
THE CONTRIBUTION OF BUS STOPS AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICES TO THE READING OF TERRITORIES

Márcia Silva

Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses bus stops as places where uses of space, inequalities, and communication practices within the territory materialise, enabling an understanding of how the experience of waiting shapes how territories are read. The study was conducted in moderately urban and predominantly rural areas of Northern Portugal, using direct observation and visual recording. The analysis focused on three dimensions: (a) the materiality of mobility, which makes inequalities of access and situations of precarity visible; (b) symbolic inscriptions, through which bus stops are transformed into places of memory, identity, and belonging; and (c) communication disputes that emerge within the space of waiting, marked by the coexistence of institutional information and community uses. Between circulation and suspension, abandonment and appropriation, bus stops reveal broader social and territorial tensions, expressed in the ways mobility is organised and experienced in public space. Although discreet, these infrastructures constitute strategic sites for understanding how territory communicates through the uses of waiting spaces, the presences and absences of information, and the marks left by institutional and community practices. Bus stops thus emerge as images of the territory, participating in the social production of space by reflecting processes of transformation, power relations, and social dynamics that extend beyond their technical function.

KEYWORDS

space-time, territorial communication, waiting, social justice, territories

O CONTRIBUTO DAS PARAGENS DE AUTOCARRO E DAS PRÁTICAS DE COMUNICAÇÃO NA LEITURA DOS TERRITÓRIOS

RESUMO

O artigo analisa as paragens de autocarro como lugares onde se materializam usos do espaço, desigualdades e práticas de comunicação no território, permitindo compreender como a experiência da espera estrutura a leitura dos territórios. O estudo foi desenvolvido em áreas mediantemente urbanas e predominantemente rurais no Norte de Portugal, com base em observação direta e registo visual. A análise centrou-se em três dimensões: (a) a materialidade da mobilidade, que torna visíveis desigualdades de acesso e situações de precariedade; (b) as inscrições simbólicas, pelas quais as paragens se convertem em lugares de memória, identidade e pertença; e (c) as disputas de comunicação, que emergem no espaço da espera, marcadas pela coexistência entre informação institucional e usos comunitários. Entre circulação e suspensão, abandono e apropriação, as paragens de autocarro revelam tensões sociais e territoriais mais amplas, expressas nas formas como a mobilidade é organizada e vivida no espaço público. Embora discretas, estas infraestruturas constituem lugares estratégicos para compreender como o território comunica através dos usos do espaço da espera, das presenças e ausências

de informação e das marcas deixadas pelas práticas institucionais e comunitárias. As paragens surgem, assim, como imagens do território, participando na produção social do espaço ao refletirem processos de transformação, relações de poder e dinâmicas sociais que ultrapassam a sua função técnica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

espaço-tempo, comunicação territorial, espera, justiça social, territórios

1. INTRODUCTION

Between circulation and waiting, bus stops make visible the contradictions between planned mobility and lived mobility. As Oliveira (2022) emphasises, when they are designed primarily according to route-based logics, the social and territorial experience of communities tends to be relegated to a secondary position. This distance between the planned and the lived is manifested in the bus stops themselves: signs of disinvestment and abandonment emerge alongside inscriptions of memory and gestures of appropriation that connect people to the territory. It is within this misalignment — between technical function and social practices — that bus stops are configured as central sociotechnical objects for understanding processes of mobility, territorial inscription, and citizenship disputes.

As noted by Pires (2021), “each street in a city is a stage of theatricality, a path surrounded by multiple physical stimuli, by visual compositions that lend themselves to the exercise of distraction and the walk of the eye” (p. 77). Within this framework, the present study is positioned to extend the “walk of the eye” to bus stops, which are regarded as strategic points for observing territorial tensions. More than functional shelters, they are conceived as surfaces of reading, marked by presences and absences. Embedded within this scenic fabric, they are revealed as small theatricalities, where signs of abandonment and precarity accumulate alongside forms of appropriation.

