

PHOTOGRAPHY, CRITICAL THINKING AND PEDAGOGY:

THINKING THE CITY WITH

GABRIELE BASILICO

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Abstract

Photography has long been used as a privileged tool to represent and engage with cities. It is not just a tool of documentation, but also a medium through which critical perspectives on space are developed. In the act of photographing, the author acts as both inhabitant and interpreter of the urban space. The photographic medium enables a reflective and analytical form of inquiry.

Photography can become a tool to challenge dominant narratives and propose new counter-narratives. For instance, by representing areas and spaces that are usually overlooked or nearly invisible. When combined with pedagogical practices, photography can provide a valuable foundation for developing critical thinking methodologies that encourage citizens to question how cities are represented, structured, and experienced.

This article aims to explore the potential of urban photography as a tool for urban inquiry and critical pedagogy through the intersections between photography, critical thinking, and education. The article uses a well-known photographic project to examine its potential as a critical pedagogical exercise capable of questioning conventional narratives and fostering urban exploration using Gabriele Basilico's *Lisboa 2006* as an example.

The article is structured into three main sections: i) a theoretical introduction to the concepts and frameworks examined; ii) an analysis of the case study, considering both Basilico's methodology and the experimental testing of the photovoice approach; and iii) a discussion outlining a possible pedagogical exercise developed from the study and the analysis of the selected photographic project. The article employs several qualitative methodologies, including the mapping and localisation of the photographs contained in the book, as well as a test using the photovoice method. Finally, the article contributes insights to the design of pedagogical assignments, in which students can engage in mapping, photographing, editing and critically analysing photographs of the city, based on Basilico's work and its analysis.

Keywords: Photography; Critical Pedagogy; Lisbon; Gabriele Basilico; Civic pedagogy; Critical thinking

Introduction

Photography has long been used to engage with the city. It is not only a tool for documentation, but also a medium through which critical perspectives on space are formed. By positioning the author as both an inhabitant and interpreter of the urban environment, photography enables a reflective and analytical form of inquiry. When combined with pedagogy concepts, photography can provide a valuable foundation for developing critical thinking methodologies that encourage learners to question how cities are represented, structured and experienced.

In the case of Lisbon during the *Estado Novo* regime, photography functioned as a tool to promote ideological agendas, documenting significant public works and monuments. Following the 25th April Revolution, there was a notable shift towards the portrayal of spaces that had previously been marginalised or overlooked, a trend that was also observed on the international stage. Gabriele Basilico, an Italian photographer renowned for his work on marginal spaces, also captured *Lisbon: Gabriele Basilico: Lisboa 2006 or Arquitetura em Portugal* (2006).

This paper analyses the intersection between photography, critical thinking, and pedagogy, exploring how visual practices can be used as tools for urban research through Gabriele Basilico's work.

Assuming that photography constitutes an aesthetic gesture and a research methodology, it discusses how photographic assignments can be designed as pedagogical tools to stimulate critical engagement with the city. This approach, in line with critical pedagogical methods, sees learners as active contributors to knowledge production, empowering them to challenge previously-established narratives.

The article will focus on Gabriele Basilico's photobook *Lisboa 2006*, which foregrounds the mistreated spaces of Lisbon.

Far from conventional portrayals of the city, Basilico's photographs draw attention to underrated and underrepresented urban spaces, thereby challenging the dominant visual narratives of Lisbon's identity.

Finally, the article will contribute with insights to inform a pedagogical assignment, in which students can engage in mapping, photographing, editing, and critically analysing photographs of the city based on Basilico's work and its analysis. This exercise demonstrates how photography can function not only as a documentation or a research method, but also as a means of fostering critical thinking skills.

Background

Photography and representation

Since the 19th century, photographic representation has played a central role in the construction of urban imaginaries. Far from being a neutral capture of reality, photography selects, frames, and interprets space, and is therefore a device that contributes to the production of discourses about the city. As Sontag (1977) points out, to photograph is to attribute importance.

The city represented in photography is not a faithful mirror of reality, but a visual construction crossed by social, cultural, and ideological values. Cadava (1997) proposes thinking of photography as the language of history, where each image contains traces of an interrupted time. In this sense, photography not only documents but actively participates in the symbolic inscription of space. This critical dimension is emphasised by Sekula (1982) and Catrica (2023). In this context, authors such as Burgin (1982) and Tagg (1982) stress the importance of analysing photography in the context of the systems that produce, legitimise, and disseminate it. Eco (1982) adds a semiotic dimension to this reading, revealing that even the most 'realistic' images are subject to cultural codes of interpretation.

Benjamin (1982), in *The author as producer*, published in 1932, introduces the idea that the author's true commitment lies in his position within the production process. This idea applies directly to photography as a critical and editorial practice, especially when articulated in media such as books, where editing and publishing contribute to its construction.

