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Lessons from Portugal

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This brief research paper is an exercise of geographical synthesis conceived as an activity of University Extension from the “Casa de La Buelga” at the University of Oviedo. This activity consists in the realization of a cultural itinerary through four cities in northern Portugal. Its main objective is to show and explain the exceptional urban landscapes of Porto, Guimarães, Braga and Valença do Minho.

All of them are historical cities, either of Roman origin such as Porto and Braga or medieval. In its organization or medieval reorganization the role of the Kingdom of Asturias was decisive: the cities are refounded and repopulated, moreover, the County of Portugal or *Condado Portucalense* –whose capital city was Porto – is created and it is the origin of the Portuguese nation.

The long historical trajectory and the monumental value they contain, with the representation of all artistic styles, made possible the UNESCO declaration of World Heritage for the cities of Porto in 1996 and Guimarães in 2001.

Obviously, to achieve the proposed objective it was necessary to check the inner organization of these cities, their functions and their morphology and also its landscape plenty of architectural and engineering monuments. Furthermore, all this had to be related to the historical and economic bases of the territory.

Therefore, the work summarized here is actually the research study carried out before the cultural trip. The methodology followed is deductive-inductive, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques for territorial analysis. In addition, in a work of geographic synthesis

like this, the cartographic, bibliographic, photographic and “webographic” support is essential. Comparisons are often made with Asturias in order to highlight the didactic approach of the work and adequately understand the “lessons of Portugal”.

ASSOCIATE CITIES

The cities visited form functional urban regions with the purpose of providing services, seeking the best possible efficiency and the greatest economy of resources. At the same time, these supra-municipal entities are in charge of issues related to infrastructure facilities and territorial planning

This is the case of Porto, a city of cities that forms a continuous urbanized space with almost a million and a half inhabitants and have a large industrial port, an international airport, world-renowned wineries and a Metro. Despite being recent, the Metro is one of the longest in the world. The Metropolitan Area of Porto, founded in 1996 is formed by 17 municipalities with an approximate area of 2,000 square kilometres.

Further to the North, around the city of Braga, the Minho Metropolitan Area is created, created in 2004 with 12 municipalities, which serves some 800,000 inhabitants similar to the Central Area of Asturias even by its polynuclear nature. Its functions are similar to those of Porto.

Finally, recently, in 2015, the operation of a “Eurocity” has begun to be tested, in the border area of Minho, between the Valença and Tui.

MULTIFUNCTIONAL HISTORIC CENTERS

The historical centres of Porto, Braga and Guimarães are full of religious and civil monuments, highlights buildings that is, architecture, sculpture, ceramics, painting, etc.

However, these cities have other prominent merits: the permanence of the traditional farmhouse on plants inherited from Antiquity or the Middle Ages, as well as the diversity of activities and functions that characterize them as living and dynamic spaces.

There are adequate relationships between residence, commerce, services, leisure and tourism, with a determined municipal policy of attention to historical heritage.

THE SPACES OF THE BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION

In these cities, the period between centuries (the last two decades of the nineteenth and the first two of the twentieth) involved large urban actions that record the importance of the bourgeois revolution with Industrialization. In general, Anglo-Saxon models are followed more than the Mediterranean geometric ones.

The scenario of the *Avenida dos Aliados* in Porto is emblematic, resulting from an ambitious proposal of interior reform of the city centre in the manner of the Spanish *Grandes Vías*, according to the project of the English architect Barry Parker.

The project of Parker encompassed the space of the nineteenth-century *Praça da Liberdade*, which becomes an extension to the North to constitute the main civic centre of the city.

Similar performances are also observed in Braga, with the *Praça da República* and the *Avenida da Liberdade*, or in Guimarães with the *Largo do Toural* and the *Largo da República do Brasil*.

In the last third of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, the city of Porto extends towards the Northwest, where the new port of Leixões is located, based on large plots and long avenues such as the one of Boavista.

THE STRENGTH OF THE NEW ARCHITECTURE

Porto and, to a lesser extent, Braga had through its history the performance of great native or foreign professionals that give the urban landscape a luminous imprint of monumentality. The Baroque-Rococo style, so reiter-

ated in the religious building of the 18th century, had the exceptional figure of the architect Nicolau Nasoni, the neoclassicism with Carlos Amarante, the historicist architecture of the late nineteenth century and principles of the 20th with the Marqués da Silva, etc.