This perspective resonates with Lefebvre (1974) by showing that space is produced through the articulation of what is conceived, perceived, and lived. Bus stops, technically conceived to organise mobility, become lived spaces, reconfigured by social practices and symbolic references. Harvey (1989/2001, 2008) adds to this framework the centrality of time, emphasising that contemporary mobility is organised according to logics of space-time compression and uneven production. Bus stops materialise these contradictions: small infrastructures that make visible the distance between global acceleration and the slowness of waiting, and between the logic of capital and local experience. At the same time, as Lefebvre (1974) and Harvey (2008) remind us, they are also spaces where the right to the city is contested, insofar as they reveal exclusions as well as forms of appropriation and resistance. Within them, acceleration coexists with suspension, and abandonment with gestures of reinscription in territorial space.

This tension between accelerated time and lived time can be analysed in light of Emília Araújo's (2012, 2014) reflections, which distinguish between chronological time,

regulated by schedules and institutional devices, and lived time, constructed through social interactions, shared memories, and everyday experiences. At bus stops, this difference manifests in the interplay between the official timetable and how waiting is experienced, prolonged, or shortened by material conditions, social interactions, and memories inscribed in the space. Various empirical studies confirm this perspective, demonstrating that the experience of waiting is not exhausted by its objective duration, but is influenced by multiple contexts. Factors such as the frequency of use, companionship during the journey, the location of the stop, and the material conditions of the shelter and the available information (Ji et al., 2019; Yang & Gao, 2025) shape perceptions of time. Weather, peak hours, and users' social characteristics also affect this experience (Ji et al., 2019). A lack of real-time information prolongs the perception of waiting, making it exceed its actual duration (Watkins et al., 2011). Taken together, these contributions reveal that context, relationships, and materialities shape the experience of waiting.

This approach aligns with the work of John Urry (2000, 2007), Mimi Sheller (2023), and Tim Cresswell (2006), who emphasise that mobility is not merely physical movement but a set of flows of people, objects, and symbols that structure inequalities and shape ways of life. Bus stops are embedded within this movement: infrastructures designed to regulate circulation, yet simultaneously revealing how the global intersects with the local. These tensions are made most visible in the experience of waiting, when the acceleration of flows contrasts with the slow time of remaining, revealing asymmetries in access to mobility, differentiated modes of participation in public space, and multiple forms of territorial appropriation.

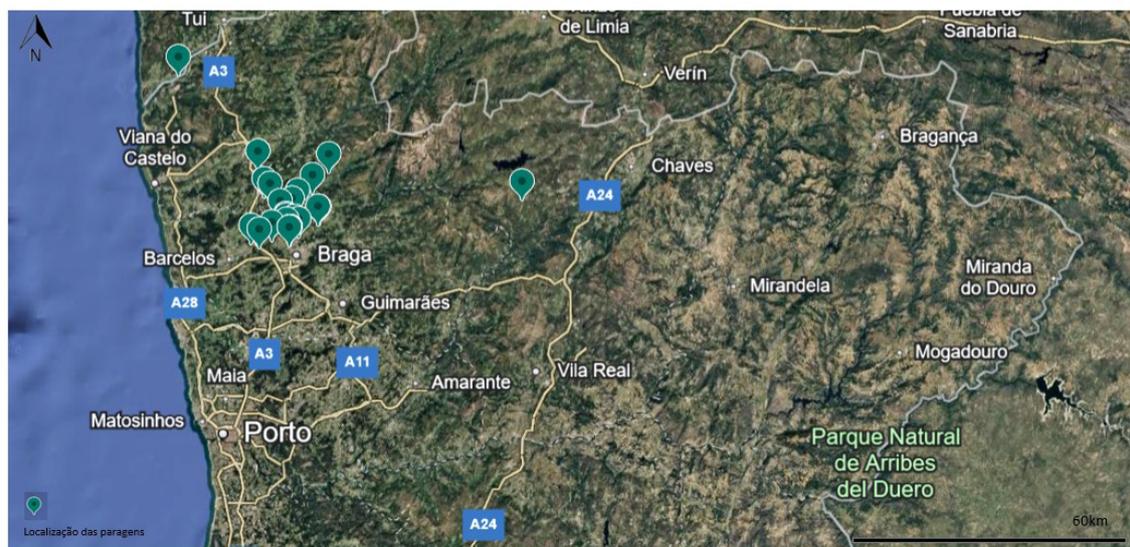
Within this framework, it is important to integrate contributions from communication studies to the understanding of territory as a socially produced space. Territorial communication is here approached as a set of material and symbolic practices and inscriptions that participate in the production, recognition, and reinscription of places, articulating senses of belonging, local identities, and territorial narratives (Pires & Mesquita, 2018). As emphasised by recent approaches in the field of territorial communication, these processes resemble placemaking dynamics, in which space transcends its technical function to become a lived, appropriated, and contested place (Andrade et al., 2024; Melo, 2021). This perspective facilitates the analysis of bus stops as sociotechnical infrastructures, where mobility, communication, and territory intersect, rendering visible inequalities, forms of appropriation, and disputes over citizenship inscribed in the space of waiting.

