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Sub-theme 61: Viewing the Unseen Organization in Practice

Visible Expressions of Urban Invisibility: Exploring Pixação

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Abstract

The article discusses the way pixação[i] (graffiti style of São Paulo city), carried out by young people from marginalized and invisible areas of the city, produces visible senses encrypted against the walls and buildings. The proposal is structured around the following research question: "How do pixadores make senses in the marginalized context of pixação?" Other secondary research questions include: (i) How pixação is socially organized in São Paulo? (ii) Which senses does pixação mean for pixadores? A set of 10 interviews with pixadores (those who do pixação), on-site visits for 8-month period, and media content analysis were carried out, in order to understand its dynamics. The data was analysed through thematic analysis, added field notes and iconographic data as complements of the observations. The data shows that pixação is a clustered communication between the socially "invisible" (individuals or groups suppressed in social scopes), which occurs visibly in urban public areas. In this sense, pixação acts as an urban reference creation device, and, although the activity has different meanings for the pixadores, the pixação in São Paulo has its own mechanisms of organization, communication and memory.

Key words: Pixação; sensemaking; marginalized contexts; invisibility; visibility.

1. Introduction

Pixação in Brazil is classified as environmental crime (Law No. 9605/98, article 65) and city's authorities, as well as private real estate owners make enormous efforts to combat pixação through harsh policing, legally prosecuting writers and large-scale grey painting (Larruscahim & Schweizer, 2015). The pixadores know that the activity is a crime, but the idea

is precisely to attack, to confront. Despite the character of affront, this paper seeks to study pixação as a social practice that has a greater meaning than just fouling the city and damaging private property.

The paper starts from the assumption that pixação is a technology of social subversion that makes the senses of marginalized and “invisible” areas of a city come to be expressed and visible in the city. Pixação works as a different way of appropriation and experiencing of the same urban space. In this sense, streets and buildings become part of a large organization, the city being a vertical agent of letters. There is a system of social communication, a movement of sharing and clustering of meanings at the same time, a coded language against the white of the walls and buildings of the city. In this sense, pixação in São Paulo acts as a closed communication. It is from pixação to pixação. It does not communicate with society, but uses the city as a channel of communication. The city becomes a great social media for the pixadores (those who of the pixação), that use the pixação as a way of city "written" appropriation.

In this sense, this paper introduces considerations and reflections from interviews conducted in the pixação course in São Paulo city, Brazil. The paper doesn't seek to reveal what is the practice of pixação in São Paulo, but only presents a limited view based on my perception. So, based on the sensemaking approach, I aim to study pixação as a space created for communication of socially marginalized groups. I don't have the intention of doing an aesthetic or normative discussion, if pixação is art or not, or if it is a legal/illegal activity, but the aim of this research is to understand the dynamic of this activity, its language and its interaction with the senses of the city, based on sensemaking perspective. In this sense, I understand that the sensemaking approach for this study can bring new insights from a micro level of analysis, and can contribute to the observation and theorization of the pixação phenomenon.

The proposal is structured around the following research question: “How do pixadores make senses in the marginalized context of pixação. To do so, I used an inductive method, which allows us to perceive the theory from the recognition of themes that emerge from the data (Eisenhardt, 1989). Data collection and field recognition efforts were carried out in order to perceive emerging themes, which was done through a qualitative study based on thematic analysis. Besides researching 12 (twelve) documentaries, reports, and public documents, I conducted 10 (ten) in depth individual interviews with pixadores.

This article is organized as follows: in the first section, I briefly discuss sensemaking perspective, so that relevant points for the empirical research of this article are highlighted. I introduce the notion of marginalized context, as a theoretical basis for conducting research, and here the metaphor of pixação is then elaborated as an urban dynamic between visibility and invisibility. In the next section, the methodology and approach used for this study are described. In the following item, I present the data analysis, and finally conclusions are briefly presented.

2. Sensemaking in marginalized contexts

Sensemaking is a notion built on psychology and drawn to management by Karl E. Weick in 1969 in his work "The Social Psychology of Organization", seen as a central organizing activity. For the author, sensemaking is a process in which events that occur in organizations come to have meaning, to have existence, seeking for answers to questions like "*What does this event means?*", "*What is the story here*?", and "*Now what should I do?*".

Sensemaking's concept derives from its own nature, that is, the process of generating meaning - of making sense of something nameless, unexpected, or confusing (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). To do so, sensemaking envolves conversational and narrative processes through which people create and maintain an intersubjective world (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, p. 524). In this sense, sensemaking researchers look for what is constructed, and how and why this process of construction occurs.

Gephart, Topal, & Zhang (2010, p. 284-285) point out that *"Sensemaking is an ongoing process that creates an intersubjective sense of shared meaning through conversation and non-verbal behaviour in face to face settings where people seek to produce, negotiate, and sustain a shared sense of meaning".* This process of meanings construction gives sense to organizational life and identity, sharing experiences, gossip, old stories, and maintain symbolic behaviors (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia et al., 1994). Such shared understandings consist of human actors' interaction through observation, conversation, interpretation, and comprehension, labelling, categorizing, and creating plausible retrospectively stories about unknown, unexpected or confused events, in order to 'rationalize' what people are doing (Boje, 1991; Weick, 2005).

