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Title: Fighting depopulation in Portugal: local and central government policies in times of crisis.

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Abstract:

During one of the worst economic crisis Portugal has faced in the last decades, with a considerable debt to deal with, emigration, population loss, ageing and unemployment afflicted our economy and society, particularly in rural territories. The purpose of this article is to assess the main local and central government policies to fight depopulation and territorial inequalities, as well as their attempts at sustainable development. What remains in the Portuguese inland regions and how is it being addressed by the few who still believe in life outside the cities? What is the role of local government in the sustainable development of the territory? All over the country, and particularly in rural areas, there is an urgent need to attract people and investment. What are the main issues addressed by the central government to deal with this problem?

For this research a database was built with the political programs of the 308 mayors elected in 2013, which were subject to a thorough analysis, as well as the new socialist government recently approved National Programme for Territorial Cohesion, aimed at promoting a more balanced territorial planning.

This article describes the demographic situation and compares the municipalities' economic strategies. The results are still to be observed, but these new local and central policies at least reflect a change of paradigm from the social-democrat coalition government (2011-2015) and introduce a discourse of hope for inland regions, even if the political time of each government (four years terms) is never enough to solve such complex issues.

Key words: Rural, population, policies, local government, government program.

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<http://www.degois.pt/visualizador/curriculum.jsp?key=1754071740115560>.

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Introduction

The revolution of 25 April 1974 initiated a political decentralization process which was put in practice in the transition period with administrative committees until the first democratic local elections on 12 December 1976. The first democratic Constitution, approved on 2 April 1976, established the principle of local autonomy. Since then, expansion periods and crisis have taken place, but one factor has grown to an apparent point of no return: the huge difference between the coastline urban space and the rural territories. During one of the worst economic and political crisis Portugal has faced in the last decades, with a considerable debt to deal with, emigration, population loss, ageing and unemployment have afflicted our economy and society and have put the political systems under stress (Freire, Lisi, 2016). Austerity measures imposed by the European Union forced the social-democrat coalition government (2011-2015) to introduce reforms of public service networks that left some territories unprotected and terribly damaged. In general there was a decrease in living standards for a large part of the Portuguese population (Baumgarten, 2017), with both political candidates and voters tending to attribute blame mostly to the European Union and the bankers (Teperoglou, *et al*, 2014).

The purpose of this article is to assess the main local and central government policies to fight depopulation and territorial inequalities, as well as their attempts at sustainable development. What remains in the Portuguese inland territories and how is it being addressed by the few who still believe in life outside the cities? What is the role of local government and its leaders in the sustainable development of the territory? Considering that, according to the 2011 census, the rural Portuguese territory has lost twelve per cent of its population since 2001; that 110.000 people have emigrated in 2013¹ and that over twenty per cent of the Portuguese population (almost 2.3 million) was abroad in 2013, what policies may be implemented to revert this trend?

In Portugal there are 308 municipalities. For this research a database was built with the political programs of the 308 mayors elected in 2013, which were subject to a thorough analysis, as well as the new socialist government National Programme for Territorial Cohesion (2016), aimed at promoting a more balanced spatial planning. All over the country, and particularly in rural areas, there is an urgent need to attract people and investment. In sum, local goals are to prevent people from leaving, particularly the youth, and to promote a movement of permanent relocation to rural areas, not only for leisure, but for life, described by Halfacree as “counterurbanisation” (Halfacree, 2014).

This article describes the demographic situation and compares the municipalities’ economic strategies, along with central policies for underprivileged regions. The results are still to be observed, but these new local and central policies at least reflect a change of paradigm from the social-democrat coalition government (2011-2015) and introduce a discourse of hope for inland regions, even if the political time of each government (four years terms) is never enough to solve such complex issues.

1. Historical context of the Portuguese local government and rural territories

Since medieval ages, Portuguese local councils had a tradition of autonomy and self-government (Coelho, 1986, Oliveira, 1996). Local elites were an important group who maintained power in areas where central government could not reach. With the New State a huge centralized government tried to control every aspect of daily life, using corporative institutions for every section of the economy and society. The military,

¹ Their main destinations were the UK (30.121), Switzerland (20.039), France (18.000) and Germany (11.401), *Observador*, 12 May 2015, <http://observador.pt/2015/03/20/portugueses-sao-dos-emigram-na-europa/>.

industrialists, landowners and bankers benefited from state protectionism, as well as local elites. And they were all put in charge of each sector's main corporative institutions, created to control industry, agriculture, and social services which the central government deliberately did not provide (Lucena, 1976). Local elites simply took control of all the new institution, just as they already controlled local economy and society, because mostly they were the main providers of jobs and services to their region (Almeida, 2013b). Local councils were almost entirely politically and financially dependent on the government. Mayors were chosen from among local notables. Their job requirements consisted of administrative duties and police work. There was no autonomy involved, neither financial nor regarding political decision (Almeida, 2017b).

