

**THE STRUGGLE OF THE 'INVISIBLES': SOCIAL POLICIES AND THE URBAN POOR.
PLANNING WITHIN SCARCITY IN THE NORTHWEST OF PORTUGAL.**

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Abstract

Throughout the intense urbanisation process that occurred in Portugal during the last decades, social policies related with the built environment, and especially concerning housing, have shown to be insufficient to address and reverse precarious living conditions. Moreover, in this process the urban poor have often been 'invisible', even in major decisions that specifically concerned them, meaning that social policies have at times not only missed their target of reducing precariousness but have also actively contributed to increasing social and spatial exclusion, through inducing the creation of clusters of vulnerabilities or neglecting adequate support.

Taking into account the recent worldwide economic crisis and its national impact in producing a condition of 'scarcity', it is urgent to rethink strategies and roles to reduce disparities. The metropolitan urban area of Porto, the second largest in Portugal, is here presented as a 'laboratory' within a broader ongoing research – commissioned by the Portuguese Government to the Porto University – to seek guidelines for social and territorial cohesion.

Therefore, having this metropolitan area as background, this paper will start by presenting a critical analysis of different approaches towards the needs and roles of the urban poor, discussing not only how '(in)visible' they have been and how social policies have shaped the city, but also their impact in the concentration or dilution of socially vulnerable groups, and in the perpetuation and rupture of geographically concentrated vulnerability.

Secondly, it will suggest the analysis of different types of vulnerabilities, understanding processes that have caused them, and their specific morphological patterns. Then it will be discussed how policies for reducing disparities have been struggling to address this diversity and sometimes missing their targets.

Finally, detecting in the international debate on social policies a recent tendency to seek collaborative approaches, we aim to contribute to discussing the tools for this challenge.

Keywords: poverty, scarcity, social policies, equity, Porto metropolitan area

1. INTRODUCTION

The urban environment, by producing a concentration of people and social diversity, shows especially evident socioeconomic contrasts, thus producing complex patterns of segregation (Wirth, 1938, *apud* Raposo, Henriques, 2005). Therefore, urban areas persist as fragmented spaces, gathering invisible cities within the city.

The city has historically been a space of diversity, either formed by processes of comprehensive regulation - 'city shaped' - or by constant additions - 'city assembled' (Kostof, 1992, 1993). Nevertheless, when this diversity produces extreme disparities, the idea of social and spatial cohesion becomes at risk, causing profound injustices and disruptions. The focus of this paper is on vulnerabilities: how socioeconomic and spatial vulnerabilities are created, understood and fought against, how the discourse around them has changed throughout time, which arguments have been used and how they have been adopted to support opposite points of view.

The recent economic crisis, caused by the 2008 real estate pressure and the consequent financial collapse, seems to have established that *scarcity* is becoming a more evident condition in the next few years (Till, 2012)¹. This implies increased vulnerabilities – related to unemployment, poverty, ageing, lower birth rates, amongst other concerning indicators – along with further limitations in public and private intervention capacities, reduction of social support and physical actions.

This recent scenario demands thus an overall analysis of new needs and priorities, as well as a reorientation of policies for reducing vulnerabilities. In order to contribute to overcoming a recurrent gap between needs and actions, this paper will analyse past experiences - with their different strategies and roles of stakeholders -, so as to discuss the optimization of existing resources and actors, to shape more adequate and responsive policies.

1.1. A laboratory

The analysis presented in this paper is set within a wider research on the North-western area of Portugal that gathers a wider team², and has been written along with the paper 'Reacting to the investment withdrawal: Planning within scarcity in the Northwest of Portugal' for this same conference, aiming at simultaneously discussing orientations and shifts: on the one hand, of the social policies to support the ones that cannot find answers to their needs in the liberal market, and on the other hand, in the private investment in the built environment.

The northwest of Portugal is formed by a vast urban system, that includes Porto (the second largest city) but also a multiplicity of settlement patterns with consolidated urban cores, urban peripheral areas, dispersed occupation and rural areas (Figure 1). Taking into account that, for discussing means for action, it is important to have a specific territory as a *laboratory* and a *toolbox* (Ferrão, 2014), the Northwest of Portugal will here be the focus of debate, though referring to broader issues.

¹ Jeremy Till coordinates the research project *SCIBE - Scarcity and Creativity in the Built Environment* (Till, J., 'From Objects of Austerity to Processes of Scarcity', *SCIBE working paper* nr. 11, April 2012, in: <http://www.scibe.eu/publications/>).

² This study, entitled '*Orientações Estratégicas de Coerência Territorial - Arco Metropolitano Norte*' ('Strategic orientations for territorial cohesion – Northern Metropolitan Area') was commissioned to CEAU-FAUP (Centre for Studies in Architecture and Urbanism - Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto) by the CCDR-N (Commission for the Coordination and Development of the Northern Region). Recognizing the present condition of uncertainty and scarcity, this research aims to contribute to the construction of guidelines for equity and cohesion of the North-western region of Portugal. The authors of this paper are part of the research team that contributes to this study.

