

FROM STRATEGIC PLANNING TO PARTICIPATED PROCESSES OF TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

Development is a complex process and its approach has to be connected with recent changes that have altered territories' government logics. The emergence and consolidation of new planning methods (and its hybrids) for spatial development is accompanied by the transition of government to governance. Governance, with planning and participation, has to be considered essential for development, but learning how to implement it has to consider the theoretical dimension as well as territorial specificities.

On the present text, we approach the concepts and different examples of "planning governance" from the North of Portugal, with a special focus on the municipality of Ponte da Barca (on the North of Portugal), and its strategic plan, adopted as the basis for a physical-strategic-participatory planning experience, that pretends to contribute for the strengthening of the system of territorial governance, and to reinforce the capacities in a process for spatially-based development.

Keywords: Governance; Participation; Social Capital; Prospective; Strategic Planning.

Introduction

Development is a dynamic and complex process comprising different and very complex systems: individual values and preferences; societies' dynamic of needs and desires; a group of economic, technological, social, political, environmental components, and a scope of various stakeholders¹ with specific interests.

Recognizing space as something more than a mere support for people, activities, and flows of information and goods, different authors and policy documents

¹ "Stakeholders" can be either public (international entities and organizations, states and their institutions, regional and local public powers), private (companies and their organizations, families, individuals and their organizations), mixed (partnerships and associations between public and private agents), Third Sector representatives, or non-governmental associations.

tend to consider three dimensions of spatially-based development: economic, social and environmental, usually translated as objectives on territorial competitiveness, cohesion and sustainability. To act on these three directions, participation and administration are considered increasingly important strategic development factor.

There was an early priority to plan and control, through policies and instruments, the evolution of different spaces. On this direction, nationally, regionally and locally, the administration decided to use territorial planning and ordainment policies that would allow the orientation of development processes by goals of quality of life and social well being, preservation of natural, cultural, and human values and the development of economic activities, amongst other normally listed objectives.

However more than a basic spatial dimension that needs to be planned, with societies' recent evolution, expansion and deepening of globalization dynamics and increasing complexity of relations and interdependences between different agents, territory is understood as an economic, social and identity reality interdependent with the development of cities and regions. As such, it has progressively gained more relevance in the definition of policies and strategies, on planning as well as management.

For Portugal as elsewhere in European Union, the fundamentals of these changes relate with two strongly interconnected variables. On the one hand, a globalization process that was accompanied by territorial redefinition, European integration, decentralization, and the State's lost of power (Badie 1995; Governa and Salone 2004). On the other hand, there were new shapes and patterns of collective action, which allowed the emergence and consolidation of new partnership possibilities, institutional cooperation, strategic planning and governance.

We recognize five dimensions associated to the emergence of new spatial development policies and strategies, namely the transition from government to governance, the valorisation of inhabitants and local communities' ability, the development of more selective policies, the building of integrated projects with diverse actions and the use of contractualization mechanisms (Anderson and Kempen 2003), the same dimensions that will be centrally considered in the approach to some examples on spatial planning and management in the North of Portugal, with a particular focus to the municipality of Ponte da Barca and its strategic plan and process.

From government to governance

Since the 80's, Europe has known important institutional alterations that progressively changed the political and administrative organization of cities,

regions and countries. This process is associated to the change of political and territorial scales, once the State is no longer the only field of collective action in the context of globalization (Galès 2002), as well as ideological and political global changes, as those associated with the collapse of countries dominated by central planning and the concentration of the ability to decide.

Also, demographics and increasingly sophisticated and expensive social needs forced the transition from a traditional welfare model with strong corporate structures and top-down steering with their traditional focus from government to governance, with privatization and partnerships, and the State more and more relegated to a mere regulatory role. These changes, even in situations where the State managed to keep much of the control, implied normally a transition to a less hierarchical, more varied, fragmented and multi-faceted process of control and influence (Jouve 2005). Limitations and debilities of the traditional system of government, without adequate resources and instruments to give an adequate answer to the new problems and challenges of the society, were exposed in this process. Other motifs apart such as the financial difficulties of the “Social State”, the “normal” government patterns were disrupted by the multiplication of the forms of communication and interaction between different stakeholders, more and more involved in the management of the territories (Álvarez et al. 2006)

As a result, as Narender put is, “more than through the Government, a major part of the challenges of both developed and developing societies can only be treated through an effective governance”(Narender 2004, p. 23). The appearance of the concept and its principles had that appealing capacity, which may be seen as the result of the association of governance with the answer for two major problems: it is difficult (impossible?) to predict the future; it is important to act and intervene in the territory in a sustained way (as the spatial is not a mere dimension but really a part of a system of development construction).

