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Diversity, interculturalism and community building in the Algarve: Preliminary findings for (re)imagining a digital road map of hope

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Abstract

The Algarve is the first Portuguese region with more immigrants per inhabitant, and the second with the highest rate of immigration, after Greater Lisbon. These immigrants bring with them different cultures, traditions, religious beliefs and customs, and face many barriers to local integration. Indeed the Algarve is a diverse reality with various forms of social discrimination and spatial segregation affecting many, including economic and forced migrants. The aim of the article is to identify the urban specificities of the region; the accounts of these immigrants about their living conditions, especially in terms of housing and employment, their support activities and cultural interactions; and the digital media that transmit and amplify perceptions of threat, but also make visible (self-)representations and opportunities. Another aim is to provide a political-philosophical lens for the production of a digital road map. Following Freire's and Harvey's ideas of hope, the reflections intersect with an exploratory empirical socio-spatial and digital recognition of Faro (and Estoi) and Loulé (and Quarteira). The article argues that intercultural dialogues, interactions and relationships based on local experiences and situated knowledge can help us imagine alternatives and more just worlds. Conclusions discuss the analytical guidelines of this digital road map (in terms of urban layers, migrant dots, digital fluxes) and the guidance it provides to support diversity, interculturalism and community building.

Keywords: living conditions, migrations, digital media, Algarve, Greater Lisbon, community building

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1. Introduction

Portugal has a population of 10,639.726 (INE, 2023a), of which 1.044,606 are immigrants (AIMA, 2024), i.e. around 10 per cent and growing. The Algarve is the region with the highest relative population growth. It also has the highest rate of immigration after Greater Lisbon (125,428 individuals or 12 per cent of the national total, and 431,919 or 41 per cent, respectively). It is the first region of the country with more permanent foreign residents per inhabitant (22.5 per cent, AMAL, 2023; potentially more, AIMA, 2024)[1]. This foreign population is made up of different types of immigrants: mainly (1) the younger/middle-aged and less wealthy economic migrants, from Brazil, Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia, in search of job opportunities and better economic conditions; (2) forced migrants, e.g. subsidiaries of temporary protection, as in the case of the Ukrainians (after 2022), many women and children, some corresponding to family reunification; and (3) the oldest and wealthiest coming from European countries, particularly the United Kingdom, France and Italy, seeking a specific affluent lifestyle.

This lifestyle is often associated with enjoying the region's good weather, slower pace, access to nature, playing golf and eating out. The former, or disadvantaged, tend to focus on work, have poor access to housing and are more at risk of poverty (AMAL, 2023). These immigrants represent great social diversity as they have different origins, backgrounds, life experiences and motivations, and bring with them many cultures, traditions, religious beliefs and customs.

Tourism is the region's main economic driver, generating strong seasonal dynamics that affect living conditions, especially housing and employment. It attracts temporary migrants, many of them internal, to work in restaurants, food delivery, and passenger transport, among others. These temporary migrants are not the focus of this article. Rather, it focuses on the more permanent economic and forced migrants who are more vulnerable to these seasonal dynamics and face more barriers to local integration. This integration is understood here as both social, in terms of non-discriminatory practices, and spatial, in terms of non-segregation.

This article is also not about the voluntary discrimination and segregation of the wealthy immigrants. It is about the negative discrimination and segregation (resulting from this social discrimination and economic hardship) that these disadvantaged immigrants face in the Algarve. In fact, official reports suggest that all immigrants (wealthy or not) are not properly integrated (AMAL, 2023). Nevertheless, the region's strong magnetism is often mistaken for cosmopolitanism, under the belief that all its inhabitants belong to the same Algarve community.

So while the Algarve is generally multicultural, with different groups recognised and living together, it is not intercultural. Interculturalism refers to the building of cross-cultural dialogue, interaction and relationships, supporting activities between different people. In this context, it also means creating opportunities that challenge social discrimination and spatial segregation tendencies within and between these cultures, especially for the disadvantaged, with a view to integration. We refer specifically to a decolonial perspective (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018) against all forms of structural violence, in a country where race tends to underpin prejudice, social and religious discrimination (Raposo et al., 2019; Vala, 2021; Sabjaly, 2024) and spatial segregation (Alves, 2021), as most visible in the Greater Lisbon area.

Indeed, prejudice is an important predictor of threat perceptions and opposition to immigration in Portugal (Vala, Pereira and Ramos, 2006). The rise of populism and the far-right party Chega (Gianolla, Mónico and Cruz, 2024) has been associated with this prejudice and threat perceptions, and increasingly organised anti-immigrant mobilisations since its emergence in 2019 (Mazzilli and Lowe, 2023; França, 2024). These are sustained by the general xenophobic trend against, for example, Brazilian communities, felt through the online dissemination of false myths, stereotypes and fake news (32 per cent of total means) (CBL, 2020), but also by growing expressions of Islamophobia, which are gaining space in the media and in the cyberspace (Araújo, 2019). In a context where 25 per cent call for more regulation of migrant entry, Indostanics are the most opposed, followed by

1 AMAL data refer to the 2021 census. AIMA data refer to the 2023 report. Given the increasing number of immigrants in the Algarve, the rate of foreign residents per inhabitant could be higher, e.g. around 25/27 per cent.

the referred Brazilians (FFMS, 2024). Certainly, the Internet has played a major role in the rise of anti-immigrant mobilisations, similar to several far-right movements around the world (Castañeda, 2025).