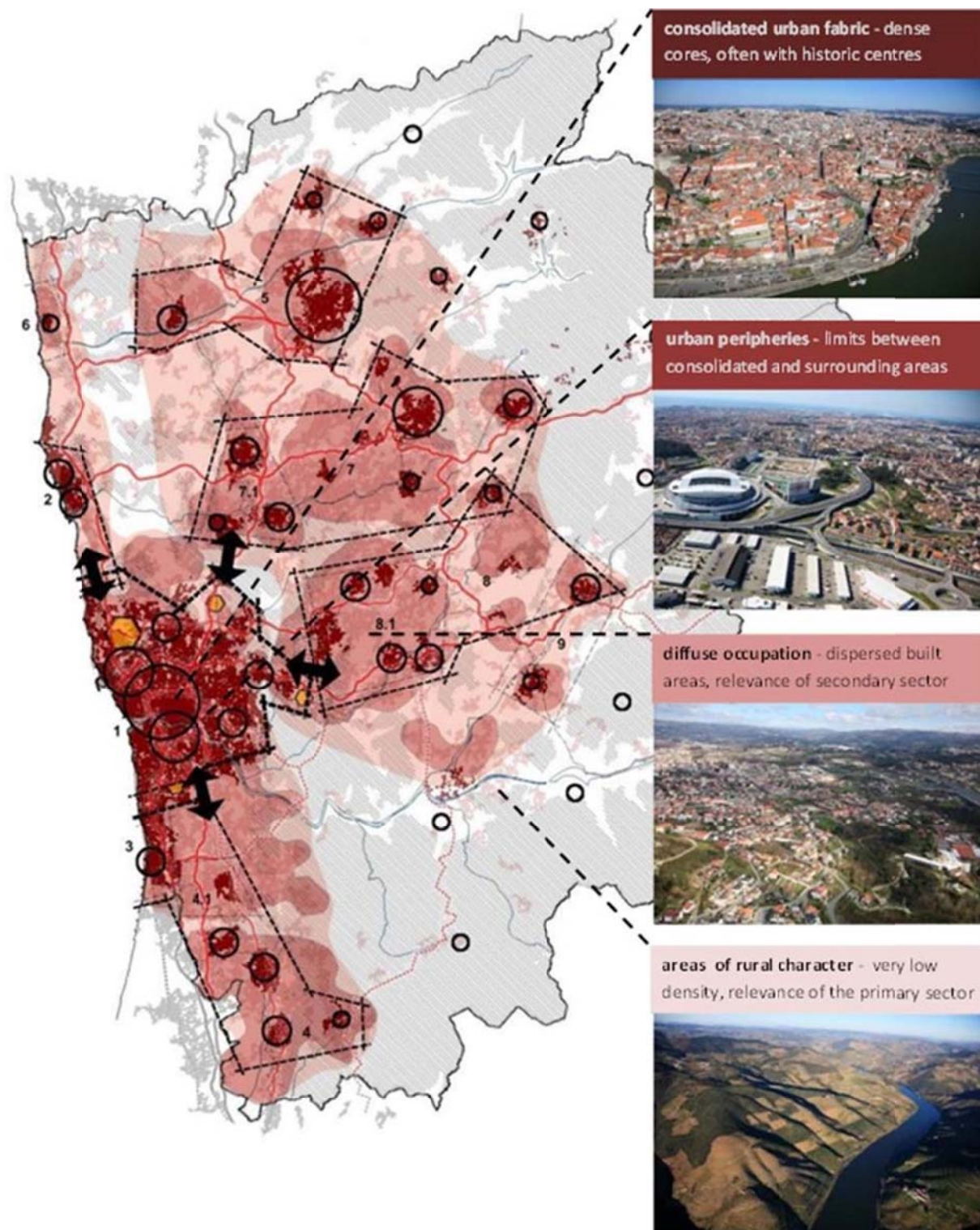


Figure 1. Diagram of territorial occupation in the Northwest of Portugal (Source: PROT-N, CEAU).

Diagram of the territorial model for the North-western Metropolitan Arch developed by the MDT-CEAU for the Regional Plan for the Northern Area of Portugal (PROT-N).

2. LEARNING FROM THE PAST - the (in)visibility of the urban poor

How have vulnerabilities been addressed throughout time? By analysing the Portuguese background throughout the last decades - and focusing on housing policies for the urban poor as indicators of political and spatial orientations for shaping the city and reducing social vulnerability - one can find a multiplicity of examples of totally different approaches and roles of each stakeholder. They form, naturally, a reflection of their socio-political contexts and of the visions of society in each period. Nonetheless, they may also illustrate difficulties and consequences of different actions, also according to the visibility and invisibility of the urban low-income population.

2.1. Informal private provision of housing - profiting from the low-income class

Throughout the XIXth century and due to industrialization and the consequent intensification of the urbanisation process, main industrial areas attracted large numbers of incoming population, being forced to densify, expand and provide shelter. The housing shortage, especially for the working class, became a challenge, to which different answers were provided, mainly by landowners, industrial entrepreneurs and small investors, who took the role of providers, responding to the low-income housing demand. In this process, the State had little contribution, being helpless, unresponsive or even neglecting. The urban poor thus became clients of a private service of house provision which - due to the large demand of incoming new urban population, reduced offer and limited capacity for paying rents - often achieved very low standards of living conditions.

In Porto, the '*ilhas*' (meaning 'islands') were then created by investors or private owners as a solution for housing these labourers, through the construction of one or more rows of small houses (around 4x4 meters) along the traditionally elongated lots of the consolidated city, in the back of existing bourgeois houses (Figure 2). If provided, infrastructures such as toilets would often be shared in common areas. These areas occupied the interior of the blocks, therefore becoming invisible parts of the city that could not be perceived from the street, hiding their dwellers, in a situation that became common practice until an outbreak of bubonic plague exposed the miserable living conditions to the rest of the civil society and forced the State to take action. Nevertheless, nowadays plenty of examples of this typology can still be found, without significant changes in their living conditions.

2.2. Authoritarian public provision - the role of the State throughout a dictatorship

Following the installation of a dictatorial regime, in the 1930s the public provision of housing became a trademark of a new vision for society and part of its political propaganda. During the first decades, a few new social housing developments were built throughout the country, consisting mostly of new areas with low-rise housing and a few social services inspired in the idea of garden cities, but mostly intended for civil servants rather than for very low-income families.

During the period of 1956 to 1966 an 'improvement plan' ('*Plano de Melhoramentos*') was created for the city of Porto for the eradication of the '*ilhas*', and was mainly undertaken through vast sets of blocks often implanted in peripheral urban areas of the municipality, where the cost of the land was lower (Figure 3). The State became the financing entity and a totalitarian decision-maker, while the low-income populations were paternalistically perceived as mere beneficiaries, which they should show to be worthy, through a strictly controlled moral conduct. These initiatives proved to be not only insufficient to meet the needs, but also highly contested by their inhabitants. By 1974, it was estimated that the house deficit in Porto would be around 600.000 housing units (Ferreira, 2013).

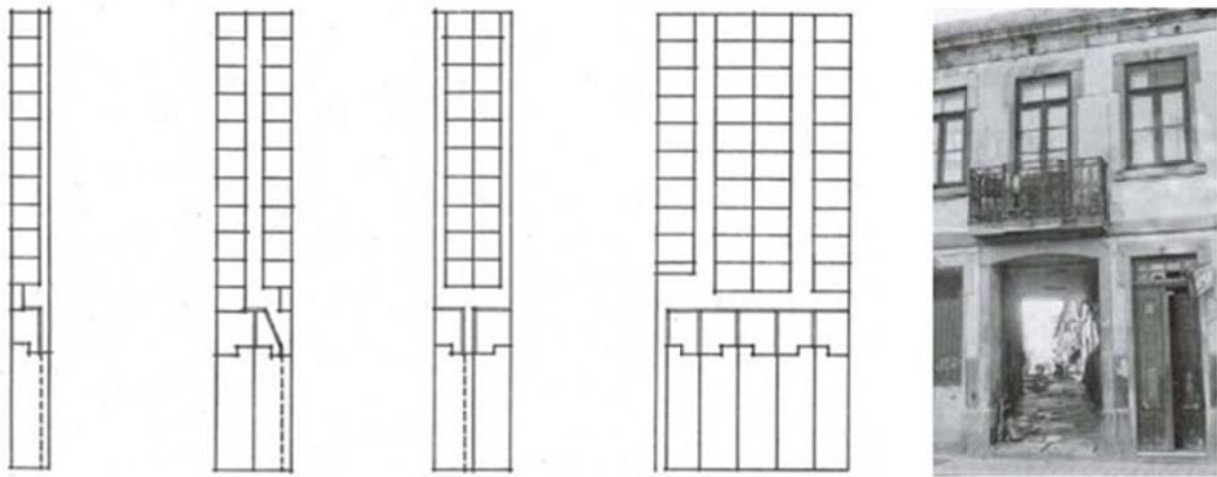


Figure 2. 'Ilhas' of Porto: houses in the interior of the blocks (Source: Teixeira, M.C.).