In the literature review performed using the Web of Knowledge platform, I didn't find significant papers articulating the notions of sensemaking and pixação. Because it is a specific

phenomenon in the city of São Paulo, I repeat the search, articulating the concepts of sensemaking, graffiti and spray painting (terms used in the literature). The results weren't satisfactory in the management, and the discussion focuses more on journals in public policy, sociology, geography and urbanism areas.

In sociology, Eyck (2014) analyses the social frameworks of graffiti in the United States in 2012. In his work, the author shows that the framing of graffiti as a crime in the public arena (and association with other crimes) is justified by the civic order of theory of broken windows. At the same time, the author shows that graffiti has been gaining recognition in the art field, such as Bansky. Hopkinson (2015), in the context of marketing in the United Kingdom, presents graffiti as an organizational metaphor, since the analysis of this activity allows a greater interaction with the world. For Hopkinson (2015), in combining practice with ideology, graffiti brings the possibility of groping the unlimited sensemaking in marketing, in that sense, graffiti analysis allows greater control in management.

Thompson, Offler, Hirsch, Every, Thomas and Dawson (2012) seek to list the psychosocial constraints for graffiti in the railway sector. The authors show that there is a need for more ethnographic studies of activity in different cultural and social contexts, so it will be possible to develop metric for monitoring and effective sustainable interventions. In this sense, in a discussion in urbanism area, Larruscahim and Schweizer (2015) carried out an ethnographic study on pixação in São Paulo city. Addressing the evolution of the city's hygienist policies, the authors advocate pixação as a struggle for social visibility and explicitness of difference. Also in the urban setting, Haworth, Bruce and Iveson (2013) study space-time trends of graffiti in Sydney, based on GPS-based mappings. The authors were able to analyse patterns of graffiti occurrence, raising the need for studies on the underlying causes of the activity, the behavioural environment associated with the graffiti culture and the social processes that involve diversity in graffiti's occurrence.

This paper is an effort in this sense, starting from the assumption that pixação is a social technology of subversion that makes that senses of the marginalized and "invisible" areas of a city come to be expressed and visible in the city. In Brazil, the word *marginal* has a pejorative sense of criminality, but in this paper I use the term in its sociological sense, as the social process of becoming or being made marginal (Mullaby, 2007). While sensemaking literature has focused on "extreme" (see Weick, 1993; 1990; 1988) as opposed to ordinary, habitual contexts, much less is known about "social marginalized" contexts. By this, I mean *context*

where people perform their activities knowing that it will not have any incidence, effects for the organization.

Context plays a fundamental role in sensemaking studies, and in the literature of Organizational Studies, theoretical and empirical studies have been exploring sensemaking in a variety of organizational contexts, between actors at different levels of the organization, like environmental jolts (Gephart, 1984; 1993; 2007; Meyer, 1982; Milliken, 1990); organizational crises (Brown & Jones, 2000; Lapierre & Moro, 2002; Weick, 1988, 1993; Wicks, 2001); crises in progress (Christianson et al., 2009; Weick, 1988); threats to organizational and individual identities (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001; Pratt et al., 2006; Petriglieri, 2011; Ravasi & Schulz 2006; Wainwright & Turner, 2004); planned organizational change initiatives (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991); organizacional descentralization (Luscher & Lewis, 2008; Vaara, 2003; Yu, Engleman & Van de Ven, 2005), among others.

Despite the number of studies addressing sensemaking in a variety of situations, the surveys have a strong social and linguistic orientation (Chia, 2000; Maitlis, 2005), feeling a lack of a deepening in the context itself. The neglected, or at least lack of explicit account, of the role of social and historical contexts in sensemaking is one of the persistent criticisms of Weick's work (Weber & Glynn, 2006). Contexts create contingencies, constraints, unique and particular causes, so it is necessary to take into account the embeddedness of sensemaking in social space and time (Weber & Glynn, 2006, p.1639). So, in the following topics I will present considerations about pixação dynamics in São Paulo city, intending to contribute to the notion of sensemaking in marginalized contexts.

3. Methodology and data analysis

The epistemological positioning that leads the adopted methodological course understands that the interpretation of the reality is constructed by people's experiences in the quotidian of the space studied. In this sense, I start from a socialist constructionist position, understanding that reality is constructed by the senses given by the subjects. So, from a methodology of qualitative approach, I seek from a set of interviews to investigate the dynamics of pixação in São Paulo city and how pixadores make sense of their activities in the city.

The unit of analysis is the speech of pixadores. I don't seek here the "real" history of sensemaking processes in pixação, or to draw a profile of pixador and pixação, once is impossible to reach a totality from the reality, but the goal is to understand how occur the visible construction of senses in marginalized contexts - urban invisibility, taking the city architecture as a major media. In this sense, I follow the social constructionist perspective for which processes of meanings construction, besides being a social product held together, is something embodied and intersubjective being achieved through a radically reflexive practice.

For a period of eight months (August 2016 to March 2017), I conducted a set of 10 interviews, and I watched 12 documentaries[ii] about the theme so I could learn more about the environment and the language, whose data were also analysed. These documentaries facilitated my insertion in the field, once promoted an initial insertion in the lexicon of the activity. In addition, the documentaries and reports were important as I became aware of important episodes of everyday life, such as the murder of two pixadores by military police, and the murder of a dentist by a group of pixadores. I felt that knowing about facts like these made the interviewees more relaxed and talkative.

I also accompanied *in loco* a group of graffiti artists who have already been pixadores, trying to understand: the activity operation, the interaction with the materials (spray, latex paint and roller), and how the meetings are booked and conducted (an example in the following figure 4). During the interviews, I became aware of groups on Facebook and they allowed me to join two groups to follow up the discussions.

