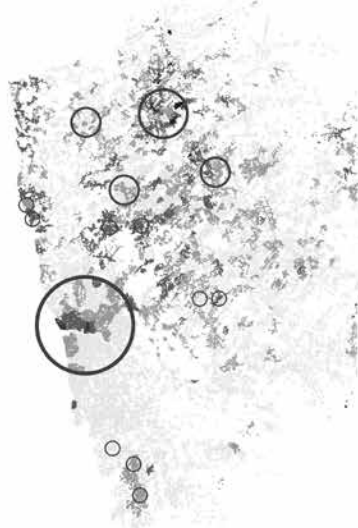**LICENSED BUILDINGS**
2005-2007

LICENSED BUILDINGS
2017-2019

Licensed buildings
(nr/ha, 3 year period)

< 0,15
0,15 - 0,25
0,25 - 0,5
0,5 - 0,75
0,75 - 1,00
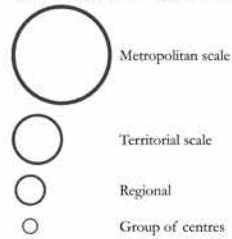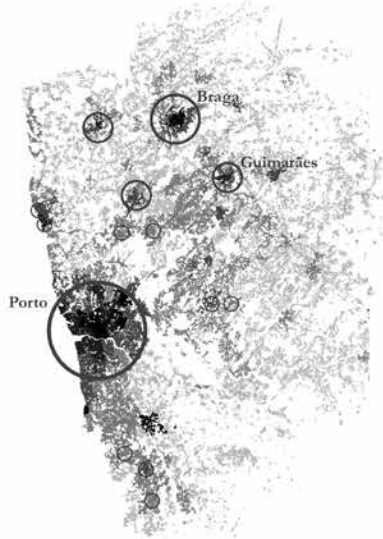> 1,00

Population density
(people/ha)

< 10
10 - 20
20 - 40
40 - 60
> 60

MAIN URBAN CENTRES

Braga

Guimarães

Porto
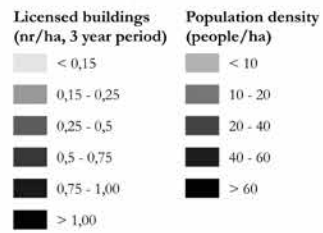
Main urban centres
(according to the Regional Plan)

Metropolitan scale

Territorial scale

Regional

Group of centres

0   25   50 km

Picture 1 – From expansion to concentration
The maps show the change in real estate investment, which was dispersed by all the territory
before the economic crisis, and is now concentrated in the main urban centres
Maps by Nuno Travasso, using data from INE and PROT-N

Nuno Travasso

Three topics for reurbanisation
Rethinking planning practices for extensive urbanisation territories after growth

Introduction

How to deal with the extensive urbanisation that we have inherited from the past decades of rapid urban growth, and which not only constitutes the vast majority of the urbanized area, but also where most of the population and activities are located? It seems obvious that continuing urban expansion makes little sense, especially in a moment when there is no demographic growth. But it seems equally obvious that abandoning these territories and concentrating all the resources (and all the discourse) in a limited number of small exceptional urban cores will also have very negative consequences.

Dealing with the extensive urbanisation shaped by the growth period of recent decades (c. 1975-2005) will now require new spatial planning practices (Lanzani, Merlini & Zanfi, 2016). *New*, not in the sense that they will need new theoretical knowledge to be developed, but in the sense that they will imply changes in the established daily planning activities, especially the ones led by local public administration.

In order to better examine this issue, this paper takes the NW of Portugal as a case-study, considering that in this territory the two previously mentioned phenomena are particularly evident: extensive diffuse urbanisation shaped by the growth period; and a sudden change in investment dynamics that followed that period, from expansion towards concentration.

The paper's argument is divided in two main sections. The first one identifies and describes the ongoing investment concentration dynamic, highlighting the need for alternative public policies. The second section suggests three ways in which common practices should adapt in order to meet current challenges.

From expansion to concentration

The NW of Portugal is covered by an extensive and continuous urban settlement with a population of nearly 3 million[1]. Despite its ancient origins[2], the image this extensive urbanisation presents today is mainly the result of a fast growth period, which started with the end of the dictatorship (1974) and was intensified after Portugal's accession to the European Communities (1986).

This growth was a reaction to a long-term shortage of basic infrastructures (Domingues, 2006) and housing (Ferreira, 2013; Antunes, 2018), which the democratic governments sought to overcome both by EU funded public investment in infrastructures and public facilities; and by a housing policy based on incentives to private house acquisition, through subsidized bank loans and savings (Antunes, 2018; Travasso, 2021).

