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CONSERVATION, DEVELOPMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT: A CONFLICTUAL RELATIONSHIP OR A DIFFERENT VIEW FOR NEW GEOGRAPHIES? 10°

The theme of development at the beginning of the 21st century. General considerations

The beginning of this century is characterised by the growing difficulty in classifying the territories where the daily life of the people unfolds. Concepts such as *periphery, marginality* and *centre* are now less easy to apply. Indeed, this logic of approaching geographic spaces should rather be included in the wider debate on processes and dynamics, on concepts and development frameworks. Before characterising a population's given territory, or the territorialities, it is important to give due consideration to the dynamics of the development encompassing such realities. The processes, mechanisms and directions of change are in fact more important than finding suitable adjectives.

There is, however, one set of premises that ought to be borne in mind in this debate. Reflecting on the development of territories and populations implies the assumption of certain key ideas, at the beginning of this new millennium, at least in relation to western societies.

In the first place, it is important to realise that we are in a social framework referred to as *post-modern* (or *advanced modern*, as some would have it). This is overwhelmingly marked by heterogeneity and diversity

¹⁰* Work carried out under the PRAXIS/C/GEO/13037/1998 project.

which frequently escape the harmonising stream, only apparently a faithful expression of contemporary geographic and socio-cultural realities.

We would highlight yet another extremely important fact regarding the approach to development at the beginning of the 21st century: the growing interdependence of all the points (or sites) in a system that is now defined by its globality. A discussion about development implies reflecting on the terms of the meeting between local and global scales. The planetary system, the mechanism for world articulation and interdependence, is read differently at any of the sites from which the observer perceives it. Although a first reading contradicts this idea, globalisation, as a frame of reference, is expressed in heterogeneous geographic realities, depending on the location and specificities in which the meeting between the local and the global takes place.

Finally, it is also important to stress that the discussion on development is very much influenced by the differing paradigmatic visions implicit in these rationales. If post-modern societies are commonly said to be experiencing a period of instability or even crisis (M. V. Abreu, 1996), it must be emphasised that among the factors from which the transitoriness and feelings of insecurity stem are the various perspectives that the actors/agents of development set in conflict. The beginning of this century is also a period of conflictuality, of tensions between differing, and not always reconcilable, points of view. A discussion on the question of development thus means analysing the conflict among systems of values and ethical frameworks and diversified behaviours, whose interaction is often complex.

The concept of sustainable development was born and consolidated around dates like 1987 (with the publication of *Our Common Future*, known as the Brundtland Report), 1972 and 1992, years in which significant conferences were held in Stockholm and Rio de Janeiro, respectively. It emerged as a panacea, capable of bringing these different perspectives closer together. Contradicting the most avowedly conservationist position revealed in 1980 by the World Conservation strategy, an IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) document, the strategy upheld in the Brundtland Report adopts a more realistic approach by also including the prospects for human societies to advance in the general

direction of preservation of the planet (W. M. Adams, 1999). In effect, by reconciling the elements of profit, innovation and conservation in what is necessarily an unstable equilibrium, reducing assaults on the environment as far as possible (Figure 1), the question of sustainability extends the concept of solidarity. Solidarity is understood here to mean equity, among both the various populations and the individuals of which they are composed, and among the current agents of development and future generations. These thus gain a significant status in the wider issue of discussion on the viability of the Earth, the common homeland of a Humankind that is increasingly considered in its global sense.

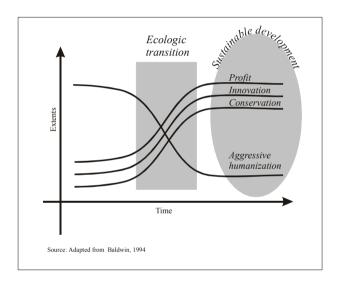


Figure 1- Theory of Ecologic Transition: a dynamic towards sustainable development.

