

Planning within scarcity: changing a ‘growth paradigm’ into a ‘capability approach’ to the territories? A view from the Northwest of Portugal
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1 A NEED FOR CHANGING THE APPROACH TO PLANNING?

Portugal inherited the European post-war planning approaches based on strong direct public action and regulation of private investment, both of which based on growth-oriented logics. Yet the socioeconomic and territorial impacts of the recent socioeconomic crisis have created different contexts and demands, aggravating the mismatch between the established planning practices and the needed action, thus raising the debate on the need to reframe the planning approach.

Portugal is a paradigmatic case of a wider mismatch, a territory where not only the impact of the crisis and the following austerity policies were especially severe, but also where planning practices still have difficulty in dealing with these new demands and need to be reframed towards more adequate local policies.

Set within this debate, and taking the Northwest of Portugal as a laboratory and a territory to reflect upon, this paper will argue that the recurrent *growth paradigm* of planning should be further changed into a *capability approach* to the territories: by understanding the existing contexts and their demands, local resources and stakeholders; by recognizing social and territorial diversity as a value; by defining local-sensitive solutions instead of one-size-fits-all models; and by treasuring specificity instead of specialization or competitiveness.

This reflection follows an applied-research project requested by the Regional Coordination and Development Commission of the North of Portugal (CCDR-N), which aimed at the definition of orientations for the cohesion of the North-western region of Portugal. This project paid special attention to territories that are usually less addressed than the denser urban cores: the peri-urban zones, the diffuse

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urbanization areas and the low-density territories. It analysed their demands and challenges by mapping statistical data, morphologies and dynamics throughout time, through fieldwork and workshops with municipal technicians, decision-makers and professionals from different disciplinary fields.

This project will thus be used here to discuss and support the argument that reframing the established planning practices is urgently needed – by focusing on the challenges to planning in scarce-resource contexts –, as well as to illustrate how these demands can be overcome through the valorisation of local specificities, the attraction of further resources, the involvement and reflexivity of the different actors, decentralised and network-based decision-making processes and small-scale articulated actions, in order to achieve territorial cohesion and inclusive solutions.

1.1 INTERNATIONAL DEBATE ON PLANNING WITHIN SCARCITY

In Europe, the widespread tradition of a planning system built upon rationality, strong public action and investment, has been put into question by the recent financial and economic crisis. Indeed, through both the recent aggravation of social demands and the limitations in public direct investment, the recent crisis exposed and aggravated the signs of mismatch between action and demand that the established planning system was starting to show in the previous years (Bourdin, 2014).

These signs have fuelled the rise of the debate over the orientation of public action, questioning the policies of austerity and suggesting its replacement by a more adequate distribution and use of resources (Awan *et al.*, 2013), as well as over governance and networks of actors, reframing the roles of each participant in the planning processes, both by a stronger presence of the citizen participation (Healey, 2006; Forester, 2008) and through the transformation of the public administration (Sanderson, 2009; Cels *et al.*, 2012).

Thus, while the framework for new planning approaches has widely been debated, the challenges lie on the implementation of planning practices that may implement these logics, to which this paper aims to contribute.

1.2 A VIEW FROM THE NORTHWEST OF PORTUGAL

Portugal is especially paradigmatic of this mismatch between the existing planning tools and the recent territorial and socioeconomic transformations, being a fertile laboratory for debating planning policies and practices.

Therefore, this discussion will address the challenges within the planning paradigms in Portugal, and their impact namely in the north-western area, from their relation with the consolidation of the welfare state – built in counter-cycle in comparison with most European counterparts, and in which the structural funds had a major role (Cordeiro Santos *et al.*, 2015) – to the recent transformation of dynamics, demands and aspirations that call for new practices of governance and local action.

1.2.1 A LEGACY OF A GROWTH-ORIENTED PLANNING APPROACH

Following the European trends, Portugal has built its planning culture largely upon the modern principles of rationality, predictability and major public investment, but especially upon the logics of growth and its management: by defining constraints to urban occupation, by relying on public gains from private investment and by using major public investments financed by the state as drivers and the backbone of territorial transformation.

Therefore, within a logic of growth, most established planning tools within the Portuguese territorial framework have been frequently designed towards the ideas of intensity, density and expansion. Even though not always explicitly, these concerns seem to have dictated the underlying principles of several of the existing planning tools, in different scales and outputs. Indeed, at regional level, the regional plans seem to highlight the logics of density, the relations amongst denser urban cores and the focus on dynamics of intensification, of which the representation of the territorial model of the northwest [Fig.2] forms an example. The municipal masterplans could also be cited as paradigmatic of the planning logics of growth, namely managed through land use and the contention of urban perimeters.

