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Spatial and social inequalities among young people: looking for 'site effects'

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between spatial and social inequalities affecting young people. The objective is to analyse this relationship considering the circumstances of young people and to ascertain to what extent favourable social conditions associated with living in the most relevant and dynamic cities are an expression of 'site effects'. The study is based on a questionnaire with responses from over 5000 young people. In order to gain a more profound understanding of the spatial and social inequalities experienced by young people, both inferential statistics and a logistic regression model were employed. The findings suggest that when the socio-spatial dimension is given due consideration, inequalities are observed to deepen in terms of the different social backgrounds that continue to determine many young people's paths. The process of peripheralisation of territories contributes to the maintenance of structural inequalities between denser, more urbanised cities and those living in more peripheral areas. The results reveal the existence of 'site effects', showing a strong relationship between young people's access to the country's most important cities and their social background.

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Introduction

Drawing on studies of the production and reproduction of inequalities through the socio-economic and educational resources available to young people, Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) concluded that the cultural capital of young people's families was central to their school performance.

This, in turn, was reflected in their professional future. In fact – and contrary to the theories of meritocracy that are becoming more and more prevalent – students whose parents have more educational qualifications tend to have better school results. In the same line, a pioneering study carried out in London by Floud, Halsey, and Martin (1956) found that, among similar social classes, parents' cultural capital was more relevant than economic capital when it came to their children's school results.

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This paper examines the spatial and social inequalities affecting young people, focusing on the role of territorial dynamics in shaping their opportunities and access to different resources. The social origins of the parents, which in this study are explored through educational qualifications, have been shown to have a significant impact on the levels of schooling achieved by young people, as well as their income and the social class to which they will belong. However, it is crucial to recognise the role of spatial inequalities in the creation and reproduction of these disparities. This assumption will be explored and tested in the first part of the results section, with a cross-referencing of social origins and socio-economic characteristics with the territory of residence of the young people. This will facilitate comprehension of how the social and cultural background of young people is related to the territories they live in, as well as their resources. The second part will involve testing the probability of residing in Lisbon or Oporto, depending on the social structure of the young people.

The objectives of this paper are to answer the following questions: (i) What is the relationship between spatial inequalities and social inequalities, when we consider the circumstances of young people? (ii) To what extent are favourable social conditions associated with living in the most relevant and dynamic cities an expression of 'site effects'? The article is organised as follows: after the introduction, the theoretical framework explores key concepts related to youth social inequalities, territorial peripheralisation and site effects, and spatial (im)mobility, emphasising how these factors contribute to broader patterns of social and spatial inequalities. Secondly, the contextualisation of Portuguese territories provides an overview of the geographic and socio-economic distinctions that structure youth experiences across different regions in Portugal. A third section entitled 'Materials and methods' details the data sources and analytical techniques employed. Fourthly, the results section presents findings on the territorial distribution of young people and the factors influencing their spatial and social positioning. Finally, the discussion critically engages with the notion of the right to the city, reflecting on the implications of spatial inequalities among young people.

Social inequalities among young people

As several authors have noted, inequalities are multidimensional and comprise different types that are related and intersect with each other (Carmo 2021). Of these, resource inequalities (or capital inequalities, as termed by Pierre Bourdieu), which include income, wealth, level of education, but also the density of social connections and networks (known as social capital), are particularly relevant. The intersection between these and other types of inequality (social class, education, gender, age, among others) generates regimes or systems (Bihl and Pfefferkorn 2008) that tend to crystallise and perpetuate themselves in societies. In other words, inequalities are intersectional (Hill Collins 2019) and are reproduced in systems that are difficult to break or mitigate as determining pillars of social organisation.

The tendency towards the cyclical reproduction of social inequalities through, for example, access to the best educational resources are well known (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970). Although much progress has been made – in modern societies in general, and in Portugal in particular – in democratising access to the various levels of education, including higher education, educational institutions continue to contribute to the reproduction

of capital, reproducing inequalities at school that consistently turn into wider social inequalities. In other words, young people's academic performance, as well as part of their subsequent career path, is still conditioned by the educational resources held by their parents. Consequently, the increase in equal opportunities that has been witnessed does not equate to a reduction in social or educational inequalities, including within the school (Boudon 1973). This is due to the fact that inequalities reflect a set of systemic phenomena that cannot be contemplated in isolation, as they are structural consequences.

Social inequalities among young people are deeply linked to the dynamics of the labour market, where spatial and social factors give rise to divergent opportunities and outcomes. The analysis of these inequalities requires an examination of the interplay of structural, cultural and institutional forces that shape the transition from education to employment. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1979) and its uneven distribution provides a lens to analyse how familial capitals and social networks influence young people's trajectories. Additionally, systemic factors, such as social class, gender and ethnicity, perpetuate disparities in access to high-quality education and professional opportunities. The geographies of inequality further compound these challenges, for instance, young individuals in rural or economically deprived urban areas face limited access to jobs, training programmes and transportation infrastructure, reinforcing cycles of exclusion.

