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The power of the cities and the power in the cities: a multiscale perspective from Portugal

El poder de las ciudades y el poder en las ciudades:
una perspectiva multiescalar desde Portugal

José Alberto Rio Fernandes 

jariofernandes@gmail.com

*CEGOT - Centre of Studies in Geography and Spatial Planning
University of Porto (Portugal)*

Filipe Teles 

filipe.teles@ua.pt

*Research Unit on Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policies
Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences
University of Aveiro (Portugal)*

Pedro Chamusca 

pedrochamusca@ua.pt

*Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences
University of Aveiro (Portugal)
CEGOT - Centre of Studies in Geography and Spatial Planning*

João Seixas 

jseixas@fcsb.unl.pt

*CICS.NOVA, Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences
NOVA FCSH, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Nova University of Lisbon (Portugal)*

Abstract

Cities –or the urban complex spaces that they are becoming– are vital in society’s future, particularly in a general context of globalization. In this setting, power fragmentation and government to governance transitions, which are indisputable and significant phenomena, go hand in hand with urban movements that are becoming increasingly relevant, both through their direct action, and as a consequence of democratic responsibility. In Portugal, however, urban movements and civic associations in general seem rather discreet in their activities, dimension and role. In fact, there is no strong evidence that the 2008–2014 crisis has brought any dramatic change in these aspects. In this article we aim to shed some light on plausible explanations for this apparent inertia. Signs of change, in a context of increased governance and new urban dynamics do exist but do not seem to follow the trend that is thriving in several cities on other European countries. In face of new opportunities for a multiscale approach to politics, planning and action, after centuries of a (still) dominant hierarchical and sectorial approach, we examine the context of the power of the cities and in the cities in Portugal.

Keywords: cities; governance; power; urban movements.

Resumen

Las ciudades, o los complejos espacios urbanos en que se están transformando, son vitales en la sociedad del futuro, particularmente en un contexto de globalización en que la fragmentación del poder y la transición de la gobernanza tradicional a la gobernanza acompañan movimientos urbanos que aumentan su relevancia, ya sea a través de acción directa o por el incremento de la responsabilidad democrática. En Portugal, sin embargo, los movimientos urbanos y las asociaciones cívicas en general son discretos en sus actividades, dimensión y relevancia. De hecho, no hay indicios de que la crisis de 2008–2014 haya provocado un cambio muy significativo. En este artículo intentamos arrojar alguna luz sobre las causas de esta aparente inercia. Creemos que aun que haya algunos signos de cambio, en un contexto de transición a la gobernanza y de nuevas dinámicas urbanas, todo queda muy distante de lo que se está produciendo en otros países europeos. En un contexto de cambio para un abordaje multiescalar de la política, de las políticas públicas, de la planificación y de la acción, después de siglos de enfoque jerárquico y sectorial (aún) dominante, nuestro examen centra-se no contexto do poder de las ciudades y en las ciudades.

Palabras clave: ciudades; gobernanza; poder; movimientos urbanos.

1 Introduction

The globalization process has overwhelming impacts at international, national and local levels on political, economic and social processes: information instantly reaches the most varied places; capital circulates with high fluidity; goods move in increasingly planetary chained processes; people move between places in a much more rapid and complex way, with the most different purposes, resources and times. However, the last decades have also been characterized by political turmoil, the retraction of liberal democracies and the surprising return of nationalisms, coinciding with the increase of capitalism unbalances and the generation of considerable increases in social and spatial inequalities in most territorial systems. In this context, urban regions and a small group of places with special global influence (Sassen, 1991) —including extensive and relatively discontinuous territories (Hall & Pain, 2006; Ascher, 1998)— where people, wealth and political influence are concentrated, play a key role not only in economic development and growth, but also in social unrest and the questioning of the models of progress.

In addition to these processes of unbalanced globalization and political neoliberal and national drifts, new processes of metropolization are taking place, conjugating the concentration of capital fluxes with new patterns of spatial injustice and territorial segregation. The concomitant growth of social discontent inflates social protest and the advent of new urban movements.

The demonstrations of what came to be called the "Arab Spring," with protests in various locations in the Middle East and North Africa (especially what happened in Tunisia and Egypt, or the civil wars in Syria and Libya), can be seen as signs of these growing feelings of segregation and inequality. That is not exclusive of the poorest countries, regions or cities and is seen after the 2008–2014 crisis, and more recently for different reasons, in relevant metropolises like Barcelona, Hong Kong, Santiago de Chile and London.

In a relatively peripheral country like Portugal these convulsions seem comparatively distant and even the rise of new urban movements has a somewhat differential pace. In political terms, the long-established centralism remains evident, with most of the major decisions taken by the National Government or by international stakeholders, including the European Union. However, despite this conjugation of centralism with internationalism being highly recognized, there are no significant signs of populist drifts or nationalist impulses, and a relatively healthy and reasonably strong democratic local power seems to be enough to prevent popular unrest. In the meantime, and most particularly at the subnational level, a government to governance paradigmatic change is on its way, while civic associations remain considerably fragile, and formal political institutions

seem to have a dual approach to new forms of active participation, as they try to simultaneous incentive and somehow control it.

Considering this general framework and the Portuguese context, we reflect on these processes from the perspective of the cities and its most recent changes (political, economic and social), within a multiscalar approach. Our research is focused on key challenges faced by urban territories when dealing with these new dynamics in the aftermath of a severe economic crisis, and now also considering expected changes due to the context of the covid-19 pandemic. In this paper we analyse and provide tentative answers to three major questions:

1. Worldwide territories, and particularly cities, are facing a set of new political, economic and social dynamics, resulting from globalization and higher mobility, that may change in a near future. What are the key-drivers of change in the political and social organizations of the urban territories? Are we effectively moving to new political and policy conceptual frameworks and practices based on 'governance without government' perspectives? What is the role of civil society and social movements?
2. In a context of globalization, metropolization and post-suburbanization, how do Portuguese urban areas face possible new types of vulnerabilities? Are they introducing new governance principles as well as institutional dynamics and promoting greater involvement, participation and empowerment of citizens? If yes, in what forms and ways are they developing those steps?
3. In the particular Southern European context, urban movements have emerged after the dramatic subprime crisis and the widespread precarity of urban life. Are Portuguese urban societies heading to growing social unrest or the new expressions of social movements remain relatively controlled? If that is the case, what reasons sustain that stability?