This is all a reflection of a difficult national context, exacerbated by a severe economic crisis (2008), strong austerity measures (2010-2015) and the Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2022). These events have had a significant impact on living conditions, employment and access to housing, particularly visible in Greater Lisbon (Allegra and Tulumello, 2019; Viegas and Jorge; 2022; Jorge and Melo, 2023). In terms of housing, social mobilisations and rallies against poor conditions have influenced the production of recent public policies that open up opportunities for disadvantaged immigrants, with effects that are still to be seen (Viegas and Santinho, 2025). On the other hand, in the context of a policy of open borders (that lasted until mid-2024)[2] and an increase in the number of arrivals, the idea that immigrants were the cause of problems and deprivation gained ground. Nevertheless, the negative demographic balance of an ageing population is countered by immigrants, who already account for 14 per cent of the birth rate (FFMS/PORDATA, 2022). Moreover, in 2023, immigrants contributed 2677 million to social security and received only 483.3 (FFMS, 2024).

In this context, this article focuses on the idea of community building on the basis of intercultural relations and mutual incentive and support as a means to overcome social and spatial barriers. It refers to the disadvantaged immigrants, their characteristics, situated knowledge and innovative capacities to solve common problems. It is about building a sense of togetherness, and developing strong bonds and a common sense of belonging. It is also about building the foundations of an open society that shares the principles of interculturality, as opposed to those that produce discriminatory tropes and that advocate spatial segregation; i.e. a diverse community where people from different places come together in a concrete space as their journeys are forged and intersect over time. It requires consistency.

Community building is an important driver of integration. It enables the creation of social spaces (Lefebvre, 2000 [1974]) that encapsulate the richness of diversity. These social spaces can, in turn, challenge emerging and consolidating nationalisms and their imagined communities anchored in far-right ideas. These social spaces can be physical and, increasingly, digital. As immigrants use technology to stay connected to each other and to their own networks, digital space encapsulates the great power of transformation. As Harvey (2008) points out (and as emphasised in the literature review), the freedom to transform ourselves and the cities according to lifestyles, social ties, and technologies is in itself a human right. Therefore, based on these ideas of diversity and integration of the disadvantaged immigrants in the Algarve today, this article points towards a digital space of intercultural commonality.

Creating a digital road map of migration in the Algarve can help us create opportunities from an intercultural perspective. It is a rehearsal to propose a vision of the world for more meaningful engagement and futures, and to experiment with transformation in and through digital space. This digital road map follows insights on spaces of inclusion, i.e. spaces of visibility, support, networking and solidarity of forced migrants (Viegas, 2024). It also follows a political philosophy of hope (Huber, 2024), referring to its significance and pitfalls in politics, and to its (social) "organisation" (Enampur, 2021)[3] for the construction of spaces of hope at the urban and regional levels. This digital road map is, furthermore, anchored in the ideas of hope, as advocated by Freire (1992) and Harvey (2000), and critical geography, as perceived by Harvey (2001), in order to support diversity, a sense of belonging and the production of just spaces (Fainstein, 2010; Soja, 2010) (Section 3, Framework). It can inspire people to challenge social discrimination and spatial segregation with implications for integration and community building.

This digital road map consists of a conceptual analytical grid to be produced for the project *Refugee Research for (Post)Covid-19. National Measures and Local Actions in the Algarve: A Digital Tour for Access to Adequate Housing and Living Conditions*[4], to help align its digital outputs for a wider digital

2 This followed a shift in the political orientation of the country's government to the centre-right earlier in the year.

3 This is in line with the theme of the online conference XIX ENAMPUR (2022, Brazil), Planning the Urban and Regional - Organising Hope.

4 The project is currently being developed at the Research Centre for Arts and Communication, University of Algarve (CIAC, UAlg), funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT, Portugal), reference 2021.03008.CEECIND/FCT (https://sciproj.ptcris.pt/7940EEC).

tour (consisting of a website, a documentary and an exhibition) with the main objectives of that research project: *to use digital media to share and strengthen situated knowledge about the living conditions of disadvantaged immigrants in the Algarve, but also local problem-solving capacities*. The digital road map therefore consists of a set of guidelines that follow the aforementioned meaningful vision of the world and that support digital activities. These activities and outputs will in turn be "organised" and produced according to this conceptual grid. Its guidelines (i.e. the digital road map) result from the intersection of conceptual references with spatial mapping references, (1) layers, (2) points and (3) fluxes, corresponding to the empirical object, namely urban experiences, migrant actors and digital flows. The outputs will disseminate original knowledge.

This article raises the following research questions: (1) What are the urban characteristics and problems of the Algarve region?; (2) How do economic and forced migrants perceive it? What negative barriers do they encounter? Do they manifest a sense of belonging despite the challenges they face?; (3) What kind of negative messages about disadvantaged immigrants are conveyed? How is digital space used against and/or for these immigrants in the region? Ultimately, the article asks: what clues does the intersection between the urban, social and digital worlds provide in terms of diversity, interculturality and community building in the Algarve today?

