Uncertainty in contemporary urban planning concepts and methods
What we (still) can learn from Garden Cities and New Towns

20th Century New Towns: Archetypes and Uncertainties International Conference
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Archetypes & Uncertainties: an apparent paradox?
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- Archetypes
  - collective and typical images
  - past & present
  - timeless & persistent
  - unconscious
  - (Jung, 1976)

- Uncertainties
Archetypes & Uncertainties: an apparent paradox?

Archetypes:
- collective and typical images
- past & present
- timeless & persistent
- unconscious
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Uncertainties:
- collective & > individual
- future
- unstable and transient (?)
- conscious (?)
growing uncertainty in contemporary urban planning

a typical image: the city of oppositions:

town vs. country

concentration vs. dispersion
growing uncertainty in contemporary urban planning

**Archetypes**

**Uncertainties**

**a typical image:** the city of oppositions:
- town vs. country
- concentration vs. dispersion

**reality:** complexity & diversity of urban form:
- town and country and
- concentration and dispersion
growing uncertainty in contemporary urban planning

we will explore these oppositions, through archetypes and uncertainties, applying them to the Garden City model, the post-war New Towns program in Britain and to what contemporary urban planning - as a still open and incomplete process - can learn from them.

1. between city and country’s urbanity

2. the coexistence of the compact and of the dispersed

3. diversity in the New Towns post-war program
between city and country’s urbanity

“(…) archetype of the city that no longer corresponds to the reality

(…) as an opposition between city and countryside (…)”
between city and country’s urbanity

Middle Ages: complementary relationship and economic social interdependence between city and country (Mumford, 1961)

Industrial Revolution(s): new realities, neither pure cities nor countryside - the emergence of the “urban” (Choay, 1994)
between city and country’s urbanity
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Porto, Portugal (B. Moreira)  

Monsanto Village, Portugal (A. Magalhães)
between city and country’s urbanity
the coexistence of the compact and of the dispersed

Chaves, Portugal (drawing by Duarte D’Armas, early 16th century)
the coexistence of the compact and of the dispersed
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Vale do Ave, Portugal, from the “Invisible Cities” series (B. Moreira)
the coexistence of the compact and of the dispersed
diversity in the New Towns post-war program
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New Town generations (fragment)
diversity in the New Towns post-war program

New Towns around London
diversity in the New Towns post-war program

New Towns around Birmingham
diversity in the New Towns post-war program

New Towns around Manchester-Liverpool conurbation
diversity in the New Towns post-war program
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the uncertainty of an archetype

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6. Intentions of self-sufficiency replaced by increased importance of the regional level on connecting communities;
7. need for greater flexibility in contemporary urban planning to better accommodate uncertainty and change;
the uncertainty of an archetype

We are moving towards an increasingly limited planning, questioned by uncertainty to an extent where one can ask if it’s still worth it. Our idealistic visions of city and country are changing. More than persistent and timeless, archetypes are undergoing profound changes and no longer match the reality; and uncertainty appears to be anything but transitory. If we expect to efficiently manage our complex contemporary territories we must find a way to inscribe flexibility into the formal planning system while allowing some extent of responsible informality.
Thank you

This paper is part of the PhD research project “From informality to formal variability - planning and urban management strategies under uncertainty contexts: the municipality of Santo Tirso between the Provisional Regulations and the review of the Municipal Plan”, which is being supported by FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia - under the QREN-POPH program and the PhD Grant SFRH/BD/86675/2012, and developed in CEAU - Centro de Estudos de Arquitectura e Urbanismo - at the School of Architecture of Porto University - FAUP.

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