Since 1974 there was a process of administrative decentralisation, which was explicitly defined on the 1976 Constitution (Ferrão, 2016), and the enlargement of the rights and opportunities of citizens and their ability to influence and participate in the local decision-making process, as well as legislative and financial autonomy. In fact, it is still dependent on central government for most of its financing: for some authors, decentralization is incomplete and Portugal is still a centralized and bureaucratic state (Allegratti, Dias, 2015). Local elected representatives in Portuguese municipalities consist of a mayor and a group of councillors with executive powers, who administer their own revenues and are submitted to control by a municipal assembly. Nevertheless local autonomy has indeed become a reality, particularly concerning budgetary, management and construction issues.

Towards the end of the New State regime, other changes occurred in the countryside. The Portuguese rural world had always suffered from a demand for food supplies without enough manpower to produce them. Since the middle-ages, keeping people in agricultural activities had been a subject of state policies: there were laws and programs meant to keep the population on the countryside using all sorts of arguments, from territory defence and military occupation, to food self-supply and autonomy (Almeida, 2016). Salazar enforced wheat campaigns in the Alentejo region in the late 1920s and early 1930s, which brought seasonal workers to the region and contributed to increase the economic and social strength of landowners (Cabral *et al*, 1976, 1978). In the second half of the twentieth century several changes were introduced which encouraged and resulted in mass migration from rural areas. In the 1960s there was mechanization, emigration and early welfare laws. Industrialization and construction works in the

outskirts of Lisbon and Porto attracted rural labourers to better paid jobs in Portuguese suburban areas, as well as in 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. By the end of the decade, workers were replaced by machines and intensive farming shoved entire populations to urban areas and abroad.

In 1975 there was an Agrarian Reform in the Alentejo Region (Almeida, 2006, Almeida, 2007, Almeida, 2013a). In 1986 Portugal joined the European Economic Community (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 (now European Union, UE). Funds were also given to rural homes for tourism facilities. On the other hand, most small properties were abandoned; depopulation became the rule; most basic products are now cheaper to buy abroad than from local producers.

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.

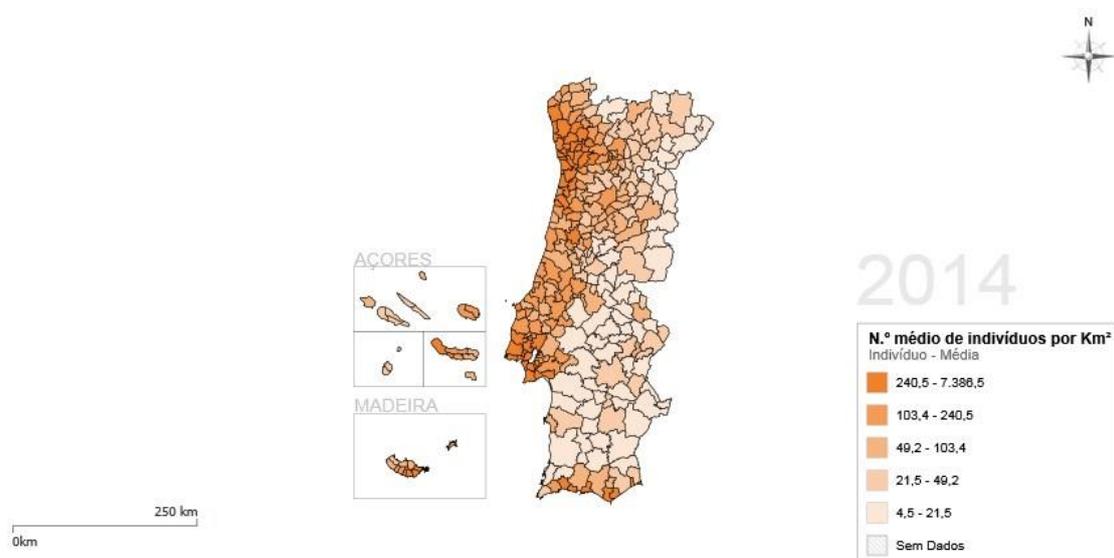
Population loss in Portuguese rural municipalities has been going on for decades, particularly since the 1960s, but lately it seems like rural depopulation has hit a point of no return. By comparing the last 2011 census to the one from 1960, 53 municipalities, four of them in the Azores Islands and two in the Madeira Islands, have lost over 50 per cent of their population, all of them in the Portuguese inland, far from the coastline 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, respectively.

On the other hand, 30 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).