From the second half of the 20th century onwards, several factors, such as major mobility infrastructures, large-scale urban development plans, the conversion of rural land into low-density urban districts, and the establishment of extensive collective-use facilities, led to the rapid and widespread urbanisation of the territory and the emergence of new types of urban spaces.

These include a wide range of open, ambiguous, and indeterminate urban spaces, sometimes suspended and in waiting, where new technologies and urbanity intermingle with rural elements, or where abandonment has allowed spontaneous vegetation to flourish. These spaces are not entirely planned or anticipated. Rather, they emerge as byproducts of other projects, plans, and actions. Their unprecedented character generates intriguing intersections. Although such spaces are present in many European cities, they are not always easy to recognise.

These dynamics are particularly relevant in a city like Lisbon, which has historically maintained a strong connection to its rural dimension. Until the early 20th century, and to some extent even today, Lisbon preserved large agricultural plots within and around its urban fabric. The extensive urbanisation has generated a variety of new urban spaces. These often remain nearly invisible: in-between spaces, spaces in waiting, abandoned, marginal, residual, or interstitial. In fact, the very concept of marginality is rather vague and context-dependent, shaped by various perspectives. For instance, the notion of the interstitial refers specifically to spaces situated between centres of greater importance, visibility, or power (Brighenti, 2013).

The first to take an interest in these spaces were not architects or urban planners, but artists, photographers, and filmmakers (de Solà-Morales, 1995). From the post-war period onward, many photographers and directors began to shift their focus away from central urban areas and iconic buildings, and instead toward anonymous, deserted, abandoned, marginal, and ambiguous urban environments, demonstrating an increasing interest in the periphery.

Recognising and taking an interest in these spaces requires a critical, attentive, and inquisitive gaze toward urban novelties. This has enabled the construction of critical and alternative narratives of the contemporary city through the representation of these 'other' spaces, which are otherwise underrepresented or even nearly invisible (Luz, 2016).

As noted by Careri (2006), various artists – from the Surrealists to the Situationists – have organised walks and urban *dérives* to explore and probe the peripheries and emerging spaces of transformation within cities.

Finally, these spaces have also attracted the attention of photographers such as Manolo Laguillo and others, who were deeply fascinated by these new peripheral spaces (de Solà-Morales, 1995).

In this context, Gabriele Basilico's body of work must be considered. As Tommasini (2024) observes, Basilico's books function not only as visual archives but as visual essays on urban morphology, documenting the processes of transformation that reveal the tension between memory and future, ruin and project. His work not only documents but also critically interprets the urban structure, challenging dominant forms of visibility and emphasising elements that often remain outside the scope of institutional scrutiny.

This approach is also evident in the work of Gabriele Basilico, whose photographic research consistently pursued the

representation and discovery of 'other' spaces (Sinno, 2018), those removed from touristic, glossy, and souvenir-like portrayals of the city (Maggi, 2019; Shinkle, 2019). From *Ritratti di Fabbriche* (Basilico, 1981) to *Bord de Mer* (Basilico, 1990), produced during the DATAR project (1985), and through his exploration of industrial landscapes, infrastructural sites, and hidden or peripheral spaces, Basilico's work culminated in the publication of *Spaces in Between* (Maggia & Basilico, 2022). This volume, in many ways, brought coherence to the photographs taken at different moments in his career and for diverse projects, all united by a shared interest in overlooked and transitional urban spaces.

These kinds of spaces, like other informal areas, can play an important role in citizens' education and development, as they are essential conditions for human interaction and social growth (Belo, 2024).

Photography as methodology

Photography as a method can be not only a way of documenting, representing, and describing space, but also a tool to facilitate inquiry in arts-based practice or research. The possibilities of using image as either the object or method of scientific research is connected to the conceptualisation of visual studies (Elkins, 2013). This field primarily focuses on the idea of image as a social and anthropological product. Furthermore, significant advancements have been made in the realm of art-based research, notably through the utilisation of visual methodologies for inquiry and qualitative research (Leavy, 2020).

In any process that engages in ideation or iterative thinking, questions can be expanded through the introduction of art-based methods of inquiry, such as photography (Morillas & Genet, 2017). Considering urban studies, the expansion of the architectural gaze allows for the exploration of marginal research topics. The idea of the artist as a producer of knowledge leads to a kind of autobiographical research,

where the experience of research can contribute to the production of knowledge (Finley & Knowles, 1995). At the same time, photography as an object of inquiry can also enable dialogic processes that extend beyond individual practice into collaborative forms of discussion, such as photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997).

