

Memory from the Avenues

A collaborative strategy towards local history and heritage

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View of the exhibition *Memória das Avenidas* at Av. Duque de Ávila, Lisbon. February 2017

This paper intends to present the project *Memória das Avenidas* and the collaborative strategies undertaken, regarding local history, heritage and memory. The project *Memória das Avenidas* (developed since 2015) has been recording and collecting oral testimonies and memorabilia from the elder inhabitants of Avenidas Novas (Lisbon), following a collaborative strategy with the involvement of local citizens, NGOs and institutions, in order to understand the historical processes by which the city has been developed, occupied, transformed and lived. One of its main goals has been to build an open platform for raising awareness towards critical ways of dealing with local heritage in its various forms as a means to foster community building and identity.

Key Words: memory, local history, collaborative research, open science, community building

Overall Project presentation

The project *Memória das Avenidas* (*Memory from the Avenues*) has been developed since 2015, following several other experiences and initiatives undertaken within the Centro República (NOVA FCSH) and the Institute of Contemporary History (NOVA FCSH) by Professor Maria Fernanda Rollo — namely the

programme *Centenary of the Portuguese Republic* (2010), *Portugal1914-1918*, *Memória para Todos* (*Memory for All*) and the project *L3 — Lisboa Laboratório Comum de Aprendizagem* (*L3- Lisbon community-based learning laboratory*). The first began its activities by occasion of the centenary of the

Portuguese Republic in 2010, promoting a dynamics of recording testimonies and memorabilia throughout the Portuguese territory. The collected content and information proved to be of remarkable importance to the knowledge of, amongst other aspects, the republicanism's process of affirmation in Portugal, which had been partially muffled by the following Estado Novo authoritarian regime (1926-1974). The stories and narratives which remained hidden and kept in individual hands and memories were of striking relevance, coming to light under the spark of the Centenary Programme.

Launched in 2012, the project dedicated to the Portuguese participation in WW1 also integrated the collection and registering of oral testimonies and memorabilia. Similarly, the *Europeana 1914-1918* international project, aimed at building the largest archive on the WW1 through *Community Collection Days* and online crowdsourcing. The project integrated the *Europeana Project* which has its roots in 2008 and the goal of building "a search engine and open data hub for library collections".¹ The *Europeana 1914-1918* intended to collect memorabilia and stories from the period of the Great War (1914-1918), following an initiative undertaken at the University of Oxford. The project's success gave way to a larger international initiative which brought together several European Institutions with the purpose of collecting, showing and granting access to digitized content from several cultural heritage institutions, together with the content collected in Road Shows or added by citizens through the project's platform.²

The Portuguese initiative undertook similar engaging strategies, working together with several national

institutions (Portuguese Parliament, National Television, Mário Soares Foundation, National Library and IHC-NOVA FCSH) and adapting the *Collection Days* to *Dias da Memória*, which took place for the first time at the Portuguese Parliament during 17th, 18th and 19th October 2014.³ Subsequent initiatives took place in Tomar (13th and 14th February 2015), Amadora (16th and 17th October 2015) and Vila Franca de Xira (16th and 17th September 2016) following the Municipalities invitation and interest in recording and knowing the stories and memories deeply rooted all over Portugal.

The content collected throughout *Dias da Memória*, mostly family documents, oral testimonies and other memorabilia, was then curated, validated and evaluated by the research team, crossing it with archival documentation and published in the platform *Portugal1914.org*. The later was created to promote the study on WW1, disseminating content and information on the subject, connecting with schools and other institutions, granting access to this heritage and raising awareness towards the crossings between collective memory and historical knowledge. The "Histories" area, which now gathers hundreds of entries, includes the stories and memories of those who shared their personal and familiar collections and testimonies. While the collected information showed to have significant importance to historiographical research, it simultaneously values the individual and family heritage otherwise lost and invisible. Since 2014 and on, people from several countries in the World have been sending their contributions to this portal and accessing this information for different purposes.