The first contact with the field occurred in July 2015. In this first contact, some interviewees gave me other contacts that were used in 2016. The respondents used nicknames, but, after some time of conversation, they gave me their true names. During the research, there was a documentary on Globo TV, in September 2016, that exposed some pixadores's names, and this made some groups fight. In addition, the police became more offensive, which made the site dangerous. The pixadores themselves told us not to go there, and I met each other in other places, using again nicknames. To all interviewed I asked them to give a formal approval to participate in this research. In addition to the set of interviews I also used other sources of secondary data, such as notes on field diaries with personal thoughts, reactions and emotions (Spradley, 1980), and public documents.

As pointed by Miles (1979), this research design generated an overwhelming quantity

of unstructured data, bringing important difficulties in data treatment and analysis. So, in order to make sense of qualitative data, researches must use *"a mix of creativity and systematic searching, a blend of inspiration and diligent detection"* (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Connor, 2003, p. 1999). This process is more necessary in qualitative researches, as the case of this study, in which it is often proposed, is not generalizable and is specific to a particular context, participants and time.

In this sense, I will use thematic analysis as an interpretive method of data, because it is a flexible method that can be used with different epistemological assumptions (positivist, post-positivist, constructionist) and suits different types of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, the thematic analysis doesn't presuppose a theoretical frame of reference, thus being only a method of analysis.

And, as pointed by Spencer et al. (2003), thematic analysis differs from coding in four ways: a) the possibility of identifying themes that emerge from the data, and no other types of codes; b) coding usually refers to the process of capturing dimensions that have already been refined (Spencer, 2003); c) this process doesn't have strict protocols; d) coding is usually associated with a realist ontology.



Figure 1: Pixadores in activity.

Source: Fieldwork, 2016.

Thus, to perform the thematic analysis, I followed the analytical framework proposed by Spencer et al. (2003) because it provides a comprehensive and clear representation of the

different levels of analysis of an iterative thematic analysis and its non-linear nature.

4. Results

4.1 The context of pixação in São Paulo city

The first pixação on walls and buildings observed in São Paulo dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, as a form of protest to the military dictatorship of the time, for example the famous phrase “down with the dictatorship”. Only in the 80's did the use of spray in urban space gain popularity among the young (mostly periphery) in São Paulo city. Thus, from the 80's, influenced by the runic-inspired typography of heavy metal and rock album covers of the time (such as Iron Maiden, Slayer, AC / DC, Judas Priest and Metallica), young Paulistas developed a unique style of urban expressiveness, the pixação (spelling with the letter x).

In the city of São Paulo we can see different styles of urban expression, such as tagging, bombing (more rounded and stylized letters, working shade and colours), graffiti (images containing a lot of colour and style), and grapixo (Gitahy, 1999), an intermediate point between graffiti and pixo (use of more than one colour, but in the straight style, with padding). The pixação (the verb "pixar" in Portuguese means to cover with tar or pitch), in turn, differs from these styles, since it is characterized by straight lines, confused, with sharp edges, and mostly black (spray or ink latex).



Figure 2: Style of pixação in São Paulo.

Source: Townes (2017).

The style is due to the dynamic of the pixação, because they work with spontaneity and ephemerality. The pixador knows that the activity is illegal and that the draw it can be erased quickly, so the time devoted to pixo is different from the time dedicated to graffiti. Graffiti is a socially legitimated activity (since 2011 when the federal law nº 12.408/2011 removed the verb "grafitar" from the environmental crimes list), and in graffiti the artist can spend much more time on his activity. The dedication of more time and the social legitimacy make graffiti more understood and accepted by society. Therefore, despite also being a form of expressiveness from peripheral areas, pixação is considered a criminal activity. In this sense, pixação is on the border between art/not art and urban expressiviness/crime.



Figure 3: Graffiti in São Paulo by Eduardo Kobra.

Fonte: Kobra (2017).

Currently, pixação is classified as environmental crime (Law No. 9605/98, article 65), with a penalty of detention from 3 months to 1 year, plus a fine. *"Which one is an environmental crime: the pixo or the wall itself?"* (Interviewee 9, January 2017). When entering buildings or houses, the pixador can also respond by trespassing. It is a crime of small offensive potential, applying to offering community services in most cases. Despite the existence of the law, it doesn't inhibit the activity because pixadores question why pixação is a crime.

> First: who determined on our planet what is art and what is not? The second point is to break this paradigm of needing to follow everything they say you to do. As everyone knows our country is dominated by

> many corrupt and very dishonest people, and these same people say that pixação is a crime ... Pixar is crime in a country where stealing is art, that famous phrase. I'm just paiting, nothing close to the problems that no one sees (Interviewee 5, January, 2017).