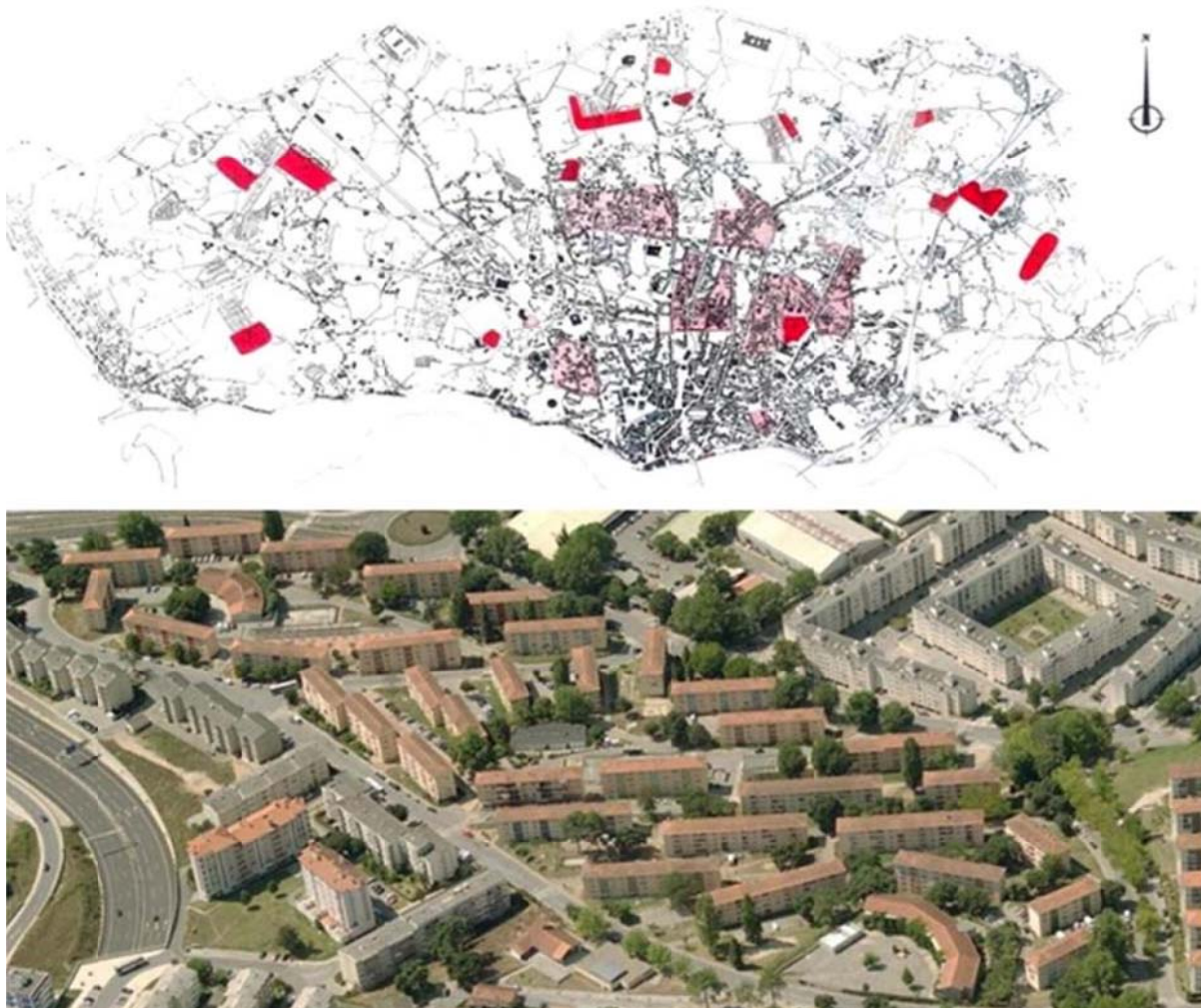


Figure 3. Location of social housing operations of the 'improvements plan' of 1956 in Porto, and aerial image of one of them - '*Bairro do Cerco*' (Sources: Câmara Municipal do Porto; Bingmaps).

2.3. Participatory housing programs – the rise and interruption of post-revolution aspirations

Following the Carnation Revolution in 1974 and throughout the PREC - the 'ongoing revolutionary process', a period of eighteen months of restructuration of the State - conditions were created for the implementation of a new vision of society and urban environment. Several targets and programs were created through technical support at local level: for rehabilitation of degraded historical centres, cooperatives and a participatory housing program for the urban poor inspired by international experiences³ of 'empowerment' of the low-income population. This last program, named SAAL (*'Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local'*), relied on the mobilization of the dwellers that, only through the formation of associations, would be eligible for receiving public funds to support housing construction. It would thus depend on the participation of dwellers throughout the decision-making process, both through assemblies for discussion and group meetings with technicians. This program would defend small scale operations and resettlement in the proximity of previous areas of residence, understanding the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1968) as also the right to maintain social and urban bonds, and not to be banned to peripheries (Figure 4), has had previously happened.

During this process, the dwellers became generators and mobilizers, and the technicians were supporters and partners, producing not only the visibility but also an active and prominent role of the dwellers throughout the decision-making process. However, this program was prematurely interrupted, announcing a shift towards a liberal orientation and the withdrawal of the State.

2.4. The market as the overall provider - liberalization and the triumph of the financial sector

Aiming at the promotion of the construction and financial sectors, public action shifted in 1976 from the provision of public housing to the creation of incentives to its acquisition in the liberal market through a system of credits and savings, and the low-income population thus became hypothetical clients. But did the market provide solutions for the urban poor? Or was it an excuse for the State to discard its responsibility in assuring overall equitable access to decent living conditions, leaving the urgent needs unanswered? Though there were also housing cooperatives, that strategy proved indeed insufficient: by the beginning of the 1990s, public social housing provision returned through the PER (*'programa especial de realojamento'*, meaning 'special resettlement program'), aiming at the eradication of precarious housing and relying, once again, in resettlement operations (Figure 5).

2.5. Recent integrated programs – testing a multidimensional approach

Due to the complexity of tackling poverty and the multiplicity of strategies already tried, recent experiences - such as 'Proqual', 'Iniciativa Bairros Críticos', amongst others - have been testing the combination of spatial interventions (construction of housing and/or qualification of public space) along with immaterial action (employment generation, training, social support). They aim at putting the low-income population as participants in these several actions, gathering several agents/partners in the process, articulating efforts and resources towards common goals. Though not always with the expected results or with premature interruption, they have nonetheless proved to be valuable experiences, focusing on the users as individuals and not as numbers.

³ Such as the influence of John F. C. Turner within the informal settlements in Lima, Peru (Turner, 1977), or Carlos Nelson dos Santos in Rio de Janeiro, Brasil, that had personal contact with Nuno Portas, the portuguese urbanist that promoted the implementation of these initiatives when working as Secretary-Geral of Housing in the PREC period (Bandeirinha, 2007; Grande, 2012).



Figure 4. The SAAL program: location of operations in Porto, a residents' assembly in 1975, residents with models of future houses, example of self-construction adopted in a few projects (Sources: Bandeirinha, J. A.; Grande, N.; Dias, J.).