In this context, the precarisation of the labour market becomes a critical factor, particularly for younger workers who disproportionately experience underemployment, temporary contracts and low wages (Tavares and Carmo 2025). Drawing upon the concept of 'precariat' as conceptualised by Guy Standing (2011), it becomes evident how neoliberal economic policies have had a profound impact on young people, resulting in diminished security and stability for emerging generations. Furthermore, spatial inequalities, as explored by Massey (1994), emphasise the importance of place in determining social and economic opportunities, emphasising the uneven development of regions within and across European nations.

Territories, peripheralisation and site effects

The phenomenon of territorial peripheralisation in modern societies can be understood as a process that gives rise to marginalisation, resulting in diminished access to resources, services and opportunities. This, in turn, engenders a spatial divide between central and peripheral areas (Kühn 2015). The concept of peripheralisation is characterised by

a process operating at different geographical scales through mechanisms of selective out-migration, disconnection from infrastructure and knowledge networks, increasing dependence upon larger cities for decision making, funding and services, and discursive marginalization (Pike et al. 2024, 8).

It engages with various dimensions of social, political and economic phenomena, referring to processes that render certain areas or communities marginalised or disadvantaged relative to more central or economically developed regions.

From a theoretical point of view, it is important to consider the processes of peripheralisation within Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual framework. In this framework, Bourdieu

([1993] 1999) proposes studying site effects through the relationship between physical, social and mental spaces. In his recent book 'Bourdieu in the City', Wacquant (2023) explores this relationship in depth, establishing a triad between physical space (the built environment), social space (the unequal distribution of different forms of capital), and symbolic space (the mental categories through which the world is perceived and organised). In fact, these three dimensions are intertwined and help us to understand that the transformations occurring at the territorial level cannot be considered in isolation from the unequal distribution of resources and the ways in which populations and their actors perceive these processes symbolically. In many cases, this results in continued and increased losses, not only in socio-economic terms, but also in political and cultural terms.

According to João Queirós, there is an interweaving between social space and physical space in the sense that

social divisions objectified in physical space (the 'reified social space') tend to reproduce themselves in the minds and language of social agents as categories of perception and appreciation (or 'mental structures') that guide their individual and collective actions (Queirós 2022, 20).

The notion of site effects shows that physical spaces produce and perpetuate asymmetrical forms of appropriation, hierarchy and accumulation, arising from the unequal struggles of different social groups and social classes. Therefore, this concept encompasses a broader, more multidimensional expression than the mere idea of 'neighbourhood effects' resulting from co-presence or residential proximity.

On the other hand, physical space is not merely a container in which complex processes of social transformation and reconfiguration occur (Lefebvre 1991). These transformations are also spatial in nature and embedded in territories. In other words, territories are not neutral: they interact with other dimensions, particularly the social and symbolic ones. Therefore, it is important to overcome the dualism between 'society' and 'space' (Ripoll 2024) and adopt a more complex analytical approach to the processes of peripheralisation. This article aims to contribute to this perspective in order to understand the extent to which the relationship between social and physical spaces may be contributing to increased inequalities among young people, particularly with regard to the growth of peripheralisation processes. Therefore, this article will not address issues of a symbolic nature.

For youth residing in these peripheral regions, such disparities can result in limited educational attainment levels or employment prospects, fostering feelings of exclusion and social inequalities (Simões et al. 2017). The concept of peripheralisation highlights the dynamic and relational character of spatial inequalities, emphasising how centralisation of economic activities in urban centres can lead to the socio-economic decline of outlying areas. Peripheralisation, therefore, is an ongoing process shaped by political, economic, social and symbolic forces. A comprehensive understanding of peripheralisation entails acknowledging the heterogeneity of peripheral territories, influenced by regional, industrial and institutional contexts.

In this analysis, it is important to draw attention to the dynamic relationship between states and territories, accentuating how the spatial organisation of power can contribute to both inclusion and exclusion (Brenner and Elden 2009). Painter (2010) has articulated how economic performance measurements and regional policies can obscure the socio-

political dimensions of territory, often favouring a simplistic binary of centre versus periphery that neglects complex socio-spatial realities. In addition, processes of stigmatisation and destigmatisation are critical to understanding peripheralisation. Queirós and Borges Pereira (2018) explore the influence of historical narratives and socio-political shifts on perceptions of territorial stigmas, emphasising the need for a relational analysis that considers temporal contexts in understanding urban dynamics. This understanding highlights a critical dimension of territories and peripheralisation: the capacity of communities to resist and redefine their spatial identities against socio-economic adversities.