From this perspective, bus stops are approached not merely as technical infrastructures but as strategic sites that reveal spatial practices, inequalities, and communicative processes through which territory is interpreted. Considering mobility through these infrastructures entails shifting the focus from a strictly functional perspective to a communicational and territorial approach. This shift allows bus stops to be understood as images of the territory and as critical points for observing social inequalities, public investment policies, and multiple forms of territorial inscription.

The selection of bus stops as the object of analysis, therefore, calls for close attention to practices, uses of space, and the marks left on the territory. In this respect, an ethnographic approach proved particularly appropriate, allowing for the observation of how these infrastructures are used, appropriated, and re-signified. Direct observation and visual recording enable the capture of the materiality of bus stops, as well as the signals and absences that shape the understanding of territorial dynamics.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted using an ethnographic approach, centred on the observation of bus stops in moderately urban and predominantly rural areas of Northern Portugal (see Figure 1) between March and August 2025. The analysis was based on the understanding that these mobility infrastructures, even in their most discreet manifestations, are sites of territorial inscription, where inequalities of access, markers of identity, and social and political communication practices become perceptible.



Captura de imagem: 12/2025

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Figure 1. Location of the bus stops

Source. Location of bus stops in Northern Portugal, from Google (n.d.), 22 December 2025

Fieldwork combined direct observation and systematic photographic recording, enabling the documentation of the materiality of bus stops, their conditions of use, and the visual marks inscribed on the structures. As Agar (1985) argues, participant observation is an appropriate methodology because it allows for the experience of space and the capture of relational dimensions that elude a purely descriptive approach. Ethnography was thus understood as a practice of immersion that could reveal appropriations, inequalities, and disputes inscribed in bus stops (Silva et al., 2022).

In this context, ethnography was regarded as a fundamental resource for producing sociological knowledge. The images collected did not merely capture objects or

structures, but also social relations, absences, and temporal marks inscribed in space. Photography functioned as a form of interpretive recording, enabling the researcher to apprehend dimensions that might otherwise go unnoticed in direct observation, while providing material that proved decisive in the analysis for understanding how communities relate to these places.

The selection of bus stops followed an exploratory logic. Efforts were made to contrast sites marked by symbolic appropriations, such as paintings, inscriptions, or improvised objects, with others where material silence and the absence of visible marks predominated. This methodological contrast enabled a comparative observation of how the presence or absence of signals produces distinct readings of public space.

The collected images were treated as narratives, with each visual record carrying an interpretive dimension. Photography was not understood solely as documentation, but as a language capable of capturing elements of everyday life (e.g., faded posters, improvised chairs, prohibited inscriptions). In this way, visual ethnography allowed for the capture of the visible, as well as practices and marks of appropriation, transforming the act of photographing bus stops into an exercise in reading the layers of communication present in the space (Pink, 2007).