This article is structured in six parts, including this introduction, a short presentation of methods and a conclusion. The article's main bulk is constituted of part 3, where our theoretical approach and background is presented, dealing with political change and cities in the globalization process, as well as governance in the urban context. It is followed by the analysis of the Portuguese case, divided in two parts (4 and 5) addressing a) participation and the multiscalar approach to governance, both in legislative production and in practice, and b) associative and urban movements and civic action, in their nature and dynamics.

2 Methods

To understand the power of the cities and the power in the cities in a multiscale perspective, we need to bear in mind a theoretical perspective that considers the situation in the world, in Europe and Portugal and different qualitative and quantitative methods.

To have a broad outline of the major political and social organization changes —especially those related with urban political transformation—, we first conducted a qualitative content analysis of relevant policy documents and scientific research in different cities on diverse geographical contexts. Secondly, we focus on Portugal as a case study. To do so we collected quantitative and qualitative data on the urban rehabilitation and governance policy documents and funding mechanisms, including access to official sources on decentralization policies, urban rehabilitation projects and social movements. In addition, some exploratory interviews were conducted with senior members of associations, university researchers and experienced social actors.¹

3 Political, economic and social organization: an ever-changing context

3.1 The global dynamics

The main assumptions of the global economy and politics of recent decades could be presented in three statements: globalization will continue to increase its spreading and overall impacts; power is moving from West to East (Nye, 2011); world free trade is the path for development and economic growth. The pace of change has never been so intense, diverse and multi-layered. One would easily predict a world in which information travels instantaneously, capital and goods in relatively simple and, sometimes, untraceable ways, and people move faster and constantly. Despite controls and barriers, or specific incentives to attract talent or investments, there is also a sense that globalization does not follow a clear and predictable path determined by specific policy incentives.

In addition, we have witnessed the growth of our individual and institutional interconnectedness and the relevance of networks, both digitally and socially. These movements of detachment from place, where power is seen as following an upward route and communities are considered to be much more easily described as occurring in digital and immaterial settings rather than attached to

¹ We would like to express our gratitude, especially to José Carlos Mota (Universidade de Aveiro), Nuno Oliveira (FAPAS) and Nuno Quental (Campo Aberto).

places of belonging, seem to contribute to this brief description of a context of upscaling and detachment.

This volatile and interdependent world faces enormous contradictions. On one hand there are easily identifiable trends, as the increasing importance of urban networks (Goh, 2020; Parnell, 2016; Acuto, 2020a), regional and urban economies, as well as sub-national governance (Kim, 2020; Pires et al., 2020; Teles, 2016), or city governments in the implementation of climate agendas (i.e. Gustafsson & Mignon, 2020). On the other hand, pressing and urgent phenomena and new leaders point to nationalism resurgences (Bieber, 2018; Teles, 2018), and the recent impact of the Covid19 pandemic (Ward, 2020) bring forward the debate regarding a new and more relevant role of the state, including forms of Keynesian revivalism. Nevertheless, this has become also a debate with divergent perspectives, namely from those suggesting pandemic crisis' role in reinforcing the importance of localized urban answers (Cave et al, 2020), with adaptable policies (Acuto, 2020b), and with cities at the frontline of answers to the crisis (OECD, 2020).

This isn't the simple story one could tell based on the leading main assumptions of the global trends announced in the end of the twentieth century. In fact, the claim that globalization, detachment from place, and power upscaling are the only games in town, fade into the evidences of clear divergent paths. An acritical perspective totally based on the globalization main assumptions would be misleading and, in due time, flawed. In fact, what was meant to be the "end of history", led us to the reinforcement of strong centralized powers and the return of nationalisms in several countries. Strong leaderships seem to survive well in contexts of fragile democracies, and the power of centralized nation states provide the perfect setting for their exercise of control.

At the same time, there was a belief –especially in European countries– in the unstoppable and unattackable virtues of welfare state, as well as its exportable potential to other developing economies and democracies in process of consolidation. Public administration reforms inspired by new public management approaches, the impact of financial crisis, the growth of counter ideological movements, have been pushing forward other ways of organizing social protection and reducing the role of the state in such matters.

This has also contributed to one of the only clear prerogatives that can summarize these contradictory and extremely complex dynamics: the subtle and impactful fragmentation of power, that seems even more difficult to understand in face of the asymmetric effects of COVID-19.

Thus, a much more complex and multilayered analysis is needed to understand contemporary social, political and economic processes. The irreversibility of globalization may be a true statement, which is in essence impossible to demonstrate, given its intrinsic predictive nature. However, it requires a nuanced approach that includes the multiple and contradictory processes of downscaling and upscaling of power, as both cities and world regions become more relevant and community engagement is recognized as essential.

Our argument is not that global trade will disappear, or that nation states are falling apart. The key is that this is no longer a one-way path, and a simple description does not provide a complete and accurate picture of reality, and much less of what the future may bring us.

By exploring this diversity in global dynamics, particularly those related to the roles of state, democracy, place and of governance, one will certainly understand better the impact of power fragmentation and the relevant role that cities play in the national and global context, as well as the role power itself plays in the cities. These are the two main aspects in which this article is focused.