Spatial (im)mobility and social inequalities

Spatial (im)mobility is strongly linked to social inequality. Access to mobility can serve as a mechanism for social advancement, allowing youth to pursue educational and employment opportunities beyond their immediate residential areas (Manderscheid 2009). However, it is important to note that mobility is frequently stratified along socio-economic resources. Those from more favourable social backgrounds often possess greater resources, including higher economic capital, which enables them to relocate for better opportunities. In contrast, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may encounter constraints that limit their mobility, thereby perpetuating existing inequalities (Donnelly and Gamsu 2020). This is particularly evident when the urban-rural divide is considered (Camarero and Oliva 2019). As argued by Manderscheid (2009), mobility acts as a substantial stratifying force, with unequal access to movement, perpetuating social and spatial inequalities. In this sense, mobility and inequalities mutually reinforce one another (Amelina and Vasilache 2014; Carmo and Hedberg 2019). In order to analyse these inequalities, it is essential to recognise the complex interplay between individual motivations and structural conditions that influence mobility patterns. Hemming et al. (2018) articulate how youth (im)mobility can enhance disparities within Europe by benefitting certain countries over others, thus contributing to uneven integration across the continent.

The analysis further highlights the relevance of examining different patterns of (im)mobility that emerge from socio-economic inequalities, as evidenced by the case of young people transitioning into adulthood under precarious circumstances. For instance, the case of how urban contexts shape mobility for undocumented youth reveals that legal status significantly impacts mobility options and opportunities (Ruszczuk 2023). Samuk Carignani et al. (2018) explore the multifaceted factors influencing youth mobilities, including social networks, gender roles and family backgrounds, stressing that these factors are intertwined with broader social inequalities that young people face. In a different example, Donnelly and Gamsu (2020) illustrate how students' mobility decisions are embedded within unequal structures of economic power, shaping and reshaping social relations across space. The 'opportunity structures' available to young people demonstrate how spatial mobility is, in many ways, contingent upon the social and economic contexts in which young individuals operate (Cuzzocrea and Cairns 2020).

The contextualisation of Portuguese territories

As Carmo (2023) has demonstrated, and in accordance with the standpoint of Adérito Sedas Nunes (1964), Portuguese society continues to be characterised by structural

divides. These have been reconfigured as a consequence of the modernisation processes that have occurred in recent decades (Machado and Costa 1998). However, the persistence of elevated levels of inequality, which intersect with numerous social and territorial vulnerabilities, remains the fundamental cause of these divides (Carmo 2023). The Portuguese socio-political landscape is distinguished by an asymmetrical matrix characterised by the juxtaposition of differentiated structural inequalities that are reproduced in various social spheres, thereby highlighting significant socio-territorial disparities (Carmo and Tavares 2024; Silva, Silva, and Malheiros 2021).

The organisation of Portuguese territory is a reflection of a diverse socio-economic landscape, with disparities in development and population distribution shaping the country's economic and social dynamics. The two principal urban centres, the cities of Lisbon and Oporto, function as the primary economic and cultural hubs, concentrating a significant portion of national GDP, innovation, and services. These cities benefit from high levels of investment, infrastructure, and human capital, attracting businesses and skilled workers. Surrounding these cities, the Lisbon and Oporto Metropolitan Areas, excluding their urban cores, play a crucial role in providing residential, logistic, and industrial support. These areas are experiencing rapid suburbanisation and are home to key sectors such as manufacturing, transport and retail, which are essential for sustaining the wider regional economies.

Beyond the Metropolitan Areas, the Coastal Area of Portugal is a significant contributor to the national economy, characterised by export-oriented industries, tourism and maritime activities. The coastal strip, extending from the north to the south (Algarve) region – passing through the centre region – exhibits a medium population density and has undergone medium infrastructure development, thereby fostering semi-dynamic labour markets. In contrast, the Inland Area confronts substantial demographic and economic challenges, encompassing depopulation, diminished economic activity, and constrained access to services. The Inland Area, with its heavy reliance on agriculture, forestry and small-scale industries, has faced considerable difficulties in competing with more economically and socially developed areas. In order to illustrate the Portuguese territory in this paper, a typology of large territorial areas was used. The typology consists of grouping municipalities into four territories: (a) Lisbon and Oporto, corresponding to the two municipalities; (b) Lisbon and Oporto Metropolitan Area, grouping together the 18 + 17 municipalities belonging to this sub-region; (c) coastline, which includes all municipalities belonging to NUTSIII located along the Portuguese coast, with the exception of the Alentejo region, which was considered inland, given its socio-economic characteristics; (d) inland, comprising all municipalities belonging to NUTSIII located inland (and, as such, without a sea border), also incorporating the Alentejo region. The autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira were included, but given that the sample totalled 46 individuals, it was decided not to present the results due to their low reliability. A map illustrating the typology of large territorial areas and the municipalities belonging to each area can be found in Appendix 1.