Data analysis was conducted through an observational and interpretive exercise, based on a descriptive and comparative reading of both the observations made and the photographic material collected. From this reading, three central dimensions of analysis emerged: (a) the materiality of mobility, (b) symbolic inscriptions, and (c) communication disputes.

3. A “STOP” THROUGH THE TERRITORY: PERSPECTIVES ON MOBILITY

Bus stops transcend their technical function and constitute sites where mobility materialises and becomes visible. Each stop reveals a distinctive mode of presence, defined by its materiality and the social practices that traverse it. It was this singular character that anchored the ethnographic gaze, seeking to understand how these structures are inscribed in the territory from the perspective of territorial communication.

4. THE MATERIALITY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF WAITING

Bus stops can be understood as mobility infrastructures in which material and symbolic conditions become visible, shaping communities' relationships with the territory in unequal ways. The observed stops reveal, through their materiality, inequalities in conditions of use and distinct forms of appropriation. Concrete structures (Figure 2), heavy and solid, convey a sense of permanence and stability; metal shelters (Figure 3) or translucent plastic ones (Figure 4), more fragile and standardised, wear quickly and leave bodies exposed to cold, wind, or intense heat; and wooden models (Figure 5), more unique and locally rooted, are associated with forms of community construction

or organised at the parish scale. The material diversity of bus stops thus reflects differentiated geographies of public investment. While some structures demonstrate greater care in maintenance, others — degraded or improvised — expose a territorial hierarchy through which certain spaces are valued over others. This material differentiation projects broader social and political inequalities, as infrastructure precarity directly affects the quality of mobility and communities' sense of belonging in public space.



Figure 2. *The solidity of waiting (Vila de Palmeira)*

Credits. Márcia Silva



Figure 3. *The metal-sheet bus stop (Carreiras — S. Miguel, Vila Verde)*

Credits. Márcia Silva

metal pole (Figure 8): a minimal presence that fulfils only the technical act of signalling the bus route, while emptying the experience of any possibility of dwelling.



Figure 6. *The wear of time (Vila de Prado)*

Credits. Márcia Silva



Figure 7. *The desire path (Queijada, Ponte de Lima)*

Credits. Márcia Silva



Figure 8. *Waiting in suspension (Valbom, Terras de Bouro)*

Credits. Márcia Silva

Amid ruined structures, shelters that remain in use despite the surrounding abandonment, and abstract markers devoid of conditions for staying or mobility, mobility appears stripped of the elementary conditions of waiting. This reveals that inequality is not expressed solely in access to movement but also in how waiting time is lived and experienced. At a deeper level, waiting itself is not equally accessible to all: missing ramps, uneven steps, and ill-designed benches turn the bus stop into a space conceived for a “standard” body, making those who do not conform to that model invisible. Here, unequal waiting conditions translate directly into exclusion. Inequality thus operates not only at the material or symbolic level, but through the systematic exclusion of those who depend on specific conditions to fully exercise their right to mobility, confirming, as John Urry (2000, 2007) emphasises, that power relations and inequalities permeate that mobility.

It is within this context that the particular nature of waiting becomes apparent. In practice, waiting should not be understood solely in its more objective dimension, as a matter of regulation (Araújo, 2012, 2014) or bus timetables; it is also a lived time, socially constructed through practices and perceptions. The material precariousness of space intensifies this experience: broken benches, the absence of information, lack of shelter, or limited accessibility transform minutes into eternity. Seen in this way, waiting is not “lost time, gained time” (Araújo, 2012, p. 12), but a cultural practice — a moment in which narratives of inequality, resistance, and belonging intersect. How these infrastructures are constructed, appropriated, or left to abandonment reveals as much about the territory as about those who inhabit it.

