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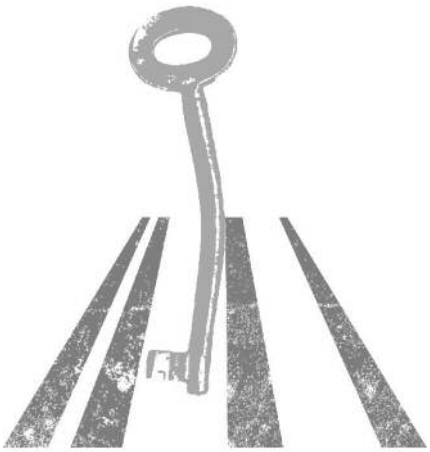

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Territorial inequalities: depopulation and local development policies in the Portuguese rural world

Abstract: The Portuguese rural world no longer resembles the one described in the literature, mostly because people no longer live or work there. Farmers became brand managers and tour hosts, workers were replaced by machines and intensive farming shoved entire populations to urban areas. With depopulation, the agrarian landscape has been transformed into a place for leisure or nature preservation. How are the remains of the rural being addressed by the few who still believe in life outside the big cities? What is the role of local government and its leaders in the sustainable development of the territory and its dynamic? All over the country, and particularly in rural areas, there is an urgent need to attract people and investment to fight depopulation and unemployment. What are the differences between projects for urban and rural municipalities? Political and economic strategies of municipalities and private entrepreneurs are analyzed and compared.

Keywords: Rural, mayors, local government, political messages, attraction strategies.

Desigualdades territoriales: despoblación y políticas de desarrollo local en el mundo rural portugués

Resumen: El mundo rural portugués ya no se parece al descrito por la literatura, sobre todo porque la gente ya ni vive ni trabaja allí. Los agricultores se convirtieron en gestores de marcas y guías de visitas, los jornaleros fueron reemplazados por máquinas y la agricultura intensiva empujó a poblaciones enteras hacia las áreas urbanas. Con la despoblación, el paisaje agrario se ha transformado en espacio para el ocio o la conservación de la naturaleza. ¿Cómo se enfrentan a lo que queda del medio rural aquellos pocos que aún creen en la vida fuera de las grandes ciudades? ¿Cuál es el papel del gobierno local y sus líderes en el desarrollo sostenible del territorio y la dinámica del mismo? Por todo el país, y sobre todo en las áreas rurales, hay una necesidad urgente de atraer población e inversiones con objeto de luchar contra la despoblación y el desempleo. ¿Cuáles son las diferencias entre los proyectos de los municipios urbanos y rurales? Se analizan y comparan las estrategias políticas y económicas de los ayuntamientos y los empresarios privados.

Palabras clave: Rural, alcaldes, gobierno local, mensajes políticos, estrategias de atracción.

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Introduction

The Portuguese rural world no longer resembles the one described in literature, particularly in the twentieth century neorealist works of Alves Redol, Fernando Namora and even José Saramago, where there were huge lands, hundreds of journeymen, big bad bosses, starving workers... (Almeida, 2012). This happens mostly because people no longer live nor work there.

Rural issues have been a subject of research by scholars throughout the centuries, particularly regarding food supplies and depopulation (Almeida, 2016). Since the middle-ages, keeping people in agricultural activities has been a subject of state policies, strong laws and state interventions: there were laws and programs meant to fixate populations on the countryside using all sorts of arguments, from territory defence and military occupation, to food self-supply and autonomy. This was the only way to keep food supplies in a regular basis, and it didn't always work. People kept abandoning the fields whenever they could and Portugal was never self-sufficient in food supplies, particularly cereals. Nineteenth century politicians called this problem "The subsistence issue" (Castro, 1856). Salazar, who was later to become the head of the New State for almost four decades, also wrote about the "Crisis of subsistence" in 1916 (Salazar, 1997), before enforcing wheat campaigns in the Alentejo region in the late 1920s e early 1930s. In the second half of the twentieth century several changes were introduced which encouraged and resulted in mass migration. In the 1960s there

was mechanization, emigration and early welfare laws. Industrialization and construction works in the outskirts of Lisbon and Oporto attracted rural labourers to better paid jobs, as well as other European countries. Over a million Portuguese people helped rebuild France after World War II and stayed there. And in some rural areas there was the introduction of agricultural related industries, such as tomato transformation factories, as well as huge investments in hydroelectric dams.

During the final years of Salazar's regime, some agronomists, economists and politicians also wrote important works about rural issues, particularly Castro Caldas (1947, 1978), Silva Martins (1973, 1975) and the leader of the clandestine Portuguese Communist Party, Álvaro Cunhal (1968), who was inspired by Kautsky's tittle and theme, *The Agrarian Question* (1970 [1899]).

In 1975 there was an Agrarian Reform in the Alentejo Region (Almeida, 2006). In 1986 Portugal joined the EEC and the countryside was introduced to CAP, Common Agricultural Policy, subsidies and set-aside policies, which completely switched the rural paradigm. As a consequence, some large estates were modernized, specialized, intensified with funds from CAP and the EEC (UE). Funds were also given to rural homes for tourism facilities. As a reverse consequence, most small properties were abandoned; depopulation and desertification became the rule; most basic products are now cheaper to buy abroad than from local producers. Consuming Portuguese goods has become a lifestyle, a matter of taste, a luxury. Nowadays it's actually very difficult to convince people to remain in or to move to rural areas. Some authors have even described the death of rural parishes (Correia, 2005).

