of people who have hosted (sometimes doubling as artists) these transitory art performances and exhibitions, artists and the events’ organizers and by experiencing the four editions of the event and engaging in multiple informal conversations with the public, this paper attempts to discuss how urban citizens may disrupt the cleavages between public and private space permitting various transgressions, and unsettling the hegemonic condition of the city council as the patron of the large majority of events.

## Keywords

Art, cities, events, Guimarães, Noc-Noc, post-political, public/private spaces

## Introduction

Cutting across many writings on public space, it is possible to identify a narrative of loss, exclusion, inaccessibility, surveillance (Mitchell, 2003; Sennett, 1994; Smith, 2014; Zukin, 1995) and democracy erosion (Rancière, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2009; Žižek, 2002). For Sennett (1994: 375), public space became an ‘empty space, a space of abstract freedom but no enduring human connection’. Increasingly understood as hostile, sometimes dangerous, congested and

lacking accessibility, public space is giving way to private developments, gated communities, public surveillance and ghettoization (Zukin, 1995), which often simulate traditional architecture and public space (Mitchell, 1996, 2003). Among these transformations

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is the widespread commercialization of events, especially in terms of their organization and sponsoring, which may affect authenticity, accessibility and inclusivity. In line with some of these concerns, Swyngedouw (2009, 2011b), building upon Jacques Rancière's (2004) concepts of 'police' and 'politics', challenges the post-political organization of the city through policy consensus, questions the partition of public and private spaces, and explores how dissensus and non-oppressive encounters open up the possibilities for producing new configurations of public spaces. The overlapping of public space decline and the rise of post-politics is useful to contextualize and understand developments in urban cultural policy and specifically the organization of urban cultural events. Lees' (2004) interrogations of the prospects and possibilities of the city as a space or site of emancipatory environments converge to this discussion. In this paper we offer a critical examination of the ways in which a specific cultural event plays an important role in subverting a dichotomous view of public and private spaces by creating, even if temporarily, a fluid urban experience, destabilizing idealized views of the hegemonic creative class and downplaying market forces. It is through an idea of a transient space (Jarvis, 1994), opening up the city to creative ephemeral initiatives and resembling temporary urbanism (Bishop and Williams, 2012), that people commonly with no voice have the possibility to subvert the dominance of traditional actors and patrons.

We look at the four editions (2011–2014) of Noc-Noc, an arts festival organized by a local association in the city of Guimarães, Portugal, which emerged in the context of the European Capital of Culture programme (ECoC). The festival attempts to transform numerous homes, commercial outlets and other buildings into ephemeral convivial and playful 'public' environments. From analysis of interviews with hosts, artists and the events' organizers, and observations from participation in the four editions of the event, we explore how urban citizens may disrupt the cleavages between public and private space, permitting various transgressions, and unsettle the dominant role of the city council as the hegemonic patron of the large majority of events. By unwrapping these practices we engage in the debate concerning the

formation of political subjectivities that may transform the set of institutional, discursive and technical arrangements that decide upon who can legitimately 'speak' and under what arrangements, what Rancière (2004) defines as the 'police' order. We argue that while Noc-Noc is not able to significantly eliminate inequalities inherent to this same police order, it reaches to disrupt both how the arts and culture are understood in the city and how the spatialities of the city itself are practised.

## Cities and creativity

Several cities share a development trajectory that went from a steep deindustrialization during the 1970s and 1980s, to a growth of service industries within a post-Fordist context after the 1990s. Often side by side with this transformation and an 'entrepreneurial' rise of urban strategies, comes what David Harvey (1989) identified as a style of revitalization that sharply segments urban space to the benefit of the affluent middle class and the detriment of the poor. During the 1990s the concept of 'creative cities' emerged as a new economic development strategy to position cities and regions in the global economy. While Landry (2000: xxxvi) argued that creative cities are a mix of heritage and present cultural resources, which includes talent, creativity, connectivity and distinctiveness, Florida (2002) pointed to the rise of a creative class. In recent decades, the creative industries came to be viewed as the key new growth sector of the economy, and against a background of manufacturing sector decline, many expect that these industries become, often by a leap of faith (Campbell, 2011), an important source of future employment growth and export earnings.

Clearly the creative city rhetoric, a political and social mantra (Pratt, 2010), fits in with the neoliberal regime, as creativity is reduced to a dependent variable in the demand functions of urban/regional attractiveness: 'the concept of creativity has been appropriated by governments (regional/urban and national) because of its supposed ability to act as a catalyst in the cultural transition of individuals from 'citizens' to 'entrepreneurs' and 'consumers', the 'idealised companions' of the neoliberal state' (Collins and Fahy, 2011: 29).

Gentrification, cultural innovation, physical upgrading of the urban environment, consumer attractions and entertainment have all become much more prominent facets of strategies for urban regeneration (Harvey, 1989: 9). As Zukin (1995: 1) has shown, although cities always had cultural functions – the institutionalization of culture in formal places of culture, such as museums and other cultural institutions, took place from the 18th century onwards – globalization and a service-oriented economy have placed culture at the heart of urban development: ‘culture is more and more the business of cities: the basis of their tourist attractions and their unique competitive edge’.

