

New Cities
and Migration
An international debate

edited by
ROBERTO BOLOGNA





IT IS NO LONGER
POSSIBLE TO SEE HUMAN
MOBILITY JUST AS
BACKGROUND CONTEXT
FOR DEVELOPMENT, OR
EVEN WORSE,
AS A BY-PRODUCT OF
LACK OF DEVELOPMENT.
RATHER,
WITH THE SDGS
[SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS],
MIGRATION IS AN
IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTOR
TO SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT.

William Lacy Swing, 2017
Director General of International
Organisation for Migration

New Cities and Migration

An international debate

edited by
ROBERTO BOLOGNA



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TO DEAL WITH
CONTEMPORARY
REALITY AND PROMOTE
AN ALTERNATIVE TO
THE PRESENT DAY
MIGRATION FLOWS, THAT
EMPHASIZE EXISTING
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IS ESSENTIAL TO
ENSURE A CONSISTENT
UNDERSTANDING UPON
WHICH TO ACT ON
THE TERRITORY OF
URBANIZATION.

**TERRITORIAL ASYMMETRIES AND RESILIENCE
IN PORTUGAL
THE LOW DENSITY AREAS OF THE NORTHWEST**

Abstract

This paper addresses the territorial effects of internal migrations in Portugal, explaining the disparities of Portuguese urban occupation and focusing on the Northwest region of the country that comprises the city of Porto and its urban conurbation. It starts with an overview on the physical characteristics of the dispersed model of urban occupation that characterizes this Portuguese region and goes on to explain the issues related to its particular socio-economic context. The present territorial condition is briefly enlightened through the sequence of main political changes and events that correspond to the arising and the institutionalization of the Democratic Welfare State. The expansion in number, in area and in diversity of the public services highly increased over the urban growth cycle that took place in the last decades of the twentieth century. This investment in new programmes and also in the maintenance of the existing ones dramatically changed with the current financial crisis. The increasing unemployment and the subsequent rise of new and significant flows of migration, followed by the emptying of public services and the state withdrawal in areas mostly deprived re-

inforced the territorial asymmetries already in place. The intensification of exodus takes place, particularly, in the depressed lower density areas, accentuating inequalities, leading to physical degradation and intensifying human segregation. Thus, recognizing the present day constraints the proposal to face this reality grounds on the concept of resilience and the related aptitude of being proactive and of recognizing and taking advantage of the inherent strengths or values of a particular territory. It is intended, ultimately, to question the present moment and the possible future of certain areas by stressing some ideas that are taken as consensual with regard to the dispersed occupation and particularly to the lower density urban areas.

Keywords

Territorial asymmetries, resilience, dispersed occupation, low density, migrations.

Introduction

Although bearing in mind all the recent polemic surrounding international flows of migration and the importance of discussing a multiplicity of issues related to the adjustment of foreign immigrants to the place they choose to settle, this paper intends to address the topic on cities and regions that are resilient to change considering, however, the territorial effects of internal migrations in Portugal.

This approach to migration, in a territorial framework relatively absent from strong cultural antagonisms of any particular order (once people are moving within the

same country) allows us to explore other perspectives, probably less dramatic, but still related to this issue, namely the demographic emptying of places of origin and the cycle of consecutive losses that this process initiates. So, we will try to explain territorial asymmetries in Portugal, focusing on the Northwest region of the country where a continuous urban occupation is the background of a network polarized mainly by the city of Porto and its urban conurbation, and also by some medium size traditional cities. We will start, firstly, with a short overview on the understanding of this region trying to explain the physical characteristics of the dispersed model of urban occupation and briefly explaining the issues that relate to the socio-economic context that is reflected in its current framework.

And then, considering that resilience is, in a way, the ability of a particular territory to retain qualities, and by doing that promoting a certain kind of prosperity or well-being — or even mitigate some negative effects in the face of a perturbation caused by the loss of employment, of population, of public facilities, among many others that further encourage the emigration process — we will address this topic focusing on the use of resources and introducing some polemics to the debate by stressing some ideas that are taken as consensual regarding the dispersed occupation and the idea of depredation associated with it.

It is intended, ultimately, to question the present moment of certain territories in order to contribute to promote better strategies for their future.

Territorial asymmetries and the Portuguese Northwest

The reality of the Portuguese territory derives from a population unequally distributed throughout the national territory. This phenomenon, in which modern migrations have a determining role, follows several processes that overlap: deruralization, litoralisation and bipolarization, i.e. the abandonment of agriculture and the exit from rural areas, the establishment of a significant part of the Portuguese population in the coastal strip of the country and, within this area, the major settlement in two large cities and respective surrounding areas: Lisbon and Porto.

