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**The Portuguese Urban
Network or The Lilliputian
Urban Network**

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THE PORTUGUESE URBAN NETWORK

OR

THE LILLIPUTIAN URBAN NETWORK

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THE PORTUGUESE URBAN NETWORK OR THE LILLIPUTIAN URBAN NETWORK¹

1. SOME DEBILITIES

The reinforcement of the integration of the portuguese economy and society, in general, in the movement of transformation that characterize the european countries, in particular those of EC, in last decades, gave evidence to the structural fragilities of Portugal, in multiple domains. The incapacity of its urban network to face the defies of an increasingly dynamic and competitive world is one of the most evident aspects of these fragilities.

These incapacity must be analyzed, both in terms of internal network, and in terms of integration in the network of the european cities and metropolis. Lisbon is the most important portuguese urban metropolitan area, with about 2.4 millions inhabitants (1991). That seems to be a reasonable dimension for a metropolitan area. But when we look at its stock of equipments and functions supplied we find that its importance is really lower and it is placed at the second or third rang of the european urban network, at the same level as Bilbao or Seville, in Spain.

Unfortunately, the metropolitan area of Lisbon with a dimension of about 2.5 million inhabitants is at the same time too large and too little. It is too large, because it doesn't dispose of some of the public and private goods and services that characterize a metropolis with this demographic dimension. It is too little, because it has not weight, dimension and organization enough to could have a partnership role in the network of european metropolis and cities, polarizing a sustained dynamic of specialization for Portugal.

All other urban areas in Portugal can be considered has disqualified to exercise the proper competences of average dimension

¹ I thank Dr. Natalino Martins for his helpful comments

dynamic centers. Tendencies of evolution in last decades seems to indicate that the inland cities has strengthened its relative disqualification. Population of all these cities stabilized or decreased during last decade. One of the exceptions to this rule is precisely Évora, the city that receives this workshop, that increased its population of 34 851 to 38 938 (+4 087). Perhaps that the factor quality of life can explain this movement.

Naturally, that the dimension of an urban center and, in particular, its demographic one, is not, necessarily, a good indicator of its capability to dynamize its influential area. However as we don't dispose of any other indicator sufficiently updated and with the same degree of homogeneity, it will be taken this indicator to some of the exemplifications that we will do in next paragraphs.

In these terms the portuguese urban network is not a real one. We have the impression to face a lilliputian world where all the elements of the scenario and all the actors are present. Everything seems to play its function of representation of reality. When we plunge in reality we can only verify that we have perhaps a good representation of the reality, but we have not the reality. At least we have not an urban structure able to face the exigencies of an open and increased, in competitiveness and dimension, market.

2. THE CHALLENGE

Must we conclude, with this superficial diagnosis, that the portuguese urban centers will be unable, in next years, to be integrated in the dynamic of the development process, with its projection in the european network? Not necessarily, but we think that a great effort of requalification will be necessary. The immaturity, the insufficiently pondered decisions and a lack of perspective about the design of the territory to be constructed, will dissipate some opportunities, that we are not sure that will remain in the next future.

What must we do to requalify our urban centers? No one can give an unquestionable answer. Every exercise will have to consider:

- the role of the urban network in the process of development, and in particular in the process of regional development;

- the possible anticipation of factors that, in the future, will command the qualification of cities as partners and mediators of the process of spatial development.

Theories of urban growth (cf. ILLERIS and BORG) provides us a precious instrument of reasoning, but seldom these theories are not able to furnish an immediate answer to each concrete problem of urban policy. The extreme variability of situations, in time and space, requires, a permanent effort of confrontation of the assumptions of these theories with reality and a delicate exercise of extension of theoretic conclusions, to achieve a policy orientation. The drawing of scenarios is thus a necessary, but also, difficult task to accomplish.

Urban growth is often taken as an independent process of regional or national growth. Cities and centers have functions to accomplish *vis à vis* their populations and face other centers of urban hierarchy, but these functions are, in a certain way, exercised out of space. The space can be considered as support of distances but not as support of cities and of the spread effects that are generated by them.

Regional development is yet largely taken as a process of correction of disequilibriums and not as a process of permanent construction of space. This help us to understand that the process of urban development was frequently considered as an aspatial one, or as an independent process of the rest of the space.

Integration of urban and regional development, and more generally with development, is something that is a recent acquisition of regional economists. They don't agree always about the role of urban network in the process of territory structuration.