Materials and methods

This paper is based on a questionnaire that was constructed comprising questions regarding the labour market and representations and perceptions of the social security system, as well as a demographic characterisation. The survey was conducted in partnership

between the Inequalities Observatory and the Youth Employment Observatory, both affiliated with ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon. It was carried out following an invitation from the Commission for the Sustainability of Social Security, established by the Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security of the XXIII Constitutional Government of Portugal. However, this research is independent and scientifically autonomous from the analyses, perspectives, and recommendations developed and presented by the Commission. The online survey was administered to young people, and subsequent data analyses were conducted. The data for this analysis were collected between 12 December 2022 and 29 January 2023, using a snowball sample that benefited from institutional contacts and social networks, namely by sharing the survey through youth associations. As this study is based on a snowball sample, it is important to emphasise that it is not a representative sample. Therefore, some caution is required when generalising the findings, which should be understood as indicative of general trends rather than statistically representative patterns.

After validating the database, a total of 5077 young people living in Portugal between the ages of 18 and 35 were surveyed, with the final sample exhibited relatively uniformity in terms of age.¹ Given the over-representation of males in the sample, a gender weighting procedure was implemented to ensure the sample reflected the balanced distribution of Portuguese population (based on the 2021 Census), and no additional weighting procedures were applied. Subsequently, variables were aggregated and a range of statistical procedures were applied. The variables used in the present paper encompass city of residence, city of employment, parents' educational level, net income, contributions to the social security system, gender and educational level.

To address the research questions, the variables were cross-tabulated and subjected to a descriptive analysis, followed by the application of a logistic regression model. A variable was created, combining gender and educational level, to enhance the analysis of gender and educational inequalities. The place of residence was utilised to construct a typology of territory, which was subsequently categorised into four categories: (a) Cities of Lisbon and Oporto, which correspond to the two largest Portuguese cities in terms of both economic and social significance; (b) Metropolitan Areas (excluding Lisbon and Oporto) which correspond to the Lisbon Metropolitan Area without Lisbon and Oporto Metropolitan Area without Oporto; (c) Coastal Areas, which corresponds to every municipality which are located on the Portuguese coastal areas, normally marked for median cities and median economic development; (d) Inland Areas, which correspond to the inland municipalities.² Different variables were analysed in relation to the typology of territory, in order to provide a comprehensive characterisation of each territory, with a view to facilitating a more profound exploration of the socio-economic inequalities that are ingrained within them. In addition, inferential statistical analyses were employed to confirm the significance of the associations, specifically through the chi-square test.

A logistic regression was used to deduce inferences and further substantiated the conclusion previously established. The dependent dichotomous variable utilised in this analysis was 'living in Lisbon or Oporto' (yes or no). The independent variables included: sex = masculine; parent's educational level = ISCED3-4; parent's educational level = ISCED5-8; educational level = ISCTE5-6; educational level = ISCTE7-8; net income = €700-1000; net income = €1001-1500; net income = €1501-2000; net income > €2000; frequently contributes to the social security system; and living and working within the same municipality.

The overall fit of the model was assessed through the -2 Log Likelihood ($-2LL$), which yielded a value of 2088.886. Additionally, the explanatory power of the model was evaluated using Cox & Snell's R^2 and Nagelkerke's R^2 , which were 0.262 and 0.371, respectively. These values indicate that the model accounts for approximately 37.1% of the variance in the dependent variable.

The model's predictive performance was evaluated through the classification table. The overall accuracy was examined by comparing the predicted versus actual classifications. The model correctly identified 89.5% of cases in the 'other municipalities' category and 58% of cases in the 'Lisbon or Oporto' category. While the model demonstrated strong predictive accuracy for the majority class, its performance in predicting the minority class was lower, suggesting a potential imbalance in the dataset. The analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics software.

Findings

Young people's territorial distribution: a descriptive analysis

This section analyses how the territorial distribution of young people is linked to their social origin and socio-economic characteristics (Table 1). The majority (58.4%) of the young people residing in Lisbon and Oporto have parents with tertiary education, while a third of the parents of young people living in Metropolitan Areas (excluding Lisbon and Oporto) have it (other third have secondary education and the remaining

Table 1. Territorial distribution of young people: social origin and socio-economic characteristics.