Though this process has begun much earlier, the urban growth and the increase of urban qualities of the last decades of the twentieth century reinforced the trend and widened the gap between the clear concentration of urban occupation that takes place near the coastline in a strip of land extending from the north of the country to the metropolitan conurbation of Lisbon and the progressively depleted areas of the interior territories, although neither of these two major parts could be understood as homogeneous (Fig. 1).

Indeed when focusing on the Northwest urban occupation we recognize a continuous urban texture with different densities and several points of polarization, which correspond to the traditional centres of old towns and the core of the metropolitan conurbation — the municipality of Porto and its surrounding municipalities. These structural elements which determine the regional urban framework stand out for their greater density and correspond simultaneously to the areas that have

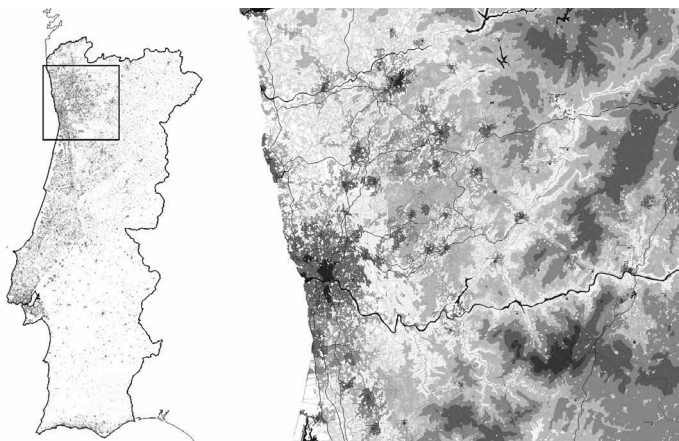


Fig. 1. a) Built area in Portugal (source: MDT-CEAU-FAUP, with data from COS 2007, Portugal); b) Variation of density in the Northwestern area of Portugal (source: MDT-CEAU-FAUP, with data from INE and IGeoE, Portugal).

a significant concentration of services and public facilities forming part of the tertiary sector of the economy, although not having the exclusivity of those.

Thus, corresponding to an area traditionally associated with the most significant development of the industrial and logistics sectors of the economy, the Portuguese Northwest has benefited from an internal flow of migration that found in this region the offer of employment and the subsequent increase in quality life that the interior regions of the country and the agricultural sector did not guarantee.

So, the Northwest region, giving continuity to a past trend of dispersed occupation related to small-scale rural properties, suffered intense dynamics of urban colonization of the existing and wide network of roads and paths that followed the major changes occurring in society in the decades that followed the end of the dictator-

ship in the 1970s and the European Union membership in the 1980s.

The asymmetries under the Democratic Welfare State

The increasingly dual Portugal — coastal versus interior territories — would thus be the reflection of a society that presented wide inequalities, being the rural exodus a compensation mechanism against those.

Since 1974, after four decades of dictatorship, the democratic governments were aware of these asymmetries and sought to progressively create conditions for greater equity and social justice, a goal which would find better ways of being achieved after 1986, when Portugal joined the European Economic Community, later the European Union.

In fact, these two new and combined political circumstances led to several structural and societal changes: the redefinition of social structures and the increase of social mobility, that we saw, for example, in the arising of an enlarged middle class; the development of the services sector, again at the expense of the abandonment of agriculture, and the reinforcement of even more important national migratory movements; the liberalization and globalization of the economy and the investment in the financial sector and in the constructions sector; and, of utmost importance, the creation of — or the will to create in a far less rich (in fact a relatively poor) country with a recently established democratic regime achieved by a peaceful but vigorous social movement which overthrew the dictatorship — a welfare state that sought to follow the expensive European post-war models.

The arising and the institutionalization of social awareness implied in the last topic took place along with the possibility of accessing to the European Structural Funds, important financial tool to meet the needs of local economy exploiting endogenous potential, to address territorial cohesion and urban convergence and, ultimately, to enable sustainable growth and better standards of living.

The fulfilment of these goals combined with the drive to establish the foundations of the previously mentioned socially driven system led to the investment in public facilities and infrastructures by local and national governments, but also to a state supported framework that increased funding access for developing enterprises (in particular SMEs). All these investments running along with a credit scenario that enabled easy access for families to building private houses.

Therefore the state reserves for himself the responsibility of elaborating plans and regulations, of supervising private initiatives and guaranteeing the existence and the adequate performance of public services. The private sector, adjusting its actions to rules in place, followed an intervention framework where the decision to act and the choice of location are mainly driven by the market dynamics or, at a small scale, by individual preferences. This way of proceeding, without a truly orientated strategy of expansion or of creating specific areas of new urban developments, enlarged even more the existing urban areas, dispersing all kinds of buildings and urban uses everywhere.

So, although the state intervention in order to establish a reasonable offer of urban services in each municipality core expected to minimise territorial differences, the importance of the previously mentioned dynamics led to the reinforcement of existing territorial diversities.