The law inefficiency makes even more tenuous and obscure the contact between pixadores and police men, who use personal actions to try to prevent or remedy pixação, as in the case of young interviewee, narrating about how it was his contact with the police during pixação:

> With the police? The police officers are (bad word) bad. I already drank spray. Police officers already painted me everywhere, even by spraying on people's faces. Two years ago (at age 19), I was on a *point* and it was '*dirty'* (slang for policial presence). I ran, but the police officer had a gun and I was '*framed'* (slang for arrested), right? The police officer said that he had quarrelled with the woman and he was nervous, so he did *Russian roulette* with me. He took the revolver, rolled the 'drum' (gun's part), and shot me. Nothing. Then he said to me to run while he continued shooting me, until the bullet came out. That day I was sure I was going to die (Interviewee 3, September 2016).
>
> I remember the police saying to me: *"You had luck we got you on the avenue, otherwise we'd knead you with my fist",* and then they left us for two hours in the trunk with the car closed. We three in that tiny space! (Interviewee 8, March 2017).
>
> I've *circled* (slang for being arrested) a couple of times until we took an ink shower. They made me bite the roll and then my brother bit it too. With a gun in my head, the police officer shouted: *"- I'll give shot you right in your face, motherfucker"* (Interviewee 6, February 2017).

The pixação goes against the concept of private property, and is fought by cleaning public policies since 80s, when Jânio Quadros was mayor of São Paulo in 1985 and wanted to clean the city. Recently, the new mayor, João Dória, declared war against the pixadores. Dressed in municipal clothing, the Mayor and his advisors covered pixações and graffiti with grey paint in January of 2017 (Fiel notes), and launched the program "*Cidade Linda"* (beautiful

city), which aims to erase and curb the pixação. In contrast, Doria intends to create a specific area only for graffiti, due to its tourist potential. The idea is the establishment of a "grafitódromo", in the mould of Wynwood Walls (Miami neighbourhood for graffiti activity).



Figure 4: Protest pixação of an interviewee after Mayor Doria's actions (Canada and Kof).

Source: Fieldwork, 2017.

The new mayor's actions of urban cleaning and graffiti sponsorship have spurred moods and discussions about pixação. In the days after the campaign announcement and the beginning of the grey painting, the pixadores responded with more protest pixações on walls, monuments, and in the areas previously painted in grey by the City Hall (Figure 4).

4.2 How pixação is socially organized in São Paulo

i. Initiation - injecting pixação in the vein

Most respondents began in the activity in their teens, ages 11 to 12, and the initial interest was for drawings or graffiti (Field notes). The entrance into the activity occurs intentionally or unintentionally, and it's not a complicated process. *"Need to take any test, no. You just need to take a notebook, go there and ask for sheets with signatures, and that's it. You're involved"* (Interviewee 7, March 2017). Young people enter by friends influence, looking for insertion in groups, or as a way of "periphery sport", in which there is a release of adrenaline, ending of boredom and social recognition. *"What are we going to do in periphery?*

There's nothing here for us, no. Then I went there and painted the wall of the school. I started this way" (Interviewee 10, January 2017).

Who is new to the activity is called *Bafo* (slang for beginner) and, over time and with the amount of pixações, the individual is gaining prominence and building his name in pixação scenario. The process of growth within pixação can take years and involves humility and respect. *"It is important that beginners have humility and respect for their elders"* (Interviewee 5, January 2017). The insertion in the activity occurs mainly in *points* (pixadores encounters).

> From 2000 to 2002 we started to scribble. I began to make *Gi nuguette* scratching the cement so it was in the vein. (...) Then I started to paste (slang for going to the place) in the points (slang for pixadores encounters) in the city centre. I have a folder that has a lot of pixações. Then I did a pause in 2006, and I came back in 2013. It was wet (slang for a complicated situation), so, from 2015 to now, I'm only doing graffiti (Interviewee 8, March 2017).

> I started to paint with 12 years old in the 5th grade. There was a child in my room that his uncle was a pixador, so this kid called me to go with him, I didn't even know what pixação was but when I started to scratch the notebook, the school, the bus ... I felt free, you know? (Interviewee 7, March 2017).

The exit from the activity happens mainly when they initiate a serious relationship or when they constitute family, and it is usual the pixadores begin to do graffiti to make money.

ii. Modalities

According to the respondents, the activity differentiates in terms of risk: pixação in the ground and free climbing pixação. There is no hierarchy between these types, although there is an admiration for those who make pixação at the top of buildings. *"Unfortunately there is usually a status. Whoever gets up high is more important. Not all, but many magnify themselves for it."* (Interviewee 8, March 2017).

Regarding the status in pixação, respondents reported that, although there is a greater admiration for those who paint at the top, being a good pixador is having many pixos around the city, since you are seen in many places, especially in the centre of the city. *"What*

differentiates status in pixação is the amount of tags in the city, and, in the tallest, important, and most noteworthy places and buildings" (Interviewee 2, September 2016).

Ground pixação is the modality in which pixadores are in the ground. It may occurs in street high walls, grids, gates, floor, windows, and all available surfaces, reaching a medium height. To achieve greater height, they make a human ladder called "jeguerê" with up to four individuals, one on the other's shoulders (Field diares).

For free climbing modality, they use more rolls of paint to give greater visibility. To reach the top of the buildings, the pixadores climb the buildings by TV antennas, pipes, and windows without any protection (Field diaries). Climbing is the most dangerous modality and in which there are more deaths among pixadores. *"Many died pixando. There are boys who are born climbers. It's not worth the risk for me. Going up there brings highlight, I admire"* (Interviewee 8, March 2016). In this modality, we can see a smoky effect on the pixação due to the distance of the spray can from the wall (Field diares).

iii. Organizational structure: crews (brands), hierarchy and leadership

The pixação in São Paulo has its own dynamics, objectives, motivations and organizational structure. Because it is a marginal activity, it is difficult to define precisely the number of pixadores in the city, but it is estimated that there are about 10 thousand pixadores that cross the city, from walls, façades, skyscrapers and monuments. The difficulty in defining the exact number of pixadores is also due to the categorization of who practices the activity. There are pixadores that only do pixação, pixadores that also do graffiti (Vieira, 2015), as well as occasional pixadores that use pixação as a mechanism to relieve stress. Besides this, some lawyers and other professionals do pixação as well, while trying to maintain a respectable life (Wainer & Oliveira 2009v).