Despite the rapid international diffusion of Richard Florida’s (2002) ideas, several overt critical analyses have been put forward (Peck, 2005; Carmo, 2012). Swyngedouw (2011a: 52) argues that one of the possible actions to reclaim the polis as a political space is to rework the creative city as a polemic urban space rather than limiting creativity to ‘musings of the urban “creative class”’. Rancière (2004) emphasizes that political conflict resides in the tension between, what he terms, the ‘police’ and the ‘political’. Democracy dwells in the transformation of the ‘police’ order by exposing a ‘wrong’, that is, a polemical point of struggle, which opens ground for the accommodation of a new set of interests, for those who previously did not have a voice. Viewed as a process, it is ‘the political’ act that allows those who do not have a voice to create a collective political identity. Yet, as Rancière (2004) argues, given the rise of a consensus around neoliberal capitalism, which originates from inevitable and self-evident policies, we have entered a period of post-democracy and post-politics. Moreover, as Swyngedouw elaborates, it is through the employment of new forms of governmentality, that ‘radical dissent, critique and fundamental conflict’ have been erased from the political arena (Swyngedouw, 2009: 608). For Rancière, the political is relational and founded on the intervention of politics in the police order rather than on the establishment of a particular governmental regime.

The idea that events such as the ECoC, with their associated investments and developments, are a ‘good thing’ in themselves, is rarely questioned,

simply because various stakeholders, that is, those with recognized speech – governments at various levels, experts and other partners – have decided so in advance. The same applies to the hegemonic position of institutions with a managerial stance over the organization of cultural events. Furthermore, such a post-political condition prospers in an insipid media environment, in a terrain ripe for ‘consolidating consensual “politics” of contemporary neoliberal socio-environmental’ (Swyngedouw, 2009: 608), which does not open up space for dissensus, for contested views and possibilities.

### **Guimarães and the European Capital of Culture 2012**

Conceived in 1983 and first applied in Athens in 1985, the ECoC has been awarded to 50 cities up to 2014. While its origins were purely cultural (Liu, 2014) and in the first years the event was ‘used as an opportunity to reinforce the status of prestigious European cultural centres’ (García, 2005: 843), the ECoC evolved, especially after Glasgow 1990, and it has since been viewed as an attractive catalyst for cultural regeneration, city branding and visitor attraction (Campbell, 2011; García, 2005; Palmer, 2004). The impact, successes and failures of the programme have been scrutinized in various contexts and case studies. A few examples include Richards’ and Wilson’s (2004) evaluation of the image change of Rotterdam as a cultural destination after 2001; Balsas’ (2004) discussion of the city centre regeneration of Porto 2001; García’s (2005) qualitative longitudinal assessment of the cultural impacts of Glasgow 1990; O’Callaghan’s and Linehan’s (2007) analysis of the political and economic developments of Cork’s docklands regeneration and the re-imagination of the associated identities; and Boland’s (2010) examination of competing interpretations of the success of Liverpool 2008. In this section we provide an overview of the city of Guimarães, a UNESCO World Heritage City located in Northwest Portugal, and engage with the principal goals of the 2012 ECoC (from now onwards Guimarães2012).

After Lisbon in 1994 and Porto in 2001, Guimarães was awarded the ECoC title. With a public investment of roughly 73 million euro, Guimarães2012

ambitiously aimed at renewing the provincial city into 'an internationally competitive creative economy', making the way from 'urban revitalization' to 'creative city'. With roughly 53,000 inhabitants (within a municipality of 158,124 inhabitants), Guimarães has a strong industrial base, with more than half of all jobs in industry, particularly in textile firms under 10 employees in size. In the municipality, less than 20% of the population has completed secondary school, a number that falls below the north region and the national averages. Despite a slight improvement from 2014, higher unemployment rates than the national average (17.1% against 15.3% in 2013) reflect the industrial decline and a structural economic problem.

During the second half of the 20th century most developments took place on the periphery, with the construction of roads, residential buildings and factories, mostly in an unplanned growth process. In the 1980s the city, and especially its historic urban core, registered strong levels of dilapidation and decline despite the dynamic industrial growth of the region. While in other historic cities in the country old quarters were demolished to give way to new residential developments or roads, the stagnation of the historic city of Guimarães was partly responsible for its fabric preservation. In the 1970s and 1980s, the city centre was of course seen and perceived as a marginal place of poor reputation (Aguiar, 1998).

From the 1980s, Guimarães, just like other medium-size Portuguese cities, has struggled and partially managed to escape the cultural polarization of Porto, one of the two metropolitan areas of the country. Up to recently, and similar to many other cities in the country (see Centeno, 2009), municipal budgets for culture significantly increased. In fact, local administration expenses with culture surpass those by the central government since the mid-1990s as the latter steadily decreased from 0.5% of GDP in the mid-1990s to around 0.2% in 2013. Still, public expenditure in the cultural sector per capita is one of the lowest in Europe.

It was precisely from the late 1980s that the country invested in various cultural equipments, among which are the national networks of libraries (from 1987), theatres and cultural centres (1999) and museums (2000). European funding was key and the

north was the main beneficiary (40% in the period 2000–2006 and 34% during 2007–2013). While these investments concurred to a growing number of cultural events and public participation, private expenditure in the cultural sector, as well as the level of involvement in cultural activities, are some of the EU-27 lowest. At the same time, the birth of key cultural foundations, such as the Serralves Foundation established in the late 1980s, altered the regional and national cultural panorama.