¹History — The Europeana we recognise today launched in 2008 but has much deeper roots. <https://pro.europeana.eu/our-mission/history>, accessed 29th September 2018, 12:13

²Europeana 1914-1918, Untold stories & official histories of WW1, <https://pro.europeana.eu/project/europeana1914-1918>, accessed 29th September 2018, 12:32

³ The initiative integrated a broader programme of activities and counted on the partnership of the WW1 commemorations committee and the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

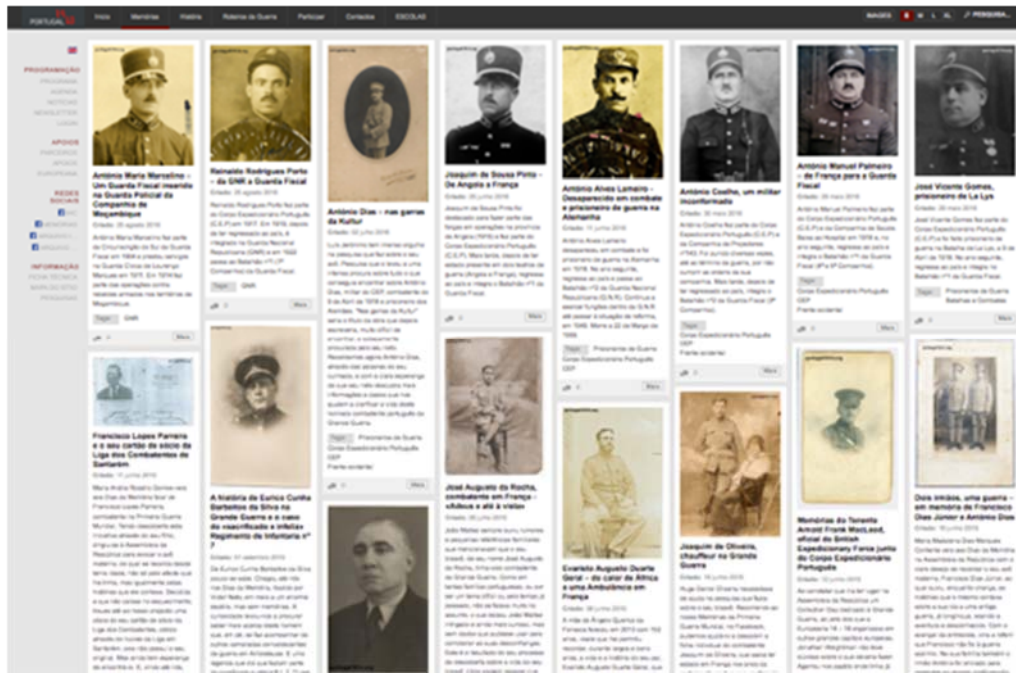


Photo 1. The aspect of the actual area “Histories” in the portal www.portugal1914.org, featuring the content collected through crowdsourcing.

These particular experiences showed the importance of family and individual heritage to historical knowledge production, since it revealed large amounts of information which were not available for research and were kept invisible while people from all over the country did not consider their particular experiences and biographies to have significant importance to the collective knowledge. Evaluating, validating, curating and sharing this information with and for the larger public had a huge impact in the particular and the collective dynamics of memory construction. The one aspect we wish here to signal is the valuing of the particular individual life histories and the perpetrating of these not only in a private sphere, but also in a larger context, with great value for academic and scientific research, which may act as an important factor for the construction of collective memory. What could have remained as scattered information and narratives is now gathered and put into relation, promoting a process of community

building around memory and intangible heritage of important significance for both individual and collective identity.

The third project mentioned above, *L3 — Lisboa Laboratório Comum de Aprendizagem (L3- Lisbon community-based learning laboratory)*,⁴ gathered 3 Higher Education Institutions from 3 disparate scientific areas: History, Design and Engineering. The project was funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation bringing together undergraduate and master students, to develop their works on specific Lisbon neighbourhoods, engaging with local communities in identifying social issues on which they could work upon or propose innovative solutions, resorting on project based learning and learning by doing strategies. The History students engaged in different ways to local issues and found particular topics to work on with the collaboration of local institutions and citizens. Besides from transforming

⁴ With scientific coordination from Inês Queiroz and project management of Inês Castaño.

the learning experience of this students within the Portuguese learning context, the project also rose awareness from local institutions and citizens to the importance of local heritage and historical narrative in providing context and comprehension to the development of contemporary social issues.