Revealing the concentration of population in the areas of highest economic dynamics, which includes not only the higher density and tertiary core areas but also the territories of industrial dispersion, the reality of the Portuguese Northwest, in these years of economic progress, has reaffirmed, even more, the differences between intensive urban contexts — denser and consolidated urban areas and their peripheral edges; extensive urban contexts — dispersed or diffuse urban occupation resulting predominantly of private housing expansion often mixed with dispersed industrial buildings or enterprise areas; and discontinuous urban contexts — lower density areas characterized by their rural matrix and the predominance of agriculture and forest mixed with single housing typologies (isolated, detached or semi-detached).

The recent economic crisis aftermath

The important urban growth cycle, that started in the 1970s and incredibly increased in the 1990s based on the real estate sector and on the production of new housing, came to an end in the mid 2000s. This outcome, resulting above all from the current financial crisis originated within the real estate credit systems, was also related to the decreasing numbers of population and a new surge of migration. A phenomenon that is particularly dramatic in the lower density urban contexts,

where the population exit was achieved mainly at the expense of young adults that reinforced denser central areas or the recent but expressive flow of emigration to other countries.

In fact, considering the increase of unemployment in the last decade it's not difficult to estimate the reasons that determine the loss of this population. In 2011 Census, it's clear that almost everywhere in the Northwest region of Portugal the unemployment rate was higher than 9%. For the mentioned reasons it is also clear that the problem of population ageing has been aggravated. If we look at the changes between Census 1991, 2001 and 2011 we can see that the highest ageing rates are found mainly in these low density areas from where people tend to leave.

At the same time, the recent economic crisis has changed the way public authorities were dealing in the past with an already fragile Welfare System. There is a strong decline in public investment, reducing even more an already restricted policy of public intervention. The new political framework that took place during the crisis climax led to the closure of many facilities and consequently to a higher concentration of public services in fewer locations, materializing decisions that were held on the basis of cost-benefit analysis that pointed out dramatically the very restricted numbers of users in certain areas. In addition to the privatization process of public services, some public facilities have closed or are operating far below capacity, showing, in many circumstances, signs of degradation (Fig. 2).

The aggravation of territorial asymmetries and social in-



Fig. 2. a) Closed and abandoned school in the interior of Portugal; b) Manifestation against the closing of Post Offices in the interior of Portugal; c) Schools closed in 2014 (source: Ministério da Educação, Portugal).

equity take place, particularly, in already deprived lower density areas. Economically driven migrations, loss of population and stagnation of urban growth are associated with the acceleration of a process of state withdrawal, abandonment and degradation that has a particular focus on the less populated areas.

The process of deruralization proceeds associated with the ageing of population and the emigration surge in recent years. As a result, the lower density areas are even more vulnerable to the decrease of population, abandonment and disinvestment in existing resources and in individual and collective physical assets. In contrast, there is a even greater concentration of services, public and private, in areas of high urban concentration that correspond, in fact, to larger and denser urban contexts. Such a setting will tend to accentuate asymmetries and the territorial system vulnerabilities, leading to an incre-

mental loss and subsequent urban fabric degradation — regarding physical and social dimensions —, accentuating inequalities and intensifying human segregation.

The resilience of low density areas

The withdrawal of the State reduces the access to resources and by doing so increases the desertification of the lower density areas mainly in the east boundary and more interior areas of the region and also in the less valued interstitial areas — usually locations away from urban centres or important urban axes, not so well served by the road network and now condemned to a progressive isolation — although belonging to the vast coastal territory mentioned in the beginning of this text. These lower density urban areas result from dispersed or diffused patterns of urbanization that have constituted a significant trend on recent urban development and a form of urbanization that has been highly debated all over the world (Fig. 3).

While some see them as a result of poor land management or as an uncontrolled growth related to the exponential increase in the use of the private car, others see them as a less expensive opportunity for a living space outside the congested denser urban areas that can also guarantee specific conditions to improve the inhabitant's quality of life.

The main issue is, in fact, on how these types of territories relate to the use (or the abuse) of resources.

Under the umbrella of capitalism one should generate economies of agglomeration that are needed for job creation and economic growth implying interventions

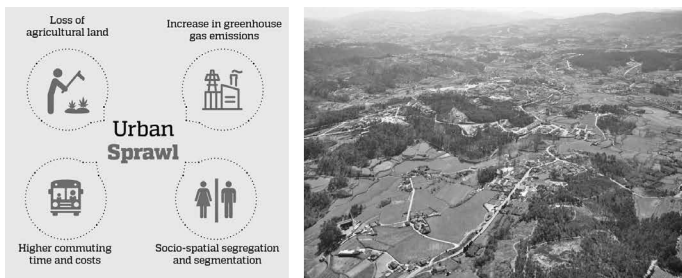


Fig. 3. a) Disadvantages of urban sprawl (source: UN Habitat 2016) World Cities Report 2016; b) Aerial photograph of diffuse occupation in the Northwest of Portugal (photo: © Filipe Jorge).

cost-effective and with great potential to prevent and reduce unplanned development, while reducing the social, economic and environmental costs of urban sprawl. Although seen as a quite interesting principle when one is thinking in the future and trying to avoid new expansion areas, is very difficult to address when trying to deal with existing lower density urban areas.