5. BUS STOPS AS SYMBOLIC INSCRIPTIONS OF THE TERRITORY

While some bus stops expose vulnerability and exclusion, others reveal how the space of waiting transcends the technical function of mobility and becomes a symbolic inscription, projecting identities, memories, and local narratives. Some, although decommissioned,

remain in the territory as traces of an interrupted time (Figure 9). The physical structure endures, but stripped of its function: the rusted timetable frame, which once organised the schedules and rhythms of circulation, now displays only emptiness or, at most, a makeshift note with a taxi contact. The silence surrounding these stops is not neutral: it speaks of disinvestment, the absence of institutions, and the transformation of a space of waiting into ruin. However, it also speaks of memory. Even without buses, they persist as material testimonies of a service that no longer exists — symbolic marks of a territory once traversed by flows, which now holds, in corroded iron and the emptiness of its walls, the memory of lost mobility.



Figure 9. Decommissioned waiting (Lanhelas, Caminha)

Credits. Márcia Silva

They persist as marks of the territory, becoming material archives of collective memories. In certain cases, these structures acquire new cultural meanings: the bus stop, whitewashed and decorated with motifs from the *lenços dos namorados* (lovers' handkerchiefs), provides a clear example (Figure 10). The simple, colourful designs, inherited from popular tradition, reconfigure the space as a support for collective identity. In this process, what was once a shelter for waiting becomes a cultural object. As Arjun Appadurai (1986) observes, objects circulate, lose functions, and are appropriated in other ways, becoming symbolic markers of the territory. It is no longer a question of providing shelter for waiting, but of affirming belonging and memory. The absence of mobility becomes a symbolic presence: places abandoned by transport become markers of identity continuity, revealing how the territory finds its own ways to give meaning to abandonment.



Figure 10. *Traces of identity (São Martinho de Escariz, Vila Verde)*

Credits. Márcia Silva

Other bus stops, emptied of their circulation function, persist as surfaces of symbolic resistance in contexts of rupture (Figure 11). One example is the inscription “MINAS NÃO!” (no mines!), painted in red letters on a worn metal sheet in the interior of Boticas. By marking the bus stop, the protest becomes a constant presence, exposed to the gaze of passers-by or those waiting. It becomes part of a territorial narrative that contests perceptions of place and possible futures (Garcia et al., 2026). The rusted iron, the structure’s wear, and the rough lettering intensify the message’s force, producing an aesthetic of urgency. The stop no longer accommodates buses, but hosts conflict: it becomes a territorial manifesto, where the functional space of waiting is appropriated as a device of citizenship.



Figure 11. *The bus stop as a space of protest (São Salvador de Viveiro, Boticas)*

Credits. Márcia Silva

In other cases, the bus stop emerges as a space for expression and the affirmation of collective identity. Through visual signals, cultural references, and institutional markings, these devices reveal the relationship between community and territory, incorporating elements that evoke local histories, recognisable landscapes, and shared traditions into their material configuration.

This diversity challenges the typical homogenisation of urban spaces and demonstrates how each territory engages with the experience of waiting in different ways. From municipality to municipality, and even between parishes, one finds very different solutions that serve as visual markers of the territory's administrative and identity boundaries. Surfaces — whether painted walls, covered panels, or adapted structures — become places where references projecting the territory are displayed. The careful depiction of a listed monument condenses centuries of history and belonging; the parish name, inscribed in large letters and flanked by coats of arms, asserts both an administrative and symbolic identity; patterns and colours alluding to popular culture, such as references to the Barcelos rooster (Figure 12) or the *lenços dos namorados* (Figure 10), inscribe a visual repertoire associated with artisanal tradition and community affectivity into public space. Far from serving merely a decorative function, these visual elements operate as markers of belonging and devices of territorial communication, ways of asserting the territory's presence and reinforcing its visibility to both residents and users of public space (Figure 13). In these cases, the bus stop functions as a device of territorial communication, operating both inwardly and outwardly: it signals local identity to those waiting while enhancing the territory's visibility to passers-by.