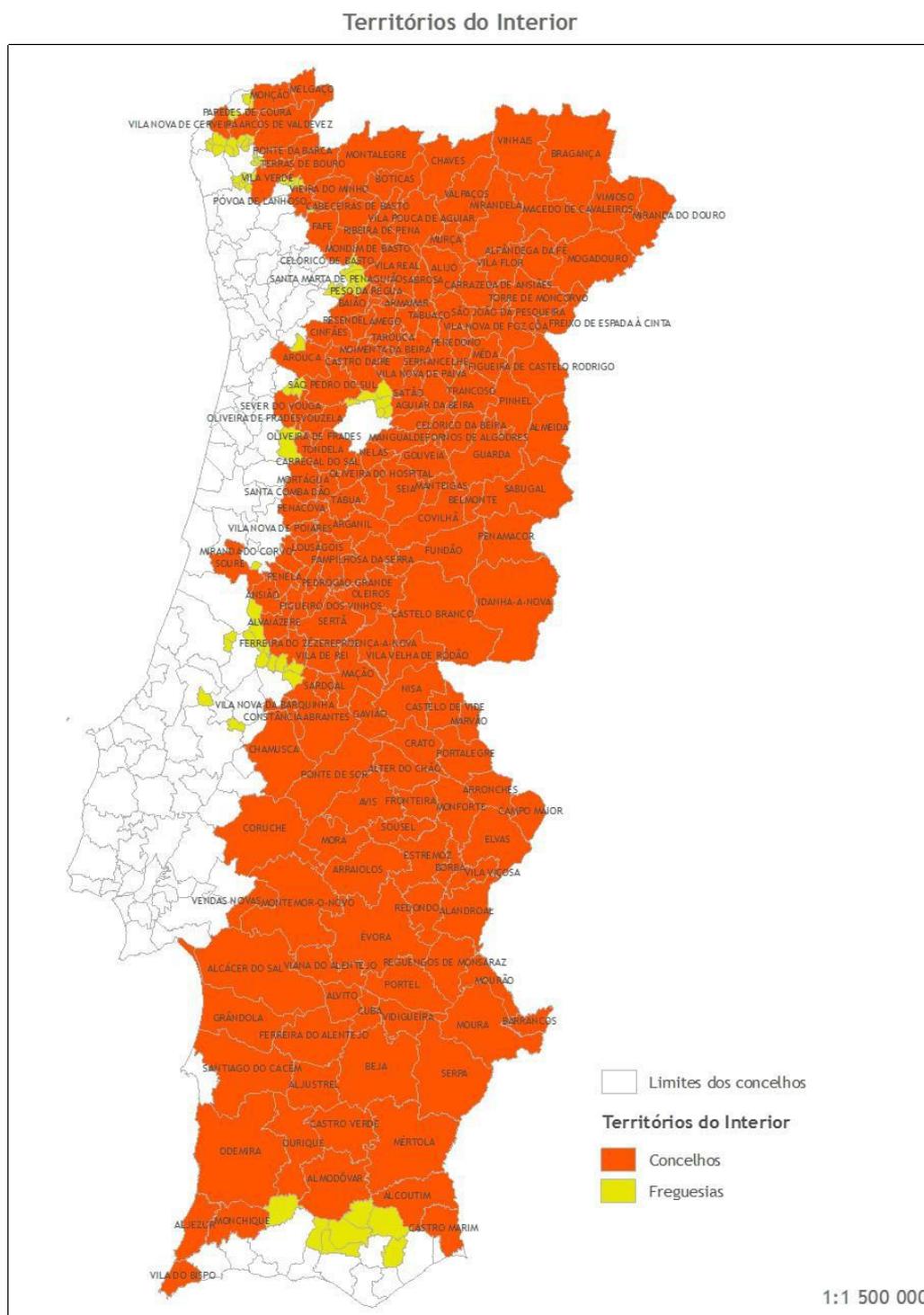
Regarding the last decade of 2001 to 2011, 67 municipalities have lost over ten per cent of their inhabitants. They all have the same location features as mentioned above: they are equality distributed throughout the country's inland, from North to South. 29 municipalities have gained over ten per cent of inhabitants: mostly the same as described above, plus eight municipalities in the Algarve region, due to the tourism boom in recent decades.

Figure 1: Map of population density in Portuguese municipalities: average number of residents for square kilometre, 2014.



Source: Pordata, <http://www.pordata.pt/Municipios/Densidade+populacional-452>.

Figure 2: Map of the geographic limits of the Portuguese areas classified as interior territories.



Source: Programa Nacional para a Coesão Territorial (National Programme for Territorial Cohesion) – Implementação, Acompanhamento e Monitorização, p. 98: <http://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc21/governo/programa/programa-nacional-para-a->

[coesao-territorial-/ficheiros-coesao-territorial/programa-nacional-para-a-coesao-territorial-implementacao-acompanhamento-e-monitorizacao-pdf.aspx](https://www.coesao-territorial.pt/ficheiros-coesao-territorial/programa-nacional-para-a-coesao-territorial-implementacao-acompanhamento-e-monitorizacao-pdf.aspx).

In figures 1 and 2 there is a clear picture of the problem's dimension: a huge population density by the sea and a desert in the rest of the country. Deep, peripheral and marginalized rural areas in Portugal occupy 81.4 per cent of the Portuguese territory. However, according to the 2011 census, only 19.7 per cent of the Portuguese population live in the 165 municipalities listed on the 2016 National Programme for Territorial Cohesion. These areas have completely lost their demographic and economic vitality.