After the period that characterised urban and industrial modernity, society should aim for processes that are more diffuse and which respect the pride that populations take in their environment, rejecting short-term materialism to bolster the post-materialist logic associated with behaviours and goals that can be assessed in the long term. Thus, after this process of *ecological transition*, "(...) new forms of consuming the territory" (F. D. Cravidão, 1998, p. 67) may be designed, and different landscapes, other geographies, built up.

If the concept of sustainable development is a curb on consumerist and developmentalist dynamics (understood here to mean economic growth) of society, the economic dimension can nevertheless be taken as a relevant and essential framework, even though this more quantitative dimension may have two other elements added to it: the social and the ecological. The preservation of growth remains an aim, but with greater equity, in a framework of respect for the burden, limits and forces of regeneration of an ecological scenario that is ever more strategic (A. Melo *et al*, 2001).

Even though the concept of sustainable development through the equilibrium that it proclaims, ought to be the guarantee of social peace and the convergence of interests that seem to be irreconcilable, yet contemporaneity seems otherwise to us. The concrete application of the concept of sustainable development has not weakened the stress and fault lines.

Maria da Graça Saraiva (1999) schematised these tensions in terms of a *continuum* between what the author called *Ecocentrism* and *Technocentrism*. The first expresses the ethical-philosophical and pragmatic postures centred on the ecological values of the countryside, and, at the other extreme, *Technocratism* unites the more materialist and confident postures in a technology that can solve the problems and weaken the negative externalities of an unbridled economic activity that is almost exclusively focused on the quest for material progress.

This author sees the complex social framework of post-modernity in the play and interaction between actors with differing postures, with respect both to development and to the relationship of Mankind and the Environment, once the undeniable link between these two domains has been assumed. Between those in favour of unlimited growth, the virtually unregulated exploitation of the ecological complex, and the more radical conservationists, here simplified and lumped together under the term 'deep ecologists', Saraiva refers to sub-groups, with postures somewhere in the middle. They are possibly more consensual and generally aim to protect or conserve the ecological systems where economic activities have become established. In fact, without our advancing much in relation to this simplified scheme of reality, these different ethics reach, primarily, the various consumers and constructors of geographical spaces. They are expressed in different territorialities to the extent that they configure the actors involved in development with varying postures and ethical-philosophical settings (Figure

2), or with "(...) contradictory priorities", in the words of Dominique Dron (1998, p. 56). Downstream, all these tensions materialise in the landscape typologies that are thus going to be built and organised.

The countryside stands out, therefore, as a frame of reference that reflects these differences, and in whose compass these tensions are materialised. Consideration of the topic of development and the philosophies and ethics of Mankind's involvement with the Environment, and of the behavioural paradigms that result from those various conceptions, find an important analytical laboratory in the territory in general and in landscapes in particular.

The landscape should be seen not as a homogeneous and stable framework, but rather as a dynamic scenario that reflects and symbolises the notions that give life to the different development agents who are, after all, all the citizens who consume and contribute towards the organisation of a given territory. This notion not only reaffirms landscapes as pivotal objects in geographical science, but also underlines their importance as a framework for reflection within the question of development.

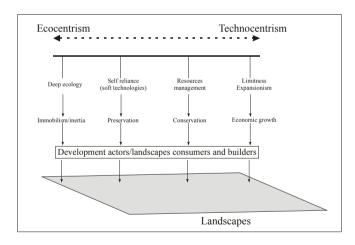


Figure 2 – The landscape as a setting for conflicts between different ethical-philosophical postures, adapted from Saraiva (1999).

In spite of an increasingly widespread concern for the environment, these tensions express a deeper conflict between conservative and progressivist attitudes. Since it is hard to achieve a balance, the challenge of development is based on a reconciliation of the various dimensions presented here in a simplified manner, in light of what the 21st century is bringing.