Together, these experiences showed the importance of collaborative strategies in the identification, studying and critical engagement with heritage. Not only did they provide new paths for historical research, by showing new sources and readings for the national narrative, particularly including the many histories and memories from multiple contexts, they've also revealed the disposition of the civil society in taking part of the research and collaborating with the identification, studying and dissemination of heritage, in different ways and through different means.

From the mentioned projects, the Programme *Memória para Todos* expanded its activity regarding

different subject areas, collecting and engaging several institutions and the public at large on *Dias da Memória*, building an open platform which gathers the different content, made available to all.

Currently, the programme is dedicated to several subject areas such as the Portuguese Revolution of 1974 (with the National television, RTP), the Portuguese Opera (together with São Carlos National Theatre), the Resistance and Freedom (with the Aljube Museum, dedicated to the memory of those who experienced imprisonment and took part in the movements for freedom and democracy during the Portuguese dictatorship of 1926-1974), the Police (as part of the Museum of the Police project), *Memória das Avenidas* and *Memória de São Domingos de Benfica*. The last two projects have a distinct approach, focusing on local urban history, following particular engaging and collaborative research strategies, which we hereby intend to present.



Photo 2. The current aspect of the platform *Memória para Todos*, featuring the several projects.

The last two projects mentioned above result from the aim at providing new strategies of research, following the experiences undertaken with the History students during *L3 — Lisboa Laboratório Comum de Aprendizagem (L3 — Lisbon Learning Lab)*. The course

of this project provided for an interesting local network, both with citizens and institutions, to whom the project revealed the importance of collaborative working processes regarding history, memory and heritage. Regarding the urban context of two distinct

geographic areas in Lisbon, these two initiatives also focus on the transformations in the forms of living, the fast disappearance of several residential buildings and rural-like areas which shaped the 20th century Lisbon.

From the established synergies, an informal work group (*Os Maiores das Avenidas*) was brought together, gathering researchers, local citizens and institutions with the goal of building a shared strategy to identify, study and show the local heritage of *Avenidas Novas* Urban Unit.

Since November 2015, the group meets every two weeks, to discuss and decide the course of the project.⁵

While most of the institutions have a social mission, new challenges regarding ageing within contemporary society, heritage, history and memory were factors of attraction to the institutions' representatives. The work developed following oral history methodologies and the biographical method, together with the idea of working closely with the academia appeared to be a fertile ground to test new strategies towards the elders' isolation, integration and well-being.

The Avenidas Novas — general context

Now undoubtedly considered part of central Lisbon, the *Avenidas Novas* parish is a recently created administrative area which gathers the former *São Sebastião da Pedreira* (1601) and *Nossa Senhora de Fátima* (1959) parishes into one larger unit (Law no. 56/2012, 8th November, updated in 2015, Art.º 6º and 7º). This fusion integrates the 2012 administrative reorganizing plan of Lisbon, following a “modernizing strategy and administrative decentralization, following the principles of universality and equity within the settings of the relationships between the municipality and its districts” (Law no. 56/2012, 8th November, updated in 2015, Art.º 1º), which redistributed the 24 districts in a larger territorial area and assigning new competencies to town councils.

The toponym *Avenidas Novas* refers to the 19th century improvement plan designed for Lisbon by Frederico Ressano Garcia, which according to Raquel Henriques da Silva intended to connect the city centre to its rural areas which provided the capital with its

main daily supplies” (which included animals, vegetables and dairy, but also domestic workers), under the influence of the 19th century progressist urbanism (mostly the Parisian and Barcelona cases).

By recalling the non-official toponym of *Avenidas Novas*, so-called mainly after 1920 “referring to a specific area of the city, a way of living and given urban and architectural plan together with a certain social status” (Henriques da Silva 1985), into an official one, the existing social differences and built contrasts are somehow diluted in a homogeneous and abstract image of the urban area. While the original plan was applied and gave way to significant transformations of the city outskirts, this did not happen without promoting inevitable inequalities and uncertainties, which may still be observed both in the edified and human urban fabric. This area is particularly interesting regarding individual and collective memory, since a large part of the inhabitants who first occupied its buildings may still recall some of the major transformations on the territory, while the academic community who inhabit the area may also take part in a responsible research and cultural engagement strategies.