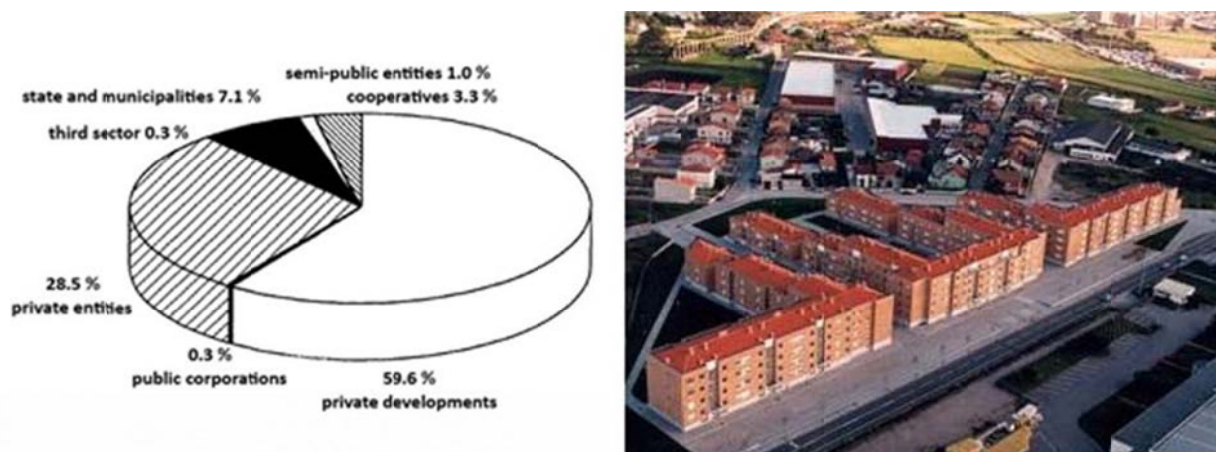


Figure 5. Percentage of housing built between 1971 and 1993, according to agents and an example of the PER program (Sources: Serra, N.; Câmara Municipal da Póvoa do Varzim).

2.6. Lessons learnt - strategies, roles, outcomes

More than a shift between policies or a strict orientation, nowadays these approaches coexist, showing that none of these strategies has been strictly discarded as totally ineffective. The result is that not only it has shown to be a challenge to refine each of these strategies (that still struggle with missing their targets), but it has also been especially difficult to assure a global overview and strategy to comprehensively support the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Throughout these different approaches, there have been different attitudes towards the recognition, the social perception and the roles of the urban poor: they ended up being clients, beneficiaries or decision-makers in the processes. Furthermore, urgent needs have at times been ignored or failed to be addressed, not only due to the complexity of the challenge itself, but also due to factors - such as political background, fund limitation, incentives to construction, amongst others - that influenced greatly in the definition of priorities.

In fact, the complexity of discussing the idea of poverty and the role of the welfare state, along with their perception by different groups within the society and the socio-political context, have also meant that social and redistributive policies have at times adopted paternalistic orientations, where the low-income sector would be subjected to moral strict control and spatial segregation.

Moreover, there has occasionally been a perverse effect of certain approaches: for example, while the extensive relocation operations aimed at providing houses with adequate conditions to a large amount of low-income people, they may also have generated the concentration of vulnerabilities, the stigmatization of certain areas of the urban environment and thus an increased difficulty in breaking the poverty cycle and the perpetuation of marginalization throughout generations.

It seems to show that, on the one hand, where low-income residents have been invisible in the decision-making process and massive operations have taken place, spatial and social integration has remained a challenge: some extensive social housing operations became stigmatized and socially critical areas, creating clusters where the concentration of vulnerabilities may escalate problems. On the other hand, it is believed that the combination of participation of beneficiaries in the decision-making process, along with small-scale areas of intervention and the concern put into spatially articulating them with the surroundings, supported by measures at economic and education levels, tends to promote social and spatial integration, and therefore more equitable living environments.

Recent interventions have tried to adopt this attitude in existing large scale social housing areas, increasing their permeability towards the surroundings and therefore amplifying the contact amongst diversified social groups. Such policy, with the qualification of public space, job creation and professional training, may thus contribute to diluting stigmatization and disparities, though with limited results.

From these examples, one may recognise not only the complexity of social vulnerabilities and their spatial repercussions, but also the importance of acting simultaneously in the several dimensions that shape them: by relating the qualification of the built environment with empowerment of its users, by negotiating amongst the stakeholders; that is, to act spatially, socially and symbolically.

In a time of scarcity of resources but also of increasing awareness towards social responsibility as well as availability of stakeholders that might be willing to take part in processes for reducing disparities, it may thus be important to find mechanisms for joining efforts and reduce the fragmentation and dispersal of interventions. This implies a comprehensive overview and deeper knowledge of the different attributes of each context.

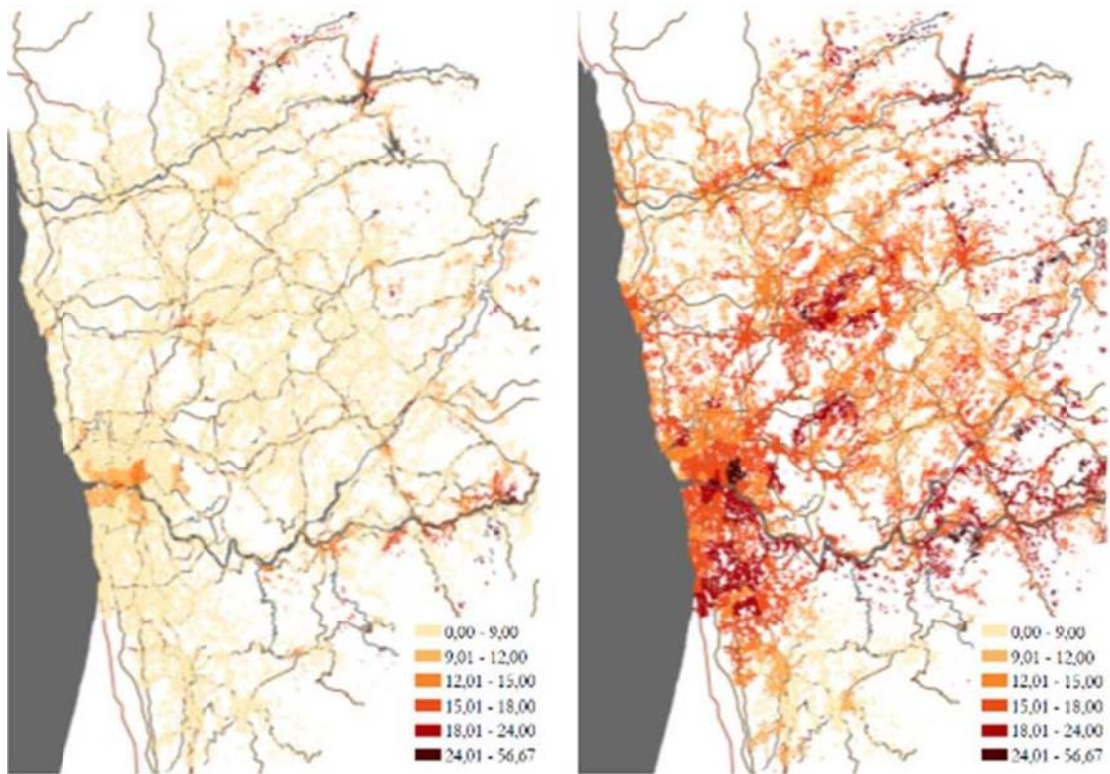


Figure 6. Percentage of unemployment in 2001 and 2011 (Source: CEAU, INE data).