The aim of this article is twofold: on the one hand, to provide an exploratory recognition of the Algarve region according to specific dimensions of analysis that emerge from the fields of urban, migration and digital media studies (Section 2, Methodology), while at the same time providing evidence to later identify different forms of socio-spatial diversity, interculturality and community building in the region. Indeed, the study aims to provide a local context to later identify possible case study scenarios for further development, and ultimately to achieve the overall objectives of the project *Refugee Research for (Post)Covid-19. National Measures and Local Actions in the Algarve: A Digital Tour for Access to Adequate Housing and Living Conditions*.

On the other hand, the article aims to produce the identified conceptual grid (i.e. the digital road map). It aims to "organise" the hope that points towards the development of a critical geography and to provide the guiding lens for the production of a digital tour, as mentioned above, from specific ideas and empirical dimensions. This lens is important because in order "to read [a given reality], to discover the laws of its structuring and transformation, one must break down, by theoretical [in this case political-philosophical] analysis, what is given in a practical synthesis" (Castells, 1977, p. 7).

The article is structured as follows: after the introduction, we present the methodological approach of this research and the specific steps taken to address it. The framework (Section 3) refers, on the one hand, to a brief state of the art on the "organisation" of hope (in a capitalist world) in order to grasp a critical geography, crossed with themes from urban and social studies; and, on the other hand, to the approach chosen to answer the research questions while (re)imagining other worlds and cities through digital media. Section 4 covers the Algarve case study, examined through the following fields of study: urban, migration and digital media, while the conclusions (section 5) discuss the guidelines for creating a digital road map of hope to promote interculturalism and community building.

2. Methodology and methods

2.1 Methodological approach

The methodological approach consists of identifying the political-philosophical structure of the ideas of hope and critical geography following authors such as Freire (1992) and Harvey (2000, 2001) and their relations to the digital space, as well as the empirical dimensions inherent to the Algarve experience from an inter-thematic perspective. This involves the intersection of (a) urban studies, (b) migration studies, and (c) digital media studies, integrating different fields of knowledge with a common goal, configuring three articulated research fronts for a multidimensional epistemic production. This approach makes it possible to answer questions (for the project *Refugee Research for (Post)Covid-19*) that urban studies and migration studies, even in close dialogue, cannot: *How do disadvantaged immigrants in the Algarve region solve problems related to their living conditions? How can digital media help to share and strengthen this situated knowledge (with the public and*

with local and national institutions) to ultimately influence policies and practices? Digital media can thus make the problem of the living conditions of these immigrants in the Algarve visible and at the same time create opportunities for action. The conception of a digital road map, as envisaged, is the first step towards this possibility.

The article follows four recent works on trends in the living conditions and social mobilisations of forced migrants, mainly in the Greater Lisbon area (Viegas, 2022, 2023, 2024; Viegas and Santinho, 2025), in order to learn from these experiences. They refer to social activism and its importance for the urban context. They also refer to the power of social resistance and social action in space, while mentioning a political power that is mediated and articulated through space. This is the first article to focus on the Algarve today, and although it builds on the previous lens, it presents a very different methodological approach. It is exploratory and, as mentioned above, articulates dimensions of analysis from 3 fields of study:

Field 1 (urban) offers a classic hierarchical view of the Algarve region, its territorial disparities and population density. It examines diversity and polarisation from the perspective of centrality, focusing on the examples of Faro (with the village of Estoi) and Loulé (with the city of Quarteira). It also refers to the strong peripheralisation of the Algarve.

Field 2 (migrations) presents information on the hitherto undocumented perceptions of a number of different disadvantaged immigrants on the specificity of the Algarve in terms of living conditions especially housing and employment, i.e. it portrays the Algarve region as seen through their eyes. It also reports on support measures and cultural and religious activities.

Field 3 (digital media) looks at the digital space referring, on the one hand, to far-right tendencies linked to perceptions of threat and poor living conditions, and, on the other hand, to the links that are built both for support and for self-representation, projecting voices that are under the radar of the mainstream media.

2.2 Methods and steps taken

A multi-method system was used to address this methodological approach - literature review, identification of the empirical object in the urban and social sphere, and identification of the empirical object in the digital sphere - and specific steps were taken:

The *literature review* on the three fields of study (urban, migration and digital) helped to define (Step 1) the political-philosophical framework (following the trends of Greater Lisbon) and (Step 2) the object of study. Academic events (joint lectures, brainstorming sessions, workshops) on spaces of hope and artistic practices for urban transformation developed with students and colleagues[5] facilitated the debate and consolidation of the first step. With regard to the latter, an attempt to review empirical knowledge (articles, documents) on the empirical object of study revealed a lack of information and significant gaps in knowledge. Indeed, the Algarve represents a unique case study within urban and migration studies, even more so when digital media are taken into account.

The *empirical object in the urban and social space* was identified through fieldwork conducted in 2022 and 2023 which included three main phases: (Step 1) observations, (Step 2) exploratory and semi-structured interviews and discussions with key informants, and (Step 3) iconographic production and collection. This fieldwork followed the standards approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Algarve (process 140/2023).

Step 1 involved the identification and selection of the initial study areas. These were limited to two medium-sized municipalities in the centre of the Algarve, Faro and Loulé. This choice was driven by the objective of focusing on the most central municipalities, also given their socio-political and economic importance. It also involved the selection of two parishes, Estoi (Faro) and Quarteira (Loulé), in order to deepen the geographical and population differences. The selection of these municipalities and sites will be extended to others, in order to improve overall understanding of the

5 With Rocio Vela or Antonio Baena (Loyola University), and Francesca Vita (DINÂMIA-Iscte), Ana Miguel Regedor (CES/III-UC) and Isabel Carvalho (CIAC, UAb).

region.