Particularly when reforms of public service networks have left these territories unprotected and inequalities in access to social services and benefits have been enhanced. Public policies by the social-democrat coalition government between 2011 and 2015, based on austerity policies and economic rationalization imposed upon Portugal by the European Union and the so called Troika, have resulted on closing down health facilities, schools, post offices, civil parishes. For instance, since 2011 the Portuguese Government has shut 1808 schools, 1027 in the inland regions, particularly in pre-school and elementary levels, as well as 117 health facilities².

The crisis and these government actions have had negative impacts in Portugal in cities and also rural areas (Baumgarten, 2017): marginal regions have become even more remote and their populations are increasingly more vulnerable. Problems of territorial structure and huge differences between dynamic cities and depressed rural areas also reveal a crisis of the social security regime (Rosanvallon, 2011). 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). The concepts of sustainable development and sustainable rural communities had already been considered a priority in the Brundtland report, in 1987, and continue to be so (Robinson, 2008). The 1997 revision of the Portuguese Constitution defined our country's tendency towards European explicit territorial

² A. Pereira, M. Cardoso, "Governo desafiado a reabrir parte do Portugal que fechou nos últimos cinco anos", *Público*, 20 October 2016, <https://www.publico.pt/sociedade/noticia/governo-desafiado-a-reabrir-o-portugal-que-fechou-nos-ultimos-cinco-anos-1748077>.

policies (Ferrão, 2016), which were disregarded lately by the social-democrat coalition government.

By 2015, 164 municipalities were considered in need for special care because of low population density. These municipalities shall benefit from special privileges in access to European structural funds up to 2020. In line with the mayors' messages, projects are supposed to encourage the improvement of local products.

With depopulation, the agrarian landscape has been mostly transformed into leisure space or into places of nature conservation: “rural areas are increasingly perceived as consumption rather than productive places, mainly associated to leisure and tourism” (Eusébio *et al*, 2017). People go there to consume its unpolluted air, its tradition and heritage. On an integrated approach to rural tourism development, cultural creativity is a must and “promoters of rural tourism enterprises” explore all possible resources (Jesus, Kastenholz, Figueiredo, 2012; Carvalho, Lima, Kastenholz, 2014).

Rural areas are also seen as places for environment conservation and they play an educational role for children. In sum, it is a playground for city folks to experience a different kind of lifestyle. This is the usual discourse associated with rural areas, for example in tourist brochures and advertisements, which may also be found in the images and representations city people use to describe them³. “A more recent debate is focused on the relevance of integrating and involving all the stakeholders in the co-creation of tourism experiences and in the promotion of sustainable local development, using local, both material and symbolic, resources” (Kastenholz, Figueiredo, 2014).

These new social representations of the rural are entirely reproduced in public policies, both local and central, in order to attract new residents and tourists.

2. Local government political programs and attraction strategies

Leadership is a key element in managing crisis situations and reversing trends (Cepiku, Mussari, Giordano, 2016). Local elites are essential to promote local development, territory occupation and increase productive capacities, by stimulating economic activities and job creation. Considering that different rural spaces have different values which need to be taken into account when planning public interventions (Selman, 2012)

³ Rural Matters Project, <http://ruralmatters.web.ua.pt/?lang=en>. Daniel Amaral, *Vozes e Olhares sobre o Rural*, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zteW5ieSfZk&feature=youtu.be>.

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.

In order to acknowledge local proposals to deal with the above mentioned problems of depopulation, sustainable development and territorial inequalities, political manifestos of the Portuguese mayors elected in 2013 were gathered in a database and analysed for message and content (Klingemann, Hofferbert, Budge, 1994; Budge, 2001; Klingemann, 2006; Volkens, 2010). In Portugal, this subject was researched on the project “Public Preferences and Policy Decision-Making. A Longitudinal and Comparative Analysis” (Belchior *et al*, 2015). The Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP)⁴ has collected dataset which 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. CMP allows for national and international comparisons. However, consequences in voters’ choices are hard to evaluate, particularly in local politics, where there is a high level of personalization of politics and very different individual and contextual determinants of voting (Riera *et al*, 2016). How may we evaluate whether a voter is choosing a party manifesto or a person? Even in central politics this is hard to conclude.

Unfortunately there are no similar projects for Local Government in general. In Portugal this is the first time such research is conducted. The following description provides us with the main results.

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

⁴ <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/>.

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 and urban regeneration. Usually there is no need to enhance neither festivals, nor gastronomy or local commodities. As for rural municipalities, the main issues 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 (Almeida, 2017a).

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. International certifications and regional brandings are important issues as well (AA.VV., 2016) and they all contribute to branding the country itself, as part of a public policy that emerges as a response to the pressures of the globalized economy and whose formulation focuses on the identification of the country's competitive advantages (Quintela, 2017).

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). Even though they try to

attract business and industry, most political manifestos reveal a special care for local producers, local farmers in a world of globalized agriculture. Small producers and small farmers have a role in landscape maintenance and reviving traditions, which are so important to attract tourists and potential new residents.

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 children⁵.

In 2016, 96 municipalities (31 per cent) gave back 2015's tax incomes (IRS) to their citizens, in order to "improve living conditions and attract and maintain people within the municipalities"⁶. Also some municipalities are giving money for newborn babies and are investing in jobs and wellbeing policies. With Project Green Flag, 41 municipalities have received a green flag award for family oriented policies.