Agriculture is no longer hegemonic as the major productive activity in the twenty first century Portuguese rural world. Forests were separated from agriculture, vacant lands have reappeared and social issues regarding landownership have become a thing of the past. Very few people want to become full time farmers and the lords of the land are no longer the lords of the villages (Almeida, 2007, 2013). Nowadays, there is highly competitive agriculture specialized in fruits and vegetables, wine and olive oil[1], which plays a fundamental role in Portuguese exports, but it produces very little impact on local communities, employing very few permanent workers and using seasonal workforce; second there is agriculture based on cattle, corn and wheat, with huge mechanization and low use of workers, totally dependent on EU subsidies; last

1• Manuel Carvalho, "O Alentejo entre os aviões, a água e os chaparros", Público, 24-04-2016, https://www.publico.pt/economia/noticia/o-alentejo-entre-os-avioes-a-agua-e-os-chaparros-1729777.

there is social agriculture, such as urban gardens and small properties, which acts as a complement to low pensions and unemployment, and has had some impact in reviving community life and social relations (Baptista, 2006, 2010). This trend had already been identified in the early 1990s by rural sociology. For example, Valadas de Lima described a new social construction of the meaning of rural. The author emphasised the redefinition of the borders between rural and urban, and agricultural space specialization versus rural space diversification. This diversification of activities in the rural space includes industry implementation, whose centres of decision are located outside rural areas, and the introduction of new social groups, mainly people with urban origins or who have been educated in cities, who contribute to a redefinition of rural societies (Lima, 1990).

In this process, most local farmers became brand managers and tour hosts, workers were replaced by machines and the agrarian landscape has been transformed into leisure space (Almeida, Melo, 2007, Carneiro *et al*, 2015) or into places of nature conservation (Figueiredo, 2008). Rural areas have acquired multiple meanings and most regions are now classified as "pluri-active, or complex or multifunctional, which may indicate that multiple modes of rural occupancy are widely found in each region" (Correia, Guiomar, Guerra, Ribeiro, 2016). In sum, there was a path from productivism to post-productivism to multifunctionality. But "multifunction agriculture has to be given a content that is politically possible, socially suitable and economically efficient" (Wilson, 2007), which is not at all what is being observed in the Portuguese countryside.

The material space of the rural is no longer the rural locality, but the material space created through usage of the rural social representation (Halfacree, 1993), which may be quite different to locals and to urban consumers. What is rural is often reinvented and sold as a product, by simulating the past and reinventing traditions. This potential is actually being used to its limit as a powerful attraction strategy, resulting in fairs and festivals, rural tourism, heritage and patrimony enhancement.

What remains of the rural and how is it being addressed by the few who still believe in life outside the big cities? According to Hedberg and Carmo, present day rural areas can be dynamic and interconnected by flows and mobility which are affecting the rural space. Migration, commuting, everyday life activities, business networks and information technology have changed spaces which were often viewed as isolated and stagnating areas into dynamic places connected to the rest of the world (Hedberg and Carmo, 2012). However, the tension between marginalisation and urbanization is still a huge problem, especially for remote areas with demographic and desertification problems. Particularly when reforms of public service networks leave some territories unprotected and enhance inequalities in access to social services and benefits. Public policies

by the Social Democrat Government between 2011 and 2015, based on economic rationalization, have resulted on closing down health facilities, schools, post offices, civil parishes. These government actions have had negative impacts: peripheral regions have become even more remote and their populations are increasingly more vulnerable. And they offend the constitutional principles of economic, social and territorial cohesion, territorial planning and sustainable development, defined by the Portuguese Constitution as fundamental State duties (1997 revision, articles 7th, 9th and 66th), as well as one of the priorities of the European Commission: "Exploring the conditions for sustainable growth in rural areas" (AA.VV., 2016).

During one of the worst economic and political crisis Portugal has faced in the last decades, with a huge debt to deal with, there was a general election for local government in 2013. A 2005 law restricted mandates to three and, as a result of the first enforcement of this law, over 63 per cent of the Portuguese mayors were replaced. What have these new mayors brought to local politics?

After a study on Local Government in Portugal, which produced a database and an analysis of local elites replacement due to the 1974 regime transition (Almeida, 2013, 2014), my new research focuses on the new elected mayors, comparing them with the earlier ones, and the solutions they present to solve the abovementioned problems.

Considering that, according to the 2011 census, the rural Portuguese territory has lost 12 per cent of its population since 2001; that 110.000 people have emigrated in 2013[2] and that over 20 per cent of the Portuguese population (almost 2.3 million) was abroad in 2013, what policies may be implemented to revert this trend?

All over the country, and particularly in rural areas, there is an urgent need to attract people and investment to fight depopulation and unemployment. My hypothesis is that local elites are essential to promote local development, territory occupation and increase productive capacities, by stimulating economic activities and job creation. This paper aims to analyse and compare political and economic strategies by local political representatives in order to create a pattern and verify the most viable ones.

Leadership is a key element: "the adoption of a strategic long-term approach, far from happening automatically, is conditioned primarily by good relationships

2• Their main destinations were the UK (30.121), Switzerland (20.039), France (18.000) and Germany (11.401), Observador, 12-05-2015, http://observador.pt/2015/03/20/portugueses-sao-dos-emigram-na-europa/.

between strong and highly skilled political and managerial leaders and robust community relations" (Cepiku, Mussari, Giordano, 2016). Considering that different rural spaces have different values which need to be considered when planning public interventions (Selman, 2012) and public intervention is best targeted when vocations of different rural spaces are assessed, local government and local residents are the most qualified agents to put in place the necessary and adequate policies which target the particular problems of each municipality or region.

Therefore, my research questions are: Considering important issues such as unemployment and depopulation, what are the major strategies used by political representatives to attract investment and finance local economy? What are the differences between projects for urban and rural municipalities regarding the sustainable development of the territory and its dynamic?

Which interests are more frequently considered and what kind of language is used concerning big cities and small villages? Considering that the evaluation of politicians' promises and results is an important part of the decision process for informed citizens, are the new mayors capable of delivering their promises?