These two dynamics fuelled an urban development essentially driven by private investment based on new construction

destined to homeownership. Rental market became residual[3] and the main historic centres entered a process of decay, characterized by population loss[4], lack of maintenance and absence of investment[5].

The described dynamics also took a major role in the shaping of the Portuguese economic development model, in which finance and real estate became the main sectors (Figueiredo, 2012).

During the last decade, we have witnessed a deep change in this context. The international economic crisis initiated in 2008 – which had been forged within the American mortgage system (Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, 2011) – hit the Portuguese economy at its core (real estate and finance), leading to a profound crisis and to an international bailout programme[6]. The result was the immediate cease of urban expansion, and the redirection of the investment towards the main historic centres, namely Lisbon and Porto.

The process was twofold:

a) In the territories of previous urban expansion, we have witnessed a double investment withdrawal:

On the one hand, severe cuts in public spending made it impossible not only to continue investing in new infrastructure and public facilities, but also to maintain the existing ones. Consequently, an important share of such infrastructures and facilities was closed or privatized.

On the other hand, credit shortage, household's income loss, and a general feeling of uncertainty, led to a sudden stop in construction. From 2007 to 2013, the number of new housing units licensed by private companies dropped 96% (INE) and more than one third of the existing construction companies were closed (INE).

This investment withdrawal was also the product of a widespread public discourse pointing out the urban growth of previous decades as unsustainable and as one of the causes of the economic crisis. Renewal was then presented as the only acceptable investment in the construction sector.

b) In the main urban centres, we have witnessed a concentration and intensification of investment mainly focused in renewal for tourism and luxury housing.

This was the product of many factors, such as previous public urban renewal programmes, new tourism trends (e.g. low-cost flights, airbnb), or the use of main centres' real estate as safe assets during the crisis. However, the concentration of capital was mainly induced by a set of public policies aiming to reactivate the economy and redirect the previous expansion dynamic towards renewal: a broad legislative reform deregulating rental market, tourism accomodation, and construction requirements; as well as new planning tools, fiscal incentives and public funding aiming to promote urban renewal (Antunes, 2020; Travasso, 2021).

This policy had two main consequences. First: the image of the main historic cores was rapidly transformed. Second: housing prices have suddenly risen, triggering gentrification and a housing crisis (Farha, 2017; Seixas & Antunes, 2019; Travasso et al., 2020). As a reaction, the government is now developing new housing policies (Portuguese Government, 2017; Jorge, 2022), once again concentrating public resources (and public attention) in the main urban centres (Pinto, 2022), where the problem is more evident.

So, while all the attention and investment are concentrated in the historic centres, the more devalued, unconsolidated and vulnerable territories – the ones shaped by the fast growth period – seem now forgotten. Here, the absence of investment and specific public policies is leading to a progressive decline (Travasso, Fernandes & Sá, 2014). And, if no action is taken, this may result in the deterioration of vast urban areas.

Aiming to stop such process, Nuno Portas has called for a *z* process (Portas & Travasso, 2011), able to complete, reinforce and give new meaning to the widespread networks that support these areas.

This is a difficult process, with no easy solutions. In this paper I will simply advance three topics to help thinking in which ways common spatial planning practices could adapt in order to meet this challenge.

Three topics for more adequate planning practices
1 – Working with other materials besides buildings.

Spatial planning tradition is based on how to guide urban growth. However, today we have no growth on the extensive urbanisation territories. On the contrary, in many cases we are witnessing a decline in population and in activities.

Besides requiring better tools for retrofitting and reactivating vacant plots (both built and unbuilt ones), this lack of growth makes it evident that the existing diffuse or dispersed

Picture 2 – Blue and green infrastructure
In the municipality of Gaia (NW of Portugal) streams are being used as a basis for setting an intelligible urban structure at a regional scale
Photo and map by Nuno Travasso

urban patterns cannot be understood as an intermediary stage towards a compact urban fabric. The major part of these areas is not and will not be built.

This means that we have to learn how to make sense of these territories, which do not follow the canonical urban models (Domingues & Travasso, 2015). We have to recognise their own logics, and to develop design and planning practices that reinforce those logics and draw on endogenous characteristics and resources (Secchi & Viganò, 2011; Labastida, 2013).