It is within this complex interplay between conservation, progress and development that networks of areas protected by special territorial planning projects have been designed. Indeed, the demarcation of protected areas in the European context was a response, no doubt with many local variations, to the need to weaken the effects of the destructive practices that were mainly legacies of the Industrial Revolution. However, contrary to what happened on other continents such as North America, when this institutional innovation was applied to fairly remote rural areas it frequently encountered human geographies that had been consolidated over centuries of permanency, and an artificialisation of landscapes that was sometimes intense. Thus, the European network of protected areas may serve as an excellent laboratory for approaching the complex interplay between conservationist logic and the yearning for progress, as well as the resulting tensions.

The analysis of a Portuguese case-study, the Serras de Aire e Candeeiros Natural Park, is a good illustration of the thesis of landscapes as scenarios of conflict, which is argued here.

Serras de Aire e Candeeiros Natural Park; the Portuguese network of protected areas

Portugal created its first protected area in 1971. Decree-Law 187/71 of 8 March established the Peneda-Gerês National Park. This was the first classified zone to belong to the National Network of Protected Areas, a list of zones subject to rules for their protection and classed in 4 categories: National Park; Natural Park; Nature Reserve, and Protected Landscape.

There are currently 25 classified areas in the National Network of Protected Areas (Figure 3), embracing around 670 thousand hectares (less than 10% of the area of mainland Portugal), and having a total population of almost 200 thousand residents. In addition to this network there is another

complicated list of classified sites, and areas with special status, like those included in the Natura 2000 network. In this way, counting all these categories, "(...) the total amount of national territory covered by protected or classified areas has now risen to 21.7%" (MAOT, 2001, p. 8).

The National Network of Protected Areas, in which the example under analysis is included, is a mixture of diverse zones, with differing levels of human occupation. First, there is a conspicuous stretch of western and southern coastline. The maritime interface and the defence of certain wetlands has been a priority of Portugal's countryside conservation policy. The Rio Formosa Natural Park, in Algarve (17 6664 hectares classified in 1987), the Costa da Caparica Arriba Fossil Protected Landscape (established in 1984), to the south of Lisbon, and various areas of dunes and lagoons have all been accorded special protection status. They have been classified as areas that, due to their physical characteristics, and location, would be quite likely to be subject to anthropic pressures, especially in a country with an unbalanced settlement structure, strongly inclined to the coast. This has meant they have suffered considerable assaults, particularly from the closing decades of the 20th century. The development of tourism, together with, in some of the cases mentioned above, the proximity to some important urban centres, are underlying reasons for these potential appropriations. The classification of the coastal strip known as 'Southwest Alentejo and Costa Vicentina' as a natural park in 1995, after approving the status of Protected Landscape Area for this mainland-Atlantic interface in 1987, is part of this logic.

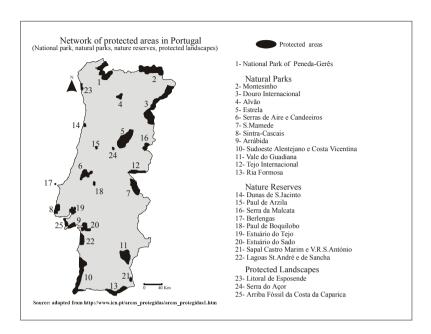


Figure 3 - National Network of Protected Areas

This preoccupation with the coastal strip is also in harmony with the Earth Summit alert, in 1992, regarding the fragility of coastal geo-systems, set out in some of the postulates of Agenda 21.

Furthermore, this network reflects the concern to safeguard particular stretches of river. Three natural parks, all classified in the 1990s, are related to this: Tejo Internacional, Douro Internacional, and the Vale do Guadiana.