Pixadores can work alone, but, to integrate in the pixação society, they are united in groups called brands (crews). It is estimated that there are more than one hundred brands (collectives) in the city (Field diaries). But what would be a brand in the pixação context? A brand would be a symbol used by a group or groups of pixadores that have an identification among them. The idea is that all pixadores in the group can perfectly reproduce the brand's logo, so it makes the brand gaining notoriety and respect among others brands and groups.

The pixo reproduction is taught by the *head* of the brand, but also by the more experienced pixadores, involving a hierarchical social recognition. *"I put several kids in*

pixação. This is also a pleasure to me, to have instructed several kids who are adults today, but who always remember me. Whether or not we were a mirror to the kids" (Interviewee 8, March 2017).

In this sense, the brand's insertion works like a label that values the pixo (Pereira, 2012). This is an interesting point about pixação in São Paulo, once the name *brand* itself and its use of valorisation reminds us the logic of trademarks. The brand's logic is also applied to the choice of pixo, because if there are homonymous pixo, the choice will be based on priority (the oldest pixo), because it will have more legitimacy among the groups (Field diaries).

The brands are formed by affinities between the individuals, as well as affinity between groups, as can be seen in the following passage:

> Brand is *um barato* (slang for something very good), that has to be with the people you know well. "*Tudo chegado*" (slang for involving the closest ones). The brands that grow very much end up losing control. I'd rather do smaller ones, though I know the brothers (friends). And the brothers know me. There are people who ask on the internet if they can get into the brand, these ideas don´t make sense. In general, they all have the same rules, like not running over anyone (Interviewee 7, March 2017).

According to the interviewees, the new members enter the brands (crews) because they meet with the old members and invite new pixadores, who start to accompany the group in the *rolês* (slang for group tours). It is common, even, that a pixador can be a member of more than one brand "*I do three brands*" (Interviewee 8, March 2017). One interviewee also explained me that the most respected brands are the oldest ones, which appeared around 1980 and are still active today - even if the original members are no longer involved with pixação.

iv. Control mechanisms and conflicts resolution

Pixadores establish friendly relationships among them, for the most part, but there are cases of hostile relationships that can be observed in the walls, when we observe "*run over*" in pixações (one pixador paints over another pixação). To run over other pixação is a serious offense, which can result in fights and even death (Field notes). So, the mechanism of control between the brands occurs by means of friendly conversations to check if the "situation" is solved, by fights between groups, or also the group will run over all the offender's pixos. *"It*

may be in the tallest building in the world, we go up there and run you over" (Interviewee 6, February 2017).

In São Paulo, there was a historic fight between the brands RGS (Os Registrados - The registered ones in the penal code), Os Podrão (The dirty ones) and Os + Im (os mais Imundos) in the 90s that generated many deaths. The fight between the brands ended around 2008 and 2009, but until today, there is a certain rivalry between the brands. When a pixador hits another pixo, this fact can start a fight, so, in these situations, the "head" (the manager) of the brand try to solve the situation. *"Here is like an enterprise. If some shit happens, the director is going to try to fix the situation to avoid more dirt"* (Interviewee 6, February 2017). The head is the brand leader. A person occupies this position through two ways: creating his own brand, or when passed on by another "head". *"I don't want to do this pixo anymore, but I created this one, so I'm going to pass my pixo to someone else. If this one accepts, becomes the head"* (Interviewee 3, September 2016).

4.3 Which senses does pixação mean for pixadores?

i. Belonging, visibility, recognition and sociability

During the research, I noticed that pixação functions as a mechanism of belonging, in which young people from peripheric areas feel recognized and belonged to a group. *"The maluco (slang for the word someone) has never seen you in life, but he know that you tagged there. Then you're recognized like this"* (Interviewee 8, March 2017). Pixação works then as a mechanism of recognition in the same social space in which there is no recognition at all. There is a visibility of the social "invisible" at that moment for a specific language game, as we can see in the following excerpt:

> I'm in the middle of a 'playboy-filled' (slang for medium class man) city. I'm having coffee in the same bakery with them, and my name is on the wall over there for everyone see. In this moment, I'm more important than everyone else, but nobody knows (Interviewee 2, September 2016).

The social network proves to be the most important element. Most of the pixadores are men, young (predominantly aged between 13 and 25 years old), poor and residents of the

peripheric neighborhoods of São Paulo. Through pixação, they circulate through different spaces of the city, exploring it and establishing relations with other young people.

> It's very crazy when you're on the peak (chosen place to paint), and then you start to *exchange an idea* (slang for talk) with another brother and look at the city in another way. It is very crazy to see São Paulo from above (Interviewee 2, September 2016).

