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***PRELIMINAR APPROACH TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A
NETWORK-TERRITORY: THE CASE STUDY OF VILA FLOR COUNTY
(NORTH- EASTERN PORTUGAL)***

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Introduction

This is a paper on low density territories, their signs of territorial identity and the local network for its development. We all know its main features: reduced human capital, scarcity of economic activity, reduced competitiveness to attract investment, lack of institutional skills, low diversity of human resources, general low levels of production, few local markets and the low valuation of local products. As a result, people tend to escape, conducting to agriculture decrease and abandonment, economic disruption, social breakdown, environmental mischaracterization and poverty (Azevedo, 2013). A scenario very often, assumed as a fatality. The assumption of this fatalistic scenario, discourage alternatives for local development and, at the same time, consider low density territories as a homogenous place. However, this is not the reality, because each territory has distinctive territorial signs and shares common dimensions, memories, pasts and heritages that promotes and creates specific local dynamics. That's to say, we have the opportunity to reverse the fatalistic scenario and create "network-territories", following a bottom up approach, as an alternative to the classical top down approach of the "zone-territories". "Network-territories had to be built, under a variable geometry, over the actual administrative division" (Covas & Covas, 2014).

We are witnessing a new paradigm, a new country-side, the so-called “2^a rurality” (Covas & Covas, 2013) which can originate a return flow to rural areas. These *neo-rural* could be the new engine to the development of the new countryside (Holmes, 2008). We are making the transition from a rural world based on a traditional space production towards a rural world based on a contemporary multifunctional and territorial model. A way from the unique functionality (agriculture/production) to a multiple functionality (Bjorkhaug & Richards, 2008; Kelly & Bliss, 2012), integrating primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, a mix of tangible and intangible endogenous resources in order to generate fluxes based on local specific products and services with added value (Covas & Covas, 2011).

Following this approach, this study aims to evaluate the possibility of implementation of a network territory on the north-eastern Portugal (Municipality of Vila Flor, District of Bragança), assuming, as starting point, the inventory of different thematic maps. This geographical data base will permit to discuss the consistence of the possible network-territories, as well as the appropriate geographical dimension, to according to the attractiveness points and accessibility.

Material and methods

The study area includes the entire county of Vila Flor (Bragança District). A county located in the northeast of Portugal, with an area of 265,81km², with 6697 residents (2011) and encompassing 14 parishes.

The inventory of tangible and intangible heritage was obtained by direct information on the Municipality of Vila Flor, local visits, direct contact with residents and consultation of other published documents. All information has been geo-referenced and included into a geographic information system (shape files of points and lines), over military maps 1/25000, complemented by satellite images available in the world imagery. Some information, including shape files of lines regarding paths, was created by drawing directly on the cartographic bases (raster).

Results

The following thematic maps were obtained: urban households; landscape values; rural tourisms; festivities (discriminated by the dates); built heritage (classified and religious);

intangible heritage; agricultural production; crafts; landscape areas; accessibility; routes of interest; delimitation of parishes.

Discussion

The cartographic analysis identified two potential areas to constitute network territories, primarily associated to two landscape units: the valley of the river Tua and valley of Vilariça. the first one having as attracting points the river Tua and the sanctuary of Senhora da Assunção, and the second one, the valley of Vilariça, the Sabor River and the dam of low river Sabor. In between is the central plateau. As it is located along the whole of the county makes it difficult to structure a network territory, in addition, no remarkable attractiveness points were detected. The establishment of thematic routes, overstepping the limits of the target parishes and even the County itself, confirms the need of territorial reorganizations (network territories), breaking the administrative division. The routes to the valley of the River Tua (Tua river route, Sanctuary Route, Route hills of Faro, the intangible route, and the route of the cliffs), although overstepping the administrative boundaries, can be a good starting point to give cohesion, consistency and interactivity within the territory. These routes forcing the internal flow can enhance the visibility of productive activities, with new business opportunities. The main constraint to the implementation of one or more territories network in this region is the quite absence of cooperation between neighbouring parishes, based on a local parochialism, connected to the current administrative division of the territory.

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