Some mountain regions, which are more strongly rural, located near the Spanish frontier, have also been awarded special protection status, at least relative to this network of protected areas. One such area is the only national park in Portugal (the Peneda-Gerês National Park, referred to earlier), and others are natural parks, including the Serra da Estrela (classified in 1976) and S. Mamede (1989). These are areas lying further away from the country's more important centres of development but which are significantly affected by the principal dynamics of the functional disintegration of Portugal's rural space, which has been particularly noted since the middle of the 20th century. Even so, values have been identified in each of them that must be safeguarded if the balanced development of the territory of Portugal is to succeed. These

values are also important to the defence of the heterogeneous nature of the country's landscape. This goal was meanwhile reaffirmed by Article 3 of Act 48/98, of 11 August (Basic Law on town and country planning), under which "The integrated valorisation of the diversity of the national territory should be fostered". The same philosophy was subsequently reiterated by the Portuguese Government when it signed up to the European Countryside Convention, in October 2000, in Florence. This declaration of the principles upheld by the Council of Europe establishes that the countryside participates "(...) to a considerable extent to the general interest, at the cultural, ecological, environmental and social levels, and that it is a resource that favours economic activity [de manière importante à l'intérêt général, sur les plans culturel, écologique, environnemental et social, et qu'il constitue une ressource favorable à l'activité économique]", and thence the strategic rationale for "(...) suitable protection, management and development June protection, une gestion et un aménagement approprié]", further underscoring its importance in the consolidation of local culture, and, therefore, in European identity itself (Council of Europe, 2000). In addition, the creation of protected areas in areas with less potential for urban-industrial and technological development responds to the need to promote a positive image of these remoter areas, with long-term effects that are usually intangible.

Difficulties arise, however, both with the actual process (descending) of institutionalising these areas, and with other factors that make their administration a problem. One of the most paradigmatic cases with respect to the difficulties of managing a protected area is the Sintra-Cascais Natural Park, which was created in 1994. Of acknowledged landscape merit, it is nevertheless set in the midst of the largest metropolitan area in the country, at the confluence of some of the most dynamic municipalities in terms of demographic encroachment and expanse of built-up areas. The municipalities of Sintra and Cascais, where this natural park is located, saw an increase in their respective populations of 39.3 and 10.1% between 1991 and 2001, according to preliminary figures from the 2001 Census, published by the National Statistics Institute. This protected area is, in fact, the object of insistent urban demands, especially from tourist promoters. The cultural landscape of the city and hills of Sintra, classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1995, are important cultural

references that comprise a large part of this area. The Sintra-Cascais Natural Park is one of the few protected areas whose identifying symbol valorises cultural aspects of the landscape (the chimneys of Sintra National Palace and a Moorish window). This cultural identity, the fine landscapes and, no less important, its location, have led to a hard-to-control assault by real estate interests within the confines of the park. Another example that illustrates the conflict between ethical values in the use of spaces is that of the Natural Park of the Serras de Aire and Candeeiros (PNSAC).

The PNSAC is situated to the Northeast of Lisbon (marked n° 6 on Figure 3), and was classified in 1979. About 13 thousand people live there, in an area of 39 900 hectares, consisting mainly of a limestone block that rises to a height of 678 metres. Two things justify singling out this natural park: first is the degree of artificialisation of the landscape, and second are zone's physical features, which also help to understand the Human Geography of this space.

Protected for its fragility, the natural beauty of its karst geomorphology and for the contours of its scenery, the PNSAC is a paradigmatic example of a territory with a high level of humanisation, but a poor capacity for load.

The limestone is, indeed, a striking feature of the scenery in the area of the PNSAC, one of the zones with the most pronounced karst development in the country, at least in some zones (such as the Santo Antonio Plateau).

Karst regions have long been of special interest to Geography; they look barren and hostile, but have certain strategic resources, historically recognised and exploited. Limestone is perhaps one of the most important rocks, and is frequently associated with the aggression of some records of human activity in these regions – quarries (J.-N. Salomon, 2000). Very special features of plant cover and difficulties in relation to farming (sometimes only practised in very specific places, such as dolines or polje), limiting these spaces to livestock rearing, which, in many cases, has evolved from an extensive regime to an intensive production system. These and other signs of anthropisation, such as the development of settlements and industrial activities linked to centuries-old practices and resources (like textiles and tanning, are intensifying the pressures on these physical units, constructing landscapes with very individual physiognomies. These pressures combined with such a level of artificialisation, on limestone blocks that lack any surface water, but which have considerable