ILLERIS (1991) assigns the responsibility of the disagreement to the difficulties that all of us face to anticipate the future. Generally positions can be clustered in two chief categories: those who are conditioned by a **concentration model** and those who are determined by a **decentralization model**.

For the first ones the argument of agglomeration advantages is pulled at the extreme. The vision and the mechanisms of the center-periphery perspective overlay every tentative to prevent that advantageous regions will become increasingly richer and that the

peripheric ones will become increasingly poorer. No one can say how and where the functioning of these mechanisms can be inverted. The breakdown of the model will be possible only with the uprising of agglomeration disadvantages. However the capacity of central metropolis to avoid the development of these disadvantages is always superior to the capacity of the peripheric urban centers to jump up the inferior limits of the sustained development. So, without the adoption of voluntary policy measures, the famous *banana* shaped area, in the center of the Europe, between London and Milan, will remain longtime as diffusion center of the urban development in Europe.

According to the decentralization model the capacity of the urban center of Europe is near the exhaustion. The great opportunity of peripheric regions, and particularly of those of the Mediterranean Sea, has arrived. They must be able to catch and to endogenous factors of development. They have special capacities to yield up. Some examples of recent dynamism can prove this change of tendency: Barcelona and Bologna.

A more realistic model, named by ILLERIS (1991) as the *mosaic model* will perhaps be achieved by the integration of elements of the two precedent models. This model supposes a little more complex vision of the development of urban centers than those that are subjacent to the precedent models. Everywhere there are cities that are expanding and others that are declining. Measurement of expansion and declining cannot be expressed only by indicators that systematically tend to favor the so called central areas. We must also consider factors of social integration that the technocratic views of certain economists tend to devaluate.

The formulation of the *mosaic model* offer some analytical capacities that we must don't disdain. It is compatible with those interpretations of urban change (HALL and HAY, 1980; BERG and al., 1982; and BORG, 1991), that tend to see the development of cities in a cyclical way, as such is well known in other domains. Cities progressively pass from the phase of urbanization to the phases of suburbanization, desurbanization and re-urbanization. These phases correspond respectively to, industrialization, growth of the tertiary sector, preoccupation with defense of natural environment and information

society.

This description of cyclical life of cities is interesting because it is able to trace a complete view of the present shape of urban centers in Europe. However nothing is said, about time of permanence in each phase, about conditions to fulfill for jumping from one phase to another and, finally, about what will happen after the last phase. Must we believe that after the last phase cities will begin again another phase of urbanization?

How can we compatibilize this latter cyclical description with the fact that all we know about cities that were born and died without passing over all those phases or even without passing beyond the phase of urbanization?

The more important to considerate is that cities are not stable entities. They are subjects of evolution, they transform themselves and theirs environments. Cities cannot, as any alive system, to be developed if they are closed above themselves, if they are not able to exchange with other territories and, in particular, with its surrounding territory.

In this context, cities cannot be considered independently of their territories. Urban development and regional development are interdependent processes and components of a larger process of territorial development. Thus, favoring regional development, without considering urban development, is equivalent, in a shorter or longer term, to block the own regional development process.

Cities must be considered as the lungs of the territory. Without healthy lungs territory will have difficulties to breath and briefly will be transformed into a *no man land*. In this way, developing and knowing how to develop urban network are necessary conditions to be succeeded in any policy of territorial development. And all development process is a territorial one !

Unfortunately policymakers, and even researchers, have concentrated their attention more on the instruments of regional development than on the instruments of urban development, which may be able to promote regional development. Regional policy of EC is an example of what I have just said. Consequently, today, we are not supplied with urban policy instruments, which give evidence in the

promotion of cities as animators of its territory or region. In a certain way, the exercise of regional development is executed without the precaution of installation of the network.

If it is so important for the process of development to have a dynamic and equilibrated urban network, we must, carefully, examine the factors of urban growth and the capacity to face competitiveness of other urban or metropolitan areas.. We will essay to bring some reflection about these factors in next section.

3. FACTORS OF URBAN GROWTH

Why some regions and central urban areas seem to have a permanent capacity to reproduce its development and others (the peripheric areas) seem asleep and unable to react to the defies originated in the former ones? This question is, in particular, pertinent to people coming, in majority, from peripheric countries or areas, and who are essaying to understand reasons of this periphericity in order to overcome the present situation of inefficiency.