From the early 1990s, while the region started to experience a marked decline in the textile industry, leading to unemployment and closure of many industrial companies, the city engaged in a profound rehabilitation and ordering process of its historic core. Already in 1985 a multidisciplinary technical conservation and rehabilitation office was created under the auspices of the municipality. This office had a critical role in the physical and social rehabilitation of the historic centre (Aguiar, 1998) and culture became prominent in the political agenda (Silva, 2000).

In Guimarães, and to a large degree, physical decay ceased, parts of the urban fabric were restored and a significant image change was slowly achieved. In fact, several cultural buildings were renovated and outside the city walls some were constructed from scratch (Vila Flor Cultural Centre, for example). Presently the city is an important tourist destination in the north of Portugal, especially due to its traditionally symbolic and metaphoric role as the cradle of the nation, and more recently due to its classification as a UNESCO heritage city and to Guimarães2012. Visitor numbers to the tourist information offices have grown substantially and there is a lively night scene in the historic centre. Notwithstanding all of these changes, population decline continued in the city centre: nowadays there are less than 1000 inhabitants in the UNESCO classified area (16 hectares) and no more than 1850 in the buffer zone (45 hectares). Attracting new young residents has proved hard, since high prices, strict rules to adapt the morphology of houses and lack of parking make living in the periphery or suburbs more affordable and attractive.

After being awarded the title of ECoC, the municipality of Guimarães, together with the Ministry of

Culture, led the process of establishing a Foundation in 2009 to implement the programme (conception, planning, promotion, execution and development). Possibly encouraged by Florida and others (Markusen, 2006), both the municipality and the Guimarães Foundation (GF), which have very close institutional links, and already in the context of strained financial resources, engaged in a discourse that emphasized the inevitable need to shift from an industrial base economy to a cultural base one, where creativity, artists and cultural labs would populate the streets. Pursuing 'cultural-led urban regeneration', engaging in a 'process of paradigm change, from a classic industrial economic model to an economic model based on creativity and knowledge', supported by an old industrial zone located in the city centre is one of the key goals of the GF's strategic plan (Guimarães Foundation, 2009: 25–26). The idea is to mobilize 'creativity' inherent in art and culture to create new industries and employment opportunities, in line with culture-led strategies, aimed at driving economic regeneration as production- or consumption-oriented models. Investment in 'production' is geared towards the growing 'cultural' or 'creative' industries (for a critique of the conceptual foundations of culture-led development, see Sacco et al., 2014).

Of the GF's 36.5 million euro budget, 22.5 million was spent in the cultural programme (see University of Minho (2013) for details). The remaining 14 million were used in promotion, marketing and expenses (see Liu (2014) on the constantly growing operational and capital expenditures of the ECoC). Public investment reached 42 million euro and was mostly about establishing new cultural buildings and requalifying public space (see Table 1). This was framed by an abandonment of comprehensive planning in favour of the selective and piecemeal development of urban fragments and by an infatuation of material legacies. As Markusen (2006: 1935) argued, whereas elites use Florida's work to claim for large arts anchor institutions in cities, 'most artists understand the negative effects that arts trophy-focused expenditures and strategies will have on lower income communities and on the diversity of artistic venues and funding streams'.

The 'life' of the GF can be divided in two distinct parts. The first one, mainly implicating the hiring of external artists and experts, was characterized by a managerial approach to the government of culture. This is, according to Rancière (1998, 2004) and Žižek (2002), one of the ultimate signs of post-politics as the achievement of a common good is done via enlightened elites buoyed by the confidence of the masses. It ended, after local tensions and anxieties and a scandal that reached national scale related to the outrageous high salaries of the core managerial team and extravagant spending, with the dismissal of the president. The second part, mid-2011 onwards, was a relatively more open approach to culture and the locale, timidly attempting to involve the local community and associations, more in line with the initial objectives, despite the still undisguised and inappropriate high salaries. Although residents have a strong sense of identity with the city, the lack of transparency in the whole project (Koefoed, 2013) maintained a continued suspicion towards the GF.

In addition, *Oficina*, a cooperative created by the municipality in 1989, is nowadays the key player in the promotion and management of culture in the city, responsible for 36 of the 80 European Union (EU)-funded cultural projects during 2012 (Sarmiento, 2014). While its initial aim was to promote traditional arts and crafts, in the last few years this cooperative has evolved into an hegemonic culture institution. It has slowly absorbed the decision-making and the organization of the principal cultural events throughout the year (which emerged and were at first solely organized by local associations), and manages the major cultural venues and the programming of a few others in a highly managerial form. It presently functions almost as a subcontracted organization of the municipality, which is still the de facto patron of culture in the city (Sarmiento, 2014).