These planning orientations might have been adequate within a context of growth, where densification and compactation would represent major issues. Nonetheless, recent transformations undertook a different direction, demanding new planning practices.

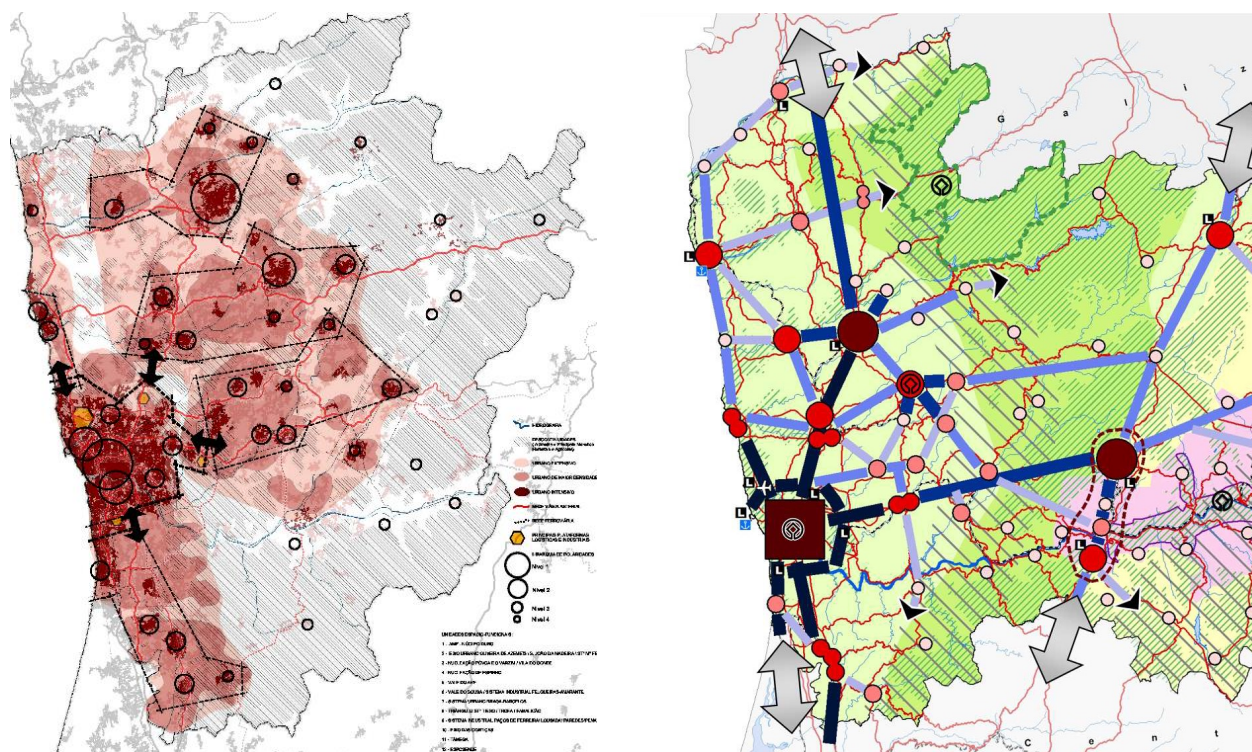


Figure 1 - Territorial models of the Northwest of Portugal, produced within the analysis and the plan of PROT-N, the Territorial Plan for the Northern Region of Portugal [source: CCDR-N, 2009].

1.2.2 RECENT SOCIOECONOMIC AND TERRITORIAL CHANGES

In recent years the growth-oriented approach has become increasingly mismatched from demands, proving to be not only unviable, but also somehow inadequate in certain contexts and in face of radical socioeconomic transformations. Firstly, due to the recent economic crisis that has put resources and capacities into risk, by drastically reducing public intervention and redirecting private investment into very specific areas such as the historical centres, which was accompanied by decreasing demographic rates and aggravated social demands. Additionally, striking evidences show that many territories do not follow growth patterns and are thus not benefited by growth-oriented planning tools or the centralization of services and facilities. Furthermore, these territories have also been the ones that suffered more radically the impacts by changes in the policy of allocation of resources: with the withdrawal of the welfare state and the cuts on public expenses demanded by the recent structural adjustment, these territories have been facing the closure of public facilities and the cuts on social support policies, thus contributing to aggravate their population loss, social vulnerability and territorial fragility.