Although having the status of a cosmopolitan area, where the rural paths gave way to the boulevard like avenues and the fields and crops to the higher blocks of rented buildings and bourgeois houses, these realities kept being concomitant and simultaneous until after the 1960s.

This particular context is very vivid in its inhabitants' memories which, in its multiplicity and heterogeneity constitute a valuable asset both to the understanding of the complex transformations performed during the last 70 years in Lisbon, while also promoting dynamics of knowledge transference, empowerment and self-awareness, together with a sense of belonging and identity.

The group *Os Maiores das Avenidas*

The group *Os Maiores das Avenidas* has been working in the identification, registering and organization of documents/objects and oral testimonies regarding the life and changes in the urban area of *Avenidas Novas*. This group has an informal structure, gathering

⁵ During this period the project *O Nosso Km²*, set by Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian together with other institutions had been working in an integrated governance dynamic in order to identify local social challenges

and designing shared solutions towards them. It was also from this network of institutions that most of the participants took part in the project from the start.

researchers from the Institute of Contemporary History,⁶ members from a Citizens association dedicated to the protection of pensioners and retired people (APRe!)⁷ and the committee of residents from Bairro Azul⁸ (one of the areas which is part of the urban unit), undergraduate and master students,⁹ members from local institutions¹⁰ and individual citizens,¹¹ under the coordination and scientific supervising of Professor Maria Fernanda Rollo.

Bringing together citizens in the age of retirement and students in the group's activities has been one of our main goals, promoting a ground for sharing skills and knowledge, valuing one's individualities and valuable expertise.

The citizens and members of local institutions have been crucial in the identification and communication with the elder inhabitants in the territory, providing multiple and diverse perspectives through the voices of those whom, for various motifs, lived, worked or crossed the area throughout their lives.

From the beginning, and together with the members of the group, two major categories of content were designed: *Spaces* and *Lives*. This allowed us to include not only the most obvious symbolic spaces in the territory, but also creating new perspectives by registering the life stories of those identified by the group.

The developed approach has been enabling the construction of a repository where we have been collecting and keeping record of this rich but otherwise invisible heritage.

The project collaborators are responsible for identifying and contacting the potential narrators, whose life courses or occupations might contribute for a better understanding of the urban area's ways of living and transformations. After their identification and first contacts, a brief summary is drafted collecting essential information (place of birth and origin, family relations and filiation, local connections) which might help in adapting the approach and script design regarding specific historical issues and themes. All the

participants are free to suggest the place of their choice for the registering of the interview. Given the advanced age of most of the participants, their homes are often the preferred place to record. This is facilitated by the fact that the first contact is made by one of the members of the working group, who they already know and trust. Frequently and preferably the person responsible for this first contact is present during the interview and desirably takes part in it.

Video and audio registering of the interview is made, depending on the informants' intention and permission, keeping a record of the oral content but also the physical aspects of communication. During editing we give preference to information on the territory, omitting, when possible, personal and intimate details, in order to protect the narrators' privacy and integrity.

Despite that every narrator and participant is required to formally consent with a permission of content sharing, all the provided information is validated by the collaborators before being published in the digital platform.

The documents and objects are always scanned or photographed and made available together with a detailed description of its characteristics — date and context of production, individuals to whom it may be connected and other details which may be important for its reading and heritagization.

Within the digital platform, the reader has access to the edited interview (audio or video), a summary of the interview with essential details on the informants' biographical information and any other content provided.

The relation with the digital platform and methods of public engagement also represents a means to foster digital skill's acquisition and awareness by the elder participants in the project, one of our central challenges.

⁶ Inês Castaño, Inês Queiroz, Sofia Diniz, Filipe Silva, Luisa Seixas and Nuno Lima.

⁷ Anabela Paixão, Fernanda Carvajal and José Bom.

⁸ Ana Alves de Sousa and Rui Barbosa.

⁹ Joana Flor, Gustavo Pedroso, Ana Campos, Rui Martins (until 2017) and Ana Francisca Bernardo (until 2017), and most recently Catarina Santos and David Alves.

¹⁰ Fernando Pinto (SCML).

¹¹ David Duarte and Heloísa Cid.

