EDUCATION AND TERRITORY IN PORTUGAL'S INTERIOR: COHESION OR FRACTURE?

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1. THE CONTEXT

By definition, qualification systems are designed to provide, in a particular territory, access to educational and training opportunities to respond to the needs and aspirations of people and institutions there inserted, contributing to human, social, cultural and economic development.

However, in certain historical, demographic, social, economic and cultural circumstances, the existence of developed and very active qualification systems, in territorial contexts, can introduce dynamicsthat promote discriminatory fractures between people and institutions which consequently end by excluding territories themselves, when compared and related with other territories wherein such phenomena do not occur.

This text intends to assume itself as a reflection on the qualification system(s) existing within Portugal and the tensions and consequent dynamics that they are introducing in the regions and in the country.
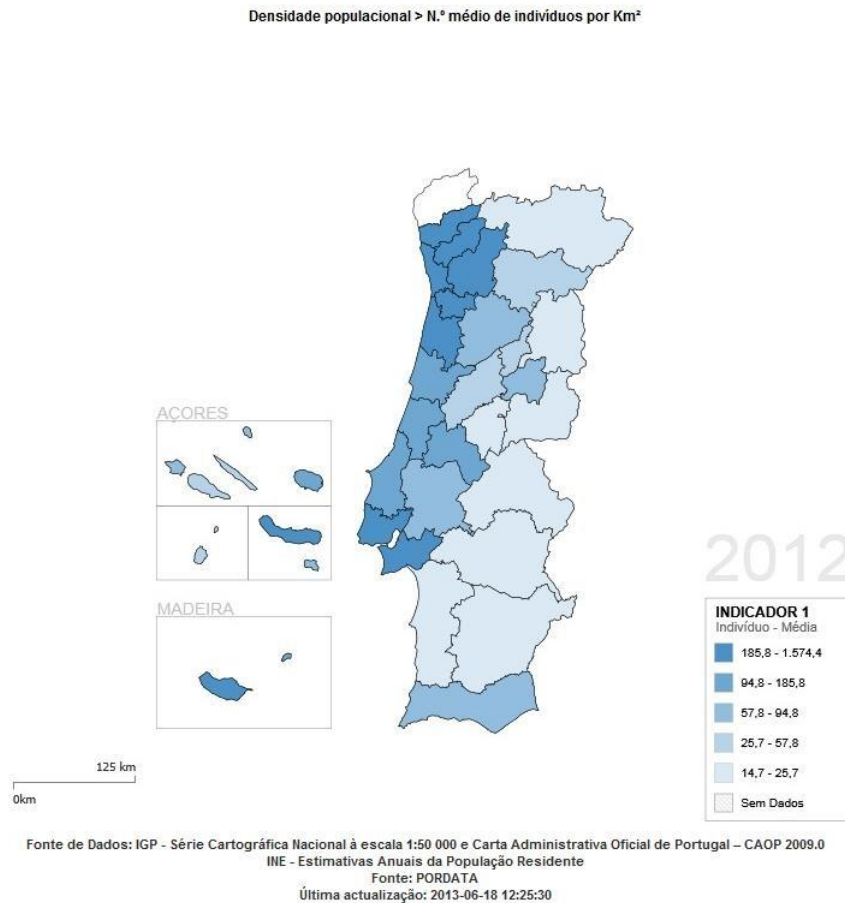
2. FOUR TENSIONS AND FRACTURE

2.1. The mismatch between demographics and thequalification networks

Across the Portuguese's interior the greatest depopulation on record in the history of the country is in motion. In fact, in the last three general population census processes,it is verified that the human presence decreased very significantly in most of the so called 'interior' territories,here assumed to be the districts that are located along the vertical border with Spain and are as follows: Bragança, Guarda, CasteloBranco, Portalegre, Évora, Beja and part of the district of Faro.

In fact,according to the information gathered, at the National Institute of Statistics (INE, 2012), demographic trends in the country led to a population distribution which is the most unbalanced ever in Portugal, that translates into

aconcentration of population along the coast inprejudice of a sharp and growing depopulation of the interior,as can be seen in the following figure:

Figure 1 - Population Density of Portugal

Densidade populacional > N.º médio de indivíduos por Km²

AÇORES

MADEIRA

2012

INDICADOR 1
Indivíduo - Média

- 185,8 - 1.574,4
- 94,8 - 185,8
- 57,8 - 94,8
- 25,7 - 57,8
- 14,7 - 25,7
- Sem Dados

125 km

0km

Fonte de Dados: IGP - Série Cartográfica Nacional à escala 1:50 000 e Carta Administrativa Oficial de Portugal – CAOP 2009.0
INE - Estimativas Anuais da População Residente
Fonte: PORDATA
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As can be seen from the observation of the previous figure, the interior's territory of the country(with the exception of Algarve,despite the very substantial differences between Algarve's coast and interior) presents indicators of low population density. To add to this depopulation, occurs another movement: the aging population. These two simultaneous and competing phenomena, determine the existence of a new reality within the country: a very significant decrease young individuals.

This demographic reality and its recent developments was not, until now, incorporated by qualification systems that are designed and structured within the interior's territories for a younger and more present demographic. There is therefore a tension, originated by the dialogue between aeducational network thought out,operated and availablein the territoriesto a increasingly less present and different demographic.~

2.2. The depopulation'shallways of qualification networks

Naturally,in interior territories, with demographics with the profile previously characterized and with qualification networks thought out for other demographic realities, another tension and consequent phenomenon occurs:mobility induced by qualification networks.