Two of the given pillars of modernity have been severely shaken during recent times: the locus of power and its nature. Nation states used to seat at the apex of control, with the rule over the traditional constitutional powers of deliberation on the law, the capacity and instruments to implement policies through the executive powers and their institutions, and the possibility to judge over it, by enforcing the law and through the separate powers of the judicial system. Resources distribution and control over the public administration were easily understandable and explainable. This picture of a Weberian way of state policy production contrasts dramatically with the current state of affairs: with fluid networks of inter-institutional policy implementation and public service delivery, multilevel governance with numerous public and private organizations, state's soft regulation in some policy areas, and –obviously– the general trends of globalization. In addition, states are now called to deal with social, economic and environmental challenges of greater complexity, legitimizing the diversification and expansion of governance networks, in complex multi-level systems, especially in eurozone and Schengen treaty European countries that have to deal with strong and sometimes multiple subnational layers.

The two pillars are much more fragile. The location of power shifts as a consequence of global economy's fluidity, demographic forces, and institutional changes. The traditional notions of where power lies had a simple consequentialist rationale: it was possible to design –and improve– the tools to exert control over, to make it accountable, and to assure its responsiveness.

People and institutions were traceable in such a formal setting. Its nature is also changing, as a consequence of the above. It is no longer confined to the authority of government and it is less concentrated on single or few recognizable institutions. This shift has a profound impact on the way politics, economics and social life is organized. Our tools for collective action are fluid and scattered.

As argued by Neil Brenner (2004), the analyses of the transformation of statehood have mainly focused on two scales –national and supranational. These post-Fordist and post-national approaches have neglected the “explosion of spaces” (Brenner, 2004, p. 1), namely the subnational scales, which, in fact, require an intensive investment of time and research. The resurgence of cities and regions as poles of economic growth, policy innovation, and democratic experimentation present good evidence of this need. At the same time, issues related to sociospatial justice, territorial segregation, and spatial inequalities require further analysis and geographically intelligent political measures.

The realm of political and policy practice is, in fact, in great need of a set of new conceptual frameworks, as suggested by Innerarity’s (2020) theory of complex democracy, and a new set of policy and political tools and institutions to address the ongoing struggles over the future of power. It is well illustrated by Harvey’s (1985) claim of an endemic tension between motion and fixity, between detachment from space –as one of the driving forces of globalization– and the immovable spatial structures. Territories replaced by arenas, organizations overthrown by networks, and state supplanted by agents are semantic evidences of this power fragmentation. There is no obvious program, stable theoretical edifice or ideological claim that can be invoked to establish an orderly new politics and governance in a context of dynamic power shift, unbalance and fragmentation, as the one described above. Daniel Innerarity may have established the baselines for a more comprehensive debate around these issues, namely those with a wider impact on democracy (Innerarity, 2020). The claim for a complex theory of democracy is nothing else than the recognition that with the usual political and decision-making tools, it is impossible to manage, and even to understand, the functioning and possibilities of democracy, when facing these contemporary challenges.

Under these conditions, a relevant challenge is to develop a scale and power-sensitive analysis of contemporary cities that can grasp not only the institutional rescaling and the statehood fragmentation, but also the significantly uneven consequences of the new political economy of scale (Brenner, 2004) having in mind not only the rights of every citizen in the city but also the

aspirational and utopian construction of “the right of the city” as theorized by Lefebvre (1968). Supranational institutional structures, globalization and post-Fordist patterns of public service production and delivery are challenging the state’s role and significance. At the same time, this coexists with complex intra-national multilevel governance structures, spatial inequalities, and the crucial role of urban regions with a small group of cities with global influence (Sassen, 1991), where talent, wealth and political power is concentrated. Finally, and most importantly, urban regions are also the places of participation and democratic innovation, social and territorial transformation, institutional advancement, and of citizen and communitarian disruption, demonstration and hope.

3.2 Government with governance and vice-versa

Since the emergence of neoliberal political economics, the fall of the Berlin wall and the admission of China into WTO, the world is witnessing widespread technological and economic transformations with quite uneven territorial impacts. And, as above reflected, the development of growing political changes and reconfigurations, most notably in the urban arenas. However, if these changes were showing a steady rescaling of statehood capacities on territorial politics (Brenner, 2004) and a generalized trend ‘from government to governance’ (Le Galés, 1995), recent social and ecological pressures have brought the need for a comprehensive revision of these trends and for more complex interpretations on the functioning of urban and metropolitan democracies (Innerarity, 2020).

The fact is that contemporary urban areas are facing new types of complexities and ambiguities, enhancing the activation of more transversal but also more dispersed governance landscapes (Merrifield, 2013; Moulaert et al., 2013). The vertiginous transition to the new digital era, alongside with the consolidation of global urbanisation, provoked not only the ‘explosion of places’ but also a parallel ‘time and space implosion’ (Brenner, 2014). Bringing the social, economic and ecological sustainability of urban habitats and economies to the centre of the debates directly linked to the future of humanity and the planet itself. This is combining a wide range of both opportunities with most serious dilemmas on the foundations of the main established models of progress (Harvey, 2010; Piketty, 2014).

In geographical terms, in most urban regions the long spatial dispersion trends are being combined with specialized concentrations of activities and people (Sassen, 2007). These global dynamics involve processes where, in each city or metropolis, an increased number of people have differentiated habitat experiences, working capabilities, mobility and consumption habits.

Urban regions are becoming palimpsests marked by multicentrism, polycentrism and archipelago complexes where the various rhythms of inhabitants and visitors originate a great diversity of space-time realities as well as urban rights conditions. This complexity, although very attractive for analysis and interpretation, is however extremely challenging in terms of diagnosis and interpretation, requiring newly in-depth and specialized knowledge.

Similar perspectives as for urban politics. As main speculums of transition in the governance arenas, urban territories have become semi planned and organic ambiguous mixtures of varied political and programmatic networks and dynamics. Today there can be seen a juxtaposition of several strategic enforcements and innovative proposals alongside a panorama of considerable fragmentation of results and inertia. Albeit a vast myriad of innovative strategic and political approaches, there remains a considerable feeling of the limitations in the capacity building and governing action of many cities and metropolises in face of the challenges before them. These questionings being positioned alongside the rise of new forms of localism and populism trends, by its part recently reinforced by the COVID-19 crisis and some of its political reactions (OECD, 2020).