## Urbanism and arts festivals

Several authors have recently engaged in a debate related to the temporary use of space, documenting an interest on 'temporary urbanism' (Bishop and William, 2012). Viewed as dynamic, flexible and adaptive, mostly bottom-up, of limited and local



**Table 1.** Major public investment in cultural/urban infrastructures (€).

	Investment
Platform of the Arts and Creativity	14,804,166.67
Old municipal market transformation (market was relocated next to the main shopping centre and further away from the city centre) into an award-winning building that hosts a contemporary art museum, and an open public pedestrian square, bordered by creative labs.	
Landscape Laboratory	2,268,055.56
Renovation of an old factory outside the city centre, managed by the municipality and the university, which attempts to promote the discussion of landscape-related themes.	
House of Memory	4,254,899.52
Renovation of an old factory in the city centre aimed at accommodating an exhibition related to the memory of the territory of Guimarães (still empty in October 2015).	
Camp Urbis	
Joint requalification project (municipality and university) that created a campus in the abandoned tanneries quarter in the city centre, by renovating several buildings and streets:	
Live Science Centre	605,000.00
Design Institute	2,722,500.00
Postgraduate Centre	3,188,350.00
Interpretation Project in Couros	248,335.00
Requalification of Public Space:	
Campo São Mamede	250,000.00
Largo Carmo	905,091.82
Toural, Alameda, St. António	5,970,000.00
Couros	2,215,268.00
Veiga Creixomil	4,267,055.58
Total (Public)	41,698,722.00

Source: University of Minho (2013: 27).

scope and impact, and departing from the specific case of 'vacant lands' in Berlin, studies have developed an interest in alternatives to traditional approaches to urban vacant land, especially after the global financial crisis. Among various promising potentials, those related to the empowerment of marginalized and disadvantages communities and neighbourhoods – either through the co-production of the spaces and places they inhabit, or through the possibilities of participating in actions that would otherwise be unavailable or inaccessible – speak to the

case study here at hand. At the same time, tactical urbanism, understood as small-scale, unsanctioned, community-led urban interventionist activities often conducted outside the official capacity of the city (Mould, 2014), may also inform initiatives that attempt to provide counter-narratives and practices in cultural development. Both trends are critical in contexts of sharp cuts in public investment in public spaces, and foster proposals that disrupt how the dominant spatialities of the city are practised. Furthermore, in different ways they may carry inherent tensions 'between their grassroots, unplanned character, and their inevitable encounter with top-down planning and urban development processes, between their search for alternative cultural forms of "insurgent urbanism" and their inherent tendency to pave the way for profit-oriented urban redevelopment processes' (Colomb, 2012: 147).

In recent decades, arts festivals have become a pervasive phenomenon in western culture (Waterman, 1998), and to a large extent they can be perceived as cultural commodities, often part of larger urban strategies, which nevertheless encompass strong contradictions. This is because, firstly, disproportionate resources are devoted to the promotion of middle-class leisure while poverty and its attendant social problems are neglected, and, secondly, often these projects (with or without the awareness of community-based initiatives) promote entertainment, consensus and agreement, while displacing debate and disagreement (McLean, 2014; Swyngedouw, 2011a). The recent commodification of arts festivals and their incorporation into and control by commercial interests is undisputable (Boland, 2010; McLean, 2014). Whereas festivals run the risk of suffering from serial reproduction (Richards and Wilson, 2006), or becoming complicit in the production of urban inequalities (McLean, 2014), there are also examples of creative initiatives, which take advantage of local idiosyncrasies for community benefits.

The format of the arts festival named Noc-Noc is not original, and several other international events have similar characteristics, although with variations. Brighton and Hove's 'Artists Open Houses!' (214 venues in May 2013), starting in 1982 and therefore the oldest of its kind in the UK, charges a



**Figure 1.** Exploring the city.  
(Photo by authors, 2013.)

fee to the venues (hosts only or artists-hosts) to be part of a listing, a cost that may be split by the host and the various artists exhibiting in that particular venue. Fees rise with the optional enhancement of the listings. Madrid-based ‘Artistas del Barrio’, who directly influenced the organization of Noc-Noc, charges visitors a €5 fee that includes access to the venues plus a map. Others have a more specific and activist goal. Cabanyal Portes Obertes, in Valencia, Spain, uses art as a social movement to reclaim urban regeneration and people’s homes and streets as art venues and sites of contestation, challenging the neoliberal transformation projects approved by the local authority. Embedded in a strong social dimension, the Maboneng Township Arts Experience of South Africa attempts to take arts, such as film screenings, visual art, dance, theatre and music, into people’s homes, in an effort to contest the negative perception and stigma of townships. In the Portuguese context, and despite previous interesting initiatives that aimed at opening private houses to the city, such as PORTO A’BRIR (see Burmester et al., 2001), organized in the context of the European Capital of Culture 2001, ‘serial reproduction’ (Richards and Wilson, 2006) in the form of medieval

fairs and smoked meat festivals is pervasive. Furthermore, since the vast majority of cultural events are under the organization, funding and management of municipalities or related institutions (Centeno, 2009; Silva, 2007), Noc-Noc may be understood as a refreshing arts event, as there are no patrons, curators, ‘creative class muses’ (Swyngedouw, 2011a) or commercial goals.

