

HOW GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENCES CONDITIONS CITY COMPETITIVENESS IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF PORTUGAL

1 INTRODUCTION

LOCALISATION AND AREA ANALYSIS CLIMATE

The study circumscribes to the Portuguese territory region placed in the north of Douro river, with very charismatic geomorphologic characteristics as well as villages and local architecture structures. Therefore, considering three regions in the north of Douro river, this study is especially addressed to the Minho and Trás-os-Montes regions (see image 1), although it might arise, punctually, one or another specific reference to examples of Douro Littoral region.

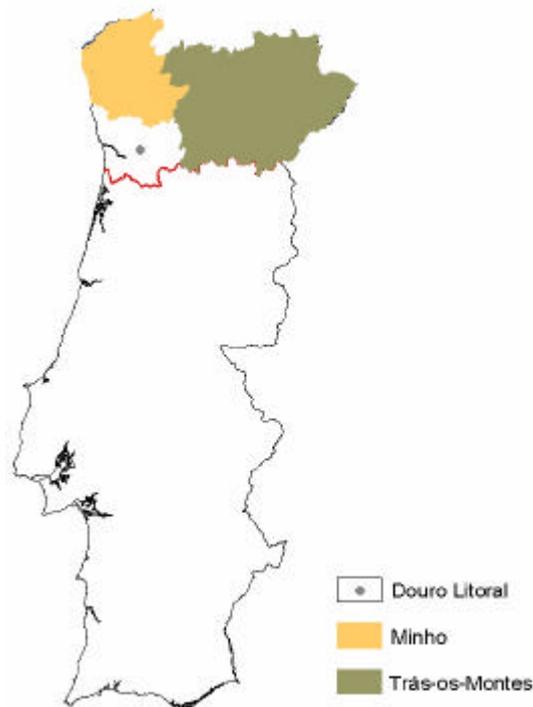


Image nº 1 – Portugal. Localisation of the study area on the national geographic space.

The analysis area composed by Minho and Trás-os-Monte regions include the northern territory of Portugal, reaching the maximum latitude of 42° 09', in one country which the total area is about 88 607 Km².

Situated at the occidental extreme of the Iberian Peninsula, the Portuguese territory, receives, naturally, the southern Mediterranean influence, and at north the Atlantic influence, especially on its coast fringe, where we know frequent precipitation and moderated summers, mainly in the mountain zones, as a consequence of the maritime air-masses that, particularly in the winter, reaches the territory, in the summer the precipitation is rare, mainly in the south of the country, due to the Mediterranean influence.

In the winter, the scenery is practically the summer opposite, that is, there are high precipitations, especially in the northwest, and the temperatures go down, mainly during the

night, because of the winds coming from high pressures centers formed in the interior of the Iberian Peninsula (continental action) and of the European and Central Asia anticyclone center.

Nevertheless, a distinctly and distinguishable relief, whether between the north or south of the country, whether inside of one same region, lead together with other elements, the soil nature for example, to a distinct setting of the populations and to the variety of development into new villages and ways of life, essentially anchored, since its origins, to its activities related to the primary sector.

2. CLIMATIC AND ARCHITECTURE IDENTITY ON THE REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE FROM THE NORTH OF PORTUGAL

2.1 Fundamental type of transmontane villages.

The transmontane villages subdivide themselves, essentially, in two kinds: the agglomerate, compact village and the extended village according to an organizer element.

The first kind it is the most common form of organization since it reacts better to the gathering model; on these villages, situated in the middle of the crops, the ways trace subordinates to the villages. As for the extended disposition, less frequent than the concentrated disposition, also this one almost ignores or despises the road trace, except a few punctual cases as Vilarandelo.

Northern Region			
Villages type			
typical northern house (<i>minhota</i> house)- connected to familiar farm exploration - predominant farm crop - (irrigated corn, field-open field)	Dispersed	Concentrated	- mountain house (<i>serrana</i> house) - circular development - it arises on the sierra flanks or at the top of the hills - mountain crops with cattle
	Minho	Trás-os-Montes	
Fertile soil (The settlement of these villages is always associated to the soil nature and to its fertility)			

Image nº2 – The main characteristics of the two types of villages of the northern region of Portugal – Dispersed village and agglomerated village.

2.2 Localization and formation criteria of the places.

On the northern region of Portugal we consider two types of villages: the dispersed village (see image nº 2) and the agglomerated village. The first one appears more often in Minho, while the second one it spreads to the inland, concretely on the Trás-os-Montes region.