Step 2 involved the identification and selection of participants from among economic and forced migrants to gather information. These were identified online (websites, social media) or through contacts with other academics and government institutions (e.g. High Commission for Migration). Twenty four exploratory interviews and discussions were held with various people from Latin America (Venezuela and Brazil), Portuguese-speaking countries (such as Guinea-Bissau), various African and Middle Eastern countries (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco and Algeria), representing the Islamic community[6], and Ukraine. Discussions were also held with nationals (community and association leaders and local/regional government institutions).

Step 3 focuses on the production of iconographic content illustrating the digital tour to also inform the conceptual digital road map. This iconographic production and collection included exploratory photography, filming (with audio recording) and the creation of visual maps and graphics, which were used for this article to revisit and analyse the contexts under study (i.e. the Algarve, specifically Faro and Loulé).

The *recognition of the empirical object in the digital sphere* consisted of the identification of different digital platforms, for example in television channels (CNN), newspapers (Postal do Algarve) and social media (Facebook, Whatsapp) that correspond to and validate the same prejudices observed in Lisbon and that contribute to discrimination and segregation practices in the Algarve. It also consisted of identifying the digital tools used by immigrants and their institutional digital sites (of associations such as Venezuelan, Ukrainian and Muslim communities, among others, identified in the interviews).

3. Literature review

3.1. To be [hope], or not to be, that is the [socio-spatial] question

In his book *The Pedagogy of Hope*, Freire (1992) refers to the word as action, reinforcing the idea of an unfinished world in which (i) hope has the power to counter oppression and enable transformation. In his *Spaces of Hope*, Harvey (2000) refers to the utopian imagination of spatial form and social process as an alternative to the unequal and destructive logics of globalisation. Both Freire (1992) and Harvey (2000) are thus committed to the hope of change (e.g. social and spatial), and so these ideas have been chosen to frame the political-philosophical structure of this article.

In the late twentieth century, the liberalisation of markets escalated and accelerated the capitalist world, reproducing logics of embodied colonialism that maintain a link between past domination and contemporary forms of extraction (Mbembe, 2021). This unsettling presence of uneven geographical development has both produced an omnipotent and homogenising space and reduced social beings to instruments of the institutional and imaginary system (Harvey, 2000, 2005). However, capitalism has also underpinned the emergence of a critical geography, or the production of a “geography of hope” (Harvey, 2000, 2001).

This critical geography (ibid.) points to increasingly just social and spatial practices in the city (Harvey, 1973; Fainstein, 2010; Soja, 2010). It has an inherent (ii) subversive, action-oriented power for change, which is here recognised as being grounded in postcolonial (Parry, 2004) and decolonial (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018) approaches (to ontologies of power, Eurocentric knowledge, etc.). It can help rebuild narratives and cultures from the ground up, holding onto intertwined intersectional dimensions such as alterity, whiteness and property (Harris, 2006), race and gender (Hooks, 1988), etc., while also building movement-based counter-practices inspired by the creative energy of hope.

Freire (1992) argues that we are not just the product of the past, but the principal agents of our present and of a future in which we must (hopefully!) act. Harvey (2000) also speaks of (ii, subversive!) agents of change - (iii) rebels – and calls us to be architects of our own destiny and happiness. He inspires us to be the political force for change, which is also what Light (2024) has recently called the

6 The interviews with the members of the Islamic community were carried out with Ana Miguel Regedor (CES/III-UC).

political people in space, e.g. "resisting co-optation, staying ahead and mutating like activist tactics". In this way, Harvey (2008, p. 23) inspires us to break with a global mechanistic and absolutist vision in which the body is contained and disciplined, and instead to be the strategists of human care, i.e. the activist designers of the world, the cities and ourselves: "The question of what kind of cities we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. [...] The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights."

These rebel architects, driven by this hope and the urge to subvert and transcend the capitalist world – with its uneven geographical development (Harvey, 2005) – can design a utopian alternative reality, or rather a plurality of (iv) alternative and counter-worlds. They can be agents of (re)imagination (e.g. against the imagined communities mentioned above) to produce experimental spaces of empowerment and emancipation, while giving us "a taste of what these [alternative] worlds might be [...] something to work towards" (Light, 2024). Indeed, the critical geography (of hope) mentioned above, again, pressing for social and spatial justice (Harvey, 1973; Fainstein, 2010; Soja, 2010) and grounding subversive power, holds the seeds of transformation in the experience of everyday life, with the Right to the City (Lefebvre, 2009 [1968]; Harvey, 2008) and its comprehensive access to urban resources, social participation and appropriation as a guiding notion.

As with Harvey's (2000) politics of collectivity, Light's (2024) reflections on the politics of transformation – reproducing seeds of (re)imagination that experiment with and anticipate alternative realities, while guiding transformations towards more just outcomes, societies and spaces (Fainstein, 2010; Soja, 2010) – can enable such counter-worlds.