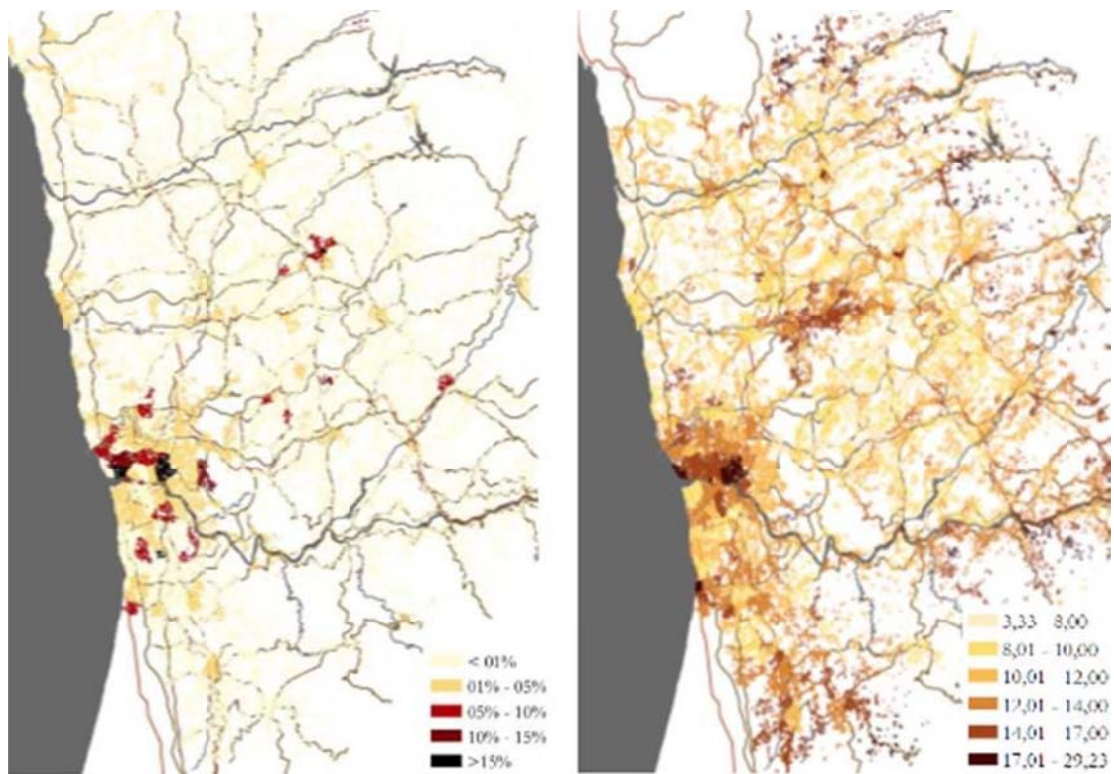


Figure 7. Percentage of social housing rents and elderly residents in 2011 (Source: CEAU, INE data).

3. SOCIAL VULNERABILITIES AND THEIR SPATIAL REPERCUSSIONS: DIFFERENT CHALLENGES

Social vulnerabilities include a very diversified, complex and difficult to define group of factors and conditions that, by their own or combined, create additional difficulties in the access to adequate living conditions. Indicators such as economic constraints, unemployment, ageing or house degradation - by illustrating situations of precariousness, and their variations on incidence and severity - serve as tools for trying to recognize and analyse complex situations. Though these indicators struggle with the incapacity to thoroughly show and explain these vulnerabilities – due to their multiple dimensions, to statistical opacity, to very recent and yet undetectable dynamics, amongst other challenges - they might prove useful for discussing the issues and having a general overview.

Taking the rate of unemployment (Figure 6), for example, the difference between the situation of the North-western area between 2001 and 2011 becomes immediately alarming. And one should be concerned not only with this vast difference in the incidence of unemployment, but also with the risk that this severity might be underestimated. That is, while previously an incidence of ten or twelve percent of unemployment would illustrate critical areas to be urgently supported, these numbers now correspond to the areas perceived as ‘well-off’ taking into account the circumstances. This may thus represent a whole shift of concern and a new level of precariousness.

The map of the concentration of social housing (Figure 7) is quite indicative of the results of past housing policies (as previously presented): the construction of vast social housing operations in the areas surrounding Porto’s consolidated core perpetuated the disparity in incidence of social beneficiaries right until nowadays, maintaining a semi-circle around the centre.

Ageing is another aspect of social vulnerability that needs to be taken into account, especially in face of recent developments. In Portugal, it has become a particularly accelerated process, through a ‘double decline’ (Malheiros, 2014) due to migration and natural causes: owing to the recent economic crisis, the rate of emigration has increased greatly in the last few years and birth rate diminished acutely, in a scenario that is described as a decrease in the ‘capital of hope’ (Malheiros, 2014), meaning little confidence in the future and avoiding long-term commitments. The occurrence of housing inhabited solely by elderly people represents thus a challenge to be addressed.

Vulnerabilities differ extensively according to occupation patterns, dominant economic activity in the area and legacy from the past, which have shaped not only different characteristics of urban areas, but also different capacities of reaction to recent changes and resilience levels, which demand diverse priorities of intervention and sensitive policies to tackle them.

There are specific settlement patterns associated with the impact of the processes of polarisation, disarticulation, deindustrialization and ‘deruralization’, related not only with morphological characteristics, but also with their location, relation with the surrounding urban fabrics and dynamics, as well as the image that is produced of it.

Without trying to create rigid categories, in this paper we will highlight and discuss differences amongst contexts, analysing their specificities and legacies, in order to try to understand common grounds for policy definitions and variations that may demand distinct approaches: in consolidated cores, in peripheral areas, in diffuse occupation areas and in low density zones with rural background. We will also try to analyse the roles of the poor and their (in)visibility, contributing to discuss specific orientations for policies of reduction of vulnerabilities and qualification of the built environment.



Figure 8. Contrasts with consolidated urban areas: aerial view of Porto's historical centre, diagram of location of Porto and Guimarães, animated nightlife and desolate streets in Porto (Sources: Jorge, F.; PROT-N; Porto Lazer; Romão, C.).

3.1. The clash of contrasts in the consolidated urban areas

In urban cores and historical centres one can often witness highly contrasting dynamics: while becoming touristic hotspots and spaces for nightlife entertainment, severe social needs still spread amongst local permanent residents (Figure 8). Indeed, this intensifying animation, while promoting economic activities and the rehabilitation of certain parts of the city, may also induce a process of polarisation **or** gentrification, thus either maintaining clusters of degradation without proper means to improve them or expelling low-income population from an increasingly expensive area to live in.

The central core of Porto is a paradigmatic example of these ambivalent processes (Figure 8). On the one hand, with a UNESCO-protected historic centre and its dynamic nightlife, attracts a highly rotational touristic population, having been elected the best European touristic destination of 2014⁴. On the other hand, some areas present high indicators of ageing population and housing with only elderly residents, a high concentration of unemployment amongst its inhabitants, along with alarming signs of presence of severe social problems (dysfunctional families, drug addition, i.e.).