This also means that we have to learn how to work with non-built materials[7]. Shaping urban space with other elements besides buildings (namely vegetable elements) is nothing new – even if architects are often ill-equipped to do so. But in reurbanising these territories, green and blue infrastructure must take the leading role. This has two main reasons:

First, because some non-built elements, such as rivers, enable the creation of large-scale intelligible structures with a relatively low budget. These structures are necessary to help organising extensive and complex urban fabrics at a regional scale (Sieverts, 1997).

Second, and more important, because planning territories acknowledging their composite nature – in the sense that they are composed both by grey infrastructure and by green and blue ones – require intervening on the way these different systems function. So, just as designing roads is first and foremost a matter of mobility, so too designing green infrastructure cannot be treated only in morphological terms. This means that issues such as climate change adaptation and mitigation, carbon storage, degraded ecosystems restoration, water quality improvement, flood damage control, heat stress reduction, forest management, ecosystem services, agriculture, circular production cycles, etc., must be at the centre of spatial planning decisions. And this is evident today, in a moment when concepts such as sustainability, climate change and Nature Based Solutions (European Commission, 2015) are setting the public discourse and the political agenda.

None of these issues is new to spatial planning. However, they are normally disconnected from everyday planning practices, mainly due to the way in which local public agencies are organised in different and often ill-coordinated sectoral cabinets. And this means that change should involve not only the practices of urban managers, planners and designers, but also the organisation of public planning agencies.

Picture 3 – Alternative practices
The public programme "Bairros Saudáveis" (Healthy Neighbourhoods), created by Helena Roseta, is promoting 246 actions developed by local communities, with a total budget of only 10 M€. This programme can be seen as a lb for new participatory practices
Photo by Palácio da Imaginação; map by Bairros Saudáveis.

2 – New actors and processes

The absence of growth also leads to a change in the system of actors and procedures that are responsible for urban transformation.

The previous urban growth was essentially based on the action of private developers, with local administration taking the role of a passive regulator, who simply enforces the compliance with the rules (Cavaco, 2009; Travasso, 2021). Today, one cannot expect this same way of doing things to be able to promote the needed reurbanisation process, because, in these territories, such process is not expected to be a profitable investment: demography does not justify new housing, and land value does not cover the investment in large-scale renewal actions. And even if growth dynamics and private investment were to return to those areas, we should look for alternative planning practices, considering that the real estate led urbanisation of previous decades has not produced the best results.

Moreover, a big part of the needed transformation is not on the buildings themselves, but on collective spaces and on connecting the existing small urban developments (Portas &

Travasso, 2011). To this regard, the *urban project* tradition – in which public administration boosts private investment by adding value to one area, mainly through the redesigning of its public spaces (Portas, 1998; Ward, 2004) – could offer part of the solution. However, this procedure is only adequate for limited areas of exception, not for such widespread common territories.

Therefore, we need alternative planning practices to complement the existing ones. New practices capable of drawing upon the already existing endogenous materials. And this requires public administration taking on a new role: more than being the developer, or a passive regulator, it becomes the one who is able to bring together the available resources and actors into coordinated transformative actions (Healey, 2002). And this implies new ways of doing things, that can be summarized in three topics:

a) Outlining the existing demand and supply networks, by identifying and mapping both the existing needs and the available resources. This is the basis for understanding how these networks may be rearranged; as well for detecting the

Picture 4 – Making public
Exhibition and workshop included in the project "Território: Casa Comum" (Territory: a common home), which aimed at promoting a broad discussion about Famalicão's territory (NW of Portugal). The project was coordinated by Álvaro Domingues and Nuno Travasso
Photos by Alexandre Delmar

elements that may be lacking, and should be provided (Boeri, 2012).

b) Engaging other actors in the urbanisation process, namely those who are interested in reactivating their territories, but have been kept aside urban transformation processes led by the real estate market – landowners with no investment capacity, housing cooperatives, non-profit organizations, activists, local residents. These actors bring new interests and new cultures of action to the process. Involving them implies creating opportunities form them to act, as well as mobilising, mediating and coordinating their actions (Forester, 2008). It also requires more open and inclusive participatory processes, based on co-creation and co-decision.

c) Creating local mediation entities able to promote and support a planning action as dependant of endogenous logics and resources as the one suggested here. Such entities must be very close (not only in physical terms) to the territories and their actors.

3 – New imaginaries

If the aim is to promote a reurbanisation process resulting from the initiative and action of a large number actors, then we need a shared idea or a shared goal able to mobilise and coordinate them.

However, this is not an easy task, because different actors do not share the same idea of what these territories are, or of what they should be (Travasso, 2021). In fact, representations of these territories of diffusion are weak, and often associated with negative discourses and imagery (Solà-Morales, 1995; Domingues, 2009).