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). These activities generate commerce, promote local economy and entrepreneurship.

⁵ Denise Fernandes, "70% das câmaras municipais vão reduzir IMI às famílias com filhos", *Sapo Económico*, 30 November 2015, http://economico.sapo.pt/noticias/70-das-camaras-municipais-vo-reduzir-imi-as-familias-com-filhos_236154.html.

⁶ List of 96 municipalities: <http://www.economias.pt/lista-de-municipios-que-vo-devolver-irs/>. <http://www.dinheirovivo.pt/economia/macedo-cavaleiros-abdica-406-mil-euros-irs-os-contribuintes/#sthash.yEPmSx77.dpuf>.

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, Kastenholz, Breda, 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). Networks are important to coordinate and establish regional interests, which can prove to be more effective than each municipality individually. Such is the discourse of the mayor of Ansião, in the centre of Portugal: “Investment in tourism must be made above the municipality limits. Tourists don’t search for the geographic line that separates Pombal, Ansião or Alvaiázere. Therefore, we should all work together. We now have an inter-municipal project with Ansião and Alvaiázere destined to recover and provide added value to the largest oak ecosystem in the Iberian Peninsula and to create tourist development in it. We also aim to insert the Fatima trails in the Santiago Ways”⁷. Mostly these projects aim to present joint applications to European funds for regions.

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 (Almeida, 2017a).

Regardless of all these attraction strategies, investments in industry, services and job creation seem to be the most effective to convince people to relocate to rural areas. And

⁷ *Jornal de Leiria*, 12 August 2016, <https://www.jornaldeleiria.pt/noticia/rui-rocha-o-que-diferencia-ansiao-e-qualidade-de-vida-4786>.

agriculture is no longer a permanent solution, because of its low job creation and use of seasonal workers.

Therefore it is essential that central governments apply policies that may correct these inequalities, not increase them. Adequate national policies are a requirement⁸. Those policies may be explicit, such as agricultural or transportation policies, which influence the organization of the territory, or by sector: employment, education, health and others. Simultaneously, local government is in fact the most suitable tier of government for public service delivery, particularly in such sensitive areas as social and elderly care, education management and local attraction strategies aimed at increasing investment, employment, tourism, and stimulate demographics, with family oriented policies. In order for local government to be able to deliver, more financial autonomy is required, but also other levels of government may be efficient, such as inter-municipal communities based on region or common interests.

Private companies and local entrepreneurs may also have a say on the subject of territorial cohesion and development of the Portuguese inland. Some cultural and artistic projects have emerged in rural and suburban underprivileged areas with the goals of social intervention, building local identities, enhancing community dynamics and political intervention, particularly as an answer to central government disinvestment (Gomes, 2010, Garcia *et al*, 2016). Youth cultural association with artistic and musical purposes have been created in contexts of poverty and social exclusion, introducing children and teenagers to new skills as diverse as arts and crafts, music and others. The pursuit of a community artistic project may enable a professional career in the area. Most of these associations are lead by locals who develop their projects using municipalities as key partners, especially regarding buildings and equipment. Financing may come from both public and private institutions, such as the *Escolhas* Program, promoted by the Portuguese government to facilitate the inclusion of children and young people from vulnerable socioeconomic contexts, with the goal of equal opportunities and social cohesion⁹. Private foundations also play an important role. The EDP Foundation has implemented the Energy Orchestra among school children in Amarante, Murça and Mirandela, aiming at social inclusion through music, and project Public Art, which brings artistic interventions to rural areas with active participation of

⁸ As claimed by the mayor of Montemor-o-Novo, Hortênsia Menino, https://issuu.com/canaspaulo/docs/mor_mag_10_final.

⁹ <http://www.programaescolhas.pt/>.

local communities. This is a nationwide Foundation which promotes local interventions and plays a role in local development¹⁰. Other important interventions have been made by the Aga Khan Foundation and Generation Orchestra¹¹, among others, such as Walk & Talk Azores, also meant to “takes an active role in the development of regional cultural and creative industries, highlighting this as a strategic sector to the sustainable development of the Azores”¹².

3. Central government policies

Until 1995, rural areas have been represented in central government programs as production areas. Since then, new concepts have emerged, such as territory and multifunction (Wilson, 2007). Regardless of the fact that agriculture is still considered structural, “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).

A brief analysis of parties’ programs for the 2015 general election reveals the main lines, key words 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”¹³. These concepts are the same that were used by most parties for the 2013 municipal election campaign.

After the social-democrat coalition government implemented centralized policies in order to respond to austerity impositions, the Socialist Government is becoming more accountable to its voters/citizens: “national parties and governments are becoming accountable to two major constituencies: their voters/citizens, at the national level, and their international partners (other EU governments, EU commission, European Central

¹⁰ <http://www.fundacaoedp.pt/>.

¹¹ <http://www.orquestra.geracao.aml.pt/>.

¹² http://www.walktalkazores.org/en/Sobre_1.