Although some interviewees have the notion that pixação doesn't lead to a social or economic improvement, a question of social recognition stands out and it is from this social recognition that the pixador appropriates the city, since it is difficult for a poor young person from the periphery to stand out in the city otherwise, to feel included in some way.

ii. Adrenaline - pixação as a sport

The question of adrenaline was pointed out as one of the main motivating mechanisms for the activity continuity and many respondents related pixação with a drug, due to the sensation that has when they are painting. The analogy with the drug remains in the language, when using expressions like *"the pixação is in the vein".* Some examples follows:

> Pixo was the worst drug I ever tasted (Interviewee 03, September 2016).
>
> Cocaine is *fichinha* (slang for a very easy thing) compared to pixação (Interviewee 02, August 2016).
>
> The pixo for me means a way to relax; it's a way of escape from this world (Interviewee 08, March 2017).
>
> Because pixação is like a drug, and pixação is quite relative. Each one has its own motivation. After so many years (in the pixação) only one word sums up: addiction. Although each one has his own motivation, every pixador has vanity. Some let this vanity transfers to the personnel side, however anyone knows that pixação is only ink on the wall, pixação is not an ideal. As I said, it is an addiction, but it also feeds my vanity too. Pixador's vanity, well, you know, is the need to being seen for everyone. That's why I said that pixação is not an ideal, because by an ideal you give life, not by pixação (Interviewee 9, January 2017).

iii. Non-conformism and social criticism

All interviewees reported the non-conformism with the *System*, understood as the current capitalist order. The non-conformism is reported from a macro perspective, such as a society in general, but also the non-conformism with the social situation of people living in the communities where they live.

> Ah, first they (the System) abandon us, leave us with no fucking incentive and then want to judge us. We are the consequence of their negligence, and they have to thank God that we are just pixadores. In fact, we'd supposed to be politicians kidnappers, terrorists and everything (Interviewee 8, March 2017).

> Many times I don't even think about myself. I have my house, I live under my mother's roof, I work, I have what to eat, to wear. It's not enough, but is enough for me. I fell angry for people here in my community that have nothing. That's what gives me the strength to climb that eaves and paint the whole building, and paint that pretty "fuck the police" (Interviewee 7, March 2017).

> The system doesn't open doors for these people, quite the opposite. The system wants to fuck and it's not suppose to happen, so we go in with our screams. I want to attack the government and put the scroll in the policemen's face (Interviewee 10, January 2017).

The interviewees know that pixação is a crime but exactly for this reason they want to continue painting as a contravention, a protest against the *System*.

4.4 How do pixadores create senses in the marginalized context of pixação?

Pixação is a communicative activity from pixador to pixador. The activity doesn't have the aim to be understood by society, but only by the subgroup to which they belong. That group knows what is written: *"Pixação has no message, I will not be hypocrite. Society has a clear message when I write a sentence"* (Interviewee 8, March 2017). This is the core of pixação. It's

a sharing of information in the urban space only for those who are participating. In this sense, pixação is only pixação while there is sharing and, at the same time, restriction of senses.

The difficulty of understanding pixação comes from the use of codes and runic-inspired typography. The stylized writing is understandable to the pixadores, as an existence of a specific alphabet. *"I put it there for pixador to see*" (Coelho, Guerra & Caetano, 2011v). The writing is so peculiar that there are cases of pixadores who doesn't know how to read and write Portuguese, but can read the walls and write the language of pixação (Wainer & Oliveira 2009v). This language styling is shared among pixadores, so they can keep up with the pixação in the urban space, and in this process, they leave their tags and build their name in the organization. In this sense, pixação then functions as a "*process through which people interpret themselves and the world around them through the production of meaning*" (Whittle & Mueller, 2012, p.114).

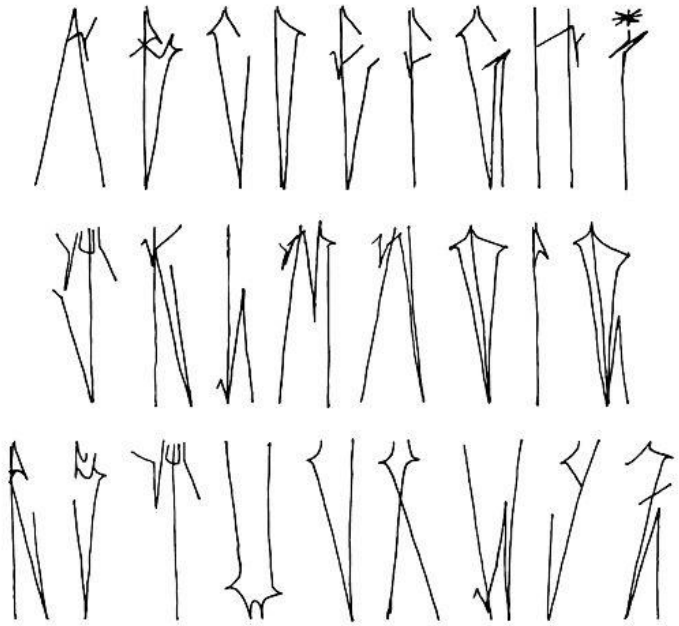


Figure 5: Pixação alphabet graphics.

Source: Henrique (2017).

To read a pixação, we usually start with the first element from left to right, which is the brand's logo, and in the upper right corner, it follows the names of who were in the moment of pixação. In the Figure 6, we can identify the brands *Túmulos* (Tombs), *Os Bicho Vivo* (The Living Beast), *VLCS* (Vidas Loucas - Crazy Lives), followed by the initials of who was at that moment (T .... A ... and Lú). So, I discovered that the pixação's writing usually has a hierarchical

structure. First we look at the brand (which involves groups of pixadores), then the pixo (name of the pixadores's group), and, finally, the name or initials of who did the pixação.