| | | Lisbon and Oporto | Metropolitan Areas (excluding Lisbon and Oporto) | Coastal Areas | Inland Areas |
|--|---|-------------------|--|---------------|--------------|
| Parent's educational level | ISCED 1–2 | 18.1 | 31 | 38.6 | 40.4 |
| | ISCED 3–4 | 23.4 | 34.4 | 34.2 | 34.4 |
| | ISCED 5–8 | 58.4 | 34.5 | 27.2 | 25.2 |
| Net income | <700€ | 14.3 | 25.6 | 29 | 36 |
| | 700€–1.000€ | 16.3 | 22.5 | 31 | 27 |
| | 1.000–1.500€ | 33.6 | 26.4 | 22.7 | 26.3 |
| | 1.500€–2.000€ | 15.8 | 14.5 | 10.3 | 6.2 |
| | >2.000€ | 20 | 11.1 | 7 | 4.4 |
| Sex and educational level | Women and ISCED <5 | 9.2 | 24.6 | 26.3 | 26.7 |
| | Women and ISCED 5–6 | 11.9 | 12.9 | 15.2 | 14 |
| | Women and ISCED 7–8 | 21.4 | 12.1 | 12.6 | 9.5 |
| | Men and ISCED <5 | 13.8 | 22 | 21.8 | 29.1 |
| | Men and ISCED 5–6 | 15.7 | 12.6 | 12.4 | 12.4 |
| | Men and ISCED 7–8 | 28 | 15.7 | 11.7 | 8.3 |
| Lives and works | Lives and works within the same municipality | 85.7 | 27.3 | 59.9 | 57.2 |
| | Lives and works within different municipalities | 14.3 | 72.7 | 40.1 | 42.8 |
| Contributions to social security system | Always | 70.5 | 67.8 | 65.2 | 57.7 |
| | Most of the time | 16.7 | 13.4 | 15.2 | 13.3 |
| | Rarely | 5.3 | 4.4 | 5.3 | 7.4 |
| | Never | 7.5 | 14.4 | 14.3 | 21.5 |
| Employers' contributions to social security system | Always | 79.2 | 79.2 | 78.3 | 73.2 |
| | Most of the time | 10.8 | 11.3 | 10.7 | 13 |
| | Rarely | 6 | 2.6 | 3.5 | 4.1 |
| | Never | 4 | 6.9 | 7.4 | 9.8 |

third have up to primary education). In both Coastal and Inland Areas, the highest level of education is primary education (around 40%), followed by secondary education (34%) and tertiary education (around 26%) ($\chi^2_{(6, 3686)} = 267,490, p < 0.001$). These findings indicate a strong association between parental educational level and the probability of young people residing in different territories. The overrepresentation of individuals with tertiary-educated parents living in Lisbon and Oporto may reflect the cumulative advantages conferred by higher educational backgrounds, including greater access to economic, social, and cultural capitals that facilitate urban integration and access. On the other hand, the distribution of parental education in Metropolitan (excluding Lisbon and Oporto), Coastal and Inland Areas exhibits a more stratified pattern, characterised by a significantly lower prevalence of tertiary education and a higher proportion of young people hailing from families with primary or secondary education as their highest level. These findings suggest that educational background reinforces spatial inequalities by concentrating higher educational levels in urban centres.

Furthermore, the observed disparities in educational levels between Coastal and Inland Areas highlight the persistence of historical and structural inequalities in educational access. The predominance of primary education as the highest level of education attained in both territories suggests the potential concentration of social inequalities, particularly in more peripheral areas where economic opportunities may be limited. The secondary and tertiary educational distributions further reflect these spatial divergences, suggesting that proximity to economic hubs and access to higher education institutions play a crucial role in shaping educational trajectories.

Net income helps to frame the relationship between territorial distribution and economic resources ($\chi^2_{(12, 2283)} = 172,598, p < 0.001$). If the proportion of young people earning up to €700 increases as we move away from Lisbon and Oporto (14.3%) towards Inland Areas (36%), the opposite movement occurs when analysing the young people earning more than €2000 (20% in Lisbon and Oporto and 4.4% in Inland Areas). When analysing the net income, a significantly territorial asymmetry is evident, with young people living in Lisbon and Oporto demonstrating greater economic advantage, followed by those residing in Metropolitan Areas (excluding Lisbon and Oporto), then those living in Coastal Areas and finally those living in Inland Areas.

These pronounced territorial asymmetries in net income distribution reinforce existing patterns of spatial and social inequality. The concentration of higher-earning young people in Lisbon and Oporto suggests that economic opportunities, including access to higher-paying jobs, are disproportionately available in urban centres. In contrast, the prevalence of lower wages in Inland Areas reflects a structural economic divide. This gradient in income distribution not only mirrors the availability of economic capital but also interacts with other forms of social inequalities, such as educational attainment and occupational segmentation, further reinforcing the cumulative advantages of urban residences.

Furthermore, economic capital is increasingly concentrated in urban centres, exacerbating territorial disparities. On the other hand, the fact that Metropolitan (excluding Lisbon and Oporto) and Coastal Areas are located on the outskirts of the main cities and economic centres helps to mitigate some of the effects of regional economic

disadvantages but does not eliminate them altogether. This finding reinforces the idea that territories play a crucial role in facilitating access to economic opportunities.

A variable that crosses gender and educational level was created in order to better understand the gender inequalities as well as the educational inequalities ($\chi^2_{(15, 3686)} = 292,761, p < 0.001$). In particular, the data show that the proportion of individuals with lower levels of education increases while the proportion of those with higher levels of education decreases in the more peripheral areas. This is more pronounced when comparing women and men with master's or doctorate degrees among young people living in Lisbon and Oporto (21.4% and 28%) and those residing in Inland Areas (9.5% and 8.3%).