To this rich tradition are added in the second half of the 20th century and beginnings of 21th the portuense architects Álvaro Siza, Eduardo Souto de Moura, Luis Pedro Silva, and the lisboners João Leal and Manuel Salgado in addition to other international foreigners like Rem Koolhaas.

Porto is the most important city in the region after its classification as a World Heritage Site in 1996. Its selection as European Capital of Culture in 2001 and its election as one of the venues of the 2004 European Soccer Championship, benefited from the large investments in expansion of the Serralves Museum in the 90s, the new Dragão Stadium in 2003, *Casa da Música* in 2005, etc. In terms of infrastructure, the expansion of the airport in 2005, the cruise terminal in 2015, the construction of the Metro from 2002, the funicular in 2004 or the cable car in 2009 are some of the interventions. Previously, in 1995, the VCI or *Via de cintura interna* had been completed the city bypass motorway using the large Arrábida and Freixo bridges. Moreover, in parallel, Porto achieved the high-speed train, Alfa Pendular, with the progressive inauguration of the Lisbon-Coimbra-Oporto-Braga line, which, by the South, extends to the city of Faro.

THE BEAUTIFICATION OF CITIES

Powerfully draws attention to the abundance of landscaped spaces that often adorn and humanize public roads. *Avenida da Liberdade* in Braga or the *Largo da República do Brasil* in Guimarães are examples of the integration of the pedestrian walkway with road traffic.

Among the landscaped leisure spaces, the peripheral parks are endowed with the unbeatable accessibility granted by funiculars (sometimes of great technical and historical value such as that of *Bom Jesus de Braga*) or cable cars.

Within the city of Porto there is a funicular called *Dos Guindais*, between Ribeira and Batalha and a cable car from the opposite bank of the Douro to the *Serra do Pilar* convent.

On the other hand, often cobbled or paved streets follow traditional models such as the Augusta Lisbon Street, and incorporate colour geometric figures.

THE PROPER FUNCTIONING OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The Metropolitan Areas of Porto and Braga are well connected to each other by the railroad. In Porto, the beautiful station of São Bento is the main reference in the regional railway organization Douro – Minho. The Portuguese high speed links since the 90s the main station of Porto, Campanhã, with Braga, Coimbra and Lisbon.

Within the city of Porto and its metropolitan area, public transport is superbly served by the lines of the public company Metro do Porto, which have terminals in all peripheral nuclei. The opening of the Porto Metro from 2002 was a resounding success for public transport. However, the tram, despite its nineteenth-century origins, has not been able to compete with the car or the Metro, and its function is almost exclusively tourist.

For the union of the nuclei separated by the Douro River (Porto and Gaia, mainly) numerous bridges were laid over the last two centuries. Of nineteenth century come the two most beautiful and spectacular built with steel and iron profiles robbed, according to the project of the German engineer Seyrig. They are those of María Pía (opened in 1877) for the railroad and that of Luis I, with two boards, opened in 1886 for road traffic and, now also, for the Metro.

THE COMPLEXITY OF PORTO

It seems reasonable that a considerable part of this paper is referred to the city of Porto and its metropolitan area because of its size and functional complexity. The

plot is organized based on a question: what is Porto? And answers are given regarding their functions and landscapes.

The first answer is obvious considering the name of the city. Porto could not be understood without its historic port at the mouth of the Douro River; a port secularly dependent on the wine industry, the famous wineries located in Gaia, on the left bank of the river. But also without its artificial port of Leixões in Matosinhos, the modern port, from the 19th and 20th century, for heavy industry (such as the oil refinery), container loading and tourist ocean liners.

Secondly, Porto is a city of cities, neighbourhoods and *ilhas*. In its metropolitan area they are linked to the main nucleus Gaia by the South, with their wineries; Maia by the North with the airport; and Matosinhos by the Northwest, where the beach, the modern port and the main industrial facilities are located. Historic neighbourhoods, such as Batalha, Miragaia, La Baixa and La Ribeira, make up monumental complexes of first magnitude with differentiated features for each of them. Moreover, there are still the *ilhas*, the hidden neighbourhoods inhabited since industrialization (the century between 1850 and 1950) by the working class.

Other responses, which are given successively, refer to the current functions of greater socio-economic representation: they have to do preferably with the tertiary sector (more than 70% of the population is employed in the services) and the secondary. Tourism, attracted mostly by the patrimonialization of the city, and to a lesser extent the University (the first in Portugal by number of students) are the two engines for the expansion of a tertiary sector that does not stop growing.