3.2. Digital [hope] as an inter-thematic approach

Framing, "organising" and mapping a geography of hope (Freire, 1992, Harvey, 2000) in the current digital age, characterised by the disruptive times of capitalist technology (Crary, 2022), is important as it helps to (re)imagine (and possibly promote) meaningful participation in shaping just urban realities and futures (Fainstein, 2010; Soja, 2010). Indeed, digital seeds of (re)imagination and hope can be experimented with in the digital space to enable alternative worlds (Lefebvre, 2009 [1968]; Harvey, 2008).

Digital space is not neutral. It reproduces the destructive logics of capitalism and its cultures of oppression and discrimination. Moreover, digital platforms reconfigure racial logics and create new forms of structural violence and socio-economic organisation (Ibrahim, 2023). Indeed, racist, xenophobic and anti-immigrant discourses have gained space in digital media (Ekman, 2019). This digital media can play an important role in influencing public attitudes towards immigrants (Kondor, 2022). In this context, the right-wing extremism associated with such discourses and attitudes is also developing in the digital space (Cesarino, 2022; Munk, 2024). It sometimes uses a repertoire of left-wing demands, thus weakening counter-movements (and their subversive power) against the violence of capitalism (Castañeda, 2025).

Digital media can have a major impact on urban discourses (Damurski et al., 2023) and on a broader general interpretation and attitude towards urban realities and futures. Thus, any form of oppression and discrimination that takes place in the digital space has a counterpart in the urban space, it is reflected and reproduced in space. So, the danger of such counter-narratives and movements being co-opted to perpetuate this system is real (and has potentially real effects), and a "revolutionary" way out is needed. Let us stress that, in terms of the digital space, Eurocentric and Western models largely dominate cultural communication (Ganesh, Mingsheng and Vaccarino, 2017). In this context, counter-voices are rising. Sengupta (Krainer, 2024) is one of these voices that advocates for "a radical re-design of the internet, so that together we build and defend an internet of, for, and by all".

Indeed, digital media and social network exchanges can amplify the voices of those traditionally oppressed and discriminated against, while preserving cultural identities and fostering (old and new) diverse forms of community building, using intercultural communication in the digital space (D'Silva and Atay, 2020) and supporting migrant forms of belonging (Leurs and Ponzanesi, 2024). In this framework, when digital space affects a particular geographical and social context it can

also be a place for rebels to experiment with its transformation (and find alternatives). Digital participation, guided by the lens of the right to the city (Lefebvre, 2009 [1968]; Harvey, 2008), can, perhaps, hack our way out of this structural system (Anastasiu, 2019). Reflections on how to achieve digital interculturality, i.e. an intercultural dialogue bridging cultural differences and barriers in virtual space, support an experimental approach that imagines unrealised digital intercultural contacts, "a postdigital patchwork of bordered platforms, in which human agents drift between digital culturality and interculturality in a type of digital cultural fuzziness" (Lenehan, 2024, p. 2).

4. The Algarve case study: unpacking the dimensions for discussion

4.1. Field 1 (urban) – Spatial diversity matters: learning from the Algarve region, particularly from central Faro and Loulé

The Algarve is made up of diverse and scattered geographical sub-regions, from the deserted interior (Serra) to the attractive coastal area (beaches), with the area in between (Barrocal) marked by the A22 motorway (Via do Infante). This connects the neighbouring region of Andalusia (and Spain) and the East (Sotavento) with the West (Barlavento) and the Greater Lisbon area. It has 16 municipalities. The capital of the district and municipality of Faro (203 km^2) and its neighbour Loulé (764 km^2, the largest municipality) form the socio-political and economic centre of the region (4,996 km^2). Faro has 67,650 inhabitants and Loulé 72,348 (the most populous municipality). Together they account for 30 per cent of the Algarve's total population of 467,475 (INE, 2021; INE, 2023b; AMAL, 2023)[7].

Estoi[8] is a traditional rural village of Faro located on the edge of the Barrocal. Its parish (of Conceição and Estoi) has 8,331 inhabitants. It has a very low population density and, unlike the rest of the municipality, a very low rate of population change (+1.9 per cent, between 2011 and 2021). The average population is middle-aged to elderly (40-69 years old) (INE, 2021). On the other hand, Quarteira, a parish in the municipality of Loulé, has 24,421 inhabitants (16,138 in the coastal city with the same name). It has a very high population density and a very high rate of population change (+12.03 per cent, in a decade). This contrasts with the opposite trend in the rest of the municipality of Loulé, especially in the interior. Quarteira is also one of the parishes in the Algarve with the lowest ageing rate (INE, 2021).

In the Algarve the risk of poverty is very high (25.7 per cent) (EAPN, 2023), and even higher after the Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2021). Recent studies (AMAL, 2023) defend a link between its economic mono-sector based on tourism and the high rates of material and social deprivation (16.4 per cent compared to 13.5 per cent nationally), which are reflected, for example, in early school abandonment (19.9 per cent compared to 10.6 per cent nationally) and poor education, the burden of housing costs (9.1 per cent compared to 5 per cent nationally) and overcrowding (13.5 per cent compared to 9.2 per cent nationally). Indeed the Algarve region has the lowest income in continental Portugal[9], despite having the second highest Gross Domestic Product in the country (after Greater Lisbon).