The dispersed village is generally composed by a group of constructions that act as a base to the familiar farm exploration. On the agglomerated village we stand out the development of circular kind, in opposition to the linear development more frequent on the Portuguese regions from the Littoral Centre and Alentejo, formed by houses that gather itself in close solidarity, creating compact centre, the villages and the places darned on the sierra flanks or in the top of the hills. As Mário Moutinho refers, on his work *A Arquitectura Popular Portuguesa* (The Popular Portuguese Architecture), on the whole “(...) the streets are narrow

and sometimes are carved directly on the rocks which form the soil. These small streets give use to the residences and to the stalls, being therefore regularly covered by the cattle, on its way or back from the herbage”.

As far as the architectonic archetype is concerned, the most frequent houses in the northern region are the “Minhota” house (typical house of the Portuguese region *Minho*) and the mountain-house: “Minhota” house very characteristic of dispersed population in the region *Minho* and mountain-house, characteristic from the uplands of the region *Trás-os-Montes* and, more precisely, from the agglomerated population. However, other kind of vernacular constructions, not less important, can be found in that region: the annexe constructions directly related to farming and pasturing activities, and the religious constructions, such as pilgrimage chapels built on the top of hills, in isolated and different places, pilgrimage chapels built on hillsides and, with smaller dimensions, shrines that appear often and with great variety, materialising the faithful promises. The shrines shapes vary between the common niches in houses’ walls and kerbsides or crossings of roads or paths.

Between the two kinds of population referred, the agglomerated is the one that most promotes neighbours relationships and, possibly, the one that presents a weaker relation between the architecture house model and the climatic factors, since other criteria have prevailed against the disposition and morphological configuration of the houses.

In a first approach, the hydraulic factors could seem the main reason that would explain the fact of existing dispersed populations in the North coast of Portugal, in the region *Minho*, where the soil has plenty of water and the climate is humid, while the Inland presents in general a dry climate, therefore, more appropriate to the gathering of the population by the water courses. However, the hydraulic factors are, in this case, minor, though it conditions in general most part of the settling of the population; so, the factors that had a greater importance in the establishment of agglomerated populations in the Inland, namely in the *Trás-os-Montes* region, are:

- The physical nature of the uplands and mountains, the isolation and the communication difficulties;
- Rough climate;
- Soil less fertile;
- Colonisation system and the agrarian laws;
- Cultural system.

Referring to the first three factors, these constitute, naturally, a very favourable scenario to the agglomeration of the population, mainly because this way they would have each others help and benefit from the organisation of the old communes, a way of striving against the difficulties in an environment where the isolated rural exploration was unfavourable. But it was the rich soil the main factor that attracted mankind; under this factor comes the topography, protection against the winds, solar exposure, the agrarian laws, etc..

In conclusion, the so characteristic agglomeration of the population of the *Trás-os-Montes* region means to the mountain house the renounce of the advantages of a good solar orientation, since its implementation follows the rules of the grouping of houses, i.e., each house is set accordingly either to the interstitial spaces left by the neighbours or to the geometric orientation set by the village implementation or the delimited streets.

This way, the study of the relation of the bio climatic characteristics in the regional architecture, namely the morphological variation of the house details while singular constructive unit searching for better solar exposure, cannot be applied to the mountain house due to the above mentioned reasons; however, the same does not happen with the

typical house of the region *Minho*, that due to its insertion in dispersed population, presents a more flexible settlement and organization towards the benefits of proper solar exposure.

3. THE ENVIRONMENT'S INFLUENCE IN LODGING

The influence that the natural environment has on lodging is mainly shown by the nature of the construction materials used. These materials vary from region to region, the same happening to the specific architectonic characterisation. In the North of Portugal and namely in the northern part of the *Trás-Os-Montes* region, the house is built with stone of that area, usually extracted in the neighbour villages, revealing the subsoil nature. The materials used show a local or regional aspect of the villages, stressing its own human landscape.

In a rustic environment, the lodging shows not only the influence of the physical conditions of its region, but also the life and work habits of the peasants. While the image of the house constitutes the geologic mirror of the soil, by the materials used in its construction, its inside, and precisely the inner spatial disposal, shows the life conditions of the inhabitants. Therefore, the rustic house is a resulting synthesis of the junction of the man with his geographic environment, linked in the harmony and sustainability of the rustic system, sometimes dispersed, sometimes agglomerated.

The traditional construction techniques endure in the cultural inheritance of the knowledge passed from generation to generation, which allows Man to know how to use with expertise each material and develop the working technique; protecting, in a way, fundamental aspects of the safeguard of the collective memory of people and places and the assertion of values of citizenship, regionalism and plastic expressions that ground the scenario of the Portuguese art and the popular identity.

Although the use of vernacular construction and the accumulated knowledge, transmitted from generation to generation, do not have a scientific ground, this practice is not less effective.