Therefore, there is the need to create new *imaginaries* of these territories (Davoudi, 2018), or, as Patsy Healey puts it, new "conceptions of place and territory which have the power to mobilise, co-ordinate and inspire" (2002: p.17). Such creation implies two complementary sets of actions:

a) Identifying and revealing specific characteristics of the territories, which may be recognized as endogenous values to be preserved and reinforced (Secchi & Viganò, 2011; Labastida, 2013).

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b) Composing a common arena for the required participatory debate and decision-making process, which implies the development of a shared language, the gathering of a legit assembly, and the definition of the *matters of concern* to be discussed (Latour, 2004).

None of these processes can be promptly determined, nor can they be imposed by an external entity. They must emerge from a progressive sedimentation, resulting from a continuous, inclusive and open dialogue, where no decision is at stake, and where actors freely explore the complexity of the matters, exchanging their different views in order to discover new shared readings (Mäntisalo, Balducci & Kangasoja, 2011). The goal is not to reach any conclusion, but to create the conditions for the discussions that will follow.

Public entities may help promoting such a process through an action of making things (the territory, its places, its values, its history, its narratives, its dynamics, its actors, its conflicts, the issues at stake, ...) public. *Making public* in both senses of the phrase: binging things to common knowledge, and, at the same time, bringing things to the public sphere – i.e., construing them as things that belong and represent the community; as things that must be decided by the collective and in the collective interest (Latour, 2004; Dehaene, Notteboom & Teerds, 2013). Actions such as debates, exhibitions, curated tours, art work, documentaries, etc., can feed that process.

Final remarks

As previously stressed, none of the changes suggested in this paper require new theoretical knowledge, or even a new legal framework (Ferrão, 2011). They require new planning practices, which imply a new culture of action.

To this regard, Sanderson (2009) proposes setting a long-term learning path based on experimental trial and error, pointing towards the formation of a collective *intelligence* – i.e., a shared way of acting and solving problems, more than a set of rules and procedures.

This should be a bottom-up process, based on the involvement and accumulated experience of frontline practitioners. However, as Cels et al. (2012) explain, public administration discourages experimental and innovative behaviour, and censures individual and risky decisions. Introducing new practices in this milieu is not easy. Anyhow, it is at this level that action must be taken: capacitating the civil workers involved in planning activities, creating fora for discussion and peer-learning, and generating the opportunities for them to develop and try new and more adequate approaches to the existing planning challenges.

[1] The analysis presented in this paper takes as a case study the Metapolitan Arc of the NW (Portas, Sá, Calix, 2015), which includes the NUTS III of Porto Metropolitan Area, Tâmega and Sousa, Ave, and Cávado. According to the Census 2021, this area has a population of 2.980.349 (INE).

[2] As shown by Durães (1994), all the NW region of Portugal is consistently described as being covered by a continuous and diffuse settlement since the 16th century (cf. Mestre António, 1512; Vaz, 1532; Castro 1762).

[3] In Portugal, the percentage of households living in rented houses decreased from 61% in 1960 to 24% in 2001 (PORDATA).

[4] Porto's population decreased 22% from 1960 to 2011, while the population of its Metropolitan Area increased 54% (and the population of the Metapolitan Arc increased 46%). Similarly, Lisbon's population decreased 32% and the population of its Metropolitan Area increased 87% (PORDATA).

[5] The rent control system, implemented in Lisbon and Porto in 1948, and broadened to all the country in 1975, was one of the main reasons for this lack of investment (Antunes, 2018).

[6] The Portuguese bailout programme lasted from 2011 to 2014, and was led by the IMF, the European Commission and the European Central Bank.

[7] To this regard, Viganò speaks of a *reverse city* (1999).

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Online data sources
INE – https://www.ine.pt
PORDATA – https://www.pordata.pt

Abstract

Come affrontare l'estesa urbanizzazione che abbiamo ricevuto dagli decenni di rapida crescita urbana (c. 1975-2005), e che non solo costituisce la grande maggioranza dell'area urbanizzata, ma è pure dove si trova la maggior parte della popolazione e delle attività? Sembra ovvio che continuare l'espansione urbana abbia poco senso, soprattutto in un momento in cui non c'è crescita demografica. Ma sembra altrettanto ovvio che abbandonare questi territori e concentrare tutte le risorse (e tutto il discorso) in un numero limitato di piccoli nuclei urbani eccezionali avrà anche conseguenze molto negative.