This recent context reflects its past processes: by the beginning of the 1970s, there had been a long disinvestment in preservation and qualification of Porto's old core, leading to the degradation of the built environment and to a fragile socioeconomic background, stressing the urge to act. The rehabilitation process that begun in that period - through CRUARB, a program that focused on improving the housing conditions in the historical centre - undertook the effort to maintain most of its residents, adopting only partial resettlements where the density and capacity of the housing units had to be reduced so as to improve living conditions. Nevertheless, these efforts faded throughout the following decades in which the surrounding and urbanizing areas attracted population, not only due to the liberalization of the real estate market and the construction boom that preferred cheaper and vacant land, but also due to an aspiration of modernity that would, by this time, be associated with a spacious house outside the centre.

Following the public space improvements undertaken in 2001 due to the nomination of Porto as Capital of Culture, a more recent resurgence and reinvestment in its central area has created new dynamics of attraction through an image of cosmopolitan lifestyle. Nevertheless, these new policies adopted for this goal have been quite different from the previous ones: instead of an action performed building by building - and family by family - as done before, recent strategies rely on a public-private partnership (SRU) that negotiates and develops complete blocks, aiming at attracting middle and upper-class clients. Through this process, former low-income residents are being driven off the centre, while their conditions do not improve but rather change geographically, in a gentrification process with dangerous creation of mechanisms that drive residents away to cheaper areas without solving needs but rather replacing population. But other strategies might indeed be possible: the city of Guimarães provides an example of a continuous rehabilitation process that started in the 1970s and has been implemented until nowadays, through a comprehensive strategy that combined the technical support to the rehabilitation of each building of the centre. Each case had specific support, along with the qualification of exterior public areas, and residents have taken part in the rehabilitation process, thus reducing the risk of gentrification and social exclusion.

Therefore, the debate on reducing vulnerabilities within the 'canonic city' - the urban centres of older setting - leads to this fundamental issue of whether policies for rehabilitation take into account the low-income residents, suggesting that good practices should promote social integration and multicultural relations rather than gentrification, as well as diversity and mixed use.

⁴ <http://www.europeanbestdestinations.org/top/europe-best-destinations-2014/>.



Figure 9. Contrasts with consolidated urban areas - Porto's eastern area: aerial view, diagram of location of Campanhã, aerial detail of social housing blocks surrounded by high-speed road connections and photograph (Sources: Jorge, F.; PROT-N; BingMaps; Fernandes, A.)

3.2. Spatial and social exclusion in urban peripheries - the limits of urban cores as places of rupture

The idea of 'periphery' always seems to refer to a condition of being secondary in face of something else, of being different but not quite recognizable. Thus, the blurry areas that stand between the consolidated city and the low-density areas of dispersed settlement seem to suffer from this condition of ambiguity, often struggling with problems of disarticulation and uncertainty, as well as showing signs of social and physical marginalisation. Even though located in the proximity of consolidated cores, some areas end up concentrating situations of exclusion, physical discontinuity or rupture, separating and stigmatizing specific zones and contributing to the perpetuation of degradation cycles.

The eastern urban area of Porto - Campanhã (Figure 9) - is one of such cases, concentrating the most severe indicators of social distress within the whole area of Porto's administrative limits. Once again, its legacy has dictated the recent configuration and challenges. The eastern part of the city has been an industrial expansion area and the place for fixation of incoming population which, due to the impact of deindustrialisation, which is related with the current high incidence of unemployment, though not its sole cause (Pereira, 2001).

Adding to it, the location of large-scale resettlement projects (as previously described) has promoted the clustering of low-income population and thus an increased concentration of situations of economic and social vulnerability, as severe incidence of unemployment, ageing population and degradation of the built environment.

Adding to a steep topography with streams and valleys, the introduction of physical elements of rupture such as high-speed road connections have contributed to constraining the continuity of the urban fabric and thus the integration and articulation of expansion areas with existing and more consolidated zones. Moreover, there has been little investment in the qualification of public space, leading to (or resulting from) low real-estate valuation, thus contributing to becoming stigmatised and undervalued parts of the city. The combination of these factors end up outlining the image and perception of this area, therefore dissuading the occupation of more diversified social groups and perpetuating the cycles of poverty and marginalisation.

There is a sensation of spatial stigmatization and social exclusion, specially felt by the residents outside the fast-speed road boundary that encircles the denser core of the city: though this area is set within the administrative limits of Porto, residents often refer to the city as an external entity, which they may reach only after overcoming a barrier. Articulation is thus urgently needed.

Nevertheless, this area withholds attributes of importance for its qualification, such as the traces of rural background with potential for reinforcing a specific and common local identity, the project of an urban park - which has been partly implemented - as well as latent social capacities.

Thus, for the peripheral areas of increased vulnerabilities, and by recognizing that an important factor for the perpetuation of vulnerabilities relies in disarticulation and marginalisation, we must thus highlight the urgency to promote permeability, integration and social diversification, through multidimensional action: spatial qualification, social support and empowerment, as well as through the improvement of image and perception. There is, indeed, a process of "de-stigmatization" that needs to be undertaken, by showing the stories beyond the statistics, the qualities and values of depreciated areas. Only these may introduce a articulation of local and external initiatives.