Along with the previous trend of desertification of the interior of the country, we now witness the shrinkage of many urbanised areas, the losses of populations and the fragilization of many territories, even within the areas of more intense occupation [Fig.2].

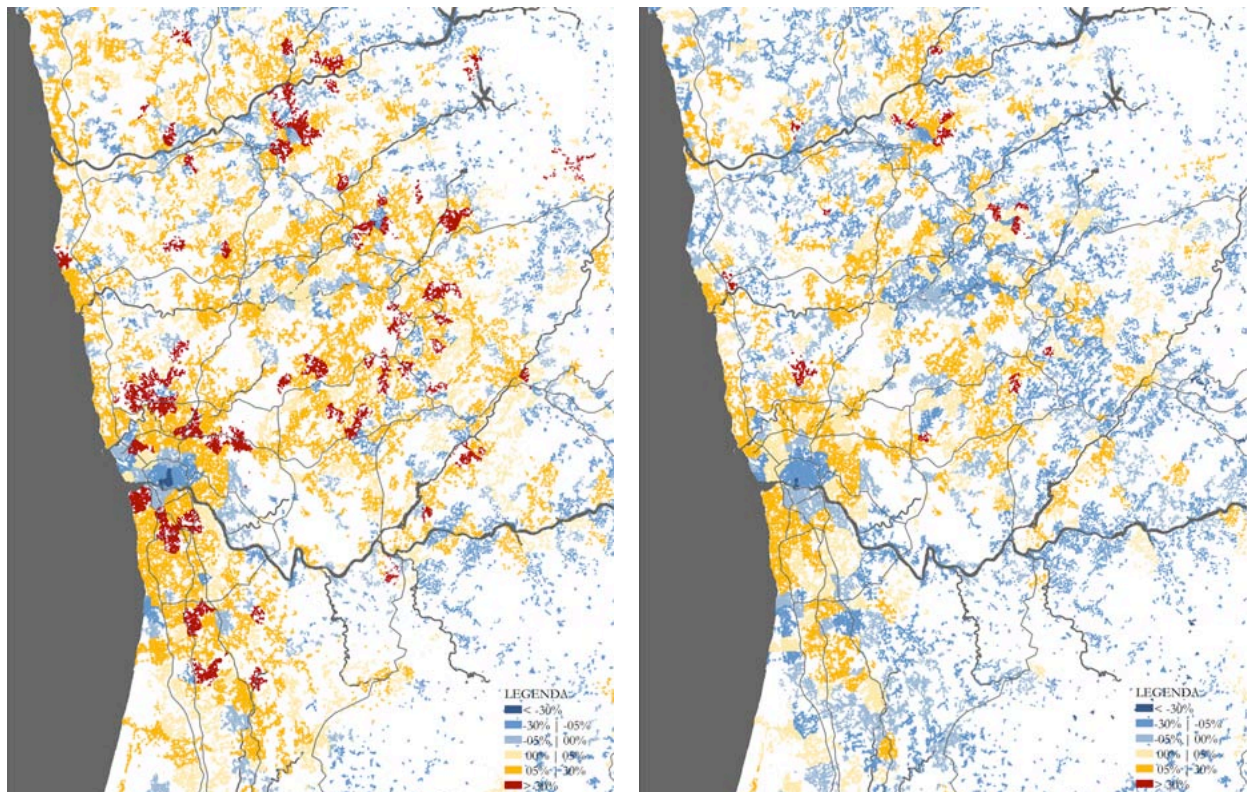


Figure 2 - Population variation in 1991-2001 and 2001-2011, in the northwest of Portugal, representing in warm colours the territories that are gaining population and in cold colours the ones with decreasing demography [source: MDT-CEAU-FAUP, based on data from INE - Instituto Nacional de Estatística].

Furthermore, the recent economic crisis aggravated the socioeconomic context, in which the increase in social vulnerabilities is one of the most visible aspects, shown namely by the intense raise of the unemployment rate is especially expressive of the aggravation of living conditions [Fig.3]. Even though this map refers to data from 2011 and the situation may have meanwhile changed, their structural impacts remain, along with the difficulties in implementing policies and practices to address them.