Some data on the Portuguese rural depopulation

The Portuguese territory has huge regional differences, particularly urban/rural spaces, the coastline and the depopulated interior where new roles have emerged for rural areas. For example, municipalities range from over half a million people in Lisbon in 2011 (in 1960 the Portuguese capital had over 800,000 inhabitants) to 430 people in a small village in the Azores Islands. Over 37 per cent (115) of the Portuguese municipalities have less than 10,000 inhabitants and only 24 of the 308 existing municipalities (7,8 per cent) are over 100,000.

Population loss in Portuguese rural municipalities has been going on for decades, particularly since the nineteen sixties, but lately it seems like rural depopulation has hit a point of no return. By comparing the last 2011 census to the one from 1960, 53 municipalities, four of them in the Azores Islands and two in the Madeira Islands, have lost over fifty per cent of their population, all of them in the regions of the interior of Portugal, far from the shore and with low demographic densities to start with. In 1960 these 53 municipalities had an average 15,308 people and in 2011

this average was 6.400. As an example, the Alentejo region, on the South of the river Tagus, occupies 41 per cent of the Portuguese territory, but in 2011 it was home to only seven per cent of the country's inhabitants. With depopulation comes aging. For every hundred young people, in the Alentejo region there is an average 186.5 elderly. In some municipalities, such as Avis or Nisa, there are 300 and 379 elderly. This contributes to the region's fragility[3].

This had also contributed for school concentration and the daily displacement of children: "Nowadays we have thousands of small migrants on a daily basis, who have to travel tens of kilometres to go to school. They are the victims of compulsive shutting of schools in their villages (...) and they are a sort of working parents' orphans, whom they barely see. They are sequestrated in school..."[4].

On the other hand, thirty municipalities have increased their population by over 80 per cent in this same period, 21 of them more than doubled, five of them more than tripled and Seixal, an industrial town in the South bank of the river Tagus, has increased its population by 673 per cent. As Lisbon was losing 31.7 per cent of its population and Porto 21.7, their suburban areas, now a part of the larger Lisbon's and Porto's metropolitan areas, were growing considerably, as well as a few other industrial towns such as Braga and Marinha Grande. Some of this population loss in Lisbon and Porto may be explained by such factors as suburbanization, economic transformations, the satellite effect and the environment (Guimarães, Barreira, Panagopoulos, 2015).

Regarding the last decade of 2001 to 2011, 67 municipalities have lost over ten per cent of their inhabitants. They all have the same location features as mentioned above: they are equality distributed throughout the country's inner regions, from North to South. Twenty nine municipalities have gained over ten per cent of inhabitants: mostly the same as described above, plus eight municipalities in the Algarve region, due to the tourism boom in recent decades.

The new Socialist Government which resulted from the 2015 elections has promised to revert some of these trends, by promoting policies for territorial cohesion, decentralization and enhancement of local democracy, with strategic plans for the development of the interior areas. For example, by reopening courthouses which had been closed due to the reorganization of the judiciary map. And 164 municipalities

3• TManuel Carvalho, idem.

4• TSantana Castilho, "Um olhar breve sobre os programas eleitorais", *Público*, 12-08-2015, https://www.publico.pt/portugal/noticia/um-olhar-breve-sobre-os-programas-eleitorais-1704665.

were considered in "risk of desertification" and in "need for "special care" because of low population density[5]. These municipalities shall benefit from special privileges in access to European structural funds up to 2020[6]. In line with the mayors' messages, projects are supposed to privilege the improvement of local products.

Regardless of the decentralization discourse, local government in Portugal is still central government and party system dependent. Local representatives have limited action span due to financial restrictions: municipalities benefit from only 20 per cent of public spending. In sum, Portugal has a highly centralized and bureaucratic system of government (Allegretti, Dias, 2015).

Political programs and messages

In Portugal there are 308 municipalities. For this research a database was built with the election programs and political messages of the 308 mayors elected in 2013, which were subject to a thorough analysis focused on the discourse and the contents of the proposed policies. The main methodology was the analysis of the most repeated topics, recurrent themes and specific words, in order to compare attraction strategies and language by elected representatives from different types of municipalities.

In times of crisis, five levels of intervention were identified to approach the subject: 1. European policies and funds; 2. National laws and public policies, party programs; 3. Municipal and regional initiatives and proposals; 4. Regional and local private associations; 5. Private entrepreneurs who develop their own rural tourism or regional products projects directly for the market, mostly using family heritage, such

5• Manuel Carvalho, "Governo aprova a lista dos 164 municípios com direito a cuidados especiais", *Público*, 28-03-2015, http://www.publico.pt/economia/noticia/governo-define-a-lista-dos-164-municipios-com-direito-a-cuidados-especiais-1690606.

6• The "Alentejo 2020" program has received applications for 43.5 million Euros worth of investments, *Visão*, 25-06-2015, http://visao.sapo.pt/alentejo-2020-analisa-candidaturas-para-investimentos-de-435-milhoes-de-euros=f823799#ixzz3e9v5d3ud. . Regarding the North, the Metropolitan Area of Porto has applied for 129 million Euros, 57 million of them to education and social inclusion projects, http://visao.sapo.pt/autarcas-do-norte-revoltados-com-veba-atribuida-pela-ccdr-n-para-projetos-2020=f823794#ixzz3e9vrLWmC.

as houses, lands or traditional knowledge, or investing their own savings in a life changing experience in rural areas and rural activities, which may contribute to the sustainable development of rural destinations (Kastenholz *et al*, 2016).