The idea of the photographer as an active agent of knowledge production has to do with an understanding of the whole practice of making photographs as a process. Not just the technical decisions that the use of a camera entails, but every other way in which the photographer engages with the object being depicted (Shusterman, 2012). The spatiality inherent in architecture and the city is a difficulty when generating photographic representations (Mattens, 2011), but it is also a method of inquiry in the sense that it allows for the creation of syntheses of some of the dimensions that make up space. Through its creative process, photography becomes a critical practice in the sense that it can draw attention to a particular detail of reality in order to critique it and promote change (Bate, 2020). As Basilico's work demonstrates, photography has the potential to engage with one's own experience, to build critical discourse and promote dialogue: "You feel part of, in so much as is possible, the physical and historical structures of some cities, and with other cities you look for that something which reveals the cities' secret, and when you find this something, it becomes a means, a tool, which instigates dialogue, which allows for photography" (Basilico, 2011, p. 19).

Critical pedagogy

The concept of critical pedagogy, strongly developed through the work of Paulo Freire (1970), positions learners as active agents of education, and as subjects who act critically upon the world to transform it, much like photography may function as a methodology to build a critical reading of reality and propose to change it through its representation. This proposition or representation can be the first step towards change.

Giroux (2010) compares pedagogy to a performative act, in the sense that it is not something that can be turned into a method because it happens around ambivalence, disrupting borders to work around political, historical, and economical struggles of reality.

Biesta (2012) describes public pedagogy as the education of 'plurality and difference', rather than the instruction of the public by educators on how to act in the public sphere. In this sense, individuals need the liberty to exist in order to maintain togetherness. Therefore, public pedagogy must exist within democratic processes or in close proximity to the practice of publicness. Concerning this idea of practice, Lawy and Biesta (2006) add that practicing citizenship, rather than achieving it through education, could encourage the inclusion of young people in these processes and present learning opportunities. Caris and Cowell (2016) situate practices that take place in non-institutional settings as experiments that highlight local issues of interest to participants. In this sense, situated art demonstrates a commitment to publicness and the development of public spaces, which could lead to new opportunities in institutional art education by breaking down the barriers between institutional and non-institutional education, and encouraging the practice of citizenship in education itself. Blending critical pedagogy, public pedagogy, and place-based learning brings education into the context of urban education, informed by place, cultural, individual and collective experience (Gruenewald, 2003; McFarlane, 2011).

In the framework of critical pedagogy, public pedagogy, and urban education, civic pedagogy emerges as a concept that encompasses processes located both within and outside the borders of institutional education. They have the potential to critically position participants to challenge the process of education from within (Antaki et al., 2024).

Photography understood both as method and representation can enact critical thinking as a form of pedagogy. The

intersection of these concepts shifts the focus to non-dominant narratives and overlooked spaces. In this way, art-based inquiry can be mobilised to produce situated forms of knowledge related to urban marginality. Photovoice further reinforces this approach by introducing dialogic processes that extend individual observation into collective interpretation, contributing to forms of civic pedagogy.

Methodology

This article aims to propose and discuss the insights to inform the design of possible pedagogical exercises in urban analysis, connecting two different methods: an individual approach of mapping based on photographs (derived from Basilico's way of photographic practice) and photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997), to be applied as a collective method.

The article is structured into three parts: (i) a brief theoretical introduction to the applied concepts; (ii) an analysis and testing of the framework on the selected case study; and (iii) a discussion of the results and the potential application of the framework as a pedagogical exercise.

From a methodological perspective, this article consists of the qualitative analysis of a selected case study, with the aim of discussing a possible framework for a methodological exercise that can be tested and replicated. The analysis proposes and tests a framework employing two different methods: (i) photography as a method of mapping and as a tool for urban analysis, derived from the spatial and contextual analysis of the photographic book; and (ii) a test of the photographic analysis derived from the photovoice method, which will need to be applied and tested in the future.

The book *Lisboa 2006* of Gabriele Basilico was selected as the case study due to the methodological and urban analytical approach of its author (also evident in other works), the circumscription of the photographed spaces (which enabled

a spatial analysis, represented in the map), and the authors' familiarity with the urban context of Lisbon.

Among the photographs of the book, three were selected. This selection was preceded by a process of localisation and systematisation of the photographs contained in the book, which were geolocated, numbered, and organised into a dataset (Figure 1). Subsequently, three clusters were created, based on the three different areas identified. For each cluster, one photograph was chosen as an example to test elements of the photovoice methodology as applied to this context.

Drawing from photovoice, this step intends to explore how the photographic or artistic work can also hold the potential for broadening inquiry through discussion and collective knowledge production. By connecting *Lisboa 2006* with photovoice, this study speculates on how photographs, taken without any pedagogical intent, might hold the potential for broadening the development of critical analysis and revealing non-dominant narratives about the urban space. To test this framework, three images, selected from *Lisboa 2006* (Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4), are described and analysed. Rather than formulate definitive claims, the focus of this description should be to identify and discuss relations in the urban context depicted as a way to demonstrate the productive capacity of photographic analysis.