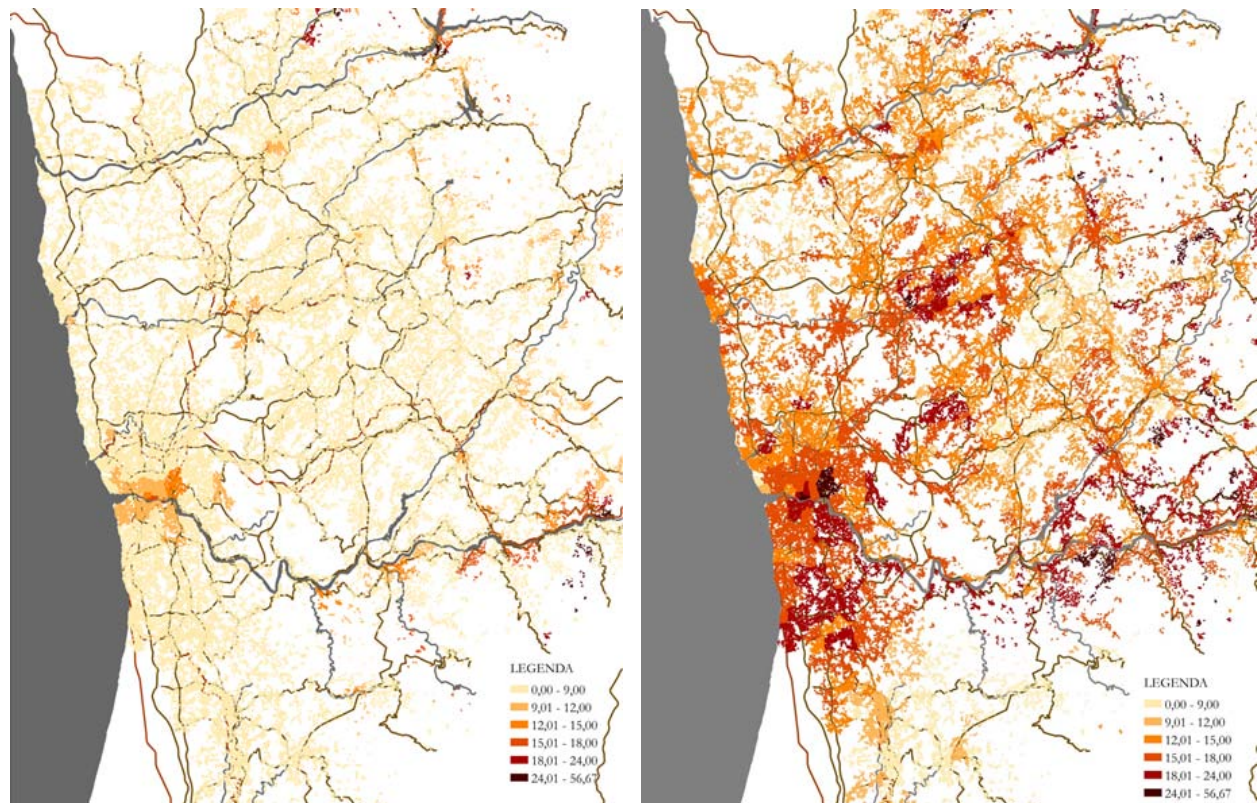


Figure 3 - Unemployment in 2001 and 2011, in the northwest of Portugal [source: MDT-CEAU-FAUP, based on data from INE - Instituto Nacional de Estatística].

These patterns represent a change in needs and the aggravation of conditions, to which are added the policies of austerity and their impact, along with the change in the capacities of the public administration to face and tackle those needs.

Indeed, the fragilization of the Welfare State – with the privatization of basic support services, the cuts in public expenses and their impact in the reduction of services and support networks – contributed to the aggravation of social demands.

Along with this impact, we also witnessed the intense decrease of private investment, an important driver of the process of urbanization with their consequences: the bankruptcy of companies and investors and their impact in unemployment, the stagnation of the real estate market, the interruption of construction sites and the abandonment of unfinished constructions (Travasso *et al*, 2014). This also represented a pillar of public income, which therefore translated into further impacts.

Thus, the decrease in major public works, which have formerly acted as major drivers of urbanization and territorial improvement, has suffered an almost complete halt.

In this process of the last years, the modes of production, the relations amongst actors and the social demands have radically changed and represent probably a structural transformation, one which means that former patterns will not be retaken, but have rather changed into a new paradigm.

Traditional planning tools have shown difficulty in adapting to this new context, which requires a change of the spatial planning practices, both by understanding the existing territories and demands, as well as by reframing planning practices and roles, paying particular attention to qualification, instead of mainly growth logics. And if there has been an effort to address the qualification and rehabilitation of existing fabrics, this logic has mostly been concentrating uniquely in historical centres, forgetting the other territories.