This intersectional approach to gender and educational attainment within the territorial asymmetries reveals deeply embedded structural inequalities. The decreasing proportion of highly educated individuals – namely those holding master's or doctorate degrees – as we move from the residents of Lisbon and Oporto to the residents in Inland Areas highlights the spatial concentration of advanced educational credentials. This suggests that the urban centres not only attract but also retain individuals with higher levels of education. The fact that this pattern is more pronounced among women further underscores the compounded effects of gender and geography in shaping educational and professional trajectories. Women with advanced degrees may face additional constraints outside these territories, where labour markets tend to be less dynamic and opportunities for high-skilled employment more limited, reinforcing their overrepresentation in urban centres.

Moreover, the gendered disparities in educational attainment across territorial contexts reflect broader dynamics of labour market segmentation. The greater decline in the proportion of highly educated women compared to men in more peripheral areas suggests that the persistence of the greater structural disadvantages faced by women in terms of career progression and the pay gap is even more pronounced outside urban centres. On the other hand, the higher proportion of less-educated individuals in more rural areas, for both men and women, suggests a reinforcing cycle of reproduction of educational and economic disadvantage.

When analysing the correspondence between living and working within the same municipality, a clear distinction emerges between residents of Lisbon and Oporto and those living in the Metropolitan Areas (excluding Lisbon and Oporto) ($\chi^2_{(3, 2265)} = 517,655, p < 0.001$). Indeed, while both Coastal and Inland Areas exhibit a similar trend (around 60% of young people living and working in the same municipality, with the remaining 40% living and working in different municipalities), in Lisbon and Oporto or Metropolitan Areas (excluding Lisbon and Oporto), the reality is different. The preponderance of young people living in Lisbon and Oporto is employed within the same municipality (85.7%), while those living in the Metropolitan Areas are employed in other municipalities (likely in Lisbon, Oporto or nearby municipalities, as evidenced by Carmo and Tavares 2024).

The territorial distribution of employment in relation to residence highlights the centralising economic force of urban centres and the dependency of surrounding areas on these cities and vice-versa. The high proportion of young people living and working within the same municipality in Lisbon and Oporto suggests that these areas function as self-contained labour markets, offering a diversity of job opportunities. In contrast, the dynamics observed in Metropolitan Areas (excluding Lisbon and Oporto) highlight

their role as residential extensions of the principal cities, with a significant share of young workers employed outside their municipality of residence, typically commuting daily to Lisbon or Oporto. This phenomenon aligns with the theories about urban labour market structures, where the economic gravitational pull of the principal cities generates strong commuting flows from adjacent territories.

The relative uniformity in the Inland and Coastal Areas, where approximately 60% of young people both live and work in the same municipality, suggests a more localised labour market dynamic, but one that lacks the job density and economic diversification characteristic of urban centres. This indicates that, while employment opportunities exist within these municipalities, they may be limited in scope and sectoral diversity, leading a considerable proportion of young individuals to seek employment in other municipalities.

The indicators related to social security system contributions ($\chi^2_{(9, 2667)} = 52,656$, $p < 0.001$) and employers' contributions to social security system ($\chi^2_{(9, 2383)} = 26,434$, $p = 0.002$) demonstrate a tendency to align in the same direction in this analysis. However, it is noteworthy that individuals frequently assert that employers contribute more frequently to the social security system than the total contributions of workers. This observation suggests that, in certain instances, young workers, when presented with the option, elect not to contribute to the social security system. Meanwhile, when they are employed, employers tend to contribute to the social security system, as required by law.

The analysis demonstrates that spatial and social inequalities have a significant impact on young people and on their labour market experiences, particularly with regard to social security system contributions. The data reveals a clear spatial gradient, with young people residing in Lisbon and Oporto – the country's main economic hubs – being more likely to have consistent contributions to social security system (70.5% 'always') compared to those in Inland Areas (57.7%). These findings suggest that urban centres offer more stable and formal employment opportunities, while young workers in rural areas face greater precarious employment. The percentage of young workers who never contribute to social security system is notably higher in Inland Areas (21.5%) compared to Metropolitan Areas (excluding Lisbon and Oporto) (7.5%), highlighting the uneven access to formal labour protections.

Employers' contributions to social security system follow a similar pattern, reinforcing the structural disadvantages experienced by peripheral regions. In Lisbon and Oporto, and their surrounding Metropolitan Areas, employers 'always' contribute approximately 79% of young workers, while in Inland Areas, this figure drops to 73.2%. The higher proportion of workers whose employers 'never' contribute (9.8% in Inland Areas versus 4% in Lisbon and Oporto) suggests a prevalence of informal work arrangements or non-compliance with labour laws. These results highlight the challenges associated with enforcing labour regulation in regions beyond major economic centres, underscoring systemic barriers that prevent young workers in peripheral regions from attaining stable employment conditions.