This paper addressed level three, based on the methodology used by Belchior on her project "Public Preferences and Policy Decision-Making. A Longitudinal and Comparative Analysis" (Belchior *et al*, 2015). In this project, political programs and party manifestos from 1995 to 2015 were analysed. Political programs and message analysis have been conducted in Europe since 1979 by the Manifesto Research Group (MRG), directed by Ian Budge (Budge, 2001; Klingemann, 2006; Volkens, 2010). "Manifestos are official party statements which contain some mix of ideological declarations, abstract principles, broad goals and specific policy dimensions" (Klingemann, Hofferbert, Budge, 1994). The dataset collected in the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP)[7] provides researchers with enough material to reach some conclusions: party manifestos matter for politics; they are the only written documents produced by parties reflecting their ideology and policy proposals; they contain valid measures of parties' ideologies.

Regardless of the fact that "subjective factors often cause citizens' evaluations to be more negative than actual policy performance suggests they should be", Robert Thomson has been answering the question "To what extent do elected politicians keep the promises they made to voters during election campaigns?" (Thomson, 2001, 2011).

The following description provides us with the main results:

Until 1995, rural areas have been represented in central government programs as production areas. Since then, new concepts have emerged, such as territory and multi-function. Regardless of the fact that agriculture is still considered structural, "a threefold narrative on the rural seemed to emerge in lay discourses: a 'pre-modernity' or 'rural crisis' discourse; a productivist perspective and a 'rural renaissance' vision. In the first, rural areas are generally portrayed as less developed and in need of change. The second is related to the association of the rural with agricultural modernization. Finally, in the third, the countryside is increasingly understood as a repository of traditional cultural values and natural resources, in need of preservation" (Carneiro *et al*, 2015, Silva *et al*, 2016). This third narrative is the one that most mayor candidates and local policies address.

7• https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/.

A brief analysis of parties' programs for the 2015 general election reveals the main lines and policies for rural areas: territory, decentralization, financial autonomy for municipalities. Regarding the item "Territory", the Socialist Party, which presently leads the Government, promised "to benefit from all its potential, by promoting balanced, harmonious and eco-sustainable economic development, with rational use of our endogenous resources. There should be an effort to join traditional activities and crafts with new possibilities put forward by the advance of technology, scientific discoveries and the influx of innovation and knowledge, with respect for our territory's diversity and natural assets"[8]. These concepts are the same that were used by most parties for the 2013 municipal election campaign.

After decades of investment in infrastructures and industrial facilities, with intensive use of European Union funds, local elected representatives, particularly mayors, have now turned to other assets in order to attract investment and assure election and re-election. Considering the aforementioned changes in the rural areas and huge crisis related industrial disinvestment and relocation to unregulated markets, which have created unemployment and depopulation, all over the country there are massive investments in services and tourism related activities, both in big cities and rural areas. Heritage and patrimony have become commodities which are being advertised and sold, together with landscape, arts and crafts and our unpolluted environment. These strategies have been put in practice by the few remaining elites in rural areas, particularly the ones who still want to live there, to be a part of a local community and to contribute to local development.

Most mayors claim for government decentralization and larger self-government powers to the municipalities. Autonomy, social cohesion, sustained development, resources, patrimony, opportunities and accountability: these are the main terms used in most of the political programs presented by the leaders of the Portuguese municipalities.

For urban mayors, the big issues are networks, internationalization, jobs, urban reconstruction and, regarding the newly elected mayor of Porto, Rui Moreira, an independent, his program was based on three priorities: social cohesion, economy and culture. Primary actions to be undertaken in the Porto municipality and main goals: fighting poverty and social exclusion, assistance to the unemployed and their families,

8• Socialist Party Program, 2015: http://www.ps.pt/images/imprensa/convencao_nacional/programa_eleitoral-PS-legislativas2015.pdf.

living conditions that are worthy; studying, working and ageing with dignity; a cosmopolitan, but nevertheless a popular city; good management of the European Community funds; a city government focused on knowledge and investment; free commerce, religious tolerance, among others[9]. In this program there was no need to enhance neither festivals, nor gastronomy or local commodities. The ideal pattern for a large, urban municipality is autonomy and decentralised services, with more power to local elected representatives, particularly independence from central government.

As for rural municipalities, the main problems are attraction strategies for people and companies. Emigrants are never forgotten as potential sources of income. Summer festivals and local products are always present in the speech, as well as the education of their youth. Heritage, commodities and resources have all been transformed into patrimony, both material and immaterial. The most referred items are: patrimony and heritage management, industry and new services for job creation, internationalization of products and regional quality certifications, counselling and training for the recovery of old skills and creation of new ones to stimulate local production and demographic recovery. Fairs and festivals for tourists and for attracting locals who are abroad and away are constantly repeated, mostly in the summer. Local products are advertised together with adjectives such as quality and tradition. Selling the countryside and the landscape has become an art form.

Patrimony has acquired new definitions and typologies: it may be natural or constructed, material or immaterial, and it may include people, landscape, gastronomy and so on. In fact, these new concepts of patrimony have resulted on patrimonial inflation (Choay, 2001). The same has occurred to international certifications and regional brandings (AA.VV., 2016). Recently a few Portuguese items have been awarded UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage status: the Fado in 2011, the Mediterranean diet in 2013 (which includes Portugal, Cyprus, Croatia, Spain, Greece, Italy and Morocco), the Alentejo *cante* in 2014 and the cowbells manufacture in 2015[10].

This is an important discourse for the definition of local and regional identities. Both the use of architecture and nature, as well as the above mentioned intangible cultural heritage may be used as an advantage in the international competition for

9• http://www.cm-porto.pt/assets/misc/Discurso%20tomada%20de%20posse.pdf.

10• https://www.unescoportugal.mne.pt/pt/temas/proteger-o-nosso-patrimonio-e-promover-a-criatividade/patrimonio-cultural-imaterial-em-portugal.

tourists and new rural residents in these times of globalization (Arruda, 2006), just as the invention of traditions (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1985), the reinvention of the past and the modern cult of preservation and nostalgia (Lowenthal, 1985) or even the use of social media to influence people about rural issues and the pleasures of country life (Cannadine, 1985).