Finally, the findings will be mobilised to reflect on possible contributions towards the design of art-based pedagogical assignments. This will be done by reflecting on each stage of Basilico's methodology and their intersection with the adaptation of photovoice and experimental photography analysis to extrapolate guidelines for pedagogical assignment design, allowing for critically engagement with the urban environment.

Gabriele Basilico, Lisboa 2006: A case study

Mapping through the photographic gaze

In the photographic work of Gabriele Basilico, the relationship between photography and the space it represents becomes of central importance. A clear example is his participation in the DATAR project (1985) and the publication *Bord de Mer*, where photography serves as a research tool for the understanding and representation of a specific territory. In fact, in works such as *Ritratti di Fabbriche* and *Italia: Sezioni del paesaggio Italiano* (Basilico & Boeri, 1997), the photographic project is supported by maps. Cartographic representation, which has historically aspired to provide a faithful and objective depiction of reality, reveals intentions, power relations, and worldviews (Casati 2024). When photographs are paired with maps, these two forms of representation complement each other. In *Milano Ritratti di Fabbriche*, the map allows viewers to locate the photographs and the factories, updating our collective image of the city of Milan. Conversely, in *Italia: Sezioni del paesaggio italiano*, the process is reversed: specific sections of the Italian landscape are selected through maps and aerial photographs, which are then explored and analysed through photographic means.

Photography is a commonly used tool for urban investigation and research, particularly as a documentary or inquiry tool (Langmann & Pick, 2018). Although the same happens in cartography, photography is also an important means for counter cartography. In counter mapping, it has the capacity to highlight what to look at. By highlighting the non-dominant, it can draw on critical markers to counter dominant discourses (Portal, 2024). Even without the use of the formal map, 'photographic cartography' offers the possibility of analysing conflict within contested public space (Ulmer, 2016).

Photography makes it possible to investigate and represent the qualities, three-dimensionality, and appearance of places, while cartography offers an insight into their scale,

extent, and emergent urban form. These two modes of representation work in tandem, each enriching the other. Yet, as previously described, photography can act autonomously as a form of mapping. It acts as a collection of fragments that portray a narrative or speculative journey, something that is also evident in the work of Basilico. In this sense, this study chose *Lisboa 2006* as a methodological case study. This collection of photographs suggests possible trajectories through Lisbon.

As a methodological contribution to this study, this critical journey plays an important role, since it aligns with the literature that explores walking as either an aesthetic practice (Careri, 2006) or as a method of inquiry (McFarlane, 2011), through which a photographer participant can build on his gaze of the urban environment. In this sense, this practice could be placed into a framework of *bildung* (Dobson, 2006), since photography can merge experience and research to act as an individual knowledge generation practice. Photography as urban investigation aligns with experiential learning models that privilege embodied knowledge and self-directed inquiry, positioning the act of photographing not merely as documentation but as a process of self-formation through sustained, reflective engagement with the urban environment.

In the book *Basilico, Lisboa 2006*, the introductory text by Maddalena d'Alfonso, in conjunction with Basilico's own selection and visual construction of the images, situates this work within the field of photography as a documentary and reflective practice. The text begins by problematising the complexity of reading the city, conceived as a structure without hierarchy. D'Alfonso asserts that Basilico constructs a "mental map of contemporary Lisbon" (2006) through visual fragments that challenge established representations of the city.

The publication of this book (Basilico, 2006) was undertaken as a constituent element of the exhibition entitled *The*

Gulbenkian Headquarters and Museum. Architecture of the 60's, with the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation emerging as the final object of the photographic series. The photographic series is not an isolated architectural study, but rather a reflection on the Foundation's place within the urban and symbolic fabric of the city. The Foundation is located at a point of convergence of different urban routes: those arriving from the south must cross the Tagus and pass beneath the arches of the Águas Livres Aqueduct, while those coming from the city centre cross *Praça do Comércio*, *Baixa Pombalina* (downtown), *Rossio*, and ascend *Avenida da Liberdade* and *Parque Eduardo VII*. This geography of access reinforces the Foundation's symbolic status within the city, situated between distinct urban grids.

Basilico's methodology is based on an acute awareness of the fragment, which is not to be regarded as a partial perspective of a absent whole, but rather as a condenser of meaning. This procedural approach is of particular pertinence in the context of urban marginality studies, as it elucidates the interplay between the central and peripheral, the visible and the invisible. Consequently, Basilico's images are less worried with the physical characteristics of the Gulbenkian Foundation and more with its symbolic and sensory inscription within the urban landscape. Rather than seeking the iconic, Basilico's gaze is directed towards what eludes the conventional eye.

In this sense, *Lisboa 2006* confirms Basilico's approach as that of an author who rejects the commonplace, opting instead to reveal the city as one in perpetual reconfiguration. The work functions as a visual and critical meditation on the contemporary city – Lisbon in particular – foregrounding its fragmentary, marginal, and transforming nature.