In these perspectives, it is relevant to express that southern European urban territories have also undergone vast socioeconomic and ecological transition dynamics (Seixas & Albet, 2012), with most of the questionings here expressed clearly applying. Including the present vulnerabilities in the main urban and metropolitan Portuguese territories, put in stage by the combination of structural urban governance weaknesses, the severe austerity years, and several liberalisation processes that created fragile regulatory systems on fundamental urban dimensions like in the housing and real estate markets. Leading to vast socioeconomic consequences, now reinforced with the sudden COVID-19 crisis. There are extremely important challenges related to housing, economy and ecology coming from before this new crisis (Seixas & Guterres, 2019), steadily coming from before the new crisis and now obviously facing new positioning dilemmas alongside the pressures for new sound national as well as local economic policies.

At the same time, the urban and regional Portuguese political spaces were also tending in most recent years to experience steady reconfigurations towards new metropolitan, intermunicipal and multilevel public policy frameworks. Concomitantly, these dimensions will also be under new stress in face of the new crisis.

These perspectives have been also consistently highlighted by the EU urban agendas and the cohesion policies guidelines, stressing domains like territorial cohesion, spatial justice, reduction

of inequalities, healthy environments, circular economy and developing conditions for more integrated strategic urban development (European Commission, 2019 & 2020). Reinforcing the needs for wider political and policy clarity and effectiveness, through knowledgeable and multilevel administrative systems, wider governance dynamics and active stakeholder involvement (LeGates and Stout, 2016; Subirats, 2016). Experiences in co-governance or even political co-production with particularly rich civic participation environments, like the Pla de Barris in Barcelona (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2020) or the BIP/ZIP programme in Lisbon (CM Lisboa, 2020), are being steadily positioned as successful laboratory experiments for broader use in wider urban universes.

These proposals seemed to be, at the same time, steadily supported and inclusively postulated by the “civil society”. In several cities of different size and geographies there is a gradual development of new types of social movements and transformative practices of varied and stimulating natures (Nel.lo, 2015). New sociocultural behaviours are emerging (Leontidou, 2010; Mayer, 2009) contributing to growing civic pressures and to a myriad of innovative processes of urban governance and public participation actions, from the neighbourhood to the metropolitan scales, confirming the ever-remarkable capacity of several urban societies to configure criticism and sociopolitical reaction, confronting interests, demanding claims, proposing projects directed for the common goods (Mattei, 2011). Most of these social dynamics happen when there are combined reasonable densities of sociocultural critical mass, the influence from qualified professions and some sort of public support (Subirats, 2016). And now, as mostly expected to strongly develop in the following times due to the new crisis, urban landscapes of wider economic difficulties, qualified unemployment and growing social and spatial inequalities. Most of the time these civic pressures were mostly triggered by contesting actions of governments of cities and their public administrations. But there is a widespread nurturing, particularly in urban tissues and from younger generations, in the main Portuguese cities and its vast metropolitan territories as Lisbon and Porto, but also in several other cities like Aveiro, Viseu, Braga or Faro, of new cultures and forms of exercise of civic politics and much more participated, transversal, collaborative and committed practices.

These synergetic processes, albeit showing an apparent fragmentation, might well support the new theories for democratic complexity. Even, or precisely in face of the huge social and economic transitions under development. Veltz (2008) also argued that the main factors for qualified governance are *quality, feedback and innovation* and the vital competitive edge is in the *relational structures* supporting organisational networks. Therefore, strengthening political co-

production would require a multiplicity of characteristics to be fostered in the DNA of the urban tissues, and no longer just in its classical institutional landscapes, thus the ability to: interpret new codes of urban ecology and cohesion, sustain firm principles of urban life, understand and work in different sectors and territories, foster open, multi-scalar and subsidiary governance and administration structures, develop *networking* coordination and co-manage multi-nodal networks (Sennett, 2016).

4 Recent changes in Portugal: participation, and multiscalar approach in governance

As an integral part of the EU and of the global dynamics, Portugal also displays these changes and dilemmas, albeit with different territorial patterns. In this section we analyse participation, governance and urban change. First, we explore the evolution of the legal framework, marked by the incorporation of European principles, associated with governance, and especially its relationship with partnerships, networks and the involvement of private actors and civil society in decision-making processes, in several policy documents and decision-making instruments. Then we analyse the practical application of these guidelines, evaluating their effects and, in particular, the impacts on urban governance, considering institutional and relational changes in a multiscalar perspective.

4.1 The legislative context

The Portuguese government is structured in four hierarchical levels: central, regional, intraregional, and local. This structure may be characterized by a dual centralism (Fernandes, 2006) since national government and municipalities (the only two constitutional tiers of government) concentrate the essential of the administrative and political functions. Moreover, the regional scale has a real territorial expression only in the autonomous regions of Madeira and Azores, with the Regional Coordination and Development Commissions acting as unconcentrated bodies of the State in the continental part of Portugal, being totally dependent from a ministry, despite an apparent financial and administrative autonomy.

Recognizing this strong centralism, national government has developed initiatives of decentralization and valorisation of participatory processes as well as oriented to reinforce governance principles, namely openness, transparency, and empowerment of other groups of stakeholders. Three sets of initiatives should be highlighted.

The first one is associated with the intermediate scales. The fragility of the subnational levels, the concentration of administrative and planning functions in the government, and the ineffectiveness of previous solutions, reinforced public pressures to create new intraregional entities that were able to reduce inefficiency resulting from the inexistence of a regional administration. Intermunicipal Communities and Metropolitan Areas were created by Law No. 45/2008 of 27/08 to promote the planning and management of economic, social, and environmental development strategies; the articulation of municipal investments of intraregional interest; and the participation in the management of regional development support programmes (Teles, 2016a).