These findings illustrate broader social inequalities embedded in Portuguese society, where young people's opportunities are shaped by geography. The concentration of stable, legally protected employment in urban centres serves to reinforce existing socio-economic divides, thereby exacerbating regional disparities among young people, as discussed in this section.

Socioeconomic and educational predictors: a logistic regression analysis

In this section, a logistic regression model was employed to investigate the association between the social structure of young people and their propensity to reside in the urban centres (Lisbon or Oporto), i.e. the likelihood of young people living in urban centres depending on their social structure. The social structure of the young people was measured by sex, parent's educational level, educational level, net income, contributions to the social security system, gender and educational level, living and working in the same municipality.

As Table 2 highlights, certain factors emerge as being more important than others in determining the probability of living in an urban centre. Young people whose parents have attained tertiary education are 3.4 times more likely to reside in Lisbon or Oporto compared to those whose parents have received primary education. Furthermore, it is evident that individuals with a monthly income exceeding 2000€ are 2.6 times more likely to live in an urban centre than those with an income below 700€. Having parents with higher education is more strongly associated with living in urban centres than having a higher household income.

Young people who have attained tertiary education are more likely to reside in Lisbon or Oporto compared to those with less education. Individuals who hold a bachelor's degree are 1.8 times more likely to live in Lisbon or Oporto compared to those with no tertiary education. When the focus is on the holders of at least a master's degree, the probability increases to 2.6 times. Young people living and working within the same municipality are 10 times more likely to live in an urban centre than those living and working in different municipalities.

The findings of this analysis suggest that young people who are more likely to live in Lisbon or Oporto are those whose parents have attained higher levels of education, those who have achieved higher levels of education, those who obtain higher incomes, those who live and work within the same municipality, and those who frequently contribute to the social security system.

Table 2. Results of the logistic regression on urban centres living determinants (odd ratios)

| | Exp(B) |
|---|----------|
| Sex = masculine | 1.167*** |
| Parent's educational level = ISCED3-4 | 1.582** |
| Parent's educational level = ISCED5-8 | 3.396* |
| Educational level = ISCED5-6 | 1.818* |
| Educational level = ISCED7-8 | 2.643* |
| Net income = €700-1000 | 1.011 |
| Net income = €1001-1500 | 1.864* |
| Net income = €1501-2000 | 1.630*** |
| Net income > €2000 | 2.624* |
| Frequently contributes to the social security system | 1.472*** |
| Employers frequently contribute to the social security system | 0.564* |
| Lives and works within the same municipality | 10.443* |
| Constant | 0.017* |

* < .001 | ** < .005 | *** < .05.

Note: reference categories: sex = feminine; parent's educational level = ISCED<3; educational level = ISCED<5; net income < 700€; do not frequently contribute to social security; employers do not frequently contribute to social security; lives and works in different municipalities.

Discussion

The analysis of the survey results confirms the two research questions mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The spatial dimension and social inequalities are indeed inter-related when analysing the realities of young people. There is a clear link between the degree of peripheralisation of territories and the loss in the accumulation of higher and more prestigious socio-economic and educational resources. It is clear from the outset that young people living in the main cities tend to come from more advantaged social and cultural backgrounds. In contrast, young people living in more peripheral territories, particularly in inland areas, tend to have lower levels of education and weaker labour market insertion, for example in terms of income or ability to pay social security contributions.

On the other hand, young people who live in the cities of Lisbon and Oporto tend to work within these municipalities. This means that they accumulate advantages not only in terms of economic and cultural resources, but also in terms of greater opportunities to experience the city fully and with a higher quality of life. This contrasts with young people living in other territories of the metropolitan area, who are more dependent on commuting from one municipality to another in order to carry out their professional activities.

The results obtained demonstrate the existence of 'site effects' in the sense that there is a very clear relationship between young people who have the opportunity to live in the country's most important cities and those who do not have such access to this opportunity. The former not only comes from more privileged families but also mobilise a set of economic and cultural capital that is fundamental to gaining added advantages in living in and enjoying the most central urban spaces. On the other hand, those who mobilise less capital simultaneously experience a peripheralisation of their living conditions, reflected in the relationship they establish with the territories where they live. Through statistical analysis, robust predictive effects can be established when considering the relationship between physical space and social space. This means that these effects may be contributing to greater limitations on social opportunities for young people who live in more peripheral areas and tend to come from families with fewer resources.

Conclusion

The findings allow us to conclude, firstly, that when the socio-spatial dimension is considered, inequalities deepen not only in terms of the different social backgrounds that still determine many young people's paths, but also in terms of the different conditions for entering and progressing in the labour market. Secondly, the process of peripheralisation of territories contributes to the maintenance of structural divides between the denser, more urbanised cities, where a higher proportion of young people from more privileged families and social backgrounds tend to live and work and who in turn find better working and economic situations, and those who live in the more peripheral areas, who tend to come from families with fewer resources. These young people have weaker pathways in the labour market, tend to earn lower wages or have more intermittent social security contributions. Thirdly, inequalities and territorial disparities tend to affect mobility practices between the place of work and the place of residence. Young people living on the outskirts of metropolitan areas have the most difficulties in organising their daily

lives and spend more time commuting; on the other hand, those who live and work in the cities of Lisbon or Oporto tend to be more privileged in the several dimensions analysed. This means that enjoying and living life to the full in the city tends to be increasingly restricted to social classes that are favoured in terms of both economic and cultural resources. This last observation is not fully demonstrated by this study, but it is a starting point for future research that looks at other dimensions of analysis, such as unequal access to housing in the context of large cities as a crucial factor of 'site effects'.