Affrontare i territori dell'urbanizzazione estensiva richiederà ora nuove pratiche di pianificazione territoriale. Nuove, non nel senso che necessiteranno di nuove conoscenze teoriche, ma nel senso che richiederanno cambiamenti nelle attività quotidiane di progetto e di pianificazione, in particolare quelle guidate dalla pubblica amministrazione locale.

L'obiettivo di questo testo è ragionare su tali cambiamenti. E, per farlo, si è preso come caso di studio il nord-ovest del Portogallo, considerando il fatto che in questo territorio sono particolarmente evidenti i due fenomeni citati: un'estesa urbanizzazione diffusa risultante del recente periodo di crescita e un repentino cambiamento delle dinamiche di investimento – dall'espansione verso la concentrazione – che è avvenuto nell'intorno temporale considerato.

L'argomento è diviso in due parti principali:

1. Dall'espansione verso la concentrazione

La prima parte descrive il citato cambiamento delle dinamiche di investimento. Si delinea come la crisi internazionale iniziata nel 2008 abbia cambiato il contesto che aveva alimentato tre decenni di sviluppo urbanistico, portando all'immediata cessazione dell'espansione e alla concentrazione di tutti gli investimenti (e di tutta l'attenzione) nei principali centri storici. Questa concentrazione, che è stata in gran parte prodotta da un insieme di nuove politiche pubbliche, ha causato un subito aumento dei prezzi dell'abitazione, innescando una crisi abitativa di scala nazionale.

I territori dell'urbanizzazione espansiva sono stati dimenticati, senza dinamiche di trasformazione e privi di parte dei suoi servizi e attrezzature pubbliche, perché dismesse o privatizzate in seguito alla crisi. Nella gran parte di questi territori si assiste ora a un progressivo declino. Per fermarlo sarà necessaria un'azione di riurbanizzazione in grado di completare, rafforzare e dare nuovo significato alle strutture che organizzano queste aree.

2. Tre temi per pratiche di pianificazione più adeguate

La riurbanizzazione di questi territori è un processo difficile. In questo testo si presentano soltanto tre temi per aiutarci a pensare in che modo le pratiche di pianificazione quotidiana guidate dalle amministrazioni potrebbero adattarsi per affrontare tale sfida:

* – Lavorare con altri materiali oltre alle costruzioni. La fine della crescita rende evidente che l'urbanizzazione diffusa o dispersa non può essere intesa come un passaggio intermedio verso un tessuto urbano compatto. La maggior parte di queste aree non sono e non saranno costruite. Questo significa che dobbiamo imparare a lavorare con materiali non costruiti – ovvero l'infrastruttura blu e verde –, non solo nel senso di utilizzarli per modellare la forma urbana, ma soprattutto nel senso di comprendere il loro ruolo nel funzionamento del sistema urbano nel suo insieme e come queste possano partecipare alla risposta delle attuali sfide ambientali e climatiche.

* – Nuovi attori e processi. L'assenza di crescita richiede un cambiamento nei processi di trasformazione urbana, che non può continuare ad essere dominata dal mercato immobiliare. È necessario coinvolgere altri attori e lavorare con le risorse endogene esistenti. Questo richiede pratiche diverse e implica che la pubblica amministrazione svolga un diverso ruolo: essere colei che individua, stimola, mobilita, facilita, media, attiva e coordina i numerosi attori e risorse, riunendoli in nuovi processi collaborativi.

* – Nuovi immaginari. Se l'obiettivo è promuovere un processo di riurbanizzazione risultante dalle azioni di un gran numero di attori, allora è necessaria un'idea condivisa che possa mobilitarli e coordinarli. Tuttavia, attori diversi hanno immaginari diversi di ciò che questi territori sono o di ciò che dovrebbero essere. Le rappresentazioni dei territori di diffusione, infatti, sono deboli e spesso associate a discorsi e immagini negative. Occorre quindi stimolare la creazione di nuovi immaginari di questi territori.

Come accennato, nessuno di questi problemi è nuovo. Tuttavia, sono normalmente slegati dalle pratiche di pianificazione quotidiana, a causa sia della cultura d'azione esistente, sia dal modo settoriale in cui sono organizzate le municipalità. È a questo livello che bisogna agire: riorganizzare i servizi e promuovere un percorso di apprendimento verso la formazione di un'intelligenza collettiva, di un altro modo di fare. Si tratta soprattutto di un cambiamento culturale, che nella pubblica amministrazione non è facile da realizzare. Tuttavia, questa è la strada che dobbiamo intraprendere.