Within the context of the bailout (Teles, 2016b), and given the acknowledgment of the relevance of these entities and of the effects of some interventions at this scale would lead the government to approve the statutes of intermunicipal entities through Law No. 75/2013 of 12/09. In this diploma, the attributions of metropolitan areas and intermunicipal communities are clear, their scope of intervention being extended to the participation or management of networks of services and equipment in the area of transport, water, energy and solid waste treatment, as well as in the articulation of municipal interventions in health, education or spatial planning.

The second initiative is associated with the decentralization process. After some earlier initiatives to strength the competences of municipalities in the field of planning, licensing and supervision (Law No. 5-A/2002 of 11/01) –and the legal advances in valuing intermediate scales (metropolitan areas and intermunicipal communities)– we've assisted, recently, to a relevant increase of the legal competences to be decentralized, with Law No. 50/2018 of 16/08 . It defines the efficiency and effectiveness of public management, territorial cohesion and the guarantee of universality and equal opportunities of access to the public service as the major goals of the transfer of attributions and competences process. It covers areas such as education, health, culture, housing, the registration information, forest and protected areas management, transport and communication routes, citizen service structures or proximity policing among many others. It also states that municipalities can, through an inter-administrative contract, delegate power to the parish structures in all areas that will serve better the inhabitants' interests. At a superior level, intermunicipal entities become responsible for managing all intra-regional projects, with a special role in the management of projects financed with European funds and for raising investment. Finally, it stipulates a gradual transferring process that can completed until 2021.

The third initiative is associated with the reconfiguration of urban development approaches in relation with the principles of governance. In this respect, the effects and notoriety of programs such as URBAN II and POLIS reinforced the conviction that urban rehabilitation should be associated with urban regeneration, through a coherent and concerted perspective that had to gather multiple sectors (social, cultural, environmental, economic, heritage) and consider various scales. In this respect the POLIS XXI urban policy (Decree-Law No. 312/2007) provided a decisive change, as it promoted participatory models and regeneration strategies based on a partnership logic, networking of collective action and the construction of a shared vision. POLIS XXI philosophy basics were respected by the Sustainable Cities 2020 Strategy –that is supported by EU financed Strategic Urban Development Plans and Urban Regeneration Action Plans (within Portugal 2020)— and by legal figures (Urban Rehabilitation Areas and Urban Rehabilitation Operations, regulated by Decree-Law No. 307/2009), contributing to the reinforcement of participatory logics in the context of planning and decision-making processes, parallel to some more capitalistic funding mechanisms like Jessica and IFFRU 2020.

4.2 The practices

Legislative changes have been associated with the development of new practices that value governance principles, citizen participation and the role of cities in sustainable development, focusing mainly on the so-called urban regeneration strategies. Looking at urban regeneration policies in the last two decades, we identify a space-based, holistic and specific approach to a certain place, where different interests intersect: social/housing, morphologic/historic, energy/comfort, real-estate/economic, and more, with an impossible perfect integration of all the dimensions, and the combination always depending on the objectives and priorities of those of who have the power to decide.

Globally, it should be mentioned the influence of what some call a certain Europeanization of national planning policies (McCann, 2015). This is certainly the case of Portugal, marked by the introduction of several the principles of governance and public participation in urbanism, as the result from European guidelines associated to communitarian funding frameworks.

There were several important moments related to urban rehabilitation and the introduction of new urban management principles and practices (Table 1), most of them with EU funding. In fact, the strategic guidelines associated with European policy and a set of rules to allow cities and urban regions to access to communitarian funding seem to play a more relevant role in the evolution of Portuguese urban policy than political change in governments. Nine constitutional governments

were in office, led by the Socialist Party –PS (Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament) or the Social Democratic Party– PSD (European People’s Party – Christian Democrats) in a government coalition with the Christian democrats of CDS-PP: PS (1999–2002); PSD, with CDS-PP (2002–2004 & 2004–2005); PS (2005–2009 & 2009–2011); PSD, with CDS-PPP (2011–2015 & 2015); PS with the support of left wing parties (2015–2019); PS (2019–...).

In a global analysis, we can say that the main initiatives developed by the right-wing governments lead by PSD tend to favour the private initiative, while more left-wing PS placed a greater social focus and seem to take participation more seriously. However, these differences are not always very clear, and that is much more so at the local level.

Table 1. Major urban policies in Portugal (21st century)

DATE	URBAN POLICY INSTRUMENT	TYPE	MAJOR GOALS (simplified)	GOVERNANCE IMPACTS	GOVERNMENT IN OFFICE
2004–2018	Urban Rehabilitation Companies	Territorial strategy Operational	To promote the urban rehabilitation of historic areas and critical urban areas.	Public-private partnerships are fostered. Strategic planning and community empowerment and participation are understood as nuclear to urban areas management.	PSD
2007–2013	POLIS XXI City Policy	Territorial strategy	To qualify and integrate different spaces in inclusive, coherent, sustainable and well informed urban operations with the participation of citizens. To strengthen and diversify the human, institutional, cultural and economic capital of each city. To qualify and intensify the integration of the city in the surrounding region. To innovate for qualification.	Local/intraregional cooperation, partnerships, area-based initiatives and multi-level urban actions are promoted. Governance principles are introduced to urban policies and strategies.	PS
2007–2010	Partnerships for Urban Rehabilitation	Legal/Financial	To support actions for the revitalization of critical neighbourhoods, abandoned urban areas, historic centres and river front, considering environmental, physical, economic and social dimensions. To develop new forms of urban management, strengthening citizen participation and cooperation.	Local partnerships between public entities, private sector and civil society is promoted. Governance principles are introduced to urban policies and strategies.	PS