Photovoice as collective inquire

Although Basilico's referenced practice was developed independently and outside a pedagogical setting, this study combines it with the principles of photovoice to speculate on how

collective reflection can generate new forms of knowledge, reflection, dialogue, and critical analysis. While Basilico's work begins as an individual exercise, its potential extends beyond the act of photographing to the interpretive processes it invites. In an educational context, this approach explores photographic engagement as a tool for understanding the city. Rather than aiming for aesthetic mastery, the objective would be to generate value through interpretation and the discussion of non-dominant urban narratives.

Developed by Wang and Burris (1997), photovoice is a participatory method designed to enable participants to record their realities and concerns, thereby fostering critical dialogue and collective knowledge production. Here, photography is not merely understood as a representational tool, but as a process of discovery and expression that encourages more sensitive and reflective engagement with the urban environment.

Photovoice is traditionally applied in group settings and relies on collective discussion to activate reflection. Sharing and viewing images in a group setting creates a space where participants can articulate their observations and recognise shared or divergent experiences. The analytical process typically involves three interrelated stages (Wang & Burris, 1997): *selecting* (choosing photographs that resonate with one's concerns), *contextualising* (describing what is seen and perceived within the image) and *codifying* (identifying emerging issues, patterns or narratives).

Working with Basilico's photographs as if they were entries in a collective visual archive allows the study to speculate on how the artistic documentation of the city could be repurposed as educational material. The potential knowledge of pedagogy does not end with the photographer's solitary practice process but continues through the results. For this reason, it's necessary to explore the "interplay between the artist, the 'artwork' and the audience" (Caris & Cowell, 2016, p. 467). Therefore, the analytical component of the study uses this framework

to take a qualitative approach and explore how non-dominant narratives can be read through Basilico's images when they are treated as prompts for critical interpretation. This will be done through a collective analysis between the authors of this article around the selected photographs. To speculate on what kind of knowledge could be generated by the participants, discussing the photographs as both viewers and learners: "viewers are not students, and students are not viewers, although their respective relationships to the artist and teacher have a certain dynamic overlap" (Bishop, 2012, p. 241).

To operationalise this, three photographs from Gabriele Basilico's *Lisboa 2006* were selected, following a preliminary mapping of all images in the book. This revealed three clusters associated with major mobility infrastructures in Lisbon: *Alcântara*, *Eixo Norte-Sul* and *Parque das Nações*. The images were chosen for their potentiality to reveal forms of spatial disconnection or discontinuity within the urban fabric, whether through physical voids, infrastructural estrangement or ambiguous thresholds between centrality and neglect.

The cluster map visually synthesises the spatial distribution of the three photographic sites analysed – *Alcântara*, *Eixo Norte-Sul*, and *Parque das Nações*. From the pinned locations: A, B, C, D, E, F and G correspond to photographs from the studied book selected for the cluster mapping; 1, 2 and 3, are photographs from the studied book selected for the cluster mapping that were also selected for individual analysis; finally, there is a pin-point for Calouste Gulbenkian's foundation location (#).

Each image was examined through compositional interpretation (Rose, 2001), paying attention to its visual structure and spatial organisation, including perspective, the distribution of architectural, vegetal, and infrastructural elements, and the degree of human presence or absence. In parallel, a discourse analysis lens (Rose, 2001) was applied to consider how these compositional choices construct implicit narratives of the city. Rather than aiming for definitive interpretations, the

analyses were deliberately presented as set of speculative prompts, offering observations that could gain further relevance through group discussion, in line with the collective approach of photovoice.

The results were then brought into dialogue through a comparative reading, identifying patterns not only within each isolated image but also their interplay as well. This method was chosen to demonstrate Basílico's critical examination of the city through relational contrast – tracing, as Rose suggests, how meaning is often generated “in contrast to, or in relation” (2001, p. 87). In this sense, comparative synthesis operates

as a rehearsal of the kind of collective learning that a photo-voice-based pedagogical exercise could foster, translating individual interpretation into a shared, reflective understanding of the urban environment.

The image provides an elevated, slightly oblique view of Avenida 24 de julho in Alcântara, capturing a dense infrastructural landscape centred on mobility and circulation. The perspective, likely taken from the viaduct between *Avenida 24 de Julho* and *Avenida Infante Santo*, limits the visual field to the avenue itself, thereby reinforcing its linearity and dominance within the composition.