By creating incentives for industries to relocate to rural areas and to create new jobs, municipalities are following European directives to involve the private sector and to "foster the development of new technologies that help meet sustainable primary production objectives", as mentioned in the "interactive innovation model, which is supported by Horizon 2020 and the CAP" (AA.VV., 2016). Not only in Portugal, but all over Europe, rural reality has been socially reinvented and constructed and political messages mirror new representations and definitions of the rural.

As an example of such policies and huge investments in territory identified commodities, Luís Matias, who was elected mayor of Penela in 2013, presented a political program based on the following items: an experienced, dynamic and committed team, a strong leadership who acknowledges Penela's territorial potential and the desires of its people; new opportunities for development and for public and private investment; a municipality that can attract investment, create wealth and jobs; to innovate with local resources; *Aldeias do Xisto*, a network of villages; Roman archaeological sites; nature projects; Mondego River's Castles and Walls Network; culture tourism, environment, food and forest, eco-energies; to value territory as development; medieval festival, theatre and music academies, among others[11]. On April 2016 Penela municipality advertised a cheese market in an archaeological site, mixing roman history and a local product, identified as an element of local culture singularity, a celebration of flavours and traditional products of the Penela territory. Rabaçal cheese is advertised as different from all others, produced for centuries in traditional ways, consumed by all classes in the Roman times of the Iberian Peninsula, when it was ever present at peasants and slaves' tables, in military rations, travellers' bags and inn's menus. Other local products are enhanced in the description of this festival: bread, wine, honey, nuts and olive oil, which, together with music and folk dances, should contribute to recreate History[12].

11• https://issuu.com/luismatias2013/docs/programa_eleitoral_13-17.

12• http://www.cm-penela.pt/noticias.php?idnoticia=1893&tano=2015#.Vx-jtlYrLIU.

Municipal attraction strategies

In the last five decades several trends and changes were enforced in the United Kingdom and the United States of America to promote community sustainability, quality of life and the environment. In these countries, both highly urbanized, "rural people and communities continue to contribute to national identity, economic development and social solidarity, as well as to environmental quality" (Shucksmith et al, 2012). In France, rural attraction policies have been producing results. Such is the case of Auvergne with the creation of a Regional Agency for the Development of the Auvergne Territories, which has already contributed to the reversal of the demographic and migratory negative trend[13]. Can these approaches to rural policy be compared and applied to the Portuguese reality?

There are several examples of such attraction strategies in Portuguese rural municipalities, focusing mainly on family oriented policies, elderly care, tourism and leisure, among others such as education and civic participation. One common ground among the most successful mayors: most of them are strong leaders, with considerable cultural background and community involvement.

Families with children and birth increase policies are major issues that are being addressed by rural and depopulated municipalities. In pace with their mayors' political programs, several municipalities have been investing on attraction strategies for families, including tax reductions and eco-oriented official classifications. In 2015, 215 municipalities (70 per cent) have reduced municipal property taxes (IMI) for couples with children[14]. In 2016, 96 municipalities (31 per cent) shall give back 2015's tax incomes (IRS) to their citizens, in order to "improve living conditions and attract and maintain people within the municipalities"[15]. With Project Green Flag, 41 municipali-

13• Ana Cristina Pereira, "Um mundo rural moderno está a desenvolver-se em Auvergne", *Público*, 02-08-2015, http://24.sapo.pt/article/www-publico-pt_2015_08_02_1017004657_um-mundo-rural-moderno-esta-a-desenvolver-se-em-auvergne#_swa_cname=homepage&t_swa_csource=homepage&t_swa_cmedium=web.

14• Denise Fernandes, "70 per cent das câmaras municipais vão reduzir IMI às famílias com filhos", *Sapo Económico*, 30-11-2015, http://economico.sapo.pt/noticias/70-das-camaras-municipais-vao-reduzir-imi-as-familias-com-filhos_236154.html.

15• List of 96 municipalities: http://www.economias.pt/lista-de-municipios-que-vao-devolver-irs/.

ties have received a green flag award for family oriented policies. One of them, Vila de Rei, has been conquering this award since 2009. These policies are applied mainly on free day care and school books, free transportation to schools and hospitals, and local incentives for industries and service companies. Regardless of those policies, population loss in Vila de Rei has yet to be reversed, since job creation is the main growth factor and it has not improved[16]. Following the same trend, in an effort to fight depopulation, the municipality of Chamusca offers school books and extracurricular activities to almost a thousand students from first to twelfth grade[17].

Mora, in the Alentejo region, is another example: this municipality has created several incentives for families with children, including money for newborn babies and investments in jobs and wellbeing. This is a municipality with 4.634 people, which has lost 51 per cent of its population since 1960 and 14 per cent since 2001. Lately it has attracted new industries, it has built a river animals' aquarium and provided jobs to hundreds of people. It has also facilitated house acquisitions and tax incentives. Since 2004, when the municipality began awarding birth incentives, 237 new babies were born; and on November 2015 there were 26 pregnant women in Mora[18].

A low birth rate is a national problem, which also concerns big cities. In Lisbon, for instance, not only did the municipal tax for properties was reduced for families with children, but also there are programs for attracting the youth, particularly towards repopulating historical and central neighbourhoods, which have become depopulated or are inhabited mostly by the elderly[19].

http://www.dinheirovivo.pt/economia/macedo-cavaleiros-abdica-406-mil-euros-irs-os-contribuintes/#sthash.yEPmSx77.dpuf.

16• Nuno Guedes, "Vila de Rei: um concelho com transportes e livros do secundário gratuitos", TSF, 18-11-2015, http://www.tsf.pt/sociedade/interior/vila-de-rei-um-concelho-com-transportes-e-livros-do-secundario-gratuitos—4890351.html. List of municipalities with the green flag award: "Câmaras Municipais da região distinguidas por serem 'familiarmente responsáveis'", 05-11-2015, *beira.pt*: http://beira.pt/portal/noticias/camara-municipais-da-regiao-distinguidas-por-serem-familiarmente-responsaveis/.