¹³ Program of the Socialist Party for 2015 elections: http://www.ps.pt/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/programa_eleitoral-PS-legislativas2015.pdf.

Bank, International Monetary Fund), at the international level. Streeck (2013) also talks about two major conflicting constituencies: the ‘people in the national states’ vis-à-vis the ‘people of the markets’” (Freire, Lisi, 2016). But also they are complying with their electoral programs, with the Portuguese Constitution and European directives.

With this in mind, the new Socialist Government which resulted from the 2015 elections has promised to revert some of the trends described above, by promoting policies for territorial cohesion, decentralization and enhancement of local democracy, with strategic plans for the development of the Portuguese inland regions. In Prime Minister António Costa’s words, in order to fight “population drifts” and “low turnout disbeliefs” (Freire, 2017), on December 2015 a special committee was appointed with a mission of creating, implementing and supervising a program and promoting measures for territorial development¹⁴. Key words for its main goals were as follows: Iberian market, commerce interface, cross-border market (with Spain), production capacity, infrastructures, workforce, resources and underused handcraft knowledge. The object was to promote balanced territorial planning, net development, urban/rural partnerships, and medium sized cities’ coalitions, to launch projects backed by scientific institutions, to intensify cross-border cooperation, to resettle people and introduce dynamics into low density territories.

Considering the necessity for administration decentralization and the reform of the State, this committee was supposed to identify the necessary conditions to comply to the Government’s program, namely: to add value to production spaces; to build regional platforms for job creation; to share knowledge between R&D centres and rural communities; to promote regional products; urban-rural partnerships; to promote youth attraction and settlement policies; to intensify production and jobs in border territories.

On 20 October 2016 the National Programme for Territorial Cohesion was approved by the Council of Ministers¹⁵.

The most innovative feature of this program is the fact that there is a program. It reflects a clear change in the Portuguese central government policies regarding inland regions,

¹⁴ Decree n. 251-A/2015, 17 December 2017, objectives published in the *Diário da República*, n. 15, 22 January 2016.

¹⁵ <http://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc21/governo/programa/programa-nacional-para-a-coesao-territorial.aspx>. Council of Ministers Resolution n. 3/2016, 14 January 2016, Ordenance n. 208/2017, 13 July 2017 established protected areas.

with its 164 measures designed to promote a more balanced territorial planning¹⁶. The program covers 165 municipalities described as “interior”, meaning not only demographically impaired, but also economically (weak and undiversified economic activity, with high unemployment rates), with weak urban centres, weak institutional engagement, weak networking, partnerships and citizen participation. Its main objectives are: territorial social cohesion; affirmative action oriented public policies for the inland regions; promotion of natural and local resources; structural projects; lining up investments and skills; smart economic development; networking within Portugal and with Spain; people’s settling; new vitality; sustainable prosperity; Iberian centrality; innovative ecosystems; local based approaches; active participation of local government, inter-municipal communities, associations, companies and people; territorial policies; proximity.

It introduces five intervention lines for interior territories: 1. Cohesion (social inclusion, equal access to territorial competence, decentralization, public services); 2. Competitiveness (added value for resources and social agents); 3. Sustainability (landscape, resources, heritage, culture, added value for mountain and peripheral territories); 4. Connections and accessibilities; 5. Collaboration (ministry accessibility, local and regional leaderships, institutional capacities, territorial governance).

One of the most problematic issues for depopulation was the lack of services provided to rural populations, particularly health, education, justice, and even post offices. This program promotes a 40 per cent pay increase for medical doctors who work in the inland regions¹⁷, financial support for the unemployed to move and work there, as well as tax incentives for entrepreneurs to relocate their companies¹⁸. Also, twenty courthouses which had been closed in 2014 due to the reorganization of the judiciary

¹⁶ 20 October 2106, <http://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/ministerios/madj/noticias/20161020-madj-pnct.aspx>.

¹⁷ Carla Sofia Luz, “Médicos no interior vão ganhar mil euros a mais”, *Jornal de Notícias*, 30 September 2016, <http://www.jn.pt/nacional/interior/medicos-no-interior-vaao-ganhar-mil-euros-a-mais-5416449.html#ixzz4LiqrHa6x>. However, it is still difficult to convince medical doctors to move to the inland and there are still many of these jobs to fill, Ana Cristina Pereira, “Não podemos obrigar os médicos a ir, não é?”, *Público*, 30 December 2016, <https://www.publico.pt/2016/12/30/sociedade/noticia/nao-podemos-obrigar-os-medicos-a-ir-nao-e-1755750>.