The need of a strategy oriented to the development assumes conciliation procedures and not hierarchical. Government is seen as an encounter of agents and scales, taking into consideration the large group of institutions and its interrelations, as well as the multi-scale dimension of spatial dynamics. This favours decentralization and the appearance of hybrid and innovative solutions. So, governance is understood by many authors simply as good government, so to say the adequate form to deal with complex and dynamic systems.

A set of principles of governance (or good government) is commonly accepted: legitimacy and voice; direction; performance; accountability; fairness (Graham et al. 2003), in line with the United Nations Development Program and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. All men and women should be free to participate constructively in the development process, and different interests should be mediated to reach the consensus that better serve the

interest of groups, policies and procedures. Thus, legitimacy and voice consists of considering the needs of participation and consensus orientation.

Direction consists in the existence and recognition of a strategic vision, considering the historical, cultural and social complexities in which the perspective is grounded, and what is needed to reach a future that is considered as the desired. All those involved (as agents, which is more than actors) should have a broad and long term perspective and should benefit from responsiveness (the processes must try to serve all stakeholders), effectiveness and efficiency (the best use of resources), which considers the importance of performance.

Accountability means that making decision-maker is accountable to the public and to institutional stakeholders and is built in on transparency with the free flow of information, in order to better understand and monitor the planning and management processes. As legal frameworks should be fair and enforced impartially (by the rule of law) and all men and women should have opportunities to improve or maintain the well-being (equity), fairness has one of the strongest universal claims for recognition (UNDP 1997).

This transition seems incomplete – which is normal with non-quantifiable and philosophical objectives – despite a wide acknowledgement and increased appropriation all the principles. In several cases, the transformations look superficial and the transition is manifested principally in the theoretically dimension and in the political discourse. It may even happen that we have a simple change of speeches to justify the preservation of hierarchies, which may be explained in different situations by two principal factors. Firstly, the opening of the decision-making process to civil society was performed through a process of public participation institutionalization. This situation conditions the real influence capacity in the definition of collective strategies of some sectors of society as the opening mechanisms follow clear rules in the negotiation of collective choices, previously defined by political structures (Jouve and Booth 2005). Secondly, the institutionalization of the process establishes differences between the groups of local actors, privileging the strongest economical groups, because of their connection with the decision and implementation.

Strategic planning and prospective

The need to predict and foresee the future conducted to sophisticated quantitative models... that some years later normally proved wrong! That needs not to contradict the importance of planning, just implies more humility and new planning methods that in most cases need necessarily to conciliate the short term demands with long term guidelines, developing new action strategies, which include new ways of cooperation and collaboration (Bock 2006; Jessop 1999). These ideas have conducted to a progressive transition of physical and positivist

planning to a more strategic and participatory approach to planning and spatial management, considering that wide-ranging strategic planning can help to guide important public decisions (Laquian 2002).

It is generally considered that strategic planning² appeared in the 80's, as an alternative to the rational model³, characterized by comprehensive planning based on "far-reaching goals and objectives" (Campbell and Fainstein 2001, p. 169), and as an answer to the growing relevance of private agents and of civil society, migrating from military though and entrepreneurial management (Fernandes 2007a). It was an answer to the State's change of functions and to the new articulations of the public with the private and third sectors. It has gained momentum with the sustainable development principles, and has been recently strengthened with EU laws on strategic environmental assessment (SEA Directive 2001/42/EC, regulated in Portugal by the Decreto-Lei n.º 232/2007). In line with this paradigm, more than the simple competition and marketing of cities and regions, we have seen the development of spatial planning approaches, taking in consideration equity of access of all citizens to goods, services and opportunities, in a trans-generational perspective that pretends to promote respect for human, cultural and environmental values and their diversity, including the right and duty of citizens of participating in the decision making processes (UNWCED 1987). Thus, a well-planned city is not only a functional and efficient space, where citizens and activities are harmoniously place over the territory. These standards, commonly accepted by planners, must now be combined with a strategic approach to planning, that assures a good quality of life, with citizen participation in a democratic decision-making process (Merlin and Choay 2009; Soh and Yuen 2006).