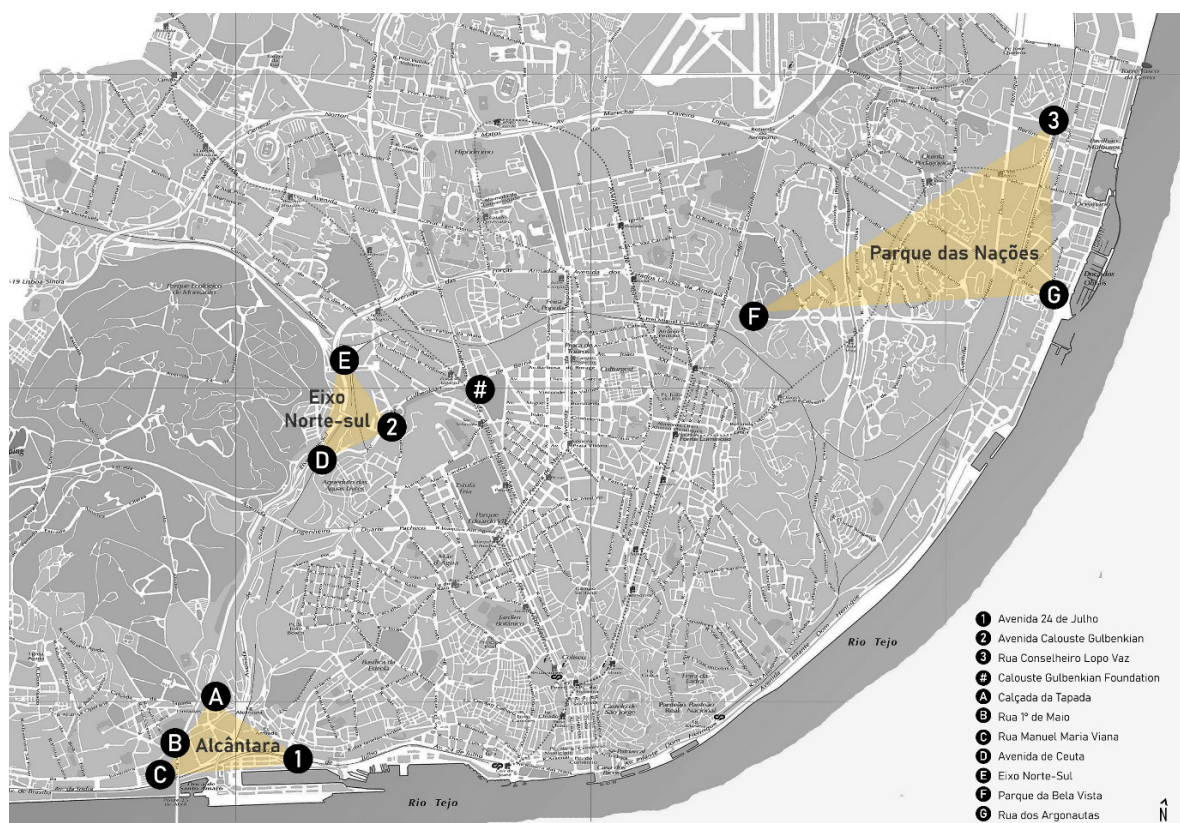


Figure 1 The cluster map made from the location of 10 photographs (1, 2, 3, A, B, C, D, E, F, G) from *Gabriele Basílico: Lisboa 2006*. Image by the authors.

The photograph (figure 2) reveals the intersection of various infrastructural systems, including the road network and railway line, which is part of Lisbon's port infrastructure (*Gare Marítima da Rocha do Conde de Óbidos*), and the public transport bus system, represented by two bus stops. These elements collectively define the space as a key node within the city's mobility network.

The composition is dominated by vehicular movement, evident through the number of cars and trails captured. In

contrast, the presence of pedestrians is minimal and concentrated around the bus stops, suggesting a spatial hierarchy in which circulation takes precedence over permanence. The office building designed by Raul Rodrigues Lima stands out as a significant vertical element in this horizontal landscape.

The image illustrates how the railway line creates a clear divide between the urban and the waterfront areas. Despite the historical relevance of this area as a connective node, reinforced by the construction of *Avenida 24 de julho* in 1940



Figure 2 Avenida 24 de Julho. Gabriele Basilico in *Gabriele Basilico: Lisboa 2006*. © Gabriele Basilico/Archivio Gabriele Basilico.

to improve accessibility, the photograph emphasises its function as a space of transit rather than permanence. The absence of the waterfront from the frame emphasises the disconnection in a site that was designed for mobility and connection.

This layered and fragmented view of the urban landscape surrounding *Eixo Norte-Sul* (figure 3) was taken from *Avenida Calouste Gulbenkian*, oriented northwards towards the

highway. The composition is structured through a succession of overlapping visual planes, revealing the intricate interplay of topography, buildings, urban voids, and overlapping projects, plans, and historical periods.