Notes

1. A sociodemographic characterization of the sample can be found in Appendix 2.
2. For further details, see section 'The contextualization of Portuguese territories'.

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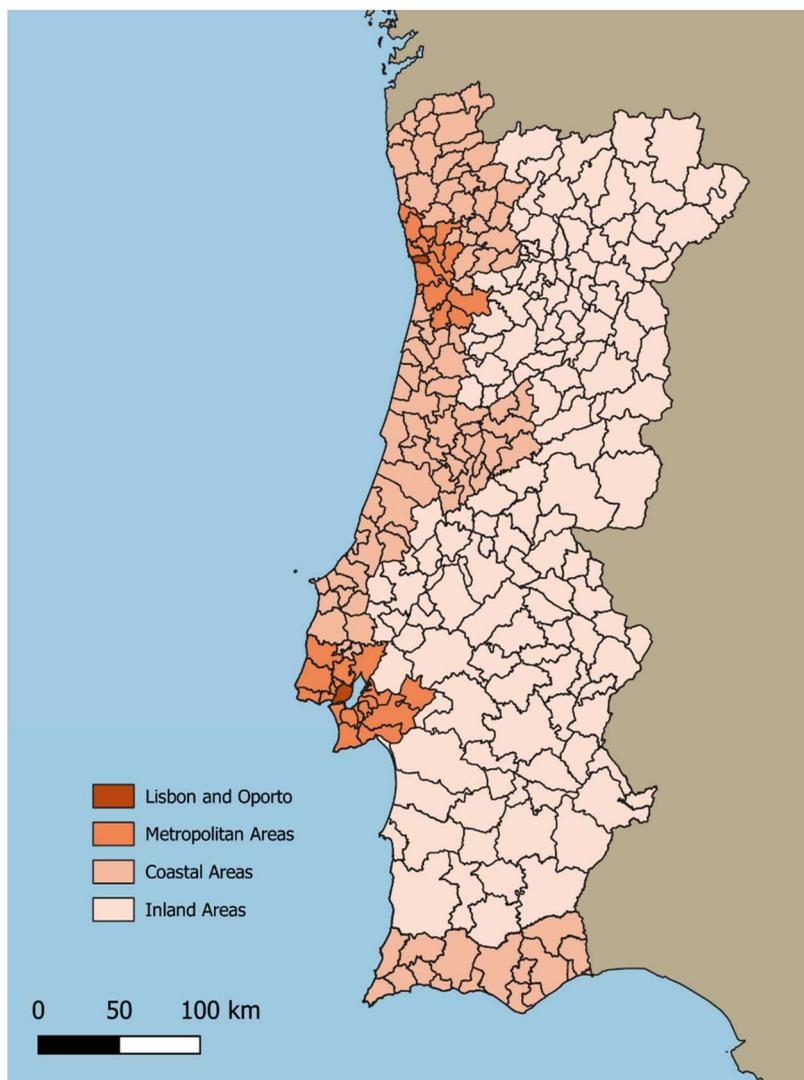
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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Map of Portugal illustrating the typology of large territorial areas.



Appendix 2 – Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample.

| | | <i>n</i> | % |
|----------------------|-----------------|----------|------|
| Sex | F | 2505 | 49.4 |
| | M | 2571 | 50.6 |
| | Total | 5076 | 100 |
| Age group | 18–21 | 1469 | 28.9 |
| | 22–25 | 1149 | 22.6 |
| | 26–29 | 931 | 18.3 |
| | 30–35 | 1528 | 30.1 |
| | Total | 5076 | 100 |
| Educational level | ISCED 0–5 | 2325 | 45.8 |
| | ISCED 6 | 1269 | 25.0 |
| | ISCED 7–8 | 1482 | 29.2 |
| | Total | 5076 | 100 |
| Main activity status | Employed | 1970 | 39.4 |
| | Student | 1975 | 39.4 |
| | Working student | 518 | 10.3 |
| | Unemployed | 544 | 10.9 |
| | Total | 5007 | 100 |
| Income | < 700€ | 773 | 25.3 |
| | 700-1.000€ | 681 | 22.3 |
| | 1.001-1.500€ | 779 | 25.5 |
| | 1.501-2.000€ | 369 | 12.1 |
| | > 2.000€ | 451 | 14.8 |
| | Total | 3053 | 100 |