Figure 12. The “rooster” of waiting (Galegos São Martinho, Barcelos)

Credits. Márcia Silva



Figure 13. Local cultural references (Real, Braga)

Credits. Márcia Silva

In certain contexts, the appropriation of space assumes an aesthetic and symbolic dimension, evoking everyday life, affective ties, and the surrounding landscape. In images collected in rural settings, the walls of bus stops are transformed into pictorial surfaces, depicting maize ears, a central feature of the local economy and memory (Figure 14). These representations reinscribe the mark of lived and shared rurality into the space. The bus stop thus ceases to function solely as a shelter for waiting and becomes an extension of the landscape, transporting the memory of the land and of labour into public space. Here, the time of waiting acquires a sensory thickness, composed of colours, affections, and belonging: looking at the horse or the maize also entails recognising the territory as a place of continuity and rootedness. In this gesture, space approaches what Helena Pires (2007) describes as sensory and cultural communication, removed from the purely functional logic of visibility. Bus stops do not merely accommodate bodies in transit; they become vehicles for affective atmospheres and everyday narratives that humanise mobility and reinscribe the territory in its symbolic dimension.



Figure 14. Marks of rural space (Crespos, Braga)

Credits. Márcia Silva

6. BUS STOPS AS SURFACES OF CIVIC COMMUNICATION

At several of the bus stops observed, posters, notices, and announcements organise information about local events, services, or activities. These devices, often associated with informative functions, become integrated into social and symbolic practices when analysed in the context of urban space. As Lameiro and Pozo Puértolas (2024) demonstrate, the urban poster cannot be reduced to a logic of unidirectional information; it has become an integral part of urban visual culture and an element that shapes perceptions of space. Inscribed on walls, shelters, and everyday structures, the poster participates in the construction of the urban landscape, reflecting social, cultural, and territorial dynamics. At bus stops, these messages coexist with other inscriptions, overlays, and traces of use, forming part of a broader communicational field in which information intertwines with practices of appropriation, visibility, and meaning-making about the territory (Pires & Mesquita, 2018). It is from this coexistence that the space of waiting becomes a surface of symbolic communication.

The space-time of waiting is thus inscribed in bus stops through visual layers and narratives that transform the shelters into surfaces of symbolic communication. On concrete walls, scratched glass, or metal panels, diverse signs overlap: advertising, institutional information, community messages, and political protests. These elements disrupt the shelter's merely technical function, transforming it into a place of social inscription (Figure 15). The plurality of practices and meanings within public space is revealed at this intersection.



Figure 15. *Overlapping messages (Caldelas, Amares)*

Credits. Márcia Silva

These inscriptions are rarely stable: they appear in fragile layers, torn by the wind and faded by rain. Posters for local festivals coexist with death notices (Figure 16); photographs of lost animals appear alongside handwritten notes, affixed with adhesive tape. Each fragment adds a narrative, composing an ephemeral visual archive of local life (Figure 17). The space of waiting thus becomes a community mural, projecting neighbourhoods, collective

rhythms, concerns, and shared losses. In this layering of signs, the time of waiting reveals itself as a cultural practice in which public space is appropriated and reconfigured as lived territory.