Generally, it is considered that the development of cities and regions is connected, more and more, with strategies that result from participatory processes of diagnosis and prospective, reinforcing synergies (with competition, complementarities and solidarity) between different people, spaces and institutions.

In this context, strategic planning has to be seen as a continuous and flexible process, oriented to action, with construction of plans, implementation, and monitoring. It considers the values and missions of the different institutions, as well as the external factors that affect the performance. It assumes that the territories evolution is not continuous and it is selective (through jumps, cycles or ruptures), comprising simultaneously a pro-active, contingent process of

² The concept is not consensual. For example, Mintzberg (1992) proposes the use of the expression "strategic thought" because, according to the author, strategy is part of the planning process and planning should serve to clarify and define strategy.

³ Strategic planning wasn't the only approach to planning that appeared in opposition to rational and comprehensive planning. Incremental, advocacy, equity and communicative planning are all important models as well, and also did their role as part of the cause and consequence of governance.

collective learning. It also brings the prospective logic, associated to the construction of future visions, in a decentralized political, technical and socially context (Ascher 1991; Faludi and Valk 1994; Friedman 1993; Sposito 1993). Strategic planning is understood as an exploratory and instructive process that seeks to help communities getting together and finding ways to solve their problems, by making recommendations, examining all possible alternatives, anticipating consequences, designing expected scenarios and providing resources for an citizen full involvement in the development process (Hall 2002).

Strategic planning does not replace rational planning, though. It is complementary, bringing it new features and perspectives as well as an operational component especially considered in the creation of a reference conceptual chart, relatively abstract, but which gives cohesion to a group of articulated and interconnected projects, that go in a certain direction, to attain certain goals, and to which new initiatives should be adapted (Faludi and Valk 1994). It rejects the vague social goals and inefficiency of the rational model, and proposes a targeted form of planning that takes limitations into account (Fainstein 2001). Strategic planning, including a process of an open dialogue between public entities and economic, social and cultural agents, may be an opportunity for a shared reflexion on the desirable and possible outcomes of the future, and the construction of the paths (strategies and actions) to attain them. So, strategic planning has a plan but it is not simply a plan in the traditional sense, as it should include a process that we see as characterized by (Ferreira 2007):

- ◆ Integration – it comprises the different planning components, namely the economic, social, cultural, urban and environmental features;
- ◆ Flexibility – it has to adapt to the specificity of each situation and the continuous evolution of contexts;
- ◆ Selectivity – the strategy considers priority of actions, as well as measures that induce change, with a practical profile, clarifying what to do and how to do it;
- ◆ Participation – the legitimacy of the development process is normally associated with participation, and should be understood as a pretext for dialogue, persuasion, conciliation and contractualization, and never associated simplistically to new kinds of referendums. The contribution of the strategic process to the society's opening and democratization, according to logics of transparency and allowing contexts of governance, must be emphasized.
- ◆ Prospective – the decision is based on the construed hypothesis for the future and not in the extent of past data (Delamarre and Malhome 2002). So, the strategic plan is a prospective reflection process, considering

tendencies, threats, opportunities and agents, and building goals, strategies, actions and resources to attain it, as the basis for discussion and development construction;

- ◆ Continuity – as a process, strategic planning demands continuity. The plan is only the beginning, one of the phases. As or more important than its elaboration, is its implementation, performance and monitoring, that should also be participated, flexible and subject to constant evaluation, to allow the adaption to the incoming challenges.

The social capital, participation and legitimacy of the development process

The idea of social capital is intimately associated to confidence and reciprocity. It is articulated by networks and created and reinforced by social interaction, with contact and crossed reference, that create multiple mutual relations and complex systems of shared confidence between people and institutions.