In the foreground, the rear façade of an elevated residential building is shown from a high vantage point, likely enabled by the natural topography. It is characterised by dense spontaneous vegetation growing along the slope. In the middle



Figure 3 Avenida Calouste Gulbenkian. Gabriele Basilico in *Gabriele Basilico: Lisboa 2006*. © Gabriele Basilico/Archivio Gabriele Basilico.

ground, another inclined plane is depicted starting from a lower street lined with older buildings, rising towards higher residential blocks. In the background, high-rise buildings and skyscrapers rise along the *Eixo Norte-Sul*, defining a more contemporary skyline beyond which other buildings are silhouetted against a hillside. The image depicts both the built form and emptiness. These urban voids, unbuilt and fragmented, result from the superimposition or juxtaposition of planning interventions and the constraints imposed by the terrain. The presence of spontaneous vegetation in these areas highlights their marginal status alongside the formal, vertical style of the surrounding architecture. The *Eixo Norte-Sul* is one of Lisbon's main infrastructural axes and it plays a crucial role in connecting the city to the national motorway network. Completed in 2007 after fifteen years of construction (Lusa, 2007), it serves as both a gateway to Lisbon and is a structuring element at a metropolitan scale. However, rather than focusing on the infrastructure itself, the photograph reveals the spatial consequences of its construction: an urban fabric that is discontinuous and where different temporalities and planning logics coexist.

The image (figure 4) provides a comprehensive overview of the Oriente Station in *Parque das Nações*, highlighting the complexity of the spatial organisation of this intermodal terminal. The elevated, slightly oblique perspective facilitates the clear interpretation of the overlapping infrastructural layers that structure the urban space: in the lower level, a road is visible; in the middle, a series of covered platforms that form the bus terminal; and in the upper level, there is the railway station, characterised by its highly expressive metallic canopy.

The composition is characterised by a meticulous articulation between the built elements and the road layout, guiding the viewer's gaze through the image via the vanishing lines generated by the canopy and the roads. The station's structural elements, particularly the rhythmic roof, assert themselves as the primary visual components. The presence of

vegetation is minimal, restricted to the lower left corner of the image, where a slope covered with spontaneous greenery serves as a subtle introduction to the depth of the composition. This strategic use of form and space invites a reading of the image in terms of oppositional and boundary relationships, offering insights into the interplay between the formalised urban space and its marginal interstices, as well as the tension between the constructed and the spontaneous.

It is noteworthy that the area has undergone a substantial transformation in the intervening years since the photograph was taken almost two decades ago. Despite the existence of a detailed master plan – *Plano de Urbanização da Zona de Intervenção da Expo 98* – that defined the infrastructure, public spaces, and buildings to be developed, criticism emerged regarding its failure to effectively connect with the surrounding areas (Medeiros *et al.*, 2021).

It is evident that the image serves not only as a form of documentation, but also as an attempt to construct a discourse on urban space in the city. This discourse positions *Parque das Nações* as a symbolic site of post-industrial urban regeneration and is the affirmation of a new metropolitan centrality following the 1998 World Exposition in Lisbon.

Discussion: a pedagogical proposal

Exploring Basilico's process leads to the generation of situated forms of knowledge. This potential can be considered in the design of pedagogical exercises. Although Basilico's practice was not intended with any pedagogical purpose, its study can highlight key stages which, when articulated alongside the existing literature, can inform experimentation within the fields of art education, urban studies, and civic pedagogies.

When considering the work portrayed in *Lisboa 2006* as a case study, the question of critical thinking emerges from the interaction between the photographer and the city. When



Figure 4 Rua Conselheiro Lopo Vaz. Gabriele Basilico in *Gabriele Basilico: Lisboa 2006*. © Gabriele Basilico/Archivio Gabriele Basilico.

photographing the city, the author must engage in a continuous selection process, deciding what to portray, from the places in the city to smaller details. The array of chosen photographs is directly related to the photographer's experience while roaming the city, establishing a parallel between his journey and the visual narrative. This narrative is based on relations of either parallelism or opposition, which can highlight concerns, contradictions, marginality, and emergent phenomena that could enrich the discourse of urban studies. This

process involves organising fragments to investigate possible meanings and adds an investigative dimension to the aesthetic gesture, thereby constituting a form of art-based research. An author that engages in this process can take an active role in generating knowledge through critical thinking, thus matching the objectives of critical pedagogy. Learning occurs through experience motivated by direct contact with the urban environment in four stages: walking, noticing, photographing, and selecting. The individuality of this process

is important because it enables participants to develop their own critical perspective of the city. Questioning is a common feature of all four stages.

The first consideration when designing the pedagogical assignments is to encourage personal exploration. Participants should use photography to explore the city, or part of it, and produce an unlimited number of photographs. Being free to roam a designated area of the city allows students to engage in an informal mapping process that will also inform their work. Although assignments should be open-ended, it is also possible to pose research questions that focus their attention on themes related to the urban territory, such as conflict or publicness, in line with the context of the assignment.