Figure 6: Pixação protest against the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.

Source: Túmulos (2016).

In the figure 6 above, we can still see arrows, which serve to indicate friendship between the brands, but also indicate that the brands did the pixação together. If next to the pixo of a brand has *TDS* (abbreviation for "todos" - all), it means that all people that participate in a specific brand were there at the time of the pixação. It is common to observe in pixações indications pixadores's origin (for example: ZL for "Zona Leste" - East Zone), as well as the date, so they can observe the durability of the pixação in the urban space.

These elements make the other pixadores follow the groups dynamics: who is new in the pixo, if there is formation of unions and alliances, or disagreements between the *grifes*, and can also reflect the dynamics of the communities. The urban path of the pixação allows us to analyse its dynamics, once we can observe the geographical regions of the city that most do pixação, where they do, and the pixos temporality. In this sense, we can observe that pixação functions as an "*ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing*" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409).

4.4.1 Pixação as an urban social media

The main idea is the communication between the pixadores who use the city as a great media. The city is the setting for an urban social network, where the social dynamics between the pixadores and their groups become visible in the walls, but also the dynamics of peripheral neighbourhoods, like an urban Facebook. "*When you "throw" your pixo taller than another one, you show to the other group or pixador that you have managed to go higher. It's not an insult. It's a game"* (Interviewee 10, January 2017). In that sense, when we can read the pixação, we know when there is a fight or one group is helping another, when a pixador is in a fight with one another, when some groups are involved with drugs, or even when has happened a crime.

In terms of communication, I observed that pixação also had another social function: to indicate the occurrence of problems and crimes in peripheral areas. Like a recording mechanism of what happens in not visible areas in the city. Therefore, pixações like these assume a denunciative character, using the visibility of the walls as spaces of the urban invisibility denunciation. "*Pixação for me is the people's voice on the walls*" (Interviewee 9, January 2017).

One of the striking examples is the murder of the couple Manfred and Marisia Richthofen under the command of their daughter Suzane (who was 19 years old), and the brothers Daniel and Cristian Cravinhos, on October 31, 2002. The day after the murder, her house was full of offensive pixações against Suzane, such as "*you killed your parents" and "Jesus cried tears". In June 2006, Suzane was transferred to a building in the Aclimação* neighborhood in São Paulo. After hers transfer, the new building was full os pixações with the phrase "*Suzane murderer*".

Another example of urban demonstration in this sense happened in 2009 in a noble neighbourhood in the south of São Paulo, when the former doctor Roger Abdelmassih was arrested on charges of sexually abusing his patients while under sedative effects. Abdelmassih was sentenced to 278 years in prison for 52 rapes and attempts to abuse 39 women. The day after, the wall of his clinic was painted with "*Abuser*" and "*Justice takes time but doesn't fail*".

Demonstrations in the walls also occur when some crime involves the very environment of pixação. On August 8, 2016, the discussion between the owner of a house that was being painted by a group of pixadores caused the death of the resident, a 39-year-old dentist in São Paulo. Only two suspects have been detained and the rest of the group is hidden.



Figure 7: Pixação against the former doctor.

Source: Túmulos (2016).

> The wall is our record. Had a day in the community that a wall in a dentist's house appeared all tagged. We knew that his son was murdered and they tagged the wall to show that the community knew what has happened and they (the community) were supporting the family. If anyone goes through there, maybe won't understand, but people that live there, they know. And the killer was desperate hidden for this reason (Interviewee 2, September 2016).

The conduct of the criminal group wasn't accepted by the others pixadores and they tagged the dentist's home, showing support from the community of the pixadores to the family. The criminals are still hidden because they fear retaliation from the pixadores themselves. The examples show how pixação shares events and the posture to be followed by other pixadores. In this sense, I understand that pixação acts as a process of sensemaking, functioning as "*an ongoing process that creates an intersubjective sense of shared meaning through conversation and non-verbal behavior in face to face settings where people seek to produce, negotiate, and sustain a shared sense of meaning."* (Gephart, Topal & Zhang, 2010, pp. 284 – 285).

4.4.2 Dynamic of the senses

The sharing and production of meanings in the marginalized context of the pixação occurs in the *points*. The *points* are weekly encounters between pixadores of diverse origins,

ages and brands. The continuity of the activity is preserved through the *points*, once at these gatherings, the *bafos* (newcomers) learn about pixação organization, rules, the typography, they share paper sheets with pixadores's signatures, share stories and meet new people from different areas. Thus, these points function as places of insertion in the activity, maintenance of pixação dynamics and a great social network among pixadores. In this sense, *points* represent spaces of meaning construction from individual to the group, as "*a cycle of individual-level sensemaking to mutual/ social sensemaking to understanding, followed by actions, and then a new cycle beginning with individual-level sensemaking"* (Griffith, 1999, p.473).

The sharing and collecting these sheets of paper act as memory devices. Who has more sheets, ends up being more recognized, has more prestige, what increases the interactivity between them. And, anyone who has signatures from dead pixadores, gets even more prestige, and is able to sell it. Thus, the collection of signatures and the interaction between the pixadores are again motivated.

Pixadores also collect pixos's images from newspapers and magazines. There is a greater visibility and status when they appear on the TV or newspaper. Thus, the *points* are places of social sharing and respect, and the new pixadores come to know who the heads are and learn about pixação's hierarchical structure. In these environments the new ones, through friendship and interaction, can create their pixos and gradually gain credibility in their names.