### Just ‘knock at the door’...

Although there are some variations as mentioned, the three main ideas behind most of these non-commercial, non-profit and low-cost events are (i) free access by the public to various venues, including artists’ or residents’ ateliers or homes, (ii) fragmentation of art venues throughout the city, and (iii) the participation of a large number of artists. Noc-Noc is an event with a very inclusive ethos: ‘(...) it is not a competition. There is no jury. There is no work selection. Participation is free and open to national and foreign artists’ (Ó da casa, 2013: n.p.). Venues are allocated in the city centre to allow exploration by foot (as in Figure 1) and clustering, and this is, in fact, the only restriction the organizers

**Table 2.** Venues at the Noc-Noc event (2011–2014).

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014
Venues	41	70	66	73
Projects	150	320	242	212
Artists	300	500	400	400
Private homes	20	27	14	13
Restaurants & cafes	4	9	14	14
Shops/other commercial	5	7	16	21
Artists' labs	2	2	1	0
Cultural spaces	7	14	12	14
Public buildings	0	4	4	5
Streets/gardens	2	6	5	3
Other				2

created, since proposed venues that are not within walking distance are not considered. The event does not engage directly with professional artists, it is not commercial, but it has benefited from the existence of the European Capital of Culture, an entity that has provided limited funding in all three editions. This has been mainly used for promotional activities and the making of the events' maps and does not preclude that Noc-Noc is an extremely low-budget event, functioning regardless of funding, which is liberating.

In the first edition, the organization was specifically looking for private houses, but in 2012 and 2013, with the increased visibility of the event, the organization just let registration organically take place. In the 2013 edition there were fewer private houses (from one in two venues in 2011 to less than one in five in 2013) and more commercial venues (restaurants, cafés and a variety of shops), which undermined one of the initial aspirations of the event (see Table 2). In the 2014 edition, the organizers argued for a return to a more destabilizing tone, and in a national newspaper interview they contended that 'in this fourth edition we understood we needed to reinvent ourselves, go back to the origins, to a more intimate Guimarães Noc-Noc, with more private homes, with more unknown spaces (...)'. (Alves, 2014, Interview in Público – P3, 17 September). This was not accomplished, and in fact the most striking feature was the rise of commercial venues, such as shops and hotels. It is naturally too early to evaluate the extent to which Noc-Noc will manage to avoid the colonization of culture by economic

imperatives, a process that Zukin (1995) described as inevitable, but opening up private houses to an art festival in a depopulated historic centre is proving no easy task (as in Figure 2). On the one hand, and according to the organization, several artists or hosts feel that opening their houses limits their mobility during the festival, restraining visits to other venues. On the other hand, it seems that local businesses realized the promotional potential of the event and decided to participate. In some venues (especially craft shops) it is even difficult to distinguish what is exhibition and what is merchandise for sale. Nevertheless, informal talks indicated that for many visitors entering a commercial space on these days was more casual, as there was a deeper sense that one could ramble through these spaces without being expected to buy something.

A clear difference between Noc-Noc and the much larger Madrid Artistas del Barrio is the near absence of artists' ateliers or workplaces as event venues. Guimarães lacks these spaces, integral to artists' creativity, an absence strongly connected with the void of private art galleries (the most prestigious one closed during 2014), collective galleries or other artists' gathering spaces, the meagre presence of bookshops in the city centre and the incipient existence of a few incubator labs. Whereas the municipality and Oficina are able to attract and nurture internationally renowned artists to perform in cosmopolitan Vila Flor Cultural Centre, being part of an arts' national circuit, the local arts milieu is impoverished. It is precisely here that Noc-Noc plays a significant role, disrupting cultural development as dominated by Rancières' 'police', by mobilizing an alternative perspective on culture.

In all editions most venues were located within the city walls, and very few outside the UNESCO Heritage city buffer. Due to their dimension some venues concentrated several exhibitions or performances: the extension of the museum, the court-house, the cultural association Convívio, Hive, The Arts and Architecture Affairs Centre, The Child and Popular Culture Centre, The Cinema Association, the Design Institute, The Arts and Creativity Centre and the Art and Leisure Centre. These venues form the backbone of the event and concentrate more than half of all exhibitions and performances. If it is true





**Figure 2.** Opening up the city.  
(Photo by authors, 2014.)

that the main idea of the event is to provide access to private spaces and especially to various homes in the city centre and to decentre art from museums and galleries, there is a significant value in opening up to culture a building such as the courthouse, and allowing people to roam through quarters normally barred to the public (as in Figure 3). The case of the extension of the museum is quite interesting, as up to 2013 Noc-Noc managed to disrupt an existing conflict between the municipality and the Ministry of Culture, which precludes the building from opening to the public. Except for its inaugural exhibition in 2012, this public building was only used three times up to 2015, all for the 2012, 2013 and 2014 Noc-Noc editions. Naturally, these were great occasions for citizens to enter the building and wander through the empty rooms. In the 2014 edition other venues included the headquarters of both the communist and the social democrat parties, and a few vacant buildings. Hence, Noc-Noc is able to disrupt how art is presented by putting on cultural events in non-traditional spaces and creating interim uses. In Rancière's terms, it is in these perhaps small actions that politics may disrupt the police order, as the place allocated to people and things is not observed.