In fact, in territorial contexts with low levels of human presence and low number of young people attending compulsory education, the school system does not have financial, material and human means to provide all segments of schooling or many curriculum and vocational options found in more populated contexts and with a larger scale of school demographic. This narrowing of opportunities and choices in certain territories determines three answersby young people:

i)   The early exit of qualification systems, because these locally, do not meet their expectations;
ii)   The vocations' stranglehold, as a result of the narrowing of choices;
iii)   The decision to leave the territory, in order to continue to qualify and maintain the latitude of possible choices.

Currently, there are witnessed any of the above paths by young people and their families. However, the exit from the territory, in a sense to keep life projects intact, is an option for many youthswho have family, social and economic support to take this decision. This exit corresponds in many cases to a final exit, since the qualification hallway, that continues, will take theseyouthsto new segments of qualification and a professional dimension that do not exist in their origin territories.

2.3. The negative cycle of the qualification / economyrelation

Being unable to fixate the more differentiated qualification segments or their young people, personally more resilient, vocationally more consistent, and academically and professionally more skilled, the territory will retain the most basic and less differentiatedsegments of the qualification systems and the youths less skilled and vocationally further away from their primary options. These will constitute the manpower available in the territory and feed the local business network.

In these territorial contexts a dynamic depression is generated, powered locally and diminished over time. This dynamic condemns the territories to processes of economic and social exclusion.

In this context,

"... *The construction of links between the qualification paths and local and regional economic rows, which may result in a more consolidated and immediate return in productivity, competitiveness and hence the production of wealth, must be links to privilege during the design of policies for education and training directed to*

the territories within the country.In fact, there are economic rows, within the more traditional activities of production of certified goods and in many areas of the local economy, that could greatly benefit with an approach of qualification.This new approach will allow small local entrepreneurs, and respective contributors and to all who are responsible for the qualification of local people and life in the communities, to provide a very significantimpetus to the local economic rows, incorporating capital, technology, creativity and innovation gains and in this way maximize the production of wealth in the territories, which is a sine qua non *for the creation of employment and the fixation of individuals and families.''* (Nico&Nico, 2011a:23)

2.4. The cultural and generational fracture

In the territories of the interior - under certain circumstances - there is still a weak association between the community institutions (very different in nature,but with a operation matrix based on civic participation and social individuals residing in the territories and very close to the local reality)and the institutions that promote formal learning, often tutored and answering to the external political powers not representative of the local territoriesand not legitimized by these.There is, in these conditions,a certain unlinking between the protagonists of formal education and their beneficiaries and communities to which they belong.

In these circumstances, there is a risk: the increasing difficulty and, ultimately, **a real break in the passage of a** *local culturaltestimony*(Nico&Nico, 2011b), a structural dimension in building a community identity and territorial, patrimonialization and appreciation of local culture and the establishment of a generational contract,through which the community does not lose, on their journey to the future,significant fragments of its past.

In most situations,the training courses and their formative proposals do not include the culture and history of local communities, the oral and written manifestations of the autochthonous literature, the vertices of social and family geometry or the natural,geographic and economic realityof each territory. It suffices to check the contents of the curriculum materials more usually used in formal learning (textbooks, databases, listings, bibliography, etc..) to conclude the existence of a huge gap between the two cultures that on the same place coexist: the one that formed there and still exists and the one there comes, imported through formal learning systems.

In fact, at the level of non-formal learning contexts, reality in the territories of the interior Portuguese assumes specific contours.The universe of institutions promoting activities belongs,in its majority, to the associative movement generated by the civic and social action of individuals, in the respective communities.This community dimension induces to the set of activities and projects promoted by educational institutions, an **intergenerational array** which is unlikely to occur in other contexts and that is, presently, one of the most structural components of a strengthening social and

territorial identity of individuals, contributing significantly for the general education of the population,for the promotion of social dialogue and the acquisition of skills of diverse nature during a lifetime.

Often it were these institutions, the only spaces available for the formation of a significant number of individuals, particularly when their economic conditions distanced them from the school learning environments, as stateCorreia&Cabete (2002:45-46), when considering the non-formal education as "the only way of learning for the majority of adults."

3. FOR THE FUTURE

Promoting the departure of young people not embracing the local culture, not relating, in a mutual and symbiotic way the with local communities and their more representative institutions and not contributing to competitiveness of the local economy, the qualification systems are being, today and in many of the territories of the interior of Portugal, assumed as the main responsible for the disqualification of the territories, which is nonetheless one of the most unfortunate and troubling paradoxes of the Portugueseinterior.

In the present historical,social and politicalPortuguese context, there is the urgent need to establish a network of qualification with regional scale, that might bring together all the operators present in that territory, in this way potentiating the existence of the maximum vocational latitude in each of the territories, in the sense that not having to be available at every point of the territory, the diversity of training provision, can, however, ensure the availability ofqualification supply that meets the demand and vocational expectations of the generality of the resident population: youths and adults.Through this integrated network, the conditions can be created for individuals to perform their qualification locally without feeling the need to leave that territory. The challenge is to construct learning and qualification pathways that may have a significant part of these training segments,installed in their own territory.

Knowing, enhance, integrate and, therefore,respecting the learning available in each territory, promoting the necessary cultural and generational encounter between autochthonous knowledge and school knowledge is, in our opinion, a fundamental exercise for a Sustainable Education, based territorially and socially respecting the cultural matrix of each community,promoter of cooperative work,solidifying social bonds and driving cultural openness,that enriches and develops.

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