17• *SIC*, 16-09-2016.

18• Tiago Palma, "As cegonhas não param de levar bebés para Mora. Esperam-nos pais com emprego, casa e 'ajudinhas'", *Observador*, 22-11-2015, http://observador.pt/especiais/as-cegonhas-nao-param-levar-bebes-mora-esperam-nos-pais-emprego-casa-ajudinhas/.

19• Inês Boaventura, "Câmara de Lisboa lança primeira bolsa de arrendamento para jovens", *Público*, 15-03-20165, https://www.publico.pt/local/noticia/camara-de-lisboa-lanca-primeira-bolsa-de-arrendamento-para-jovens-1726271.

Attracting and educating the youth is also a concern in many municipalities, such as Manteigas, which enforced programs for job creation and awards scholarships for local students to go to the University. It also aims become the capital of adventure and leisure sports.

Other municipalities are developing policies for stimulating youth citizenship and democratic participation. Such is the case of Santa Maria da Feira, where there were school based elections both in 2015 and 2016 to vote for the Young Councillor of the Feira Municipality. This project was inspired by the Young Mayor model, created in Lewisham, London. Both a seventeen year old girl in 2015 and a fifteen year old girl in 2016 presented candidacies in schools; did campaign actions and participated in debates, finally to be elected for one year mandates with a budget of ten thousand Euros and a team of eighteen people to manage. Several other municipalities are considering applying the same model, which, according to the Feira's mayor, Emídio Sousa, has been very successful: "Our major achievement was to have our youth thinking about politics, about their village, about their homeland (...) this is a strong head start to probably increase election turnouts"[20].

Elderly care and social services are important issues which are mentioned as a priority by most municipalities. In fact, it is one of the most serious national problems, which lately has been address by local government and local institutions. During the Estado Novo regime, local elites assumed the roles of mayor, civil governor and controlled local economy, provided social services and assistance to the people (Almeida, 1997). With democratization came political decentralization, but, simultaneously, education, health and social services were centralized. With the current crisis and austerity measures, the Social Democrat Government (2011-2015) reduced expenses and civil servants were the first to endure cuts both in number and pay. As a result, several central services stopped functioning or started performing poorly. Local institutions came back forward and assumed social services. Lately, parishes and local charity institutions in 58 Portuguese municipalities have been hiring technicians to provide social services no longer assured by Social Security, such as caring for the elderly and accompanying vulnerable families. These projects are titled Local Networks for Social Intervention and they have been put in practice with European funds. Fifty million

20• Sara Dias Oliveira, *Público*, 01-11-2015, http://www.publico.pt/local/noticia/sofia-a-miuda-de-17-anos-que-tem-um-municipio-na-mao-depois-de-ganhar-eleicoes-1712960 e 17-01-2016, http://www.publico.pt/local/noticia/margarida-a-mais-nova-autarca-do-pais-quer-provar-que-a-sua-geracao-nao-esta-perdida-1720294.

Euros of community funds are available for Portugal until 2020 for three year projects in these areas. Local institutions argue that they know better who really needs help and care, and they are on the ground to verify every situation: if necessary they go to peoples' home in order to check whether there is food on the table[21]. Most of these actions have been led by municipalities, particularly by putting together the networks and the institution and by pressing central services to provide the necessary facilities and staff, such as medical doctors and health centres[22].

Leisure activities based on History, heritage, landscape, environment, culture and patrimony are key issues in most of the Portuguese countryside. There are several examples of success, because it has been proved that "public spending on leisure impacted spare-time quality of life in various ways. Spending for tourism essentially followed an upward path, linearly enhancing citizens' spare-time quality of life" (Mafrolla, D'Amico, 2016). Such is the case of Mértola, Óbidos and Montemor-o-Novo, where mayors Jorge Pulido Valente (2001-2008), Telmo Faria (2001-2013) and Carlos Pinto de Sá (1993-2012) respectively, they all have History degrees and they promoted their villages and countryside in quite dynamic ways.

In Mértola archaeological excavations were promoted and B&Bs were encouraged. The Mertola Achaeological Site has demonstrated that culture and historical patrimony may be combined to produce results. For forty years it has originated twelve museums and it has attracted researchers from the Maghreb region who have found remains from our collective Islamic past. Partnerships with the Universities of Faro, Évora and Lisbon, have produced new studies on Mediterranean History. With only a thousand inhabitants, Mértola receives fifty thousand visitors each year. And rural tourism has boomed.

Using its beautiful castle scenery, Óbidos village is home to fairs and carnivals throughout the year, almost non-stop: Christmas Village, Chocolate Festival, Medieval Market, Piano International Week, The Holy Week, Buskers Festival (street art and performers), art exhibits, and so on.

21• Andreia Sanches, "Há 58 concelhos a experimentar uma nova forma de acompanhar famílias. Será que funciona?", *Público*, 27-04-2016, https://www.publico.pt/sociedade/noticia/indefinicao-marca-inicio-da-transferencia-de-competencias-da-seguranca-social-1730219.

22• Manuel Carvalho, "O Alentejo entre os aviões, a água e os chaparros", *Público*, 24-04-2016, https://www.publico.pt/economia/noticia/o-alentejo-entre-os-avioes-a-agua-e-os-chaparros-1729777.

Since 2000, Montemor-o-Novo has been home to Rui Horta, a dancer and choreographer who established a multidisciplinary centre for research and creation, "the space of time" in a sixteenth century monastery, which has given the liberty of time to create for numerous artists, both Portuguese and international[23]. Along with cultural activities, the municipality also promotes festivals throughout the year, which contributes to the definition of Montemor as a cultural and hospitable town, with all the advantages of an urban centre in perfect harmony with a strong rural component.