Table 1. Continuation

2009	Legal Regime of Urban Rehabilitation	Legal	To qualify and revitalize cities, in particular their most degraded areas, and qualify the housing stock, seeking a more harmonious and sustainable urban life for all, ensuring decent housing.	Area based initiatives and strategic planning within communities is fostered	PS
2009–2021	JESSICA Fund Portugal	Financial	To support private rehabilitation operations of higher risk.	Public-private partnerships are fostered, with direct funding to private rehabilitation of buildings	PS
2014–2020	Strategic Plans for Urban Development	Legal/Financial	To promote low-carbon strategies. To develop measures that improve urban environment, recover and decontaminate abandoned industrial areas. To support the physical, economic and social regeneration of disadvantaged communities in urban and rural areas.	Public-centred strategies for urban development. Private/civil society participation is valued. Governance models are promoted.	PSD
2015	Sustainable Cities 2020 Strategy	Territorial strategy	To qualify in an integrated way, promoting the functional, cultural, social and economic development of diverse problematic urban areas, including historical centres.	Area-based initiatives and community empowerment and participation are promoted. Governance principles are relevant for urban policies and strategies success.	PSD
2018–2021	Financial Instrument for Urban Rehabilitation and Revitalization	Financial	To provide easy access to financing for investment promoters in the area of urban rehabilitation. To promote the integral rehabilitation of buildings aged 30 years or older, including social housing and industrial units.	Public-private partnerships are fostered, with direct funding to private rehabilitation of buildings	PS

Source: own elaboration

Considering the relation of urban rehabilitation with governance, the POLIS XXI city policy deserves special attention, particularly through its “Partnerships for Urban Regeneration” program (PUR). PUR was designed to finance programmes for an integrated action in small urban areas, implemented by local partnerships led by municipalities that should contribute to new forms of governance in urban spaces, able to strengthen citizen participation and to produce flexible and hybrid structures of cooperation between different stakeholders, and as so capable to improve the performance of urban planning, by the means of a project spirit and a space-based articulation. The PUR supported actions for critical neighbourhoods (or “problematic areas”),

peripheries (or “less used areas”), abandoned areas (as “old industrial”), historical centres (at the time with several houses void and in ruins) and riverside front rehabilitation (in several cases with severe environment problems).

Practice revealed the immense difficulty of implementing all the multidimensional objectives (cultural, social, economic, environmental) that was foreseen, and of introducing the then revolutionary participatory and governance principles. In fact, the analysis that was made to some of the cases (Chamusca, 2012) concluded that the introduction of governance principles into the processes of urban areas strategic planning and management was very slow and imperfect, and that physical rehabilitation dominated over economic and social perspectives. There was an increased hybridism and complexity of the processes and solutions, and different public and private partners were involved. But the participation was very limited and had practically no influence in the decision. On the other hand, it is possible to conclude that the urban regeneration partnerships were valuing more and more public-private partnerships, seduced by important amount of private investment, in what can be understood as some kind of urban rehabilitation privatization that did not serve all the city interests (McCareavey, 2009).

In 2011, the PUR were replaced by operations inserted in an integrated strategy of sustainable development and valorisation of public equipment, defined by the municipalities. The implementation of the urban strategies was now totally controlled by municipalities and cooperation was restricted to public-private partnerships within a new created entity, the Urban Rehabilitation Societies (Decree-Law 104/2004). Therefore, the involvement and empowerment of other groups of stakeholders (which had never been significant) was reduced. Thus, this change within Polis XXI points out to an evolution of urban policies, within a severe economic crisis, towards becoming more permeable to globalized markets, adopting the spirit of renewal of the city for economic competitiveness and innovation rather than a focus on integrated urban regeneration for social and territorial cohesion.

While the JESSICA fund (Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas, JESSICA Holding Fund Portugal) was being operationalized (2009-2021) –with 132.5 million euros available for urban rehabilitation of building, energy efficiency, local economy revitalizations and technology development– and Urbact, II (2007-2013) and III (2014), was implemented in some Portuguese cities (related with the integrated urban development principles of the Leipzig Charter and later with the 2020 European Strategy), a new set of public policies was designed, marked by the valorisation of integrated territorial approaches. Considering the

focus on urban areas, the Sustainable Cities 2020 Strategy defined urban regeneration as the integrated valorisation of the urban physical support and the promotion of functional, cultural, social, and economic development of urban areas.

Within Portugal 2020 the municipalities were asked to develop Integrated Actions of Sustainable Urban Development within a Strategic Plan for Sustainable Urban Development. These plans articulate several tools: i) the sustainable urban mobility plan, defined at the level of NUTS III, and specially oriented to promote sustainable multimodal urban mobility; ii) the urban regeneration action plan, oriented to improve the urban environment, revitalize cities' economy and rehabilitate abandoned or degraded spaces; iii) integrated action plans for disadvantaged communities, seeking to support physical, economic and social regeneration of disadvantaged communities in urban and rural areas.

At the local level, the importance of urban rehabilitation is also recognised through other initiatives, such as the financing of urban regeneration action plans in smaller urban centres (associated with the delimitation of urban rehabilitation areas) and the creation of a financial instrument (IFFRU, 2020) to promote territorial cohesion and competitiveness by supporting the physical revitalization of cities and energy efficiency in housing. Currently, within the framing of Portugal 2030 initial actions, the intraregional entities were asked to review their Integrated Territorial Development Strategies, focusing on economic and social development, strengthening territorial cohesion, improving competitiveness, protecting the environment and heritage, and improving wellbeing.

In short, we can say that the recent development of policy instruments (such as PNPOP and PROT) and financial support programs, as well as the preparation and implementation of a set of municipal, regional or national strategic plans, participatory budgets and local Agendas, have taken as central the principles of governance and promoted greater involvement, participation and empowerment of citizens. However, practice shows us an incredibly low development of civic involvement and, above all, an incapacity to participate effectively in decision-making processes. In fact, the territorial management and planning process (and in particular of the urban areas) remains an almost exclusive competence of the municipalities: with the involvement of large private groups in the context of public-private partnerships of a different nature; and little openness to civil society and the associative sector, contrary to what was expected if we take into account the strategic objectives of the different support programs for urban rehabilitation.