This doesn't mean that the existing planning tools are obsolete, but rather that they may need to be adjusted to the different territories and demands, as well as complemented with further practices and approaches to make the whole planning framework more responsive, as well as to provide a more intense involvement of different stakeholders, and specially the civil society, in the role of designing common future.

In this task the academia, and applied research, may have an important role, by rethinking the way questions are debated, diagnosis are formulated, potentials are identified, and solutions are jointly achieved.

2 THE 'METAPOLITAN ARCH': A PROJECT FOR DISCUSSING THE TERRITORIAL COHESION OF THE NORTHWEST OF PORTUGAL

The research group MDT – which studies Territory Dynamics and Morphologies within CEAU-FAUP – has been actively engaged in rethinking planning approaches and agents, namely through applied research projects in partnership with the regional and local administration, aiming at a wider public as well. Therefore, a project will be used as illustration to discuss this approach. It is a laboratory due to its nature of experimentation, where we have been trying to test different tools, ways of looking and reframing challenges, as well as in reaching for different publics in the task of conceiving planning as a shared task.

The 'Metapolitan Arch' ('Arco Metapolitano') project, commissioned by CCDR-N – the Commission for the Coordination and Regional Development of the Northern region –, aims to contribute to the territorial cohesion of the north-western area of Portugal. This project is coordinated by Nuno Portas, Manuel Fernandes de Sá and Teresa Calix and, after documenting the impact of the recent socioeconomic and territorial transformations, paid special attention to territories that are usually less addressed, such as peripheral areas, diffuse urbanization and low-density territories.

The project adopted the concept of *metapolis* (Ascher, 1995), which expands beyond the idea of *metropolis*, in order to describe a continuous urban area with heterogeneous densities and behaviours, but specially to address, analyse and understand the phenomena that shape it and that take place not only inside this territory but also beyond it. This "arch" stretches around Porto, comprising 43 municipalities and gathering more than three million inhabitants (almost one third of the total national population). The project gathered different professionals and disciplinary fields, undertaking multiple tasks and formats, namely through workshops with municipal technicians, fieldwork, the production of cartography and diagrams.

The intention of this project has been to contribute to strengthen a point of view that establishes territorial diversity, local identities and tactic interventions as major drivers of spatial and living improvement.

Thus this example aims to discuss how a new planning culture based on a more profound comprehension of local specificities, on small-scale extensive and articulated actions, as well as in the awareness and reflexivity of the different actors within decision-making processes, while requiring less economic resources than the previous growth-oriented approach, may prove more responsive and flexible, inclusive and sensitive to both territorial diversity, as well as to societal challenges.

2.1 THE 'METAPOLITAN' LOGICS OF THE NORTHWEST

The project started with the characterization of the Northwestern area of Portugal, focusing both on the patterns of occupation, as well as on the socioeconomic dynamics and reactions to the recent transformations. Thus, the analysis of the behaviour of this *metapolis* allowed to discuss the major logics of relation and spacialization of the different phenomena, the territorial asymmetries (cf. Calix, 2017), as well as the relations between the denser areas, the extensive urbanisation and the low-density areas, trying not only to characterize the specificities of different territories, but especially debating their potentials. Towards this aim, a set of territorial samples were selected in different contexts to be studied in detail, both in their urbanization patterns, as well as in their role within the green infrastructure [Fig.4].