Figure 16. *Fragments of local life (Merelim São Pedro, Braga)*

Credits. Márcia Silva

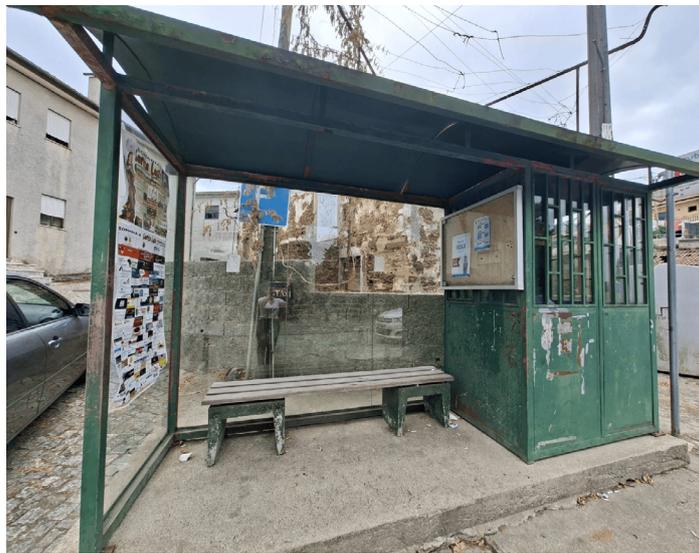


Figure 17. *Archive of local life (Padim da Graça, Braga)*

Credits. Márcia Silva

As Pires and Mesquita (2018) emphasise, public space is constantly traversed by multiple practices of citizen occupation, transforming it into a surface for collective expression. At bus stops, what at first glance appears as an improvised collage — posters for festivals, death notices, religious messages — can be read through this lens: supports originally designed for technical or institutional information are appropriated as community archives, where memories, identities, and local needs are inscribed. The bus

stop can thus be understood as one of the archives of everyday life (Certeau, 1990/1994), where small gestures by residents leave discrete yet significant marks, reinscribing fragments of common life into the space.

At a time when much communication is migrating to digital platforms, these practices persist through the force of their materiality (Figure 15). It is the worn paper, yellowed adhesive tape, and ink faded by the sun that ensure the ephemeral persistence of the messages, even when they are almost illegible. These traces transform bus stops into symbolic surfaces, where belonging, memory, and forms of community expression are inscribed.

There are also scenarios of direct layering, in which different communicational practices coexist in the same space, transforming the shelter into a field of symbolic contestation. At a bus stop painted with rural motifs — a tractor, maize ears, and vivid colours — a timetable poster is superimposed centrally, obscuring the community inscription (Figure 18). This involves not merely distinct graphic layers but different logics of spatial occupation: on one side, the aesthetic and community expression that affirms the lived territory; on the other, the technical and regulated information that organises mobility. The superimposition does not eliminate either dimension but makes visible the ongoing tension between distinct modes of inscription: that of local, symbolic, and cultural life, and that of administrative rationalisation. In this confrontation, the space-time of waiting ceases to be a neutral interval; it is revealed as a cultural practice in which meanings of the territory and forms of citizenship are negotiated.



Figure 18. Agricultural landscape in transit (Crespos, Braga)

Credits. Márcia Silva

In contrast with bus stops saturated with community messages or those that become resistance stages, others are dominated by silence. However, this silence is not neutral: it is produced and inscribed in the very materiality of the bus stop, resulting from explicit regulations, commercial appropriation, or the absence of territorial references. In some cases, the bus stop communicates only a prohibition. The inscription “posting prohibited” (Figure 19), affixed to a clean and uniform surface, transforms the prohibition itself into a message, nullifying any possibility of plural expression. The space

ceases, therefore, to support community life and approaches the logic of “non-places” (Augé, 1992/2012), reduced to its technical function of shelter and waiting.



Figure 19. *Imposed silence* (Lama, Barcelos)

Credits. Márcia Silva

In other contexts, silence emerges from commercial saturation. Structures entirely covered by uniform advertising transform the bus stop into a privately controlled medium of commercial communication (Figure 20). Paradoxically, the more densely covered with images, the more silent the space becomes in relation to the territory. Bus stops with temporary advertisements alternating within panels or display cases (Figure 21) are even more common. Although the message is renewed, it becomes a unidirectional channel of communication, detached from community life and unable to accommodate the diversity of uses and inscriptions that characterise other spaces of waiting.



Figure 20. *Voice of the market* (Merelim São Pedro, Braga)

Credits. Márcia Silva



Figure 21. *Between advertisements and silences (Dume, Braga)*

Credits. Márcia Silva

In these different modes of silence, what is revealed is a symbolic silencing of public space. Unlike bus stops that accumulate identity or community inscriptions, here the surface is controlled, appropriated, or emptied, preventing the territory's plurality from being inscribed. Silence, in these cases, is not absence: it functions as a regulatory device, selecting who can — and who cannot — speak in the space of waiting. Although institutional communication strategies often rely on planned forms of visibility and participation (Andrade et al., 2024), in the observed bus stops, this control is manifested through the material configuration of the space.