In fact, while accepting that some features of these contexts can indeed determine increased vulnerability the real question is: can we also accept that these territories have as well some particular attributes with high potential for local regeneration? Are they resilient and able to recover from present day threats?

Although urban sprawl is usually related to the loss of agricultural land, the dispersed urban pattern of the Northwest region of Portugal is characterized by the proximity between agriculture and the built occupation, including housing and industrial plots.

Farming is a way to supplement the lower income of certain families (usually employed in local factories) but can also be seen as a form of occupying leisure time that in the cities we have come to associate to the recent

trend related with urban gardens, communal, allotment gardens, urban farming, and so on. Furthermore the ecological and the aesthetic dimensions associated with the agriculture and the forest green landscapes are seen as an important feature that values these territories and that should be considered when transforming them.

With respect to the mobility, studies have showed that in daily house-work commuting there are many areas where walking corresponds to 20% of the displacements but in certain areas it reaches values greater than 30%, standards only achieved in the central urban core of cities like Porto, which, considering the Portuguese reality, is not inconsiderable. However one can not help saying that often the proximity in these areas of diffuse urbanization, while revealing an important mix and complementary uses in the territory, can also point to a possible limitation of access to other modes of transport, and consequently to serious constraints in finding jobs out of a restricted area.

Although these territories may present some problems of exclusion or discrimination, considering what has just been said, it seems clear that the lower density areas are the ones that best respond to social inclusion. If you look at the housing issue considering the proportion of housing only with elderly residents, it is clear that the areas of segregation and social segmentation are those that match the denser urban city centres. Furthermore the lower density areas are those where community ties, neighbourhood relations and social solidarity can be found in a more significant way.

Final remarks

Considering that being resilient means being proactive despite the anticipated and unanticipated challenges that will emerge and also being able to take advantage of inherent strengths or values to withstand crisis and deflect attacks of any nature, to deal with contemporary reality and promote an alternative to the present day migration flows, that emphasize existing vulnerabilities and territorial asymmetries, is essential to ensure a consistent understanding upon which to act on the territory of urbanization.

It requires, first of all, to recognize and accept urban diversity, to value heterogeneity and to identify and understand its different meanings as well as the actual characteristics that distinguish each pattern of occupation, its risks, vulnerabilities and values and determine the framework to promote specific actions.

Recent changes are indeed radical, going from realized investment in growth, by occupying new urban areas or expanding existing ones, to a real contraction of the available funding for intervention and, above all, of the existing population. It is recognized, therefore, this new condition of shrinking territories — not only in the Portuguese reality but also in many European territories.

In Portugal, the public administration, in its different levels of action, has serious difficulties in knowing how to manage territorial asymmetries, and particularly, areas with a visible demographic loss, partially occupied housing developments and buildings unfinished, abandoned or vandalized. The big question, in fact, is how to deal with the management of infrastructure and public

services in a drastic cut in funding scenario and, at the same time, how to set limits and rules for the privatization process, defining detailed plans for public goods and provision of public services valuing the particular identity of each territory.

The territorial asymmetries are a challenge for the future, particularly in what matters the less populated areas and therefore the ones that are usually understood as the least economically interesting, a condition that modern society has learned to associate with development. It seems clear that one has to question the excessive value placed in the economic principles that characterize modern development. However, corresponding to a paradigm shift, there's no experience yet on the best practices to counteract these degradation cycles.

Meanwhile one should be aware of the specific values of each part of the territory and, above all, be conscious of this diversity, which must be dealt with as a positive dimension of the extended urban territory of contemporary times.

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The book brings together contributions to the discussion on the relationship between the future of our cities and migration, which took place on the occasion of an international meeting held in Florence (Italy).

Scholars, educators, researchers, professionals, policymakers and students interested in the contemporary challenging question of migration within, across and beyond cities participated from different countries where migration represents a big challenge. The socio-spatial transformation of the everyday urban environment due to the migrations movements has been debated under an interdisciplinary approach. In general terms the workshop aimed to address questions related to cities and regions that are resilient to change (climatic, social, cultural), and to discuss new forms of residential patterns and urban life, with the purpose of jointly developing global visions regarding future cities in transformation. Immigration being but one of the most important expressions of this change.

The purpose was exploring new forms of appropriation of the urban territory, in a multidisciplinary way, involving the various fields related to the project, as well as the humanities and social sciences.