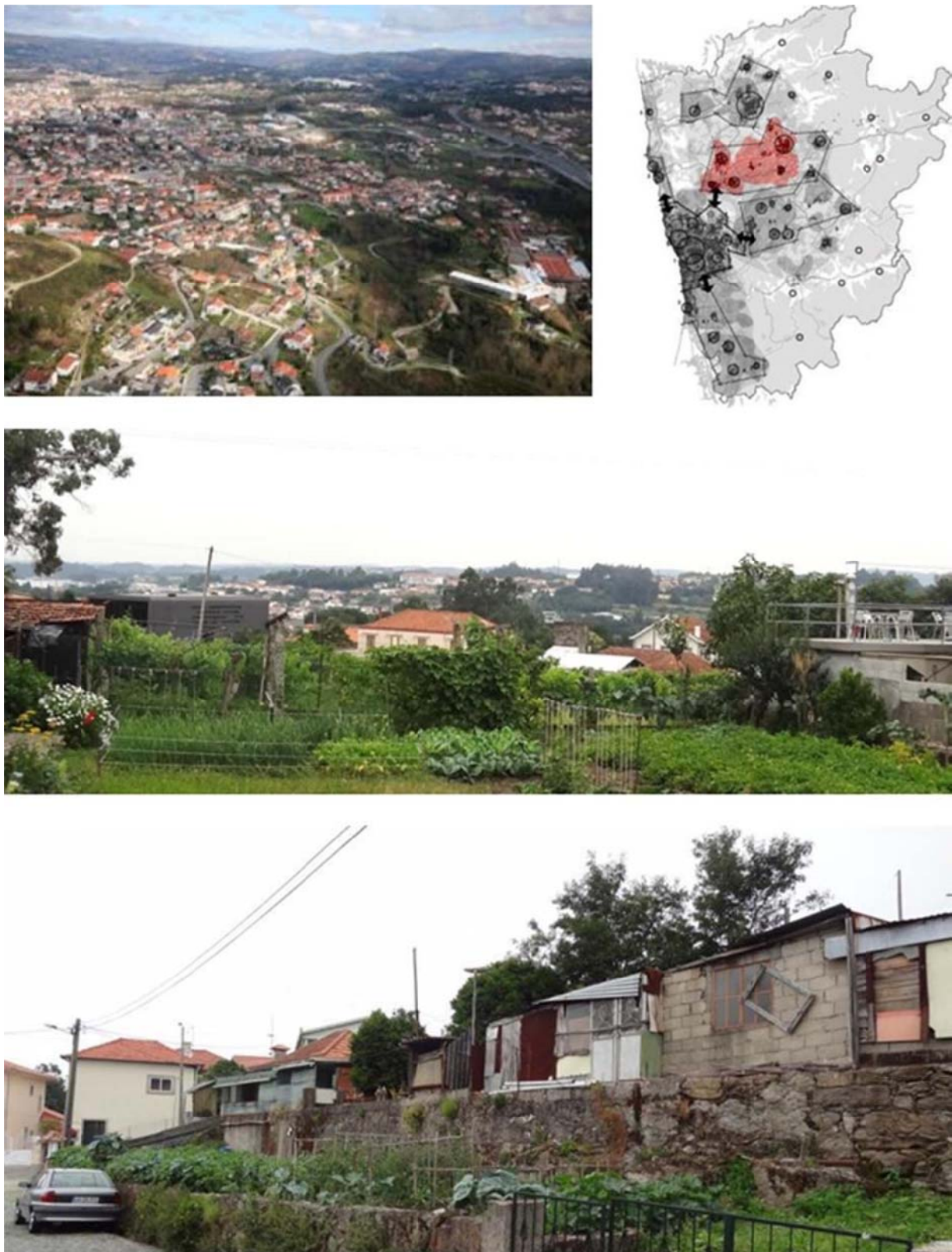


Figure 10. Vulnerabilities in urban dispersed areas - the example of Ave's valley: aerial view, diagram of location, photographs (Sources: Jorge, F.; PROT-N; Travasso, N.).

3.3. Effects of deindustrialization in urban dispersed areas

The areas of urban diffused settling patterns, which have originally been associated with the diffusion of small industries over areas of former rural background, face difficulties due to recent economic constraints, struggling with the severe impact of unemployment and loss of its original economic structure, thus on living conditions.

The area of 'Vale do Ave' (valley of the Ave river, Figure 10) is a place where this process of creation and mutation of a dispersed urban occupation is quite obvious and intense: this low-density but continuous occupation, in which constructions are scattered and widespread in the territory, faced a rapid surge of expansion from the 1970s and shows signs of recent retraction of its original structures.

With small-scale lots and a fragmented land property, this pulverisation of constructions has long relied in the combination of economic activities, meaning that the typical residents' livelihood would gather both the labour at industrial plants and small-scale home plantations for subsistence. This characteristic has dictated a pulverization of constructions, but also the relatively high permeability of the soil (for an urban area). Thus, while retaining a rural structure, this area has also welcomed the legacy of industrial development through the fixation of factories that were mainly connected with the textile manufacturing and needed a close connection to water. The expansion of the road network also contributed to the fixation of population and the intensification of commercial activities and services, therefore promoting the coexistence of these different logics.

Contrary to what might be supposed by the impact of the road system in the production and maintenance of dispersed settlements, by mapping the data collected in the last census (INE, 2011) it is shown that the short distances - as well as walking - achieve great importance in everyday movements of residents of these diffuse urbanization areas, illustrating a 'sense of proximity' in their living routines.

The (past and) recent industrial decay is creating further challenges, through a severe and persistent incidence of unemployment (and especially long-term unemployment), aggravated by a legacy of intense specialization of labour and its constraints into finding work alternatives, thus forcing a restructuration of the social and economic configurations. This process has been quite devastating, as statistical indicators show alarming signs of increased vulnerabilities, and further detailed studies that gather interviews are detecting a striking sense of frustration and loss of aspirations (Pereira, 2012). Policies to address these vulnerabilities have been scarce and face the difficulty of tackling vulnerabilities that are scattered and widespread, and therefore sometimes nearly invisible.

This occupation pattern would therefore demand policies to be adjusted to its specificity. The attributes mentioned above would need to be recognised as specificities and qualities, and thus understood and used for the identification of common goals and strengthening of a common identity, such as the legacy of rural structures that might be traced and enhanced, or the small-scale horticulture as an economic backup subsistence activity.

A physical consolidation process would also be important, through completing and better articulating supporting structures (such as the road network or other infrastructures), the creation or qualification of centralities within the urban fabric (as meeting points for the fruition of public space). Finally, social policies might also be strengthened, through small-scale and network operation, forming a lightweight but extensive support system.