4. NEW STIMULATING ALTERNATIVES FOR LIVING IN THE NORTH REGION. WHICH POLICIES AND WHICH MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS?

Although very synthesized, the physical and landscaping description presented in the above points intends, as far as possible, to show the scenario of the northern region of Portugal (essentially the regions of *Minho* and *Trás-Os-Montes*), since it presents a great potential to new life patterns, by the light of urban competitiveness and globalisation. Indeed, being supported by the idea that the globalisation means, in a general way, to offer more chances of accessibility to regional, national and international differences of several nature (cultural, historical and economic), promoting the approach and interaction of different people and cultures in a time each day more competitive, it's obvious that the civilized vernacular groups present nowadays a more competitive potential, in view of new life ways, more qualified and capable of extending its differences and identity. So, it's about improving towards the main goal of globalisation – *develop the differences qualities, instead of, as often mistaken, merging identities.*

In a period when the more developed cities meet, in most cases, its competitive border, it's important now to improve more life alternatives accommodated by more prospective and scooping government and local policies, capable of joining the aims of economic development, nationally and regionally, with the particular interests of persons/families with investment power in certain populations far from big metropolis, being these populations their hometowns or some others that, for one reason or another, attracted them.

In the North of Portugal, as well as in other regions of the country, this phenomena of searching the inland starts now to develop considerably, possibly more stressed due to the small dimension of the country. However, it's a special process since it is not accommodated with sector policies capable of increasing these events. At the level of the territory ordering and planning, the profit is still very low: the most visible effectiveness of these instruments remains only in the regulation of the occasional transformations of the existing buildings, in the new approved constructions and, in some cases, in the ordered classification of constructions or areas that for its qualities fit in special protection dispositions.

At the same level as the aims of regional development and, concerning the intervention in the vernacular agglomerates, there is still a micro vision of the isolated or occasional valorisation of villages or places construction without considering regional policies capable of assuring a more competitive and effective regional development (and national). Indeed, due to the reduced budgetary capacity of the Portuguese municipalities, specially the smaller ones, this policies conciliation constitutes, in our opinion, the way with greater synergetic advantage in what the globalisation and competitiveness are concerned.

4.1 Principles for a competitive enlivening of the vernacular centers. Conclusion.

In spite of the registered search that nowadays we note for the most interior country places, of vernacular charisma, referred on the previous point, the fact is that we still observe, in many of these places, the abandonment resulting of the desertification phenomenon. According to A. Lourenço Fontes (2000), the real causes of this desertification are:

- Illiteracy, socio cultural delay;
- Lack of information;
- Above and below underdevelopment;

Concerning the less real causes, these ones divide themselves in:

- Europe pattern utopia, Portuguese adventure;
- Rural unemployment.

Considering this scenery, aggravated essentially with the emigration flow to France, since the 60th decade, of younger Portuguese proceeding from places and villages of the inland, it is important to comment some principles for the more competitive enlivening of these vernacular centers, even though it is not our goal to run out, on this study, all the principles that might regulate future interferences, since others might be created in the future as a direct consequence of the transformation that is legitimately expected from this places.

Consequently, in a concise way, and in the imminence of the creation and implementation of new politics more articulated, participated and of more innovator management systems, we consider as essential the following principles to contemplate, prepared from A. Lourenço Fontes (2000):

- Organize the education, covering all the less privileged places, along the year;
- To supply the places and villages with the indispensable social equipment, according to its kind of deficiencies, resident kind of population and age level. In this way, it must take place the adjustment of the specific existing buildings, such as old schools, outbuilding currently deactivated which in former times supported farm activity, parochial houses, etc;
- To empower small local companies and create incitement to the rising of new business especially focalized to the production of local or regional products;

- To promote volunteering principles through the parish church, parish council and any other organized groups or associations, as well as to create young-social leadership boarders;
- To develop interaction mechanisms between the public and private agents (to speak with state and regional organizations, to discuss solutions, hypothesis and new ideas to carry out);
- To create privileged zones for the settlement of residents, providing them basic infrastructures;
- To provide new rural construction zones compatible with its geomorphologic and biophysics characteristics;
- To enlarge the innovation and the information circuits transmission regarding these places to other destinations, usually less provided, as the emigrants communities of Portuguese emigrants living abroad;
- To create and program new activities implementation associated to leisure and tourism capable to attract new visitors and to encourage the residents settlement (camping, fishing, mountain climbing, radical sports, etc.);
- To support the production and commercialization systems development of the local and regional products diversity;
- To promote the cultural activities development and the behavior that can reinforce the places civilizable identity;
- To develop the genetic patrimony of some kind of rustic animals created in these regions, which are autochthons species, which we can find only in Portugal.

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