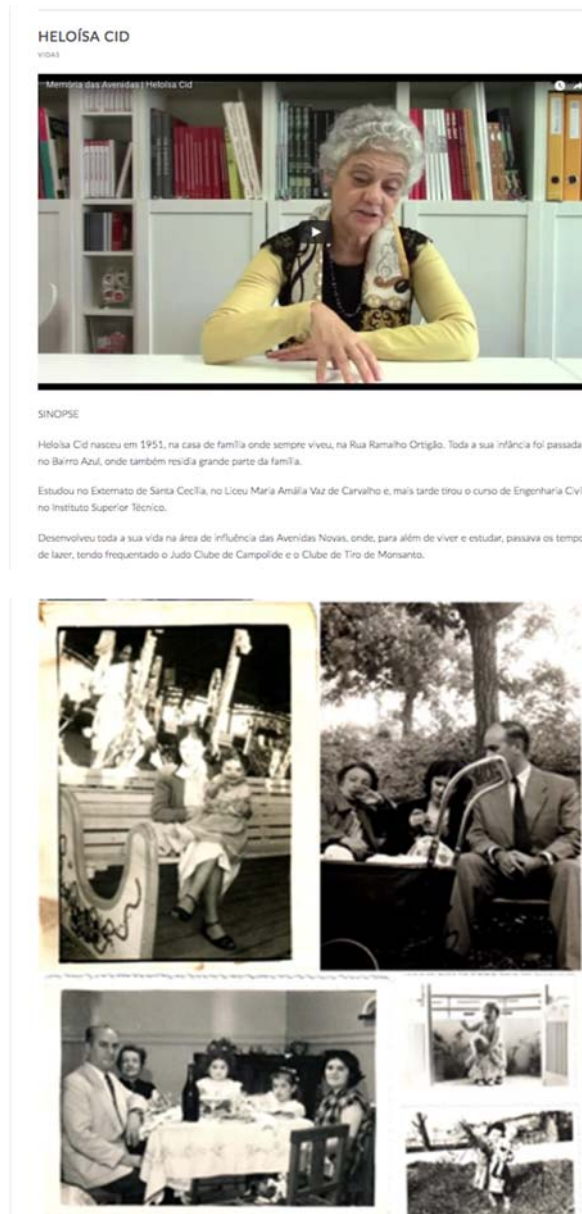


Photo 3. Aspect of one of the platform’s entries, featuring the interview, summary and some of the photographs of Heloísa Cid’s contribution.

Historical conscience is thus nurtured based on individual stories, valuing the singularities of one within the landscape of the many. The living memory, even if related to past events or conveyed through generations, represents a changing heritage only tangible when histories are told, pictures, documents and objects are shown and its historical context and value is interpreted and shared. Within the project we are committed to engage the local community in identifying, recording, showing and studying the historical processes through which people have been

relating to this urban space, through individual and social Memory.

Individual collections and archives with a familiar, individual, institutional or local character allow the relations between present and future to be fostered

and may work as important foundations to justice and reconciliation,¹² authenticity and identity.¹³

The relevance of these aspects may also be proven by the influence caused in the project *24 Estórias. Entre Vizinhos* (22nd November 2018 to 8th January 2019), developed by the artist Ana João Romana to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, following the example of engagement established within the project *Memória das Avenidas*.

Dissemination and sharing are one of our main goals. This is being achieved through a shared strategy between the individuals and local institutions which take this mission as their own, disseminating it in their closest circles, but also by larger initiatives such as exhibitions and seminars open to the general public.

The first exhibition, which took place from September 2016 to February 2017, allowed us to put together the

whole collection of contributions, showing photographs and excerpts from the interviews, centred in the individuals and their life courses related to the urban area.

It also allowed us to understand the importance of showing this content, as this brought together the different collaborators, who acknowledged the significance of their contributions as central to this narrative.

The venue, at Picoas Plaza commercial area, was granted by the local council, after requested by one of the main partners and collaborators in the project. The group meetings took place there while the exhibition was on display.



Photo 4. View of the installation at Picoas Plaza. September 2016.