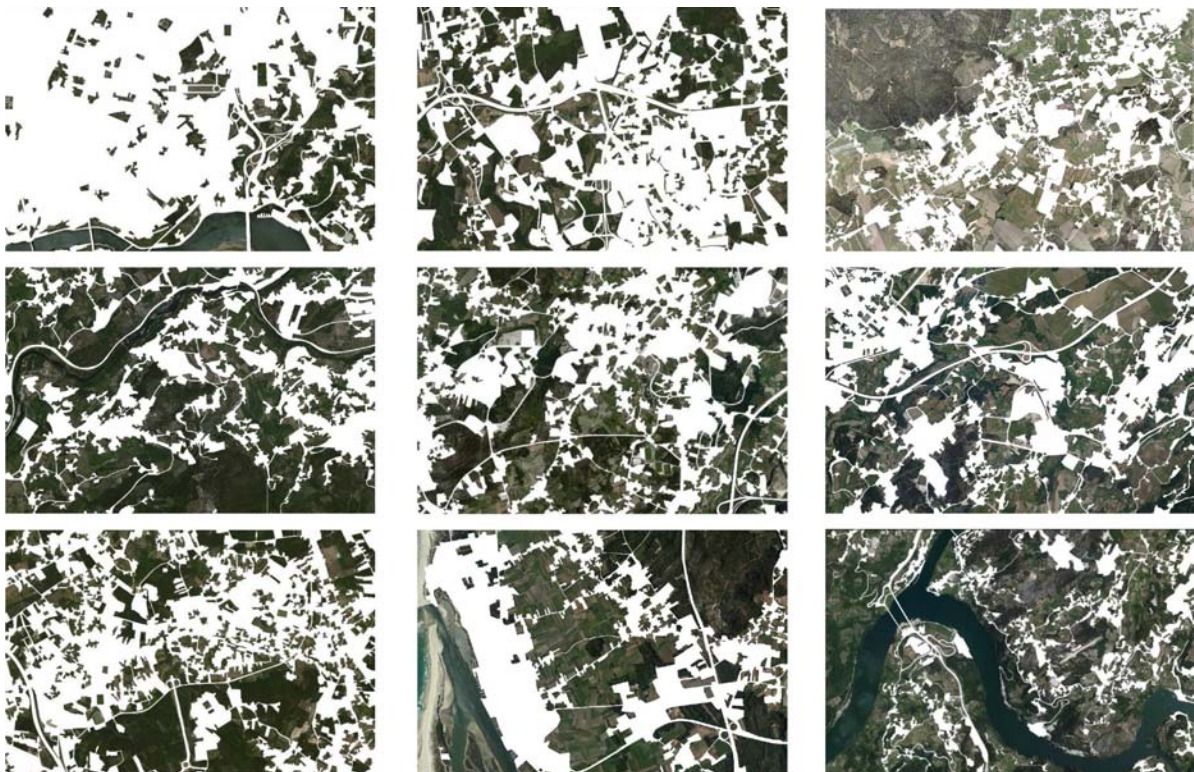


Figure 4 – The territorial samples studied in detail within the project, representing their non-built areas (from left to right, and top to bottom): eastern Porto and Maia representing the limits of denser cores; four areas close to Santo Tirso, Famalicão, Paços de Ferreira and Paredes representing the diffuse urbanization areas, and Esposende and Douro showing examples of lower density [source: MDT-CEAU-FAUP, based on GoogleEarth imagery].

2.2 THE PROCESSES OF FORMATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE TERRITORIES

The selected territorial samples allowed to test several exercises of analysis, especially focusing in areas that are often undervalued, which are often described negatively through emphasizing socioeconomic vulnerabilities, population loss, spatial fragmentation or difficulty in understanding their logics.

A fundamental starting point was recognizing the importance of the ‘intelligibility’ of the territories – or the ability to understand their own logics – as an important aspect for detecting their potentials and specific values, for strengthening the sense of belonging of the residents and the meaning of each territory to its outside, as well as for designing adequate and sensitive policies and actions.

Therefore, one essential task was to understand, present and describe the processes of formation and transformation of the territories, their logics and specific attributes. Indeed, often an inability of understanding a specific phenomenon derives from a lack of perception of its own patterns or the complex overlapping of different layers and processes that generated a complex reality. Thus, analysing and highlighting these different patterns may be useful for clarifying the different layers that form the territories, recognizing the specific ‘nature’ and causes of each story that they comprise [Fig.5].

Therefore, this task could contribute to detect and illustrate the specificities of each territory and their own logics of formation, transformation and use, which forms its identity and could further inform local policies.