This notion is particularly important when the movements and dynamics that affect spaces and societies are manifest in other dimensions and not simply those more related to the State's political and administrative organization (with complex geometries, thematic fragmentation and an increasing number of agents) or the public management of cities and regions. The economical organization, or the populations' daily routine are good examples how dynamics transcend and don't care about the administrative boundaries and capacities. So, cities and regions cannot be understood as isolated spaces, with defined spatial limits and singular dynamics, but "...a complex space of knots and networks, places and flows, where multiple relations and activities co-exist, interact, combine, conflict, oppress and generate creative synergies" (Healey 2007, p. 1). Changes in the economic organization may be seen as "the emergence of an informational and global economy" (Castells 1996, p. 32), as a result of the globalization processes, technological revolution and of new forms of companies' organization ("networked" companies). Transformations lead to the appearance of a new space of economy and territory valorisation. In his view we are dealing with the progressive transition from a mode of organization of economical activity, structured essentially around local resources and capacities (frequently referenced to the space of the State-Nation), to other mode where previously fixed limits go beyond their nature due to geographical, political, historical and/or technical reasons.

Daily routine transformations of populations are specifically important because we are facing a deepening of individualisation processes and differentiation of ways of life, associated to job changes, consumption and mobility, and in various other areas, with growing diversity of perceptions, meanings and territory uses. The space where people live has become diverse, dissociated,

fragmented and, sometimes, conflictual⁴ and uncomfortable (Healey 2002). Thus, the multiplicity of identities contributes to the shaping and creation of multiple spaces and temporalities within a country, a region or a city (Bridge and Watson 2000).

This growing complexity of social life has made more difficult the government, as the connection between people and places is more diffused than in past periods (Healey 1996), in such a way that the space can be seen as a place of overlapping of relation networks, in several spatial scales (Cars et al. 2002), where there is a more complex social differentiation, and the adoption of new lifestyles, as people live in a different way, travel in distinct directions, shop in different moments⁵. As a result, in our cities and regions, the social divide is increasingly more complex than the dualistic opposition between rich and poor, local born and immigrant, intellectual and uneducated (that certainly still exist), posing a challenge to the government of shared spaces.

Consequently, there is a growing relevance of social capital in the development processes, and emphasis is given to the empowerment of institutions and local communities⁶, as the institutional density (Amin and Thrift 1994) is seen as playing a decisive role in the reduction of uncertainty and in the promotion of the collective learning process, where the articulation of strategies of different local agents, since the idea that “territories are built according to actions and projects”, becomes mandatory (Meunier-Chabert 2001, p. 33). Thus, the emergence of civil society as a significant political force is seen as one of the most important changes in the government contexts in recent years, contributing to the legitimacy of the principles of participation, responsiveness and public accountability (Laquian 2002).

In this heterogenic and complex society, strategic planning implies the consideration of the multiplicity of visions present in each territory. The complexity and diversity of daily life, and its multiple spaces and temporalities requires a strategic planning approach that considers governance principles and mobilizes the multiple identities of a region as resources for a collective process development. The collective action has the ability to build governance capacity and to legitimate development process as it considers the diverse ways life is experienced (Healey 2002). And when it is assumed the need to engage diverse agents in the territory strategic management, as well as the identification of an institutional leadership for the process (Godet 1993), we realise the importance given to the construction of development collective representations.

⁴ The complexification of relations and the diversification of meaning regarding territory produce conflicts in the heart of parties, institutions or even individuals.

⁵ See Healey (1997)

⁶ Local communities are here considered not only as the resident population of a certain area but as all the institutions and persons who have a strong relation with a certain territory, feeling an affective connection, of a certain “ownership”.

Experiences in Northern Portugal

Nowadays, we don't need to predict the future but we do need to be prepared for what it may bring, if possible, when possible, in what it is possible. Due to the need of accompanying changes and the difficulty of articulating different agents and act in different areas and scales, the spatial planning and governance must rely on a vision of a desired future, and when possible and adequate must try to anticipate it.