These activities generate commerce, promote local economy and entrepreneurship. This is not related to ideology: these mayors were elected from different parties, ranging from the entire political spectrum. Such policies result from personal motivation and far sight, from skills and ability to attract economic leaders. In the rest of the country, villages look like ghost towns. Old people asylums.

In fact, culture promotes development and local elites invest in it whenever they can. Both local governments and local entrepreneurs try to attract new publics to music, dance and theatre festivals. Such is the case of Guimarães, in the North of Portugal, where there is also a course in performing arts and another in design. Five municipalities in the Minho region have joined forces with private investors to create a professional travelling theatre company. As did Santa Maria da Feira, with an International Street Theatre Festival. There are many other examples of municipal investments in culture, including music schools, arts centres and philharmonic bands[24].

In Campo Maior and Redondo, traditional street paper flowers festivals now take place on a yearly basis. And in Marvão there is a Chestnut Festival which attracts Spanish people from across the border, as well as international music and cinema festivals. In fact, Spain is now considered a huge potential market for the Portuguese border territories, whose municipalities are investing in attraction strategies towards our neighbour. Cross-border cooperation is even considered a "mechanism of democratisation through the decentralisation of regional or/and local governmental bodies", by opening the possibilities for local and social participation, in which local authorities play an important role as "the nexus between transnational institutions of cross-

23• http://www.oespacodotempo.pt/en/o-espaco-do-tempo.

24• Sara Dias Oliveira, Carlos Dias, Idálio Revez, "O poder central devia estar mais presente na cultura? Devia, mas as câmaras dão conta do recado", *Público*, 10-04-2016, https://www.publico.pt/local/noticia/o-poder-central-devia-estar-mais-presente-na-cultura-devia-mas-as-camaras-dao-conta-do-recado-1728508.

border cooperation and the inhabitants of border regions" (González-Gómez, Gualda, 2016). The European Commission has also recently placed its attention on territorial linkages and their contribution to sustainable growth (AA.VV., 2016).

Every summer there are huge music festivals with internationally acclaimed rock stars all over the country, in big cities, in beaches and in the countryside, some of them in rural properties. And then there is Andanças and others of the eco-friendly kind. "Andanças is a festival for the promotion of popular music and dance as the primary means of learning and exchange between generations, knowledge and cultures. In Castelo de Vide, every year since 1996, Andanças has been uniting people from all over the world in a spirit of sharing, meeting and sustainability, as an alternative to other summer festivals. It provides room for dancing, making music, and to experiment, but also for sharing and exchanging ideas for a better world"[25].

Other festivals are organized by private companies and institutions, with municipalities' endorsement in infrastructure, financing and promotion. Such is the case of the Art&Tur, International Tourism Film Festival, organized by APTUR, Portuguese Association of Tourismology and BRIDGE, Events and Entertainment with the official support of the Municipality of Barcelos and recently Vila Nova de Gaia. One of its first initiatives in 2008 was a contest to reinvent the Barcelos Rooster. Artists, artisans and designers created new images for a traditional Portuguese symbol, "preserving the authenticity of cultural identity and values with creativity and innovation"[26], which were used as awards for the winners of the film festival.

Local tourism is a main feature of rural areas, providing some income to homeowners and increasing consumption of local products, as well as it may contribute to the sustainable development of rural destinations (Eusébio, 2016). Many of these projects are members of regional networks, local development associations, inter-municipal communities regarding services and joint development strategies. The development of inter-municipal cooperation mechanisms has been one form of fighting the economic crisis and dealing with the European Union/International Monetary Fund bailout process (Teles, 2016). These situations have created new forms of civic participation, which have yet to prove their worth and efficiency in most cases (Allers, van Ommeren, 2016). One common ground: most of them try to implement direct democracy and to attract people to present and solve their own problems. Others

25• http://www.andancas.net/2016/en/.

26• http://www.aptur.net/artetur/.

originate in local government or in municipalities' associations. Networks are important to coordinate and establish regional interests, which can prove to be more effective than each municipality individually. Mostly these projects aim to present joint applications to European funds for regions, such as the Viseu, Dão and Lafões Inter-Municipal Community, which received over 39 million Euros for several operational programs[27].

For example, *Aldeias do Xisto*[28] is an agency for the development of villages which has contributed to join forces to promote tourism and create development projects. Citizens decide on projects and applications, demonstrating a clear democratization process within civic society and the private sector. Also the Association *Fragas Aveloso* in São Pedro do Sul, financed by the Gulbenkian Foundation, has project *Acolher* for providing education and skills to young people in the region in order to form ethical and responsible tourism mediators, promote rural areas and attract investment[29]. And the Montado Route is project for a "new tourism product for Alentejo": a inter-municipal touristic route spanning four municipalities with a focus on the cork oak tree forests, based on the largest raw cork producing area of the world, with an "exceptional natural heritage" and "one of the most extraordinary preserved cork factories from the 19th century as an example of the industrial heritage of the region (...) and, finally, commercial activities with gastronomic products and handicrafts" (Faísca, Tavares, Prates, Botella, 2016).

In line with these projects there are others with larger scopes, such as *Novos Povoadores* (New Settlers) which aims to support urban families to move to and create businesses in rural areas[30], after the Auvergne and Spanish *Abraza la Tierra* models[31]; and *Animar*, the Portuguese Association for Local Development, which creates local and regional partnerships for economic, social and solidarity intervention[32].

Universities and polytechnic institutes have already proven to be useful tools for demographic stimulation and local job creation, because of their direct and indirect contributions to regional development. "The presence of a higher education institution may bring public (e.g. more taxes and more leases) and private (e.g. better

27• http://www.cm-vnpaiva.pt/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=865&catid=45.

28• http://aldeiasdoxisto.pt/.

29• http://fragasaveloso.pt/.