### Artists, hosts and organizers' views

In this study we focus on the views provided by a sample of artists, hosts who sometimes doubled as artists, the organizers of the event and the public. Twenty in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 artists, three hosts and seven artists-hosts (cited here using pseudonyms) were conducted between September and October 2013 (see Table 3). All interviews were made face to face and were video recorded for detailed analysis afterwards. One representative of the organization was also interviewed in 2013. Participants were identified using a snowball technique involving artists, and a non-probabilistic sample that equals with the ratio of artists, hosts and artists-hosts obtained from the event's inscription list.

Unfortunately there is no hard data concerning the public who attended the four editions, except for unreliable media estimates on the number of visitors on those particular weekends (6000 in the first edition according to one local newspaper). Despite this lack of data, the authors participated in the four editions of the event, observing, taking various notes



**Figure 3.** Uncommon views.  
(Photo by authors, 2014.)

and informally engaging in multiple conversations with the public, and in the third edition one of the authors participated in the organization as a volunteer. This allowed for a more accurate perception of the public who visited one of the venues. As residents in the municipality of Guimarães, the authors were exposed to and participated in debates concerning the organization of the event as well as the various developments related to Guimarães2012.

From the available 2013 inscription list, 92 out of a total of 242 projects (about 152 artists in 400) were registered with a Guimarães address. From these, roughly one third is located on the city's periphery. About one third of the remaining 150 projects referred to addresses in small parishes of neighbouring municipalities. Whereas it is unwise to draw conclusions from this simple fact, many of the artists who participate in Noc-Noc do not live in the city, nor in other large neighbouring cities such as Braga or Porto.

Our sample is composed of 13 males and eight females, 14 of whom have a university degree. Of these, five are artists – one photographer, one painter, one graphic designer, one art merchant and one entrepreneur in a creative company. If we include the

three arts teachers who engage in artwork on a daily basis, and one architect, almost half of the sample is professionally related to the arts. For the others art is a hobby and a part-time activity. Significantly, they are not industrial or manual workers who are looking for upskilling or to enter the 'creative industry' cluster, as aspired and promoted in political and official discourses. Most of them are over 30 years old (the youngest being 14 years, the oldest 64), and two thirds are exhibiting art work for the first time. Although some (eight) participated in previous editions, many admit they might not participate in the future, in order to visit the other venues more at ease.

Noc-Noc is organized by Ó da Casa (ODC), a local association that emerged in 2011 in connection with the first edition, and aims at promoting arts and artists and to develop cultural projects. The 11 people who make the ODC collective fit into the core of what Florida (2002) broadly termed the creative class and are mostly young professionals involved in arts. The Guimarães2012 programme promised 'solid community involvement (...) as to generate vibrant creative energy', but our interview with ODC confirmed the notion that Noc-Noc materialized out of a certain resistance and rebelliousness

**Table 3.** Interviewees' characteristics.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Venue
<b>ARTISTS</b>					
Aida	Female	47	Graduate	Teacher	Home
Alba	Female	47	Graduate	Unemployed (visual arts teacher)	Lab
Anusha	Female	23	Unknown	Unknown	Home
Dino	Male	39	Graduate	Computer consultant/musician	Street
Dolly	Female	35	Postgraduate	Visual arts teacher	Shop
Gail	Male	49	Graduate	Art merchant	Street
Mat	Male	64	High school	Archive technician	Shop
Niki	Male	32	Graduate	Bank employee	Hostel
Sue	Female	37	Graduate	Journalist	Home
Tod	Male	14	Student	Student	Home
<b>HOSTS</b>					
Adam	Male	45	Postgraduate	Civil servant	Home
Gwen	Female	37	Postgraduate	Entrepreneur – creative firms	Shop
Noel	Male	31	Graduate	Unemployed (architect)	Home
<b>ARTISTS-HOSTS</b>					
Aldo	Male	40	Graduate	Photographer	Shop
Ali	Male	55	High school	Warehouse responsible	Lab
Cyril	Male	37	High school	Computer technician	Shop
Hazel	Female	35	Graduate	Unemployed (engineer)	Home
Joan	Female	50	Graduate	Visual arts teacher	Lab
Ray	Male	30	Graduate	Painter	Lab
Robin	Male	39	High school	Graphic designer	Home

towards a top-down approach in the organization of Guimarães2012, and to a certain extent as a consequence of the latter's lack of transparency (Koefoed, 2013). With the typical discourse of most ECoC post-Glasgow based on regeneration, rebranding and repositioning (O'Callaghan, 2012; O'Callaghan and Linehan, 2007), at least on its first phase, the GF was almost blocked to local artists (Koefoed, 2013). It was in this context that in 2010, a local group of people with a sound knowledge of the city, its people and its cultural environment, launched a call for participation in a cultural event, by creating a blog and a set of digital and printed postcards. Illustrating the willingness to engage in an art event, a large number of people (mostly local) demonstrated their interest, and what started as an informal idea of a group of friends, led to the establishment of ODC. Apart from the event itself, the association has been active in participating in different cultural debates, establishing partnerships with local, national and international

institutions, organizing and participating in artistic workshops, and having an important presence in the local but especially in the national media.