Complementarily, a photovoice-based framework adds a layer of collective meaning-making to a possible pedagogical exercise. As a participatory method, photovoice enables participants to engage in dialogic processes around images, fostering collective reflection and interpretation. In this study, its discussion-based dimension was adapted as an analytical tool to test how photographic material can harness critical thinking through shared interpretation. A collective analysis of Basilico's photographs and a retrospective look at the mapping process demonstrates the potential for expanding the inquiry into the city and enriching it through collective experience. Infrastructural contradictions, the fragmentary nature of the city, and symbolic tensions in public spaces can all contribute to speculative knowledge. While this may not align with the original intent of the photographs, it can enrich the dialogue and discourse on urban territories, thus promoting a civic understanding of the urban environment.

A comparative reading of the three photographs reveals how different infrastructural conditions produce forms of spatial fragmentation and urban discontinuity, expressed through analysed tensions. Considered together, these images demonstrate how photographic analysis can move beyond

description to interrogate spatial hierarchies, temporal overlaps, and the visibility of marginal conditions within the city. This comparative reading exemplifies how critical thinking can be developed through the identification of tensions, patterns, and contradictions across different urban contexts. In a pedagogical framework, such an approach can be mobilised to engage participants in analytical observation, interpretation, and the collective construction of knowledge about the urban environment.

The second consideration is to include the stages of the group discussion and dialogue about the work produced. Participants should present their work to their peers and explain their perspective, while also listening to alternative interpretations. Collaborative interpretation will occur through recognising common ground and noting divergences. In this way, the participants can enact civic participation and negotiation. This will enable a new type of critical interpretative knowledge to be developed, based on how space is perceived, framed, and narrated.

In an educational context, the contributions of this study align with civic pedagogy by fostering critical thinking and emancipating participants in their agency towards public spaces and the urban environment through a practice that cultivates democratic negotiation. Engaging with photography as a means of personal exploration and collective dialogue could lead to assignments that combine urban education, critical thinking, and civic engagement.

As a final consideration, any attempt to translate these insights into pedagogical assignments, as proposed in this study, should consider three design principles. First, walking should be fostered as a practice of aesthetic and critical enquiry. Secondly, there should be an embracing of the fragment as a possibility for visual storytelling. Thirdly, there is a need to consider the individual and collective dimensions of learning when designing the stages of the assignment.

Conclusion

As a methodological approach, Gabriele Basilico adopts a physical and critical stance within the urban environment. His work comprises a series of photographs of the city, taken with the intention of constructing a reading of the urban space. The article has examined how Gabriele Basilico's Lisbon 2006 can be mobilised as a methodological case study to reflect on the possibilities of intersecting photography, critical thinking, and pedagogy. Basilico's shows how artistic practice can generate forms of individually and collectively-generated knowledge. By connecting this process with photovoice, this research speculate on these methods can be reframed as a pedagogical exercise capable of fostering critical thinking, speculative inquiry, and civic engagement. In this way, the findings suggest that this framework offers guidelines for the designing of pedagogical exercises in which participants may engage in visual exploration, question dominant discourses, and engage in collective mean-making and democratic participation.

Despite the focus on photography, the implications of the study may extend to a broader field of visual representation and interpretation, including cinema. This methodological approach has the capacity to challenge the dominant narratives and foreground other spaces through the highlighting of marginality and fragmentation. A main contribution of this study is the demonstration of the potential of exploring critical thinking in the design of pedagogical methodologies. This is as well as the possibilities of placing inquiry, public discourse, experimentality and civic participation at the heart of education practice.

This study demonstrates that the systematic analysis of the work and the creative process of authors such as Basilico constitutes a fundamental methodological reference for the innovative design of experimental practices in art and urban studies education. The in-depth study of authorial practices

is able to inform the development of pedagogical devices in critical thinking and urban literacy.

However, the relevance of this research extends beyond the institutional educational environment. The methodologies discussed here prove equally pertinent for professionals and agents who intervene in urban space, such as architects, urban planners and anyone involved in decision-making. By stimulating forms of critical observation, spatial interrogation and paying attention to non-dominant narratives, these practices can enrich the processes of identification, planning and territorial intervention, contributing to a more nuanced and democratic understanding of the contemporary city. Also, the articulation between these tools offers instruments to strengthen the agency of citizens in public space. By positioning the participants as the producers of knowledge in the territory they inhabit, these practices foster the development of critical competencies and an awareness of the processes that structure the urban experience, aligning with the objectives of civic pedagogies and the practice of citizenship.

Looking to the future, the considerations outlined in this study should be tested and refined through pedagogical experimentation to be effectively translated into learning assignments. The process phases identified, walking, noticing, photographing and selecting, remain deliberately open, requiring adaptation to foster critical thinking in various educational contexts. This flexibility is essential to ensure that pedagogical applications remain responsive to the specificities of different urban environments and participant groups while retaining their potential to transform urban spaces through critical thinking.

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