5 Associations and urban movements

As abovementioned, the recognition of the growing ambiguities and precariousness of urban life, combined with the limited capabilities of city governments' actions, is giving rise in several European cities to the gradual positioning of social movements and transformative practices of the most varied and stimulating natures.

5.1 The old structures

However, albeit with growing exceptions, the political and planning cultures and practices in Portugal still remain considerably diverse from the dynamics that seem to characterize third sector involvement in most European urban arenas. Anyway the nature and impacts of most social and urban movements remains too blurred. There is a mixture of organizational dynamics alongside resources and networking fragilities, combined with an ever-reluctant posture from the side of public administrations in their relationship with civic engagement and social intervention. Most recent analysis developed on these fields (Seixas & Guterres, 2019; Fernandes & Seixas, 2018) as well as recent auscultation to senior members of associations, university researchers and experienced social actors confirms a continuing weakness of the social movements empowerment capacitation in Portugal.

In these senses, our respondents mentioned some relevant issues:

- an entrenched corporative culture, that may result from the Salazar-Caetano dictatorship that ruled the nation (and its colonies, as part of it) for 48 years and had its fascist version based on a so-called "corporative state" that promoted a sectoral organization where employers and workers were organized by sectors, on a centralized and hierarchical administration. The result is a attitude very strongly structured around the protection of professional-sectoral interests, and a distant relationship with the State that feeded paternalism;
- a relatively strong social sector, associated with the late arrival of some of the North and Central Europe social systems, that is mixed-up with the historically long and strong presence of the Catholic Church and Santa Casa da Misericórdia (whose origins go back to 1498, and that counts today with 388 units);
- a sectoral civic organization, with a significant number of associations but normally with a local dimension and a very low number of members. In geographical terms, we find them mostly in popular neighborhoods of the two larger metropolises (Lisbon and Porto);
- promiscuity, leading to a closer sense of relevance and engagement in decision-making but contributing to a dangerous and unaccountable incentive towards a transactional contract

between participation and decision (Teles, 2014). Unfortunately, this “mixture” is sometimes too evident, with abundant migration from one “political side” to the other after decisions being taken that affect directly their next job, as silence being sometimes seen as the result of public support by the administration;

- A dominantly reactive attitude, passivity still considered the norm, and proactivity relatively rare.
- It is true that the associative world has come a long way and is also evolving in more diverse and complex panoramas, that the so-called third sector encompasses a great number of roles and dimensions, with civic activism and participation having now many different facets and possibilities. Putting grossly simple and concerning the urban movements and their developments in contemporary Portugal, three main assumptions can be stated. Firstly, the old sociopolitical structures that are related with the Industrial Revolution and have evolved over the last century continue to show severe problems to cope with the “new times”. Secondly, a new wave of social and urban movements is gradually taking ground, although still with extremely unorganized and erratic dynamics. And thirdly, there are some signs of growing empowerment and communication capacities of some urban movements –namely in the housing, ecology and social rights sectors– being combined with a civil society consciousness, despite the slow, inconsistent and intermittent openness of some public authorities, especially in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon.

This landscape is particularly striking when, considering the contexts of Southern Europe and looking at the emergence of urban movements after the subprime crisis, one acknowledges their success in other urban contexts. This is even more salient if one takes into consideration the fact that Portuguese transition to democracy took place a bit earlier than in Spain and Greece, and popular participation was so intense and fundamental in the tumultuous times between the April 1974 revolution and the legislative elections of 1976.

5.2 The urban grassroots movements

Considering all the above limitations, some civic manifestations may be expressive and generate some relevant sociopolitical consequences, in different situations. Respondents mentioned three types of actions:

On the “single case burst”, ad-hoc movements may capture important public attention around a certain urban change that brings indignation. Sometimes only a few, around a site, a public manifestation and/or a petition may gather the interest of millions, attracting public attentions,

sometimes getting a juridical base and being able to block what is taken as undesirable. It comes to mind the popular manifestation to block the pretended use of Coliseu, a traditional theatre in Porto, by an evangelic church; or when some well-organized neighborhood movements steadily achieving some of its claims, like the Caracol da Penha movement who successfully changed the municipality plans to build a parking lot towards the installation of a green park in Lisbon.

The organized reaction is mentioned when we are in the presence of a certain project or action that is the target of an association or a semi-organized group of citizens. An Internet platform and a public debate are normally two of the most relevant aspects to consider on what could be a long fight that may need expensive juridical services to have some sort of success in preventing any unwanted change. Campo Aberto, an environmental organization, for example, had a very relevant role to prevent the construction of tall buildings in Porto urban park, and in the process, weeks before elections, gave a very important contribution to the election of Rui Rio, against favorite and former mayor Fernando Gomes. Decades later, more proactive action on a “green and live areas” project for the Porto metropolitan area had not as near as much success!

The third possibility is a project-based engagement. In the last few years, we’ve seen a multiplication of relatively independent and proactive associations with digital communication and social networks helping citizenship to be expressed for a multitude of objectives. And we’ve also assisted to an increased capacity of different projects –with or without the presence of a formal association– to attract the participatory energies of many citizens, although most of these projects don’t get much public attention for different reasons, including the neighborhood dimension of several of them.

5.3 Urban movements and formal power

According to our respondents as well as with parallel documental and social media analysis, we conclude that, in general, the urban movement relations with formal politics in Portugal is still considerably distant and even understood with high suspicion and mistrust for most of the cases and institutional cultures. It is true that there is an independent movement leading the second most important city, and that there are some other independent movements in power through coalition forms (like in Lisbon municipality itself). However, the relationship between formal power and citizenship still needs a long and necessarily maturing way.

