Towards a flexible definition of limits in urban planning:
controlling urban form under uncertainty.

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Reflection and theoretical framework on the concept of limit:

1. Towards a limited rationality.
2. Unlimited citizens and territories.
3. The limit in controlling urban form.

Limited rationality + unlimited citizens and territories > uncertainty in controlling urban form
Main Case Study

Municipality of Santo Tirso (Ave Valley region, Portugal)  Source: Bing Maps
Towards a limited rationality
1. Towards a limited rationality: Positivism

- Positivism: natural science rationalism to be applied to social sciences, social facts as “normal” or “abnormal” - in need of a cure (Durkheim, 1982);

- On planning: planner as “doctor” and owner of the truth - rational approaches led to designing the city by zoning, parameters, ratios, indexes (Busquets, 1995).
1. Towards a limited rationality: Positivism

Preliminary design for the urbanization plan of Santo Tirso, 1943, by Rogério de Azevedo.

1. Towards a limited rationality: Positivism

Preliminary urbanization plan of Santo Tirso, 1949, by Miguel Rezende (left) and existing situation (right)

1. Towards a limited rationality: Taylorism

- Taylorism: systematic management to reduce every single workmen’s action to a science;
- Individual judgment replaced by universal and systematic laws (Taylor, 1919);
- Subdivision of labour: separation between planning and execution and the importance of planning ahead by a class of managers;

- On planning: planner as a manager and anticipator of urban development tasks, promotor of universal and systematic laws.
1. Towards a limited rationality: Fordism

- Fordism: innovation in work processes, capital accumulation and social regulation (Jessop, 1992);
- Mass production, standardized goods, division of labour on the assembly line - *economy of scale*;
- Continuous cycle of production, demand, profitability and re-investment;
- Social regulation: norms, institutions, networks and patterns of conduct of the capitalist society (Jessop, 1992);

- **On planning: focus on the production of plans through institutional**
  
  "assembly lines" **for an homogeneous and standard society.**
1. Towards a limited rationality: Fordism

The production of plans: elaboration and revision of a Municipal Director Plan

Source: DGOTDU
1. Towards a limited rationality

- Fordism failing as a virtuous growth cycle;
- Accumulation strategies being replaced by “just-in-time” approaches;
- Standard and homogeneous replaced by customization and diversity;
- Positivism can’t handle the growing complexity of our territories;
- **Discussion and learning by doing as important as scientific and technical knowledge**;
- Planner as a mediator;
- Planning instruments less normative and more flexible “to grab opportunities” (Portas, 1995).
1. Towards a limited rationality

Provisional Regulations in Santo Tirso during the elaboration of the Municipal Director Plan.
#2

Unlimited citizens and territories
2. Unlimited citizens and territories

• Contemporary citizens: complexity and multitude of needs, aspirations and tools to achieve them;

• Faster and reliable ways of transport and communication - increased mobility, increased social fragmentation;

• Paradox: new ways of isolation - technological literacy, gated communities fed by “hiperspaced” mobility;

• Complexity and difficulty of representing society as a whole and make compatible individual interests; what is “public interest”? 
2. Unlimited citizens and territories

- Increased mobility brings multiple territories of proximity; multiple belongings; multiple identities; multiple relationships;

- Complex and varied actions throughout the territory, new ways to explore, inhabit, produce it;

- Dispersion, fragmentation and privatization as processes leading to the disappearance of public space as a space of citizenship (Borja, 2003).
2. Unlimited citizens and territories
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- Cities expand their limits; suburban growth; invasion of rural land; mix and clash of different realities;
- Limits of urbanity hard to trace: no longer exclusive to the [canonical] city (Domingues, 2013);
- Multiple types of limits at a given time and space: physical, symbolical, administrative; what are the “real” limits of the territory?
- Administrative and political limits do not correspond to the complex dynamics of economy and society (Ferrão, 2014).
2. Unlimited citizens and territories

- Metropolitan area of Porto
- Inter-municipal community of Ave
- Northwest waters (water supply company)
- Ave Region (NUTS III)
The limit in controlling urban form
3. The limit in controlling urban form

- Changes in social and economic contexts lead to changes in urban planning policies;

- CIAM, 1933: urban planning as rationalizing instrument; large and simultaneous operations *networks, volumes and free spaces* (Portas, 2005);

- Post-war: fordist machine, welfare state, distributive planning actions on the territory, strong public and central powers.
3. The limit in controlling urban form

- Decay of the Fordist model, crisis, private sector gains power over public, multiplication of public entities;
- Decay of the public monopoly on controlling urban form; preference for designing infra-structures instead of urban form;
- Globalization of economy, reticular recomposition of the territory, flexibility over rigid and standard models;
- Strategic planning aiming to make more operational the actions over the territory, seeking cooperation;
- Importance of contextual solutions and of *alternatives* (Domingues & Silva 2004).
3. The limit in controlling urban form

- Increased localism, seek for participation, seeking representativeness of a fragmented society;
- Unpredictability of opportunities and execution capabilities, need for cooperative solutions instead of rationalized central ones;
- Planning, management and systematic evaluation (Oliveira, 2011) of results needed for change of goals and objectives to be possible;
- Need for reflexibility: to reflect on every action to give a better response (Ascher 2010);
- Need to incorporate this flexibility in formal and informal planning instruments.
Conclusion
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• Limitation of the rational-comprehensive approach: planning with an unlimited conception of science and knowledge; difficulty to accommodate all urban forms and dynamics on strict rational models;

• Less limited citizens and territories: complexity, diversity, multiplicity with consequences on the territory;

• Failure of several paradigms due to increasing uncertainty and need for a limited rationality on contemporary urban planning;

• Flexible definition and understanding of this limited rationality as a way to control urban form under uncertainty.
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