A series of lectures and visits were organized, focusing particular aspects of local history, oral history and the biographical methods. A total of 6 public events were programmed, with 2 guided tours (to the Calouste Gulbenkian Gardens, with the Landscape Architect Teresa Bettencourt da Camara and the Bullfight Arena

of Campo Pequeno), 3 lectures (one dedicated to Christmas celebrations by local commerce during the 1910s, by Daniel Alves, a session dedicated to a musical tradition in a rural area close to Lisbon, by José Barbieri and Filomena Sousa (IM e IELT- NOVA FCSH) and one focusing the urban transformations and the

¹² BASTIAN, Jeannette and ALEXANDER, Ben (eds), *Community archives: the shaping of memory*, Londres: Facet publishing, 2009, p.x

¹³ BENNETT, Julia "Narrating family histories: Negotiating identity and belonging through tropes of nostalgia and authenticity" in *Current Sociology* 1–17, Sage Publications, 2015

biographical methods by Professor Luís Baptista and Professor Joan Pujadas), 1 film and debate session, with the presentation of the project TRAÇA, developed by the Municipal Council Archive, which gathers and archives family and private films. For this particular

session, the team responsible for the project chose excerpts of films made in the urban area of Avenidas Novas between the 1950s and 1970s.



Photos 5 and 6. Visit to the Calouste Gulbenkian Garden with the Architect Teresa Bettencourt da Camara



Photo 7. Session *Cities in Transition* with Professor Luís Baptista and Professor Joan Pujadas



Photo 8. Session *Christmas in the Avenidas Novas* with the researcher Daniel Alves

The second exhibition, in February 2017, was made by occasion of the refurbishment works of Avenida da República, one of the main arterial roads of Avenidas Novas, in which we have put together excerpts of the interviews related to the public space and daily life aspects and photographs showing images from the contributors and others from the municipal archive, taking as a work-base the collected content and

aspects mentioned by the elder inhabitants of Avenidas Novas.

This particular action has actively brought the collected content to the public space, reinforcing the connections between the tangible architectural and urban landscape and the habits and intangible aspects of living, showing the fast mutations performed in the

city. This may have a strong impact in new generations who may take conscience of this historical background and take it into the present, towards a future that takes the past in consideration.

Final Considerations:

Entering its fourth year, *Memória das Avenidas* is keeping its regular activities, intensifying its relations and spam of action to different areas. Since 2017 we have joined the Santa Casa da Misericórdia's Day Center — placed just next to NOVA FCSH — in its pilot programme to change the assistance provided to the elder who resort on this kind of spaces. As mentioned earlier, this has been one of the central issues to be addressed by the institutional partners who acknowledge the project's potential to provide new answers in this field. While the well-being of their public represents a central challenge, culture, identity and community perform a very important role in providing a solid ground for it.

Enduring in a close relation with the centre's team, we have been working with a group of around seven people (aged 75 to 96) in recording their memories of the Avenidas Novas and designing walking tours around places of their choice, in which they perform the leading role, sharing their stories and experiences of the city with the public.

After a first year of experience and besides its general success with the public who took part in the guided tours, it is important to mention how this dynamics has changed the way the group relates to the local heritage — by giving it more relevance and acknowledging a broader sense of its historical importance — but also valuing each other's experiences and memories in ways they did not thought of before.

This experience is being developed in 2018-2019, throughout 11 months and will incorporate the georeferentiation of the places mentioned by the group and the introduction to digital skills and methods of research.

It is also important to mention the work developed with the local secondary school — Marquesa de Alorna. Together with the Library's coordinator and a group of 4 students (aged 12 and 13), we have been scanning, organizing and archiving the school's photographic collection. Since the school celebrates its 60th anniversary in the academic year of 2018-19, we have also been jointly working on an exhibition gathering a selection of these documents, oral testimonies of former students, teachers and employees.

By opening the scope of collaboration with several partners and institutions, *Memória das Avenidas* has been actively claiming the public's attention to the tangible and intangible heritage of Avenidas Novas in its multiple forms. One of the most central aspects of this process, mentioned earlier but reinforced by the latest exposed, is the importance of raising awareness of different generations to a wider perspective on heritage. By enabling these relations, we are also providing new grounds for questioning and strengthening identity, the sense of community and consequently the shape and form of public and private spaces.



Photos 9 and 10. View of the installation at Av. Duque de Ávila, February 2017 and Heloísa Cid with her family in front of a picture of her as a child that featured the exhibition.

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