In the North of Portugal, there are several challenges to the territorial governance. First, there are conflicts at several scales⁷ and of diverse nature. Then, there is severe coordination deficiencies derived from the absence of a shared regional planning and vision and of power fragmentation. And, nowadays, development is a complex challenge.

Although significant alterations have been introduced in the last few decades in the accessibilities' networks and peoples' mobility, the internal asymmetries of Portugal have increased in several spatial dimensions, in part as the result of the fact that municipalities don't have the pertinent dimension (and the city councils the capable abilities) to promote a planned and shared development. This situation is aggravated by the disarticulation in the interior of the Central State, and the absence of a regional level. In this framework, characterized for a double centralism - of the Central Power over the country and of the Municipal Power at the local level (Fernandes 2007b) - the principles of the governance may help to find alternative scales in planning and territorial management and the construction of new forms of institutional cooperation. Sometimes, as in the case of Trofa, Ribeira de Pena and especially in Ponte da Barca (municipalities with no more than 50.000 inhabitants) strategic plans (connected with the revision of a comprehensive general municipal plan) is the basis for the incorporation of the principles of territorial governance.

At national level, the Habitation Strategic Plan⁸ for the period 2007/2013 is an instrument of national scope whose goal is to analyze, at the regional level, the needs and undergoing or programmed policies. Equally, it aims to develop detailed strategic proposals (implementation, monitoring and evaluation of habitation policies) that sustain the achievements of the defined goals in a participated way, in order that all actions, projects and strategic orientations be accepted and incorporated by the several social partners, in different regions.

⁷ Portugal has not implemented yet a regionalization process that would allow a new dynamic of territorial development and more efficient public politics. We face, frequently, conflicts of the Portugal second city and unofficial regional capital, Porto, with the capital, Lisbon, urban region and rural areas; the more densely populated coastal areas and the interior.

⁸ Available at <http://planoestrategicohabitacao.com>.

In the process of its construction, a regional vision is the basis for the identification of the priorities of the several partners, at different scales. These priorities will be organized and a hierarchy will be established through strategic axis and goals that pretend to assure the correct plan's performance and evaluation. Finally, through programs, the priorities and more specified political orientations are expressed at the level of: direct public intervention (social housing, cooperatives and development contracts), house renting and urban rehabilitation.

Strategic planning is also a motto to the cooperation at both sides of the national borders with Spain. There is, for example, a Strategic Plan for North of Portugal-Galicia (Northwest of Spain) that defines the priorities for the investment of EU period of 2007-2013. It is facilitated by the linguistic and geographic proximity and by the continuous engagement of university specialists and local authorities⁹, which defined as priority the impulse to the systems of transportation and accessibilities; cooperation on the sea cluster; competitiveness of small and medium companies; environmental protection and increased social and institutional cooperation.

More recently a strategic cooperation plan for the North of Portugal and another Spanish region, Castilla e León, was concluded, also with 2013 as temporal horizon, presenting as main priority the promotion of commercial and economic inter-regional relations

The connections between strategic planning and the reinforcement of governance systems are also evident in the case of the network "Douro Alliance – Douro Urban Axis"¹⁰, which, amongst other inter-municipal projects, exemplifies the articulation of different scales and groups of agents at the service of a common goal: the creation of a cooperation platform among cities. The project was embraced since the beginning by the Municipalities of Vila Real, Peso da Régua and Lamego, by the University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, by the Commercial and Industrial Associations of Peso da Régua and Vila Real, by the Companies' Association of Lamego and Vila Real (NERVIR). Besides the creation of a strategic plan to guide the action, it wants to consolidate and enlarge the participation and engagement of different agents in the execution of the proposed actions and in the shared territorial management, creating development advantages from the existent complementarities and interdependences in an active and long lasting cooperation.

⁹ A centre for studies on the "Euroregion" (CEER) was created in 2007 by 6 universities (3 in North of Portugal and 3 in Galicia) and other regional institutions and it is a unique example in Europe of permanent cooperation between university specialists and local authorities. The Atlantic Axis association of 34 municipalities both sides of the border was recently awarded by the Association of European Border Regions the *Sail of Papenburg Crossborder* for the work developed in the cooperation between borders

¹⁰ Available at <http://www.douroalliance.org>

In the specific case of the Municipality of Ponte da Barca, which we will approach with more detail, the Strategic Development Plan (PEDPB) and the participated strategic process connected with its elaboration, created the basis for an integrated system of participation and cooperation, in line with the principles of governance.