Perhaps we must remind that many of our depressed urban areas were, in the past, progressive centers of development. Why they do decline? Life cycle, as suggested by authors of urban change, must be interpreted in a perspective of a longer wave, in such a way that present peripheric areas can aim aspirate at living new phases of prosperity?

We don't know too much about this process. Our understanding about factors of urban transformation is too limited in time. It doesn't exceed fifty or, at the best, a hundred years. It is, however, imperative that we question ourselves about factors of present competitiveness, even if our memory in the time and our capacity to peer into the future are too limited. It is preferable to risk on error than on inaction.

Three questions must be raised:

- Why an urban area is not enough dynamic or competitive?
- There exists domains where this area can be competitive?
- Which are the instruments that guarantee that the domains of potential competitiveness can become effective?

Research on factors that condition an answer to these questions is

more and more difficult as we proceed from the first to the last one. We have not the possibility to give any list of factors that guarantee the success of any operation of urban dynamization. At the best we can enunciate factors that are, in general, considered as necessary conditions to strengthen competitiveness of urban structure. They are general conditions, that is, they are factors that we cannot find in certain particular contexts. They are necessary, but not sufficient conditions, for any operation of urban redynamization.

Despite all these limitations they are important instruments for reflection. In every situation the more important is the capacity of the analyst to anticipate the future. In an happy synthesis, BORG (1991) classes factors of urban competitiveness into two groups, that he name first and second rate competitive factors. He enunciates three first rate factors:

- efficient infrastructure network;
- strategic urban services;
- efficient urban policy.

Factors of the second group only arise if the first group of factors is accomplished. First group factors are considered as necessary conditions of the development or satisfactory benefit of the second rate competitive factors:

- gravitational center of goods and services produced or circulating in its influential area;
- international network for activities and people working in the metropolitan area;
- institutional organization of innovative activities;
- central node of an efficient information and communication network;
- central node of an important network of cultural exchanges.

These are conditions for urban vitality. Our disappointment must be however expressed because, even if we are able to enunciate the conditions which we are not provided, we don't know sufficiently about efficient instruments to become these conditions effective in reasonable

time.

In another study carried out by ERECO (1992, 19) and quoting a research of IFO, preferences of firms in three categories of regions (lagging regions, regions in industrial decline and favored regions) were classified into nine categories. Even if preferences of firms refer to regions and not to urban centers, we risk to consider them as equivalent. It is interesting to verify that the three main cited factors are the same for the different types of regions: social facilities (cultural and social facilities and leisure facilities), regional economic structure (advertising and consulting) and educational system (proximity of higher education and training facilities).

However, some differences can be referred at the level of sub-factors inside these three factors. So, leisure facilities are the first sub-factor in all type of regions. Cultural and social facilities are the second sub-factor for favored regions and the third for the other ones. The second sub-factor for these ones are advertising and consulting. The third sub-factor for favored regions is advertising and consulting. Proximity of higher education is the fourth sub-factor in lagging regions and in regions in industrial decline (simultaneously with training facilities). The fourth sub-factor for favored regions are training facilities and banks, insurance and lawyers.

PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVING REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

	LAGGING REGIONS	REGIONS IN INDUSTRIAL DECLINE	FAVORED REGIONS
SOCIAL FACILITIES			
Cultural and leisure facilities	3	3	2
Leisure facilities	1	1	1
REGIONAL ECONOMIC STRUCTURE			
Banks, insurance and lawyers			4
Advertising and consulting	2	2	3
EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM			
Training facilities	-	4	4
Proximity of higher education	4	4	-

Other factors related to regional policies and infrastructure are also important but the weight that the firms allocated to them is variable from region to region. It is significative to note that labor market and financial market are the less important factors.

This doesn't mean, naturally, that the importance of factors is the same in all types of regions and in all categories of urban areas. These are necessary conditions and the capability of urban centers to jump barriers of stagnation will depend on the way how this factors are combined with other factors of lesser importance.

Now, we will essay to analyze, briefly, the position of the portuguese urban network in the european network of metropolitan areas and its evolution in the last decade.

4. THE PORTUGUESE URBAN NETWORK IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

During longtime researchers had considered the dimension of urban areas as a necessary condition of these areas to generate growth dynamics. Today this association is not taken as an inevitability. Different crisis during eighties and policies adopted to overcome them have demonstrated that cities of medium dimension can acquire a rhythm of development superior to that of some other larger agglomerations.