First, we have to consider that independent candidates have had access to office, as there are several non-political party members in power. A lot of them, as what is perceived as the combined consequence of the scarcity of good candidates for the most demanding positions in

the affiliated of the two biggest parties, and the political advantage of the party leaders to attract prestigious names from social spheres outside politics, especially science, culture and media to a party list. Rui Moreira, the independent mayor of Porto, is an exception, as he was not invited by a party but was the candidate of a newly formed local group. However, he was aided on the path to a surprising victory in 2013 by an important sector of one of the two traditional parties (PSD), also benefitting from his exposure on TV and newspapers (as football commentator) and of several years as the president of the prestigious local business association. Even if counts with the support of the right wing CDS party, his movement has some similitude to what happened in several other municipalities as dissidence in formal parties has enabled the election of 17 independent mayors (in a total of 308), mostly former PSD, like Isaltino Morais (in Oeiras) and PS, like Elisa Ferraz (in Vila do Conde).

Secondly, we have to consider that, normally, real independence may not be considered as a political asset by those who are in power: obedience may be rewarded, and critics may have to fight harder or to wait for a turn of fate. Within this general context, with good exceptions, associations that are outside the political system and all types of civic movements are expected to be docile if given some sort of attention. Understandably, denunciation of injustice, corruption and wrong-doing, as well as the presentation of alternatives, emerge more often from the partisan dispute, the university comfort (that allows independence), and the courage of a few, including some very qualified professionals in the media, than from any sort of urban movement.

All that said, it is true that some municipalities may invite for free participation without expecting anything in return but good ideas. That's the case of the above cited BIP-ZIP program in Lisbon, with action in the historical and multicultural areas, the participatory process for the construction of the municipal plan in Maia, or the intermunicipal project for "Serras do Porto" (with the support of the municipalities of Gondomar, Paredes and Valongo). It also seems that while we keep our focus on formal politics maybe the number, diversity and relevance of civic action outside the politic sphere is becoming increasingly important on daily life of common people. We may see that on these extraordinary covid-19 days, as we write, as civic action is solving real problems, getting food help for old people, establishing psychological networks, getting food to homeless. Or on the way we are in touch with each other, looking for new ways to see the problems we have and the future that is ahead of us on uncountable webinar debates, without any formal power intermediation.

6 (Looking for a) conclusion

Given the broad picture presented above regarding the Portuguese context, it seems quite clear that the contemporary patterns of attitudes, motivations, instruments and resources of urban movements are dwelling on two dominant and apparently contradictory circumstances. Firstly, a historical and path dependent behavior based on both political and public institutional cultures that do not favor citizen participation or engagement. Secondly, a most recent uprising –still mainly reactive and significantly blurred but none withstanding evolving in growingly interesting forms– of new processes and drivers of urban citizen engagement. We looked into these processes given the contexts of the most recent changes (political, economic and social), within a multiscalar approach. We acknowledged the fact that there is no absence of clear and objective –or even common– motivations for power struggles, civic dynamism, democratic innovation and urban citizen engagement in Portugal. However, we have also underlined the most plausible factors that still inhibit similar phenomena as the vibrant dynamic already witnessed in several cities all over the world.

The key challenges faced by urban territories when dealing with paradigmatic changes and in the aftermath of severe economic crises, are expected to result in a growing recognition of the power of cities and of citizens within them. In a context of globalization, metropolization and possibly some forms of desurbanization with the post-COVID trends, urban areas face new types of possibilities alongside new vulnerabilities. This is a particularly complex scenario, given the still too volatile urban governance systems which, above all, remain highly centralized in Portugal. New urban consciousnesses and concomitant pressures –in fundamental areas like housing, transport or ecology– alongside the steady rise of new governance and institutional dynamics are expected to generate greater involvement, participation and empowerment of diverse institutions and citizens in general. The longevity of old sociopolitical structures coexisting with an unconsolidated new wave of urban movements may well be the most accurate picture of this dynamic and complex context. In this sense, our initial support for Innerarity's (2020) claim for a complex theory of democracy is clearly useful and acknowledges that with the traditional political and decision-making tools, it is impossible to manage, and even to understand, the functioning and possibilities of urban democracy, when facing these challenges.

A power-sensitive analysis of the contemporary Portuguese cities and of the socio-historic context of civic movements allowed us to grasp the relevance of the institutional rescaling alongside statehood fragmentation, but also the significantly uneven consequences of the drivers, tools and

resources of urban civic engagement. There is still a long path to follow in order to see cities in Portugal as politically relevant places of democratic innovation, of social and territorial transformation, institutional advancements, and of citizen and communitarian disruption, demonstration and hope.

With the power fragmentation, globalization and urbanization movements, it is possible to think that this will be the century of the cities. If this will be the century of citizens, that is a different question. Recent developments associated to social and economic global dynamics (e.g. the growth of tourism, city-users and gentrification processes) started to challenge the governance theories, emphasizing the importance of real articulation (public-private-society) and effective participation within the design and implementation of public policies and urban management strategies and actions. In this hyper-globalization process the “voting city” has been hollowing out, which puts greater pressure on effective governance and civic participation. Some see in the reactions to the coronavirus pandemic the basis for a post globalized world and the rise of both localism and nationalism trends. However, the major governance challenges consist not only in deciding what each society wants (as a collective political construction) but also in the identification of how to implement and who should take voice, in decision-making processes. These fundamental political questionings positions the protagonism of cities and urban regions as fundamental international actors, even when nationalism rises, be it in Minneapolis, in Hong Kong or in Paris. In fact, the generalization of neologisms like ‘glocalization’ makes sense. The cosmopolitanization of the city requires localization to exist. Social movements, citizen engagement and democratic representation require an objective and highly tangible ‘polis’, a place with political existence and with an intelligent degree of political autonomy.

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