PEDPB was understood, since the very beginning, as a process: a dynamic, participated and creative one, based on reflexion and debate. The plan is a mechanism that guides change, responsible for setting the visions of the future, translated into goals, projects and concrete measures, which are performed by the several agents with interests and intervention over a territory.

In this plan-process, the proposals consider the dimensions of biggest repercussion in the territorial transformation, such as the urbanization process and the accessibilities network, as well as the most urgent questions as those related to inter-municipal cooperation, comprising all the themes of spatial development (economic, social and environmental). Since the beginning, there was a strong effort to favour the communities' participation, although respecting the special role of the elected.

The dynamic of the planning process tried to associate the best practices in civic participation, in respect for the local specificities and strong emphasis on the respect and usefulness of everyone's dedicated time to the plan. On a reinforced partnership and maximum demand in terms of responsibility, transparency and participation, with the firm support of the City Hall President and the Municipality, the contact and cooperation with the population and those collectively identified as the principal development agents is very real (and always in construction) since the beginning of the elaboration of the Strategic Development Plan of Ponte da Barca, and was prolonged and reinforced after its approval.

Efficiency in the use of time (the plan was completed in 14 months) was essential to create confidence, and a facilitated communication, with texts and interviews in the local newspapers and radio, conferences at schools, and personal contacts of the coordinator of the plan with all identified as the local leaders was also important to create an atmosphere of shared collective construction. Some formal and informal meetings also helped, as the two editions of the "Quintas da Barca" initiative, where in six sessions, at successive Thursday evenings thirty to forty persons debated with three or four relevant invited researchers, political actors and public and private sector institution directors, important themes for the future of Ponte da Barca.

After the plan approval, the process of shared discussion and of engagement on its implementation started as something almost natural, with the help of two groups.

The first is the “Comissão Municipal de Desenvolvimento” (CMD), or Municipal Commission for the Development, that meets with the technical and political coordination every three months to evaluate the progress and to influence the definition of the implementation of the actions, getting actualized information about the measures completed, on course, or to be started. It comprises members of the principal local institutions and associations, with presidents/directors of schools, police, fire brigades, newspapers, environmental, cultural and social associations, etc., representatives from all the political parties and relevant researchers of the local culture. The CMD has as main functions to monitor and accompany the strategic plan (with 115 concrete actions to perform until 2013), to participate in all debate on local planning, and to cooperate in specific projects or initiatives, as in the construction of the municipal budget for 2008, with three investments collectively chosen from a list of nine suggested the Núcleo de Monitorização de Desenvolvimento (NMD), or Nucleus for Monitoring Development.

NMD is a more restricted group, nominated by the Municipal Development Commission (CMD). It was initially composed by only five members, and has eight elements since its first anniversary, representing different political sensibilities, areas of residence and professional specializations, all with a strong affective connection to “their land”. Its functions consist basically in monitoring and accompanying the development strategic process and all its 115 actions, through monthly meetings and a very strong and keen cooperation in the partial or total implementation of some of them. The regularity of the evening meetings and the support of participation and monitoring methods associated with recent instruments for the territorial intervention¹¹ have helped to create shared confidence and an atmosphere that promotes efficiency.