¹⁸ Carla Sofia Luz, “Governo paga a desempregados que trabalharem no interior”, *Jornal de Notícias*, 24 September 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 September 2016, <http://sicnoticias.sapo.pt/economia/2016-09-24-Vieira-da-Silva-confirma-apoio-para-quem-quiser-ir-trabalhar-para-o-interior>.

map have reopened January 2017¹⁹. Regarding education, closed schools may reopen if smaller classes are allowed. But it remains to be seen whether the Ministry of Education shall pay for more teachers. Professional schools are mentioned as important factors for local development and youth settlement, as well as universities and polytechnic institutes, which have already proven to be useful tools for demographic stimulation and local job creation, because of their direct and indirect contributions to regional development (Alves, 2015). This was also an important feature in the 2015 manifesto *Knowledge as Future*, promoted by the Foundation for Science and Technology, as a fundamental base for a new political agenda: “More regional inclusion, with more integration of knowledge into regional and local development strategies, supporting scientific institutions, universities and polytechnic institutes who associate with local partners²⁰”.

Tourism and heritage are important issues, particularly branding, professional certificates in the area, wifi in historical city centres and the creation of a digital platform to enhance historic, heritage and cultural visibility. There is also a program for migration assistance, which very much resembles the Auvergne project in France²¹.

In sum, except for a few novelties, most of these items are not new and they repeat what many local government projects and programs had already mentioned in 2013 and before. Border relations have been developing for decades, with Spaniards coming in hordes to fairs and festivals in the Portuguese border cities. Regarding health care, some municipalities were already providing and paying for services that the Ministry of Health was failing to deliver: for example, the mayor of Alcoutim, in the Algarve region, had hired a doctor to work in its health centre when the ministry didn't provide one and the mayor of Vila Real de Santo António, also in the Algarve, paid for 150 eye

¹⁹ “Vão reabrir portas 20 tribunais que foram extintos com a reforma do mapa judiciário”, *Público*, 2 January 2017, <https://www.publico.pt/2017/01/02/politica/noticia/vinte-tribunais-extintos-com-a-reforma-do-mapa-judiciario-vaio-reabrir-portas-1756761>. “Vinte tribunais extintos com a reforma do mapa judiciário reabrem portas esta segunda-feira”, *Observador*, 2 January 2017, <http://observador.pt/2017/01/02/vinte-tribunais-extintos-com-a-reforma-do-mapa-judiciario-reabrem-portas-esta-segunda-feira/>.

²⁰ <http://www.manifesto2015.com/>.

²¹ Where there is a Regional Agency for the Development of the Auvergne Territories, Ana Cristina Pereira, “Um mundo rural moderno está a desenvolver-se em Auvergne”, *Público*, 2 August 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&_swa_csource=homepage&_swa_cmedium=web.

patients to go to Cuba for cataract surgery²². Of course, these local actions did not solve the major problem of lack of health care in the inland regions and the effectiveness of a pay raise for doctors to live and work there remains to be seen. Most National Health Services in the inland, particularly in emergency rooms and local clinics, are being provided for by foreign doctors, some of them Spaniards who cross the border on a daily basis, some others from South America and Eastern Europe. Portuguese medical doctors haven't responded much to these incentives, even if they are requested to spend the summer in the Algarve, attending patients near the most popular beach towns. They prefer to go there on vacations, rather than work. For example, in June 2017 only four doctors have accepted to work in the Algarve for the following three critical months, when the region's population grows from five hundred thousand people to a million and a half. Unattractive working conditions and low wages are considered the cause for such refusal, even when payment is higher than in other regions²³. The president of the Southern Section of the Doctors Guild insists there should be long term measures and that these latest laws were just meant to patch things up²⁴.

Anyway, one main feature is the purpose of decentralization of state services and local autonomy, as long requested by local government representatives. In case a new government service is to be created, it is supposed to be implemented outside Lisbon and contribute to reverse the existing bureaucratic concentration²⁵.

Curiously, in a country ravaged every summer by huge forest fires, the National Programme for Territorial Cohesion doesn't mention them a single time (neither do mayors' political messages). After this program was divulged, a new forestry reform was also announced to implement forest planning, professional management of forest areas and fire prevention²⁶.

²² In his 2013 electoral program, the mayor of Pedrógão Grande promised to improve access to health care, "even though it is a central Government responsibility", https://issuu.com/jornal_regiao_de_leiria/docs/3988jr12220809_75b9e0bb6b602c.

²³ Pedro Vilela Marques, "Algarve paga quase o dobro acima da lei para garantir médicos", *Diário de Notícias*, 4 June 2018, <https://www.dn.pt/portugal/interior/algarve-paga-quase-o-dobro-acima-da-lei-para-garantir-medicos-9405305.html>.

²⁴ "Só quatro médicos aceitaram reforçar hospitais no Algarve", *Diário de Notícias*, 23 August 2017, <http://www.dn.pt/portugal/interior/so-quatro-medicos-aceitaram-reforcar-hospitais-no-algarve-8721590.html>.

²⁵ Ana Fernandes, "Há um novo departamento da função pública? Que abra no interior", *Público*, 24 April 2016, <https://www.publico.pt/local/noticia/ha-um-novo-departamento-da-funcao-publica-que-abra-no-interior-1729782>.