In addition, the Algarve has long been tackling its well-known structural problems: for example, the long-awaited central hospital, the improvement of the N125 road (free of charge, unlike the A22 motorway, until December 2024) and, more recently, the solution to water rationing during severe droughts. In terms of investment, the government recently announced a doubling of the Community funds available to the Algarve (780 million, from PT 2030), specifically for employment and growth. In terms of housing, 38.6 per cent of existing housing is secondary and 11.9 per cent is vacant (AMAL, 2023), contributing to the region's great housing shortage and need. Despite this, only 891 housing units have been approved for funding in the Algarve (100 million euros, form PRR 2026), 181 units for Loulé (around 30 million euros) and even less for Faro (77 units, around 8 million euros) (O Contador, 2024).

Estoi partly represents this reality. Not as depopulated as the hinterland villages, it has undergone

7 More recent data, including that from AMAL, refer to the 2021 census.

8 The study focuses specifically on the urban center of the village of Estoi and its rural surroundings.

9 An employee working in the Algarve received around €565 less than the national average gross income (declared value) in 2020 (AMAL, 2023).

a social renewal that is changing the urban context and experience, even if the official figures don't show it. Alongside the museum of the Roman ruins of Ossonoba and the luxury hotel of the 18th-century palace of Estoi live (1) the original inhabitants, many of them poorly educated and poorly paid in a rural labour context; (2) disadvantaged immigrants, some of whom work in the nearby greenhouses[10]; and (3) the working class, as the village has become a satellite suburb for people with jobs in larger cities such as Faro. In fact, housing in Estoi is comparatively more accessible, although prices are rising. Nevertheless, commuting has always been a problem, as public transport is inconsistent. Services and shops are also scarce.

The city of Quarteira is very different. It has undergone a profound urban transformation since the late 1960s with the arrival of beach tourism. In 2016, it was linked by a pedestrian and cycle path to the Marina of Vilamoura, a high-end luxury resort that attracts large amounts of foreign capital, particularly for golf activities and real estate. The path was built on the new seafront where fishermen used to live. Immigrants from Portuguese-speaking African countries such as Angola and Cape Verde began arriving in 1975, expanding the existing slum and mixing with the local population. Twenty shacks in the 1970s eventually became 2018 households, the last of which was demolished in 2010. Families were evicted and most were resettled in Abelheira (a central neighbourhood of Quarteira).

4.2. Field 2 (migrations) – Social diversity matters: learning from poor living conditions, support actions and interactions

Nine of the first twelve municipalities with the highest number of immigrants are located in Greater Lisbon. The ninth is Loulé, with 22,725 immigrants (AIMA, 2024), representing around 18 per cent of the Algarve's immigrants and 5 per cent of its population (INE, 2021; AMAL, 2023; AIMA, 2024)[11]. In Quarteira, 21 per cent are immigrants (INE, 2021). This is the municipality with the highest population growth in a decade. In Faro and Estoi, the number of immigrants is much lower, at 9.79 per cent and 9.52 per cent respectively[12]. The general living conditions of disadvantaged immigrants in these municipalities and sites are not registered, particularly in terms of housing and employment. However, it is known that there are 24.590 unemployed immigrants living in the Algarve region, representing 26.5 per cent of the national total (AMAL, 2023). In Quarteira, for example, the official regional reports indicate that many people have precarious jobs and that homelessness tends to increase in winter (DICAD, 2017).

For this particular study, many housing problems were reported by disadvantaged immigrants: e.g. (1) the African man sleeping in a tent because he "cannot go back to his country and face the shame of failing the migration project" (Statement 1, Faro); the Brazilian family of four sleeping on someone else's living room floor because they were "cheated on arrival" (Statement 2, Quarteira); the (3) Ukrainian woman and child living in a borrowed caravan and a plot of land in the countryside (Statement 3, Loulé); (4) several Indostanic men working for food delivery platforms living in overcrowded apartments or sleeping on a mattress in the hallway of the building (Statement 4, Quarteira); (5) a myriad of Indostanics and Moroccans living on rural permits and working in the greenhouses[13] for low wages (Statement 5). There are also (6) those who pay 300 euros a month for a rented room while they in turn receive 3.5 euros an hour, or salaries of 250 euros a month, to work in these rural permits and greenhouses (Statement 6).

A common perception among these disadvantaged immigrants is that "you can have a house but no work in the interior, or you can have a job but no house on the coast because it's too expensive" (Statement 7, Loulé). Furthermore, due to the seasonal nature of tourism, they also perceive that there is a lack of jobs even in the coastal areas. Those that do exist are mostly for the unskilled:

10 For example, in Chaveca and Conceição, extending into the Areal Gordo area towards Olhão. This suggests the existence of an economic and labour circuit of immigrants from Odemira (Alentejo) and Aljezur (Algarve), and finally to Andalusia and its expressive sea of plastic in Almeria.

11 Again, the AMAL data refer to the 2021 census, while the AIMA data refer to 2023. As the number of immigrants increases, the figures may be higher.

12 More recent data again refer to the 2021 census.

13 In the early days, this migration was mainly of men. More recent observations and testimonies refer to women and children for family reunification.

"The basic problem here is housing and work after the summer" (Statement 8, Quarteira); "men work in construction and gardening, women in cleaning, hotels and restaurants" (Statement 9, Quarteira), supporting the more affluent. Limited opportunities sometimes lead to disputes between immigrants of different origins, e.g. food delivery services (Statement 10, Quarteira). Immigrants also refer to worst-case scenarios such as drug dealing and prostitution to obtain an income, especially in the luxury resort of Vilamoura (Statement 11, Quarteira).

