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Abstract:

*Territorial Stigmatization and Environmental Justice in a Social Housing
Neighborhood in Lisbon, Portugal*

The stigma surrounding the Chelas neighbourhood of Lisbon has existed, at least, since the formal establishment of social housing in the area and has persisted over the past few decades, despite its changing realities and conditions. The ‘stickiness’ of this stigma can be understood through the framework of territorial stigmatization, which refers to the blemish attached to a place which subsequently impacts the material conditions of the place and the people within it. Since Loïc Wacquant’s formulation of the concept of territorial stigmatization, many researchers have applied this framework to understand the stigma of place in different urban neighbourhoods. Despite Wacquant’s framework’s inclusion of resistance as a possible response against stigma, multiple studies have found that there are limits to what local resistance can achieve towards erasing or dispelling stigma. There are many examples of destigmatization ending through processes of gentrification and of the displacement or erasure of those impacted by stigmatization. As part of a multimethod approach to conducting research on Chelas, including in-depth semi-structured interviews, archival research, and discourse analysis, this paper examines how Chelas, both in its past and present, has dealt and negotiated with the realities of the stigma fastened upon it, be it through submission or resistance by local residents or other impacted actors. It investigates the potential for successful destigmatization of Chelas not despite, but because of it being one of the largest social housing projects in Portugal.