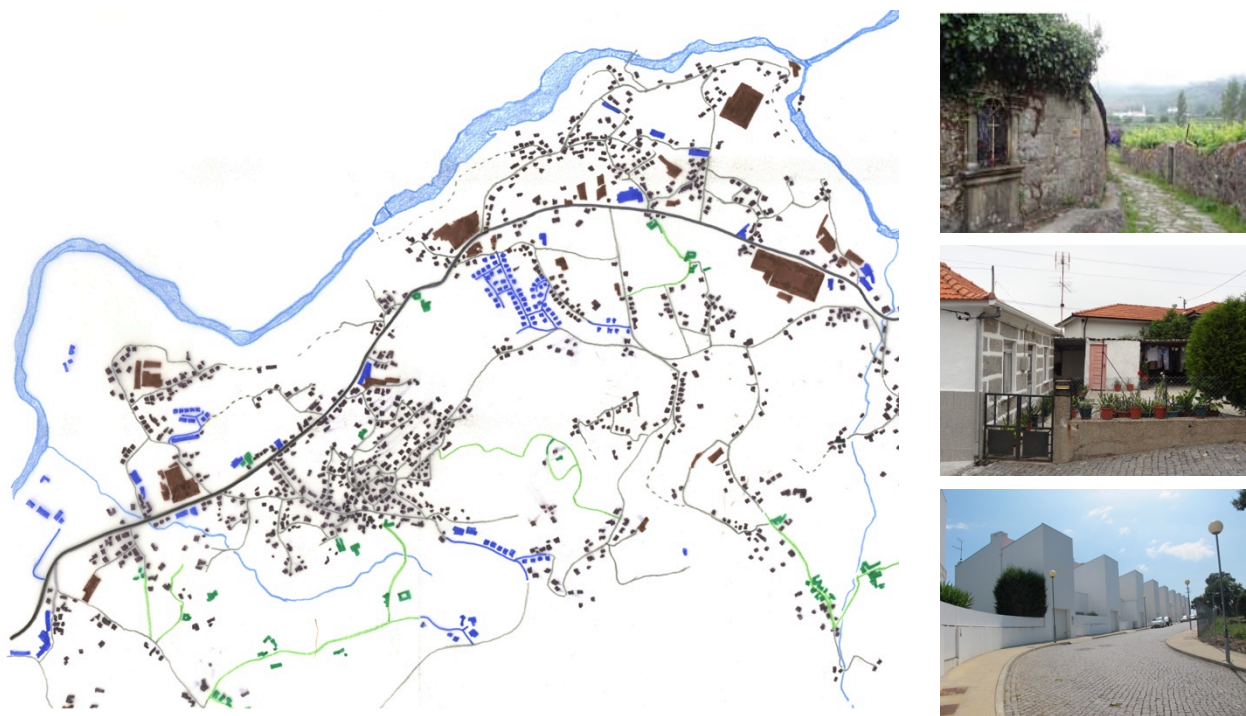


Figure 5 – Different occupation logics in a territory close to Santo Tirso. The diagram: in green, the rural routes and buildings; in black, the urbanization along existing roads and cores; in blue, some housing developments. The photographs correspond to examples of these three patterns [source: MDT-CEAU-FAUP].

2.3 TERRITORIAL ENDOGENOUS AND SPECIFIC VALUES

Based on the specific logics of formation and transformation of each territory, the project also undertook studies on the identification of endogenous values and potentials, namely in order to understand how each layer and process may encompass attributes that are not only important for the territory's resilience, but may also represent elements – actors, materials, spaces – with the capacity to improve the quality of the territory and of the life of its residents.

Therefore, by illustrating some of these capacities, this task aimed at giving visibility to local attributes and potentials, highlighting the importance of the identification of specific logics, testimonies and legacies that tell the stories of the lives, uses, processes and transformations that shaped the space [Fig.6].

Simultaneously, and by focusing on positive aspects and potentials, this project has helped to discuss preconceptions that have established negative identities and thus limit the development of some territories. This study has shown, for instance, that the areas of extensive or diffuse urbanization, which tend to be mostly described as an occupation with high consumption of land and energy (UN-Habitat, 2016), actually have an opposite behaviour in the Northwest of Portugal: not only because it represents a pattern of a very permeable built fabric in which the constructions are closely related with non-built areas (most of which used for family and small-scale agriculture that provides for complementary subsistence or income, improving the livelihood and resilience), but also because it shows a high incidence of pedestrian routines for pendular movements (thus illustrating a pattern of proximity and low-energy consumption for daily transport). The studies on the low-density areas and on the limits of denser urban cores have also shown the potentials for improved quality of life, namely due to the privileged relation with green areas, which could be further enhanced and represent major attractors for new residents and visitors.



Figure 6 – Location of cultivated fields and old houses related with agriculture close to Santo Tirso [sources: MDT-CEAU-FAUP].

2.4 TACTIC INTERVENTION

Finally, a third aspect the project discussed was the potential of tactic intervention, thinking beyond the structural action, by dealing with the existing structure and attributes of each territory, complementing the extensive intervention with a network of surgical actions. This goal was tested through identifying leftover spaces that could be put into public use for improvement of the quality of life of residents and visitors: dead-ends, street enlargements, abandoned public facilities, amongst others, were just some examples of potential spaces that could be transformed into improved public places for everyday neighbourhood life, either through direct public intervention, through citizen mobilization and/or networks of agents, representing an endless potential in conceiving the territories, the decision-making processes and the actions [Fig.7].