underground flow and a great capacity for hydric dispersion through their peripheries, can thus lead to pollution-spreading foci. All the effluents, waste products, rubbish and other assaults made on the surface and drained to the underground cavities will later come back in the quality of the waters that spout from the springs of these limestone rocks. In addition to this dynamic the excessive artificialisation and productive exploitation of some strategic resources is often seen in damaged landscapes, aesthetically scarred by the unbridled activity of removing land, depositing waste products, opening up holes and other signs uncharacteristic of the area (L. Cunha, 1990).

When these features are associated with intense levels of humanisation, and close to certain important urban centres, as is the case with the PNSAC, in relation to Lisbon, the outcome can be conflict, tensions and intervention/appropriation logics that are not always easy to reconcile.

The Serras de Aire e Candeeiros Natural Park as a landscape of conflicts

Though created in 1979, it was only in 1988 that Implementing Order n° 21/88, of 12 January, approved the Regulations for the PNSAC and its Master Plan. Among the principles stated when the Natural Park was created, the general aim, as described in Article 3 should be noted: "... protection of the existing natural aspects, defence of cultural and architectural heritage, development of craft activities and revival of the local economy, as well as promotion of open air leisure and recreation". This principle takes the countryside as a synthetic and indivisible value, articulating its natural elements while safeguarding the Human Geography that has already been built up in this area.

The reality, however, is more complicated than what is stated in the legal framework. Although the dynamic conservation of the countryside ought to be a structuring presupposition for the territoriality of the various development agents present in this area, practices are sometimes found to be contradictory and are frequently conflictual.

The Natural Park is a karst landscape, with its dolines, its limestone walls, its traditional windmills and caves, which deserves global protection.

Efforts have thus been made to achieve methodical utilisation of the space, while stimulating sustainable functionalities for consuming the land. Tourist activity that is diffuse and which respects the equilibriums that are sought for this protected area (with a network of hostels and some marked walking routes, for instance) is one of the strategies considered to consolidate the basic philosophy of the Master Plan (Seo and Searn, 1988).

At the same time, this landscape is viewed and felt differently by other development agents. One of the more striking images in this area is associated with mining. The quarries focus on four kinds of exploitation (ornamental rocks, slabs, paving and industrial blocks), and are one of the more aggressive activities; but they are also more strategic in social and economic terms. In March 2001, according to information from PNSAC, a total area of more than 590 hectares was being worked.

The country's development model, especially since joining the EEC (in 1986), is of great importance to this landscape. Investment in remedying lack of infrastructures and, more recently, events such as Expo '98 (in Lisbon), have resulted in increased demand for raw materials for the building industry, and these include limestone. This has led to a greater density of productive appropriation of the territory to which the PNSAC belongs: *Maciço Calcário Estremenho* (Estremenho Limestone Blocks).

Textiles and tanning are additional activities in some parts of the natural park. Rubbish tips are noticeable in some sectors such as the parish of Santo António, and these are a focus of aggression in relation to the environment: car bodies and piles of containers for chemicals, spilling harmful substances on the land, scar the landscape and affect the hydric dynamics of the territory.

The list would not be complete without a special reference to livestock rearing. According to the *Recenseamento Agrícola do Continente* (1999) (Mainland Farm Census), there are about 486 cattle farms in the Natural Park, with a total of around 10 thousand animals scattered around it, particularly on a plateau which has a microclimate and soil that encourage the growth of pastureland, almost always found where the ground is carpeted by dolines. The same report shows that there are 925 pig farms in this protected area, with about 120 thousand animals.

The density of intensive livestock production has caused considerable anthropic pressure on an ecosystem that is extremely fragile, and this has been aggravated further by the complete separation of this activity and agriculture, which is not much engaged in here.