²⁶ Forestry sector reform: <http://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/ministerios/mafdr/noticias/20161027-mafdr-floresta.aspx>, http://www.cm-lousa.pt/Conselho_de_Ministros_realizado_na_Lousa. "Governo cria banco

Regardless of the twelve steps announced in October 2016 for a forestry reform, there was no preventing a tragic summer in 2017, with over sixty people dead in the fire of Pedrógão Grande on the 17th June and another forty five people on the 15th October. Summer fires in Portugal are directly associated with depopulation and abandonment of agricultural fields. The typical Portuguese landscape was essentially made out of bush traditionally used for grazing. With the introduction of monoculture and the emigration of farmers to urban areas or abroad, subsistence agriculture was practically abolished from the Portuguese rural areas. There are practically no more shepherds, vegetable gardeners and local people to take care of the land. Fires may start with neglect or crime, but they thrive on dry bush, destroying the landscape and threatening peoples' lives and jobs. There are numerous published studies on the subject by agronomist and forest engineers (Oliveira, 2017, among others). Regardless of science, public policies haven't been effective on the long term. There is an urgent need to enforce strategic solutions, both at national and local levels, in order to manage territories and prevent fires. Some of them might include more responsibility and workforce for municipalities to enforce cleaning of abandoned lands and properties. This would certainly be more cost effective than fighting fires and rebuilding what is destroyed by them. After these tragedies, one of the above mentioned forest engineers, Tiago Oliveira, was appointed president of a Mission to Install an Integrated System for Rural Fires' Management (24th October 2017).

Just as Portugal “has made a huge investment in renewable energy generation, particularly through wind power, as a result of policy incentives and a favourable regulatory framework”, which has allowed it to conquer a honourable position “at the top of the league in renewable energies”, mostly with hydropower and wind energy (Delicado *et al*, 2017), our country should also achieve a better place in fire prevention...

On July 2017 the director of the special committee for the National Programme for Territorial Cohesion resigned from her post due to lack of political support²⁷.

de terras com propriedades sem dono reconhecido”, *Diário de Notícias*, 27 October 2017, <https://www.dn.pt/portugal/interior/governo-cria-banco-de-terras-com-propriedades-sem-dono-reconhecido-5466856.html>.

²⁷ “Faltou ‘apoio político’, queixa-se ex-líder da unidade de valorização do interior”, *Público*, 24/10/2017, <https://www.publico.pt/2017/10/24/politica/noticia/faltou-apoio-politico-queixase-exlider-da-unidade-de-valorizacao-do-interior->

Conclusions:

In a time of globalization, income and wealth are powerful drivers that are widening the gaps between countries and between individuals and social groups belonging to the same society (Carmo, 2016, Piketty, 2014). The same applies to territories. Both local and central government programs and political manifestos have a discourse based on territorial development and cohesion. Regardless of the way heritage, culture and local resources are sold as commodities to promote tourism, job creation and attraction strategies for companies and industries remain the most important feature for keeping people in the inland regions. Seasonal activities such as rural tourism or festivals may be important, but they cannot solve a region's sustainability problems.

Considering the goal of 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 local policies has certainly come out of the 2017 local elections results, when some mayors were re-elected or not because of their concrete actions on these issues. And on the next general elections in 2019 these factors may count as election and re-election criteria. Until then economic recovery of Portugal's rural areas has a long way to go.

The Socialist Government's National Programme for Territorial Cohesion has introduced a new paradigm of hope for interior regions, but its three year scope is clearly not enough to produce results. As stated in the document that created the committee on January 2016, the budget for this program has the duration of this twenty first Constitutional Government, which may last until 1919. Regardless of the efforts of mayors and local community leaders, as well as the government's good intentions and politically correct discourse, the Portuguese rural world will never recover from the population loss which has been going on particularly since the 1960s. Therefore, attention should be given to the remaining few, who, as citizens, deserve to be provided the same public services, security, mobility and communication as the other 80 per cent of the population. And to have opportunities and to enjoy life with the proper environment. Without a permanent vibrant economy it should be very difficult to keep them in rural areas, particularly with a quality of life worthy of every citizen. However,

the Portuguese rural world is still a long way into finding a way for survival, particularly in such limited timeframes.

Under those circumstances, and considering the importance of landscape and heritage for local economic and social lives, it is important that local governments realize their role on preserving these features under the best possible conditions. Tourists and travellers want to visit beautiful sceneries and traditional agricultural fields, they want to see sheep grazing in green pastures, hunt in the wild, and they want to swim and practice water sports in clean waters. The Portuguese rural world is being sold to city folks and foreigners as a place for good traditional food and wine, made with local clean and unpolluted products. Municipalities and local elites are the closest to local problems and it is their responsibility to address them and provide the best answers to the people they represent.

This article introduces the discussion on local and central government policies towards rural areas and intends to draw the attention of the scientific community towards a political problem which affects a considerable extent of the Portuguese territory, even if it affects only less than 20 per cent the population. Regardless of this percentage, there is a need to introduce new questions into the public debate: what does society want from rural territories? What are the rural world's new functions and who is supposed to manage them? It's only after these questions are properly discussed that new programs and policies may be enforced and benefit the Portuguese rural world and the people who live there and the rest of the population who wants to enjoy it, even if only temporarily.

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