These two groups apart – and their stimulus for the City Hall and the consultants with responsibility on the implementation of the Strategic Development Plan – there are other important factors that influence the construction of a shared and desired future, as expressed on the plan and embodied on peoples’ minds. On the one hand, the territorial articulation, where the top priority was reinforcing the cooperation with the neighbour and rival municipality of Arcos de Valdevez, and which is getting stronger. Besides the monthly dinner meetings between the

¹¹ As candidatures to EU financially based programmes, named as: “Qualidade ao Centro” (“Quality to the Centre”), for the regeneration of the central area of Ponte da Barca, with concrete partnerships with private institutions, combining different areas of intervention as public space, mobility, energy and urban identity (approved in February and distinguished as one of the best in the North Region of Portugal); and “Programa Integrado de Salvaguarda, Valorização e Animação do Património Cultural de Ponte da Barca”, (“Integrated Program for Protection, Recovery and Stimulation of the Cultural Heritage of Ponte da Barca”), an intervention that combines actions of inquiry, research, spreading and stimulation of the distinguished personalities, legends, traditions and buildings of high patrimonial value.

presidents and other members of the executive board of the City Hall, there are already concrete results, as the co-realization of an urbanism plan for the contiguous and mostly densely populated area of both municipalities, as well as the establishment of an inter-municipal transport, on a circuit connecting the principal equipments both sides of their common border. But as spatial planning and management must be performed at different scales, there was a communication improvement and cooperation in the context of the Inter-municipal Community of Minho-Lima, with common projects with some or all municipalities of this new association, and also with municipalities of Galicia. Also, a new strength has resulted from the conscience of a vision and the existence of clear objectives in the institutional articulation with the North's Regional Coordination and Development Commission, the National Park of Peneda-Gerês direction, as well with several ministries and public companies (especially important with those elected as primordial: Estradas de Portugal and Electricidade de Portugal), while – on a social capital basis – prestigious partners were found to cooperate on important projects, as INESC and Smarwatt on energy rationality, Logística Florestal on forest planning and management, and Engenheiros Associados on touristic investment.

Conclusion

Development goes beyond plans and projects. It is a process which is related to “social products”, such as local leadership, entrepreneurial culture and innovative action, and must enable people to act and to take advantage of opportunities (Willis 2005). Actions for development imply a multidimensional and multisectorial approach, creating the conditions for the success of *bottom-up* initiatives, with a wide participation in the planning process, which is essential for good planning and good governance (Stewart 2006).

Development processes should be guided by the principles of: openness (institutions should work in a more open manner and use accessible and understandable language for the general public); participation (the quality, relevance and effectiveness of EU policies depend on ensuring wide participation throughout its chain, from conception to implementation); accountability (roles in the legislative and executive processes need to be clearer); effectiveness (policies must be effective and timely, and actions should take place at the most appropriate level); and coherence (policies and actions must be coherent and easily understood).

Strategic planning at different scales is a possible starting point for integrated and participated development processes that contribute for territorial governance, considering that, at whatever scale, spatial planning strategies have the potential to suggest the desirable directions (Hall 2002) and create de basis

for convergence of multiple agents. In face of increasing complex spatial government systems, spatial dynamics and heterogeneous societies, an adequate territorial management depends a great deal of the engagement of people and their institutions. The aims are consensually related to the principles of the European Territorial Policy to the satisfaction of the needs and expectations of each group, sector or individual, with an evident need of a strategic and integrated process of its components: cohesion, competitiveness and sustainability.

The development of innovative and plural ways of government (in line with the concept of governance), claims for more inclusive and democratic methodologies of spatial planning and management, essential for the competitiveness, cohesion and sustainability of territories. So, territorial governance should be taken in relation to the best ways of in each case achieve coordination and articulation of collective action, centred on a local or a regional scale (but always with multi-level approach), recognizing the need of a process for a desired good management of a complex system where convergences of institutions and diverse sectors of public, private or other nature must be constructed.

Governance must be understood as something positive, so related to “good government” and not admitting “bad governance”. It is a way to unify different agents, who interact in society, helping each other to solve each-other and collective problems and to build a common, desired future.

Although there are not miraculous solutions, from the conception of the plan to the system’s reinforcement of the governance system, the scale of action (European, national, regional or local) and the selection of the tools should be proportional to the objectives we want to achieve. It is essential to previously evaluate the needs of public participation, to work with the adequate scale and to see if the actions to develop are sensitive to the proposed goals.

In the North of Portugal, a set of recent strategic planning processes have helped to develop a participatory culture in line with the principles of governance. That seems to be specially the case of the plan-process at Ponte da Barca, where since the beginning of the construction of the strategic plan until two years after it is concluded, a new culture of openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence are being exercised.

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