Coincidentally, the first Noc-Noc edition was preceded by a profound 'adjustment' and financial cutbacks in the GF, and ODC was invited to include the event in the Guimarães2012 official programme. This allowed for limited financial support for promotional materials, the publishing of a free map with the venues' location, some logistics support and greater visibility. Yet this bond with Guimarães2012, which ODC swiftly announced would not undermine the event's independence and autonomy, raised some local anxieties and tension and was felt informally not only in the city but also in social media. According to the organizers, some people/artists in the city decided to withdraw participation, as this liaison with such a 'neoliberal' acting foundation would undermine the whole counter-cultural spirit. Just as many activities understood as tactical urbanism and

temporary uses have been slowly conquered into urban capitalism and incorporated into mainstream urban policy and into the neoliberal creative city (Colomb, 2012; Mould, 2014), for many people in the city, and somehow unfairly from our point of view, Noc-Noc and ODC became just one more event organized by Guimarães2012. While there are several earlier examples of cultural events' absorption in Guimarães (Sarmiento, 2014), it is nevertheless too early to establish to what extent Noc-Noc will be used by the local authority to promote the city as a cultural place.

Whereas many submissions included project and respective venue, allocating venues to artists was a difficult task. Some of the 11 people of the organization visited most venues beforehand, in an effort to match venues and cultural projects, even if at times artists did not provide detailed information about the exhibitions or performances to be held. This was an ongoing process of adjusting and re-adjusting spaces that was only completed at the last minute. Emerging from the thin boundary between craftsmanship and artistic intervention, a discussion among the organization whether a project selection should be in place often loomed. Yet ODC continues to understand a selection process as the denial of the event's essence, so it is ruled out. Most artists we spoke to agree with this posture, and strongly believe this is one of the strong assets of the event. Noc-Noc comes closer to ancient festivals, be they religious or pagan, which were of the people and by the people (Waterman, 1998). Unlike many contemporary arts festivals in which there is a clear distinction between participant performers and participant audience, Noc-Noc encourages audiences to enrol in art, even if just for a short period of time. This practice disrupts the barriers between producers and consumers of art by implicating the audience in the staging of the event and shifting these relationships between events. Several artists mentioned Noc-Noc as a good opportunity and worthy moment to promote their own work and make it more visible, since invitations to exhibit in most arts events organized in the city are made to those within the arts milieu, of which they are not part. Furthermore, it is significant that the reasons behind some artists' participation relates to the openness and freeness of the event, some referring to

'a taste of a lost democracy and inclusivity' (Aida, personal interview). The sense that at least for a couple of days the city is not constructed upon individualistic and property-based concepts was pointed out by several artists, and the collective turn and sharing spirit generated by Noc-Noc is certainly one of the assets that participants highlight. Alba (personal interview) talks of the 'opportunity to freely exhibit, with no judgments or demands normally inherent to curators'. Noc-Noc shows a great ability to allow for the formation of collective action, reclaiming unused spaces and opening up, even if temporarily, private spaces. The idea of the event as an open venue, spread throughout the city, is very strong for most participants. For some, this kind of mobility and accessibility is one of the principal motivations to participate. Visiting other exhibitions and rambling across the city is essential. In fact it is this sense of collective exhibition, a process that is made together by visitors and artists, that provides meaning to the whole event. Yet, confirming the organizers' view mentioned earlier, there are a few that argue their own exhibition is restraining, and a certain sense of frustration emerges from not being able to move around: 'my participation ties me to my venue and I am very sorry I cannot visit everything' (Joan, personal interview).

Not only was matching venues and art displays and performances a challenge for the organization, but also some artists felt uncomfortable with the spaces they were allocated. Unsurprisingly, some argued they would have liked to be allocated to more visible and prestigious venues, such as the extension of the museum, where large and new rooms and 'proper' light would allow for an official/professional exhibition. Others mentioned that their work was restricted by the space they could get, mostly in terms of size, and for that reason only, they should have known their allocated space some months in advance. Yet most artists were particularly sensitive to the limitations of the organization logistics and constraints posed by inexperienced volunteers, as they were all freely working for a common cause. Since the event was locally organized, without commercial goals or significant resources, tolerance towards some organizational shortages cut across the spectrum of both hosts and artists.



**Figure 4.** Setting new boundaries.  
(Photo by authors, 2013).

Many artists and hosts also discussed the immense public curiosity for private houses, pointing to gentle behaviours, and a strong interaction with them. In living rooms or backyards, people's manners are distinct from those encountered in an art gallery or in an official art venue. Hosts create new boundaries (as in Figure 4), but at times people entered rooms that they were not supposed to, as restrictions are blurred and it is not clear on the day where public space ends and private space starts. This is also the outcome of an event that is not heavily controlled, unlike other venues in the city where staff with uniforms and hi-tech communication devices attempt to regulate and order all public movement. At the same time, this informality allows the public to interact, question and comment more on what is on display or being performed. In a country where only 17% of the population claims to have visited a museum or art gallery in the previous year (more than half because of lack of interest), and that shows one of the lowest cultural practices indexes in Europe (European Commission (EC), 2013), events such as Noc-Noc can be extremely relevant. Public curiosity is also significant since people hear a lot about the requalification of the city centre and the UNESCO status of

Guimarães, but are always confined to public squares and street views. While it would be bold to argue that Noc-Noc is giving voice to ordinary citizens, the event helps to take the ownership of cultural spaces away from elites by opening up the production of art spaces to a broader public. Furthermore, it allows them to experience the city in different ways, from otherwise inaccessible angles and perspectives.