In many cases, unequal waiting conditions are imposed; in others, the community itself intervenes to restore the space's habitability. At a bus stop saturated with advertising — slogans from global brands and luminous images — a discreet gesture introduces an alternative reading of the space: placed at the back, a white plastic chair, worn from use, replaces the missing seat (Figure 22). It is not decoration, but response. Removed from the domestic sphere and relocated to public space, it restores dignity to the act of waiting and inscribes the concrete mark of everyday needs onto the territory. By contrast, some bus stops are designed from the outset to accommodate prolonged presence. A large integrated bench does more than fulfil the minimum function of a seat: it invites lingering, provides extended comfort, and recognises waiting as an integral part of mobility (Figure 23).



Figure 22. *Improvised gesture (Vila de Palmeira)*

Credits. Márcia Silva



Figure 23. *Acknowledging waiting (Loureira, Vila Verde)*

Credits. Márcia Silva

Between community improvisation and the designed solution, a gap emerges between mobility reduced to the technical act of stopping and mobility that recognises the cultural richness of waiting time. This tension can be interpreted in light of what Lefebvre (2000/2012) terms the “right to the city”: a critique of the capitalist production of space, which privileges the accumulation of capital and exchange value over the concrete social needs of users. At bus stops, this logic manifests in prioritising consumption (e.g., advertising, standardised furniture) over fundamental dimensions of the urban experience, such as comfort, sociability, or participation. The act of placing an improvised chair precisely exposes this imbalance: a community response to the deficiencies of space conceived according to market logic.

7. CONCLUSION

At first glance, bus stops emerge as infrastructures designed to organise flows and regulate circulation. However, ethnographic analysis has shown that even in their most discreet forms, they preserve presences, memories, and acts of appropriation that confer social and political density. This observation resonates with Augé's (1992/2012) reflections on "non-places", often associated with mobility spaces marked by anonymity and the absence of identity. While bus stops may be partially understood in this register, observation demonstrates that, beyond their functional appearance, they reveal inequalities, identities, and disputes that transform them into places with social and political significance.

The study further highlighted that these spaces bring together contradictory temporalities — circulation and suspension, presence and absence, abandonment and appropriation — revealing the unequal production of space-time. Organising the analysis into three dimensions allowed recognition of different layers of experience: the materiality of mobility, where precarities and exclusions are expressed; symbolic inscriptions, which transform shelters into places of memory and belonging; and communicational disputes, which expose the overlap between institutional norms, market strategies, and citizen resistance practices. Broken or improvised benches, ephemeral posters, and imposed silences constitute, in this sense, concrete evidence of how public space is appropriated, regulated, and contested.

This interpretation is particularly relevant in predominantly rural and semi-urban areas. In these territories, bus stops operate as images of space, revealing tensions and processes of transformation. More than merely serving as support for transport networks, they express social and territorial dynamics, functioning as places where inequalities, memories, and forms of appropriation are projected. Their precarious materiality reflects disinvestment in contexts already marked by mobility difficulties, reinforcing asymmetries in access and vulnerabilities in territorial cohesion. Ethnographic observation of these infrastructures allows an understanding that mobility is not reducible to circulation alone but also encompasses citizenship and social and territorial justice, inscribed in the ways territories are cared for, abandoned, or recreated by communities.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Márcia Silva is an adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Minho and a researcher at the Communication and Society Research Centre and the Observatory of Communication and Culture Policies. She holds a PhD in Sociology from the Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Minho and researches on culture, mobilities, territories, and social dynamics.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3464-2194>

Email: marciabarbosabsilva@gmail.com

Address: Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, 4710-057 Gualtar, Braga, Portugal

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