However, it is always supposed that dimension can favor dynamic of growth. We can suppose that growth is not a specific characteristic of the biggest cities, but certainly we must accept that a minimal dimension is necessary to provide scale to the uprising and maintenance of certain factors and superior functions on urban areas. Certainly that a minimum of 50 000 inhabitants will be a a reasonable threshold of this point of view (cf. WIBERG, 1991).

In Portugal if we exclude urban agglomerations of metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Oporto, only four other cities exceed or approach that limit:

- Braga - 90 535
- Guimarães - 48 164

- Coimbra - 96 142

- Setúbal - 83 548.

All these cities are located in the littoral band of the country, concentrating the most important focus of growth. The minimum of dimension is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one. The inland agglomerations are so excluded of the process of more dynamic and independent growth.

The higher dimension of the other cities is not a guarantee that they automatically will acquire functions and equipments that correspond to dynamic cities with the same dimension. Lisbon and Oporto, in particular, if we consider their metropolitan areas, are cited in all specialized studies, as paradigmatic cases of insufficient endowment of infrastructures and strategic factors, capable to become these cities and their influential areas competitive towards the international market.

A report, already quoted (ERECO, 1992, 20), classify Objective 1 regions in three categories:

- Regions with potentially good development prospects;
- Regions with problem situations and open development prospects;
- Regions with development problems which are tending to worsen.

It is expressive that all the portuguese territory, with the exception of the Lisbon region (in the second category), is considered as belonging to the third category, with development problems which are tending to worsen.

The state of regions is also that of theirs cities. That is a large defy to essay to counter this natural tendency. Identification of factors that, in each case, would may found policy measures has not been yet achieved, with sufficient rigor. Examining carefully that matter is not this paper aim. In any case this is an urgent and useful research to accomplish.

Observing the degree of urbanization in Portugal will render evident fragilities of the portuguese urban network. The degree of urbanization has slightly grown in the last decade. If we consider

agglomerations with more than 50 000 inhabitants that degree will increase from 15.8% to 16.4% (INE, 1993). If we lower the dimension of centers to 10 000, those percentages will increase respectively to 29.7% and to 33.8%. The dimension of 2 000 would originate the percentages of 43.1% and 48.9%. In any case, we face urbanization levels that are inferior to near an half of the european mean, which certainly don't facilitate problems to be solved.

In an international context, the present position of portuguese cities is enough disadvantageous. Clustering of european cities will help us to understand the defies placed to our development. Different alternative of clusters are possible. As an illustration we take the one presented by ERECO (1992, 28). The *banana* shape is recognized as crossing groups of Capitals Center and Alpine Arc. Portugal territory is remit to the peripheric cluster of the Atlantic Arc. Certainly that other clusters are feasible. In particular, it may be justified the inclusion of the southern part of the country in the Mediterranean group.

However some pretend discover a particular atlantic vocation for Portugal valorizing all its maritime coast. That is an alternative that can be succeeded but, for the moment it has not yet been sufficiently studied and proved.

In the context of the Atlantic Arc there are chances whose viability must be object of a larger reflection. In this group we can find areas with a growing dynamism and with high development potential. That is the case of cities of the French atlantic coast and in particular of the English city of Glasgow. We can hope that portuguese cities can learn something with these more dynamic areas and that positive synergies may be generated and cultivated between cities of the same group.

Development perspectives are not too much auspicious to the portuguese urban network, chiefly if authorities will resume to adopt a policy with arms across. In this situation no Structural Funds will be enough important to inverse present tendency.

To stylize our urban network and its insertion in its territory FERRÃO (1993), in an unpublished work, assimilates territory of the Continente to an archipelago, with its islands and submerged areas. The

islands are zones with a demographic and economic growth inferior to the mean. It is dolorous to verify that submerged areas occupies a territorial surface larger than the one of islands.

Some of the islands grew, at least in terms of population, during last decade. This growth, however, is the result of the repulsion of the inland zones and not of a sustained growth. More grave is that these urban zones had not seen, in accumulation, the development of its infrastructures and social equipments. This blockade and its reinforcing is the most probable situation in the future. Paraphrasing one of ours ministers, and also our colleague for urban and regional reflections, we will say that these areas and, in particular, the metropolitan areas have excess of population to functions that they exercise.

The lilliputian country seems, thus, a prism of analyze perfectly justified.

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