Support activities are developed especially between immigrants from the same cultural landscape and religious background: "we are united in the community, we are in solidarity with each other" (Statement 12, Faro). These include: (1) (one-off and ongoing) financial support for those in need (Statement 13, Faro; Statement 14, Estoi); (2) support in the form of offering temporary accommodation, food and clothing (Statement 15, Quarteira; Statement 16, Estoi). In fact, disadvantaged immigrants, e.g. Brazilians, have been found looking for jackets in rubbish bins in winter (Statement 17, Quarteira). Support activities also include (3) networking to reach a wider audience on housing and employment opportunities (Statement 18, Quarteira); and (4) promoting local activities to combat negative discrimination, including racism and xenophobia (Statement 19, Quarteira).

Cultural interactions can take place through aid activities, but also through other, possibly more enjoyable activities, such as fairs and festivals. These are places where leisure activities take place, but also artistic work and performances (such as music, dance), gastronomic activities, trade and sport. In Estoi there is the annual Pine Cone Festival (a historical re-enactment linked to Almocreves) and the Horse Fair, as well as the monthly Gypsy market (selling vegetables, fruit, clothes, arts and crafts, etc.). These events are important because the village has little urban life, although it has strong local groups (the Moto Club, the Jograis). In Quarteira, cultural interactions take place during the Carnival Party or the Sweet Potato March and Race (September), among other local events. In fact, the urban life and vitality of Quarteira is expressive and strongly linked to the presence of disadvantaged immigrants, especially Brazilians and Indostanics, in public spaces, more so in the large pedestrian area (the so-called Calçadão) along the city's seafront and beach.

Cultural interactions can also arise from religious activities and be consolidated over time. Both the Islamic[14] and Catholic groups have spaces that gather immigrants from different locations (Faro, Quarteira and Estoi). The mosques bring together Muslims from African and Middle Eastern countries, while the churches bring together Catholics from Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe[15]. The former speak of the need to adapt in order to belong, despite the cultural difficulties, and of a sense of gratitude to the host communities: "To thank the man is to thank Allah (God)" (Statement 20, Faro). The latter turn to immigrants in order to find new ways of communicating a common faith that transforms and gives new life to old forms and expressions of religious celebration (Statement 21, Estoi).

4.3. Field 3 (digital) – Online discourses matters: far-right movements, threat perceptions and (self-)representations

In Portugal, the political shift to the right and the rise of the far-right Chega party with its xenophobic and anti-immigrant ideology is recent and significant. In the March 2024 legislative elections, Chega obtained 17 per cent of votes in Lisbon (district). However, its best results were in the Algarve (Faro district), with 27.2 per cent[16] of the votes (64,228) (NEC, 2024; MAI, 2024). In both Quarteira and Estoi, Chega achieved its the highest results (30 per cent): "they are votes of protest, because they are a confirmation of the [huge] problems" (Cordeiro, 2024) (online Statement 22, Estoi) .

Younger men are more likely to vote for the Chega party (Cancela and Magalhães, 2024). This may be the case in Quarteira. This vote is particularly prevalent among the less educated (ibid.), which

14 Twelve leaders of the Algarve's Islamic community (representing its various localities) are united in the search for a common central mosque in Faro. They are following in the footsteps of Andalusia in terms of Islamic-oriented community building and tourism.

15 In this case, the experience refers to clergy from Eastern European countries and choir members from the Cape Verdean community.

16 Nationally, Chega accounted for 18% of all votes (1,169,836 votes) and 50 out of 230 members of parliament (NEC, 2024; MAI, 2024).

may also be the case in Estoi. Paradoxically, disadvantaged immigrants also voted for Chega (e.g. Brazilians and from the Islamic community) (Statement 23, Faro). These immigrants point out that Chega representatives in the Algarve are more in touch with the major problems mentioned and closer to the needs of the disadvantaged population. They also point out that newly arrived immigrants are responsible for the lack of opportunities, poor living conditions, especially in terms of employment and access to housing, and the deprivation experienced by others.

These ideas follow local perceptions and discourses about generally poor living conditions, again in terms of employment and housing, which affect the general population in many different ways. Some claim that these newly arrived disadvantaged immigrants are stealing already scarce jobs: "some people say that cheap immigrant labour replaces Portuguese labour that would otherwise be better paid" (Cordeiro, 2024) (Online statement 24, Estoi); some complain about massive house-sharing that affects their daily lives: "my doorknob is always broken because the flat on the fifth floor is full of immigrants" (Statement 25, Quarteira). These perceptions of threat tend to increase as the number of immigrants increases and as they congregate more visibly in public spaces (beaches, etc.). At the same time, the Algarve is now the scene of major far-right anti-immigration rallies, but also of demonstrations in favour of diversity and against discrimination.

Prejudice and perceptions of threat in the Algarve are reproduced and reinforced by online digital media. Different examples can be found on internet TV channels, newspapers and social media, especially against racialised men and Muslims, as well as Indostanics and Africans: "Moroccan immigrants. Trio involved in violent crimes after landing in the Algarve" (Marcelino, 2022) (Online news). The growing presence of these immigrants has caused indignation at their official social recognition and organisation: "I can't help but feel indignant when I learn that our local council is preparing to donate public land that belongs to the people of Faro for the construction of a mosque" (Statement 26, online). This prejudice expressing trends of Islamophobia has already resulted in physical attacks on Muslim groups (Statement 27).