In addition to the sharing of information in *points*, theirs stories are shared on the internet, in websites and blogs dedicated to the activity, as well as pages dedicated to dead pixadores.

> People who are from the streets they don't have history. Now that we're organized, we even have photo, there are people to write. We have a book, we have a magazine, we started to record the story. But two decades ago, the 20 years that have passed, we have no record. We have just the city walls. The city wall is our book. And keeping that preserved is keeping our story (Coelho, Guerra & Caetano, 2011v).

Nowadays, because of the speed with which the governs delete pixos, they make visual records in photographs and videos, sharing in blogs, specific group pages, personal pages in social media, and groups in Facebook.

5. Conclusions

This article had as objective to present considerations and reflections about pixação activity in São Paulo city. The results presents that pixação in São Paulo is an activity in the edge of the society - on the frontier of language, legality, and expressiveness. The sense of pixação is constructed by pixadores and by the surrounding society. Both parties recognize it as a crime; however, society wants pixação being invisible, while pixador, even not wishing to be famous, want to be seen and recognized in the urban space by pixação organization. For this paper, I focused on the meaning construction by pixadores.

The dynamics of pixação occurs in the dichotomy between art *vs*. dirt, urban peripheral expression *vs* vandalism, visibility *vs* invisibility, life *vs* death. This is the core of the activity, once pixação is only pixação while it is a form of aggression to the society. If it gains status of art or of a legalized urban expression, it stops being pixação. At the same time, pixação is a form of communication and construction of meanings that is more complex than just scrawls in the city's buildings. It is a form of communication in urban space, but only for those who do pixação.

Regarding to its social organization, the activity has an organizational hierarchy consisting of newbies (*bafos*), managers (*heads*), and groups of pixadores (*grifes* - brands). Similar to formal organizations, pixação has its own norms, such as codes of conduct, control mechanisms, meetings, group celebrations, and conflict resolution, institutionalized by pixadores groups. And, still regarding to its organization, I observed that there are two basic types of pixo: ground and climbing pixação, and that the criteria of social status among the pixadores are the quantity of pixos in the city and pixos in very high, improbable or dangerous places.

From the field visits and interviews, I observed that pixação has different meanings for pixadores, such as *(i) mechanism of belonging, visibility, social recognition and sociability:* the social environment of pixação is a form of social prominence and city appropriation by the individuals from periphery; *(ii) adrenaline:* functioning as a sports alternative for the peripheral regions; *(iii) social criticism:* expression of dissatisfaction with the social system.

I could observe also that there is in pixação a resignification of the city appropriation rules, by the construction of an underlying urban *ethos*, based in a parallel intersubjective and continuous meanings construction (Gephart, Topal, & Zhang, 2010). The construction of

meanings in pixação is the result of a dichotomous relationship between socially *invisible* individuals, producing visible expressions in urban space. Although visible, these expressions are largely understood by the invisible ones, not by society as a whole. Thus, pixação works as a construction of meanings from pixação to pixação, using the urban space as a channel of communication and social media.

Thus, meanings creation in the marginalized context of pixação is possible through: *(i) stylized language:* there is a proper linguistic and symbolic structure for the construction and sharing of meanings, understandable to only the participants in the language game of pixação. In this sense, the pixo language functions as a right to the city, so marginalized people can feel integrated into the city; *(ii) points:* the sharing and production of meanings in this marginalized context occurs from these meetings, in which pixadores are updated on what is happening in the different areas of the city, choose places do paint, as well as they promote social gatherings between brands. In these points, the insertion of the newcomers takes place so they learn in the interaction with other pixadores the rules and conduct codes. The main artefact of inscription in the group is the paper sheet, and it is from the exchange of paper sheets with signatures of pixadores from several groups that the newcomer begins to know new people, to make friendships, to create individually or collectively its own mark, and to define in which brand he will be part of.

From the exchange of these paper sheets with their signatures, the pixadores share stories of older pixadores, rescuing the pixação history in the city. The sharing and collection of these paper sheets acts as a device of group memory, keeping the imaginary of identity existence among the group. In these sense, pixação has an autonomous dynamics of insertion, maintenance and perpetuation of the activity culture.

So, in this paper can be noticed that the reasons and mechanisms that encourage and perpetuate pixação are complex and should be taken into account in urban cleansing campaigns. Social cleansing programs haven't proved productive to date and taking into account variables such as those raised in this paper may help the formulation of more effective public policies. The pixação problem is more complex and goes beyond an urban cleansing campaign. Finally, there is opportunities in management literature for empirical studies related to the notion of sensemaking and urban expressiveness, in this sense, it is suggested new empirical studies on the subject.

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[i] For this research, I adopt the spelling of the word pixação, with "x" and not with "ch"(according to the brazilian portuguese official orthography), as a way of respecting how pixadores identify themselves and write the term that defines their practice.

[ii] *A letra e o muro* (2017), *A Guerra aos Pichadores | Conexão Repórter* (2017), *Pixação* (2016), *Programa Diferente nº 85 – Pixação* (2016), *Paredes que gritam* (2016), *Pichação é arte? – Cidade ocupada* (2016), *Occupation visuelle* (2015), *Contra a Parede* (2015), *Intento de Arresto a Djan Ivson en Berlin* (2012), *Pichação busca reconhecimento e é discutida por acadêmico* (2009), *Luz, câmera, PICHAÇÃO* (2011), e *Pixo* (2009).