Figure 7 – Location of spaces with potential for improvement of the public use: a dead-end street, a street enlargement and a public washing tank [source: MDT-CEAU-FAUP].

3 FINAL NOTES: THREE POINTS TO REFLECT UPON, TOWARDS A ‘CAPABILITY APPROACH’ TO THE TERRITORIES

Therefore, set within new societal challenges, the question is how to react and reframe the way of observing, discussing and improving intervention strategies. Indeed we believe that, besides adjustments in planning tools towards local demands, the major challenge of the years to come relies in building a new *planning culture* (Ferrão, 2011), improving the articulation and the soft skills of actors and the wider public. Thus, there are three main ideas we wish to put into debate.

3.1 TO VALUE EACH TERRITORY'S SPECIFIC IDENTITIES

The first principle to be highlighted has to do with observation and analysis, here defending the importance of accepting and discussing complexity, as well as realizing that we may put further effort into looking carefully, reading patterns and logics, their co-relations and meanings. This task demands, on the very basic level, to manage big data, trying to gather information, making sense out of the data, identifying and analysing patterns, as well as producing outputs to make them readable and thus understandable.

Yet this effort means, furthermore, to go way beyond the data into understanding, explaining and re-observing territories and their dynamics, according to the different perspectives and publics. Indeed, the attribution of patterns, identities, specificities, values and conflicts depends on the points of view, some of which fail to be recognized or taken into account in observation, diagnosis, prospective and planning of the territories. Some tasks and processes may be crucial for taking these aspects and meanings into consideration.

The multi-scale nature of the dynamics is also an important factor into understanding the local and global interconnections and their socioeconomic and territorial impacts. Themes such as the geography of labour and economic transactions, with structural consequences in the living conditions of the populations, are especially paradigmatic of the need to discuss multi-scale factors and thinking beyond geographic limits into understanding local phenomena.

The deconstruction of the multiple layers that form complex realities and territories may also help not only into understanding their patterns and logics, but also into explaining them and putting them into discussion. Indeed, the difficulty in reading, analysing and finding a sense into the specific processes of formation and transformation of some territories has often dictated interventions without clear directions and the implementation of contradictory planning actions, contributing to increasing misconceptions, negative perceptions and decreased sense of belonging. This vicious cycle might be inverted by further efforts into reading, discussing and sharing views on complex territories.

Finally, an aspect that is always crucial to take into account is the process and the relations amongst actors. Their identification, may not only help understanding their impact into shaping the territory, but may also shed some light into possibilities of reshaping processes, both to improve existing responses and to react to new demands.

3.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALIFICATION, RATHER THAN GROWTH

A second major theme to be discussed has to do with the attitude towards action, here advocating for the importance of thinking beyond growth, but rather aiming at qualification beyond the urban cores. This starts from the recognition of the diversity of settlement patterns, and thus highlighting that one size doesn't fit all, as well as that growth and intensification may not be the sole aspiration of every territory. This attitude, though often defended, ends up rarely being taken as a priority, crashing into de normalization of models, procedures and rules.

The different patterns of the territory, from higher density to lower density, from intensely urbanized areas to territories of agriculture and forest predominance, face therefore distinct challenges and their value indeed abides to their specificity and diversity, characteristics that should be further highlighted as drivers of development, qualification and improvement.

This attitude may be materialised into finding the specificity and value in each territory, detecting elements, paths and patterns that may be recognised as part of local identities, improving their visibility and caring for their identification and qualification.

Additionally, the small scale, strategic thinking and tactic action might contribute to an effective improvement of the quality of the territories, namely the intervention in devalued public space, by acting chirurgically yet with major repercussions at local level in the daily use of the space.

3.3 BUILDING COMMON GROUNDS

The third aspect we wished to highlight is the construction of common grounds for discussion of the territory, for building shared visions and projects for the future, taking the debate of the territory as a pillar of citizenship and its planning as a collective action.

The strengthening of a dialogue amongst actors is a crucial task, one where the academia may work as a facilitator, by establishing connections, building networks, making voices heard, within the local administration, within technicians of different municipalities, with different approaches within the same institution, involving students, different generations, mapping affections and memories, discussing needs, potentials and visions: building a common future.



Figure 8 – Work session undertaken with representatives of the municipalities of Santo Tirso and Vila Nova de Famalicão within the “Metapolitan Arch” project, and workshop undertaken with the Association “Geração” (aimed at the active ageing) set with the “Território: Casa Comum” project [source: MDT-CEAU-FAUP].

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