In turn, digital media are used by disadvantaged immigrants to connect, and to develop support actions and cultural activities. On the one hand, they (1) share information about their lives especially within their limited circles (namely in social media) in order to network and promote support for solving problems (regarding employment, housing, etc.) (Statement 28, Quarteira). On the other hand, they (2) develop websites to give visibility to their forms of self-representation and self-organisation (immigrant associations, e.g. Oranta, AVA, among others). They seek to project a common image and voice to the outside world, while providing support and countering perceptions of threat (Statement 29, Loulé). Aware of its importance, local associations are investing in digital literacy amongst immigrants (Statement 30, Quarteira).

5. Discussion of the findings: a digital road map, to be hope or hop(ing) to be?

Following previous ideas of hope and critical geography and empirical findings on urban, social and digital media, our road map for the Algarve region is understood here as a conceptual analytical grid connecting (1. subversive) layers, (2. rebellious) dots, and (3. counter) fluxes. These references help us to "discover the laws of its structuring and transformation" (Castells, 1977, p.7). The main guidelines for the digital tour and its outputs are as follows:

1. Subversive layers of hope (urban) – This guideline uses Greater Lisbon as a leading reference to put southern Portugal into perspective in terms of uneven geographical development (Harvey, 2000, 2005). It refers to Faro (with Estoi) and Loulé (with Quarteira) as case studies to represent different scales, time frames and manifestations of capitalist spatial (re)configuration. It also points to experiences of spatial segregation. Thus, we propose to look at subversive spatial practices, especially those that emerge in places that have undergone urban transformation with disadvantaged immigrants (e.g. Quarteira).

These can be found in different places and urban experiences and should have the potential to challenge uneven geographies and their homogenising space, while being the action-oriented force for transformation. Based on these experiences and practices, new spatial representations can

be built from the ground up to decolonise local knowledge and cultures. They can help us to (re) imagine more progressive and just societies and spaces (Fainstein, 2010; Soja, 2010);

2. Rebel dots of hope (social) – This guideline refers to a preliminary micro-documentation of social discrimination in relation to these urban experiences and poor living conditions, especially in relation to housing and employment. Therefore, we propose to consider disadvantaged immigrants trying to overcome such experiences and conditions as political agents in space, namely through aid activities and cultural interactions (e.g. fairs, festivals, religious activities), "resisting co-optation, staying ahead and mutating like activist tactics" (Light, 2024).

These agents should be able to subvert and go beyond being instruments of the capitalist system (Harvey, 2005). They can create opportunities that challenge social discrimination and spatial segregation by supporting interactions that promote connections and a sense of belonging. New connections can then emerge from these defiant agents to strengthen global networks of support against extractivism and violence;

3. *Counter-fluxes of hope (digital)* – This guideline concerns the parallel growth of far-right movements, perceived threats and prejudices against disadvantaged immigrants which are reflected and reproduced in space and/or lead to social mobilisations and rallies. Alike past experiences, they could have an impact (in this case negative) on politics and on living conditions. It is also about ideological orientations with intersectional expressions, namely regarding class and (anti-Muslim) racism mobilising pro-diversity social responses. Thus, we propose to look for the digital flows that position themselves against fear and hate on mobilities, to counter capitalist co-optation and also to build intersectional counter-narratives.

In point of fact, we call for digital experimental spaces for support actions and cultural activities that reflect subversive local activities and rebellious migrant self-representations in order to create less unequal and more just spaces and futures (Harvey, 1973; Fainstein, 2010; Soja, 2010), all the while giving us "a taste of how the world could be" (Light, 2024).

6. Conclusions and directions for future research

Political-philosophical ideas help to "break down" the empirical object, but again what clues do these guidelines provide to identify interculturalism and community building in the Algarve region (to ultimately challenge systemic discrimination and segregation)?

These guidelines point to future research on spaces of hope in the Algarve, namely (1) those that emerge from (subversive) spatial practices, support activities and cultural interactions that challenge the existing poor living conditions (e.g. employment and housing) in the urban environment, (2) those that are promoted by (rebellious) disadvantaged immigrants struggling against these poor conditions, especially difficult access to housing and employment, and (3) those that emerge from multiple (alternatives in the) digital world that counter perceptions of threat and fear. These spaces of hope point to a critical geography (of hope) that (hopefully!) hacks our way out of the oppressive logics of capitalism.

These spaces of hope, when produced and reproduced in digital media, can foster dialogue, interaction and relationships between different cultures, creating new opportunities for belonging while overcoming barriers and promoting justice in time. As such, our digital road map of hope supports human-technology relationships in the shaping of the future.

This digital road map uses the urban environment to feed the digital tour (with situated discourses, iconographic content, etc.). This digital tour will, in turn, be the online expression of a particular geographical and social place. Moreover, digital relationships are reproduced in the urban environment. As such, these spaces of hope to be experimented in the digital world can be reproduced and experimented in the urban environment (in the Algarve). However, this digital tour (hoping to be the seed of an alternative world) can also be a trap. It can be used to feed right-wing extremism and encourage threat perceptions and xenophobia leading to further anti-migrant movements, social discrimination and spatial segregation. Nevertheless, in current times of uneven geographical development, the impulse of a critical geography urges us to reimagine hope.

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