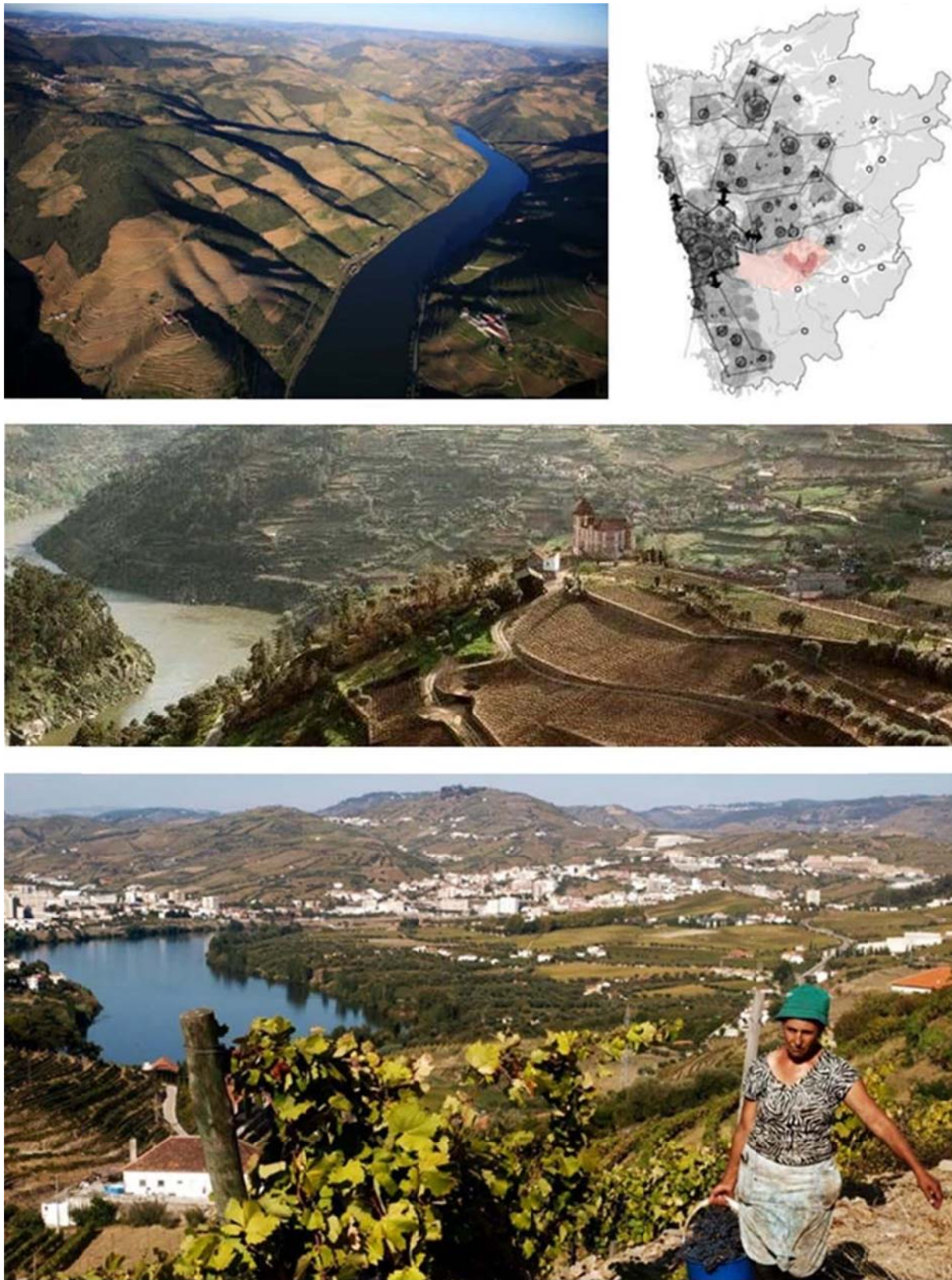


Figure 11. Challenges within rural areas in transformation - the Douro's valley: aerial view, diagram of location, photographs (Sources: Jorge, F.; PROT-N; Maze, S.; Museu do Douro).

3.4. The transformation of the rural areas

Lastly, the areas of rural settlement that have recently been confronted with major changes in their agricultural economic background, face also specific difficulties in subsistence, modernisation or transition towards urban patterns. There are indeed certain areas of agricultural predominance that are economically dynamic, but some others present extremely severe indicators of vulnerability.

The example of the Douro's valley (Figure 11) gathers both of these scenarios: along with the famous port wine vineyards and their villas, there is a backstage of invisible but widespread precarious context with very high indicators of ageing, unemployment, population exodus and inadequate living conditions. This area presents especially severe dwelling conditions, with alarming difficulties in ensuring even basic needs, such as safe water provision, access to a sanitation system and energy. The legacy of a profoundly hierarchical social structure related to land ownership, along with harsh conditions for agrarian workers (due to weather, topography, seasonality and precarious daily payments), have perpetuated disparities and extreme precariousness, which are still evident. Some years ago, civil construction had been extensively emerging and recruiting labour force in this area, acting also as a complementary economic activity. Nevertheless, as the recent crisis was especially severe in that sector, this same region suffered yet another hard hit, struggling to overcome these difficult conditions, to find alternatives and social support.

Even though in this area the distribution of a subsistence subsidy (RSI - '*rendimento social de inserção*') is relatively extensive, nonetheless it has proven insufficient to control - or even wishfully to reverse - the vulnerability of a relevant part of the population. Specific policy orientations would therefore demand further efforts in ensuring equity, namely by guaranteeing that the successful economic sectors would also translate into widespread local development, and that the social policies would in fact not also reach the needed but also reduce disparities and promote cohesion.

4. CONCLUSIONS - COHESION DESPITE UNCERTAINTY

In conclusion, this discussion illustrates the importance of tackling problems not only through their symptoms, but rather in their **several dimensions**. As it is shown, social support, if provided just by itself, may represent alleviation in needs and privations but fail to break the perpetuation of poverty and vulnerabilities (Bruto da Costa, 2012). Therefore, it is indeed imperative to simultaneously tackle the spatial, socioeconomic and cultural dimensions, not only by ensuring the minimum of dignity for all social groups, but enabling their access to opportunities and aspirations, thus breaking cycles of disparities.

The recognition of **heterogeneity** is also important: having discussed how past legacy has shaped recent demands, as well as that different human settlements show distinct vulnerabilities and priorities, this perception highlights the need to **adjust social policies to different and specific challenges**. Therefore, as similar issues may show through distinctive ways in different territories, social policies would need to ensure that their tools meet in fact different needs throughout these specific contexts, be they widespread or concentrated in stigmatised clusters.

Therefore, common targets may be addressed through different implementation strategies, recognizing and taking into consideration a *sense of specificity*. It was thus recurrently highlighted that the specific **local identity** might be a key factor for socioeconomic enhancement and spatial qualification, recognizing *heterogeneity as a value*. Hence, instead of an attempt of homogenization, it would be fundamental to perceive specific values of each territory and area, returning to the idea of the local as a *toolbox*: a space containing already most of the resources for its improvement. This

has been evident in different locations and patterns of settlement, all of them important in their specificity: the centre as a provider of a lifestyle of proximity, the peripheries as places of 'endless possibilities' that need to change their condition of 'being close' to 'being connected', the dispersed areas as places of mixture and recombination of characters where its multiplicity may become a value, or the low density areas with specific values of a lifestyle of closer connection with nature and land, along with their possibility of combination with complementary activities. The definition and clarification of this local identity would also involve, in some cases, a process of minimization of stigmas and promotion of integration.

The idea of **equity** is also crucial, defending the need to make sure that common **resources and services** are not only available, but actually **reachable for all** social groups, including the lower-income population and the most vulnerable. That would mean, on the one hand, a regulation of liberal actions based in the redistribution and reinvestment of outcomes, while on the other hand, stronger and more sensitive social support measures that might be equally effective and adapted to different situations as the contrasts in centres, the clusters of vulnerabilities in peripheries or their dilution in dispersed and low-density areas. This would mean that, regardless of the pattern of settlements, there needs to be ensured proper coverage of services and social policies, a network to reach everyone and their provision designed from the users' point of view.

Another important factor that comes out is the idea of **physical articulation and public spaces as catalysers of permeability, social diversification and interaction**. Therefore, it is also defended that the intention of social integration and contact could also be promoted by the qualification of public space, through providing meeting points for dialogue and conflict, common references and affiliations, and for wielding citizenship. These intentions would naturally assume different materializations according to the diverse human occupation patterns and their specific needs. Thus, whereas in consolidated urban centres there might already be physical cohesion but some social barriers, probably in most of the peripheral areas this articulation is still to be ensured, lacking on permeability, connectivity, relations, social activation and diversification of residents. Likewise, dispersed settlements and low density areas of rural character probably lack physical consolidation, meaning a need to strengthen physical and social connections, forming a small-scale but widespread network.

For these goals, it also becomes clear that the recent condition of *scarcity* - by increasing challenges and limiting funds - demands a whole new approach of **reorganisation of available resources**, meaning the urgency in their **redistribution and activation** (Ferrão, 2014). Taking into account the **collaborative orientation** that seems to be recently gaining further strength (Ferrão, 2011), the need for **articulation of actors** and contributions has become more urgent, rethinking roles and outputs.

Throughout the previous discussion, it is also shown that the **(in)visibility of the urban poor** - their social and spatial exclusion or integration, as well as their role in the processes of intervention - has dictated important **repercussions in the deterioration or success of policies**, proving that an equitable society and a just territory can only be achieved if all their citizens may indeed share their common resources and aspirations.

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