Partly to attenuate this division, but also to limit the negative impact of the effluents produced by the pig farms, the PNSAC has developed a project to utilise the manure from the smaller farms (those with fewer than 200 animals) for the anaerobic production of electricity. For this, it enjoys the backing of the European Union, through its membership of a development association, ADSAICA. The resulting waste products are treated and can be used as natural agricultural fertilisers.

The conflicts between the different logics of land use and consumption in the same territory may further be symbolised by another geographical fact: the PNSAC is crossed by the A1 highway that links the two main metropolitan areas of the country (Lisbon and Porto). This motorway effectively divides the Serra de Aire (at the northeast end of the PNSAC) from the rest of the protected area, fragmenting a landscape which should be valorised as an integrated whole. The crossing of this area by the motorway means far more than the impact on the ecosystem, which led to much criticism by environmentalists in the mid-1980s; it symbolises two different logics in relation to appropriation of the space. On the one hand, it is a territory-heritage, regarded as a landscape to be preserved and experienced at a slower pace, diffusely and more carefully, with the sustainability that was essentially envisaged by the chief goals of a protected area. On the other, this same space is utilised as a mere physical substrate of an infrastructure, which far more than helping to fragment the landscape, sets store by speed and valorises the connecting of two distant points. This encounter could lead us into the wider discussion on the juggling act between space-flow and space-heritage, which is a feature of contemporary geography (J. Ferrão, 2000)11*.

 $^{^{11}\,^*\!\}text{Our}$ own translation for the original "Espaço-fluxos" e "Espaço-mosaico".

Despite everything, these contradictory appropriations of the same territory do not have a clearly defined boundary. For instance, two of the most important images of the PNSAC in terms of heritage (the Algar do Pena and the National Monument of Dinosaur Footprints at Ourém/Torres Novas) would never have been discovered were it not for the quarrying activities.

The Underground Grotto Interpretation Centre 'Algar do Pena', one of the most evocative points of interest in the PNSAC, is a cavern that was discovered in 1985 when Joaquim Pena, a paving stone quarry owner, removed a block of limestone in the search for raw materials for his business.

In 1994, a palaeontological resting place for dinosaur footprints was found in a quarry for ornamental rocks. The prints date from the Mid Jurassic period and are the longest and oldest records of such footprints world-wide. These unique characteristics caused the Portuguese government to undertake lengthy negotiations with the businessman concerned and eventually to classify this find as a National Monument, in 1966. This heritage site plays a significant role in the context of environmental education, welcoming over 110 thousand visitors between March 1997 and August 2000 (the period for which figures are available), many of whom were members of school parties.

The same landscape, on the other hand, is emblematic of the territory, as the dolines, walls, and green pastures of the Santo António Plateau are also repositories for one of the most aggressive activities in the area: the intensive cattle rearing, mentioned earlier.

This entire picture of relationships is expressed in the landscape, which here, as in other places, is the outcome of a synthesis, a special meeting between the spheres of culture and nature, between the artificialising activity of Mankind and the very specific features of the physical substrate. The intrinsic characteristics of the area are important, since they modulate a whole range of conditioning factors whose roots may be found on other scales, which are more extensive and remote.

To sum up, we have a landscape of synthesis between local and global dynamics, but an encounter that is not without conflict. The PNSAC is thus a cultural landscape that has resulted from the convergence of those who share a holistic view of it and so defend it in its entirety, as the regulations of the Natural Park have established theoretically (an institution with little power and certain internal fragility), and those who see it as a fragmented landscape, with clearly identified resources and capable of sectoral exploitation, as exemplified by mining operations. Side by side, overlapping in the same geographic setting, two ethical postures: the landscape as a collective heritage, and the landscape as framework for individualistic appropriation.

When discussing and characterising a determined territory (is it marginal? is it peripheral? or deprived? interactive? in transition?), it must be remembered that there is a multitude of views, perceptions, uses and functions associated with that same area. And so, as it is hard to find an adjective that can safely and unarguably be applied to this territory, trying to make these differences compatible is the strongest evidence of what may be called "development", is perhaps the safest approach.

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