None of the hosts we spoke to referred to any conflicts in opening up their houses. Some removed one or two valuable objects, but none did major changes or spent any money in hosting visitors. Emerging from our informal conversations with the public in the four editions, and somehow confirmed by the artists' and hosts' views of this same public, Noc-Noc represents a unique moment for many people who both live in and outside the city to engage with art. Because venues are just there, open, unpretentious, informal, requiring nothing to go in, many people who rarely enter an art gallery, or listen to a string quartet or see a photo exhibition find the opportunity to do so. Naturally, while we do not have quantitative data concerning the festival audiences, many visitors, perhaps the majority, are well into the arts scene.



## Reconfiguring space

One of the strengths of Noc-Noc is the way in which it allows for everyday citizens, many living on the city's periphery, to find a place to exhibit art and to co-create a polyphonic city. This possibility, which is often asphyxiated by official selective events, although it may constitute a weakness in that some exhibits are of doubtful quality, brings participation and engagement to the centre of public space and the city. The notion of culture as a purely aesthetic realm, as the result of artistic and intellectual elites who dwell isolated from society and economy is disrupted, and is momentarily traded by culture understood as a way of life, understood as one that 'integrates the arts into other aspects of local culture and into the texture and routines of daily life in the city' (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993: 209). At the same time, a disruption and fluidity is also established in binary boundaries artists/audience, as many people decide to participate in one edition as artists and in the next as audiences, and vice versa.

The event momentarily transforms and augments the city public spaces, and people stroll through the courthouse building, walk into someone's home, and in that sense, even if only transitorily, as confirmed by many participants, it promotes a transient mobility that connects artists and non-artists. Unlike ticketed events that physically and symbolically exclude people (Smith, 2014), Noc-Noc is transgressive: anyone can walk into a café, restaurant, hotel or shop to see an art exhibition. Even if temporarily, Sennett's argument of cities increasingly being abstract spaces is contested.

On a less disrupting note, the event builds upon a reinforcement of the centrality of the urban historic centre, since all venues are centrally located. While it allows for an exploration of back alleys, it does not unsettle the uneven relationship and orthodox binary between historical centre/inner-city bohemia and less qualified peripheries and outer-suburban in the municipality at large. Brighton and Hove's 'Artists Open Houses!' event covers different areas of the city and beyond, organized in autonomous trails, and maybe it is an interesting model to try in Guimarães, to counterbalance the concentration of central venues, promoting and including venues in peripheral

industrial areas in an attempt to embrace people who do not frequently attend art events, and expanding the number of private homes.

Noc-Noc disrupts the dominance of hefty public expenditure or major corporation sponsoring in cultural event organization as well as an overwhelming presence of the local public authority as the culture patron of the large majority of events. The event clearly disquiets the encouragement of large-scale and high-budget events and constructs a counter-cultural narrative that is highly appreciated by artists and hosts. This low-cost event may be seen as an unconscious counter movement against a commodification of cultural events and everyday urban experience at large. Guimarães2012 promoted the event *Mi Casa es Tu Casa* (January and December 2012) by inviting various musicians to perform in private houses. Overall the event was a success, bringing visibility to the city and disrupting, just like Noc-Noc, the rigidity of urban boundaries. Yet, being dependent on external funding to invite musicians and being organized by outside groups, the event was important within the Guimarães2012 programme, but it evaporated.

ODC members seem to be more concerned about culture – in the elitist sense of the term – than about cultural politics or tactical urbanism, but they are inevitably caught up in it. That was visible especially in 2012 and 2013, when they became associated with Guimarães2012. The 'amateurish' nature of the organization has benefited from some sponsoring, and proudly advertised on their website are the results from an economic impact study highlighting that, in 2012, they were one of the most profitable events for the city. In 2014 the organizers tried to depart from these links, and return to a more intimate event, encouraging more private homes to participate, but that proved difficult. Yet, after four editions, ODC emerged as the responsible body for an emancipated and successful event, one of the few that escapes the municipality hierarchical control, and that is in total contrast with Guimarães2012's selective character and lack of transparency (Koefoed, 2013). ODC urban activism is claiming a voice in the order of things, challenging the dominance of the current post-political condition, and may in the future engage with other partners to claim

for a different design of public spaces, a foundation for and condition of possibility for a reclaimed polis (Swyngedouw, 2011a). Noc-Noc did not change the dominance of neoliberal creative city initiatives, but it may foster engaged participation and generously embrace artists' and ordinary citizens' contestation in imaginative ways. Naturally, the actions and engagements of artists and public and the contents and scope of the exhibitions will dictate the extent to which Noc-Noc may continue to unsettle public-private binaries and the cultural status quo in the reconfiguration of the city. Here, as we hope to have demonstrated, we witnessed a proper political gesture, as both the place and the arena of the political as a form of experience is defined by the partitioning of times and spaces, of the visible and invisible, of voice and noise (Rancière, 2000: 13–14).

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