30• http://novospovoadores.pt/projecto/index.html.

31• http://www.abrazalatierra.com/inicio.shtml.

32• http://www.animar-dl.pt/.

salaries and better jobs) economic benefits, as well as public (e.g. decreased unemployment rate, reduction in poverty and criminality, and reduced welfare dependency) and private (e.g. greater life expectancy, greater satisfaction at the workplace, better quality of life, improved health and greater family stability) social benefits, despite the likelihood of some costs being incurred (e.g. land use and tax exemptions). The integration of an institute into a region may constitute a contribution in the form of the development of local networks that promote a good learning environment and the improvement of skills, capabilities and qualifications, as well as increased competitiveness and social cohesion". Results and conclusions: "Polytechnic institutes are major employers in the regions where they are located, ranking, in general, in second place. The estimated number of jobs created as a result of the location of the polytechnics in the regions under analysis ranges from 915 in the case of Portalegre to 6321 in the case of Leiria. (...) The relative weight of the jobs created in terms of active population ranged from 1.77 per cent in Setúbal to 12.92 per cent in Bragança. It appears that this relative weight tends to be higher for polytechnics located in municipalities of the inner regions of the country. (...) The impact on local GDP varied between 2 per cent and 11 per cent with a multiplier effect on job creation ranging from 2 to 5. (...) It is clear that the largest contribution to this impact resulted from the monthly spending of students who had moved to a particular region to study at the polytechnic institute. Finally, it is important to highlight the role of higher education institutions as major employers and, consequently, as settlers of qualified people in their respective regions. (...) the impact of polytechnic institutes goes far beyond the economic dimension, namely in aspects not easily quantifiable, such as socio cultural benefits and equality of access to higher education for these regions." (Alves, 2015).

Final remarks

Considering demographic increase and population migration back to rural areas, official results of the above mentioned policies may only be checked on the next census, in 2021. A political evaluation on these policies shall certainly come out of the next local elections results in 2017: these factors count as election and re-election criteria. Until then economic recovery of Portugal's rural areas has a long way to go.

Adequate national policies are a requirement[33], such as the recently approved National Programme for Territorial Cohesion[34]. This programme reflects a clear change in the Portuguese central government policies regarding interior regions, with its 164 measures designed to promote a more balanced territorial planning. Furthermore, there shall be implemented pay increase for medical doctors[35] and financial support for the unemployed to move and work in the interior regions, as well as tax incentives for entrepreneurs to relocate their companies[36].

Regardless of all the above mentioned attraction strategies, investments in industry, services and job creation seem to be the most effective to convince people to relocate to rural areas. And agriculture is no more a permanent solution, because of its low job creation and use of seasonal workers. Even when there are family oriented policies, promoted by the municipalities, if parents cannot find a job, whether in the municipality or in a private local company, there is no way for families to remain for a long time, unless they have some other income or they work at home. Such is the case of Mora, where the municipality has invested in new jobs and industry has grown. Summer festivals and tourism are seasonal in most cases and they provide income to a very select group who offers some services at those specific moments. Even a local farmers market on Saturday mornings, such as the one in Estremoz, which has become trendy and attracts tourists and some celebrities, does not do much for the local economy, other than provide the municipality with a local tax paid by the merchants. And other parishes, away from the centre of the municipality, never benefit from these measures.

33• As claimed by the mayor of Montemor-o-Novo, Hortênsia Menino, https://issuu.com/canaspaulo/docs/mor_mag_10_final.

34• In January 2016 a special committee was appointed with the goal of creating, implementing and supervising a program and promoting measures for territorial development. Its objectives were published in the *Diário da República*, 1ª série, n. 15, 22 January 2016. In 20 October 2016 this program was approved by the Council of Ministers, http://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/o-governo/pnct/pnct.aspx.

35• Luz, Carla Sofia, "Médicos no interior vão ganhar mil euros a mais", *Jornal de Notícias*, 30-09-2016, http://www.jn.pt/nacional/interior/medicos-no-interior-vao-ganhar-mil-euros-a-mais-5416449.html#ixzz4LiqrHa6x.

36• Luz, Carla Sofia, "Governo paga a desempregados que trabalharem no interior", *Jornal de Notícias*, 24-09-2016, http://www.jn.pt/nacional/interior/desempregados-terao-apoio-para-viver-no-interior-5406334.html; "Vieira da Silva confirma apoio para quem quiser ir trabalhar para o interior", Sic Notícias, 24-09-2016, http://sicnoticias.sapo.pt/economia/2016-09-24-Vieira-da-Silva-confirma-apoio-para-quem-quiser-ir-trabalhar-para-o-interior.

In all this process dynamic elites are essential to turn dying municipalities into living territories for new opportunities. And to reduce the location gap: the closer to the sea and to Lisbon and Porto the better; the farthest, the more of a desert you will find. Strong leaders and economic and social entrepreneurs have to live in rural areas and be a part of the countryside's daily life in order to be engaged on local communities. Only under those circumstances may they implement adequate programs to attract new families, promote jobs and help demographics. Social innovation for rural development is only possible with the creation of "an actor-oriented network" (Neumeier, 2012).

Regardless of the efforts of mayors' and local community leaders, the Portuguese rural world is still trying to find a new way to survive. The Portuguese countryside and its people are no longer waiting to be rescued while resting under the shadow of a cork or olive tree. They are doing their best to survive. In spite of some modern industrial and agricultural facilities, up to date and technologically advanced, there is still a long way for the majority of these lands and these people to be classified as modern or up to date. And for most of them the future is still a long way ahead[37].

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37• Manuel Carvalho, "O Alentejo entre os aviões, a água e os chaparros", *Público*, 24-04-2016, https://www.publico.pt/economia/noticia/o-alentejo-entre-os-avioes-a-agua-e-os-chaparros-1729777.

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