



SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

MAP Position Note

EMPOWERING RURAL AREAS IN MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE PROCESSES



SHERPA has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement No. 862448. The content of the document does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed therein lies entirely with the author(s).

EMPOWERING RURAL AREAS IN MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

MAP POSITION NOTE

MAP SW

Version 07.04.2023

Authors: Pedro Santos

Contributors: MAP Members

Citation: Santos, P. (2023). *Empowering Rural Areas in Multi-Level Governance Processes, MAP Position Note SW (Portugal)*. DOI 10.5281/zenodo.8240225

Table of Content

1. <i>Current situation based on background research and evidence</i>	3
2. Position of the Multi-Actor Platform	3
2.1. Identified challenges and needs	4
2.2. Existing interventions and actions	5
2.3. Recommendations from the MAP	6
2.3.1 Recommendations for future rural policies	6
2.3.2 Recommendations for future research agendas	7
Conclusions	9
Acknowledgements	10
References	10
Annex 1 Methodology used by the MAP	11

1. Current situation based on background research and evidence

The territory of MAP SW has for many years attracted many foreign citizens of various nationalities.

The extension of land near the coast, the microclimate, and the existing irrigation system, are constraints that have favoured the establishment of agricultural companies, which have found in our territory the ideal requirements to produce quality and high added value, making agriculture, particularly horticulture and small fruit production, one of the main economic activities of the municipality. Therefore, the territory attracts migrant labour because the local supply does not meet the needs of the companies based in the municipality, due to the amount of labour required and the demanding nature of the work.

Currently, the municipality of Odemira presents a great cultural diversity. In 2017 and according to data from the Foreigners and Border Services, 18,8% of the resident population in the municipality of Odemira was legalized migrant, which corresponded to 4.912 inhabitants and represented 68 nationalities. Of these, 49,8% were Third Country Nationals and 57,8% of migrants registered in the district of Beja lived in the municipality.

Due to the characteristics of this territory, there are a number of challenges that imply a commitment to inclusive and collaborative governance. For this, it is essential to mobilize a "critical mass" with strong capacity for intervention and participation at different levels. The greater the range of actors in governance, the greater the guarantee that responses will be more real and sustainable.

This discussion cycle of the MAP, centered mainly on the answers to the questionnaire proposed in the methodology, complemented by a set of conversations with some of the MAP members, made it possible to collect an important set of testimonies, sensitivities, and visions that allowed us to draw a very concrete portrait of the challenges of multilevel governance in the territory.

One of the first things to note is that local players are not unaware of the territory's constraints or its potential. There is a real and widespread effort on the part of these players to promote discussions about intervention in the various areas that need to be strengthened or fine-tuned.

One of the good examples of inclusive and collaborative governance happens in social policies, especially in education, with the effort to integrate children from migrant communities, with emphasis on the remarkable work of the teaching staff in schools.

It is, therefore, essential to be closer to the populations, particularly the most vulnerable, so that there is a more real knowledge of their needs. Knowledge of the territory will result in an evaluation framework that is much closer to what the territory needs, as well as a framework of impacts that these actors are better able to judge. Thus, supra-regional action will not be based on ideas, even if they may be kind, but often with too much abstraction.

The rurality of this territory is not doomed to some sort of inevitable degradation. However, the distances, with political decision-makers and urban populations, will only be minimized from the projection of common interests followed by a more effective communication.

2. Position of the Multi-Actor Platform

Studies (namely by the Francisco Manuel dos Santos Foundation) have pointed to a growing deficit of citizen participation in local governance (e.g. participation in elections). In rural areas this lack of citizen participation and involvement in meetings and projects is an obstacle to the analysis of real problems and adherence to measures. Measures to promote participation have been non-existent or ineffective. There is low literacy and motivation of the population for policies and governance, and participation in working meetings is low. This phenomenon must be reversed, otherwise any measures and practices designed under MAP, and SHERPA, are not effective.

In fact, there is a resistance of the population to participation in decisions. Local actors feel that there is a gap between the dynamics of some issues (e.g. migration) and public policy measures at the national and EU level. On the other hand, there are public consultation processes for planning tools that have an impact on the territory that are not discussed locally.

Most of the time, there is a lot of time lost and energy wasted due to the lack of definition of the "common ground" that should serve to align the interests of local actors. In fact, it is important for everyone to have defined the framework for action, at the various levels of action and influence. The rapprochement between players depends, therefore, on the courage to define, assume, and defend them. The lack of a collective understanding of the territory will always be fertile ground for misalignment and discontent.

In the territory, the issue of non-inclusive, and sustained management of rural workers, namely immigrants, has been an example of the inability to align interests, which has allowed shortcuts to be found in the hiring of migrants. Taking advantage of flaws in immigration law that allow situations of temporary precariousness, which none of the local players want and which has done so much damage to the region.

In parallel, the actions of some public services, which have difficulty in keeping up with the social and economic dynamics of the territory (environment, agriculture, health, and security forces), have not helped either. The exercise of rapprochement can and should be done by the public affairs manager so that when defining local strategies, he can know in advance the risks and challenges, but also the opportunities.

The territory has a number of entities truly interested in solving the territory's structural problems, but more formal communication channels are lacking, with the capacity to bring more players into a more inclusive and comprehensive discussion.

2.1. Identified challenges and needs

The territory of Southwest Alentejo is marked by a diversity and multiplicity of local actors, with very distinct and sometimes conflicting interests, which should be seen as a strength of the territory to foster multilevel participation processes. In fact, the territory has no lack of people with the "ability to think" in a structured way. If there is room for frank debate, differentiated and welcoming responses to the various sensibilities or interests can be born in the territory.

Over the years, there has been a lack of capacity to align priorities and define the layers of intervention (private or public), clarifying the role of each interest group. For example, regarding the rural/urban relationship, the fact that there are new residents with strong urban connections (origins) allows an exchange of potentials and learning between the different visions.

Therefore, one of the challenges of the territory is exactly linked to the need for a greater alignment between the different actors so that communication is common. Any misalignment will provoke doubts, and doubts generate mistrust.

Another challenge is related to the fact that many of the main problems of the territory are not directly related to issues that are the responsibility of local government. It is important to find ways to hold decision-makers accountable for the impacts of policies on the territory, as there is no common line of direction and that many government sectors are conflicting. It is important to ensure strategic and political commitments across sectors. It makes no sense to have a "competition", in the territory, between agriculture and environment/tourism, for example, with contradictory policies and investments.

In any case, the problem of housing, or the lack of it, in the territory is the biggest challenge and the greatest need. The media visibility of the problem, long pointed out by local actors, has created additional pressure for the issue to be solved, or minimized, and there is now greater scrutiny over the entities involved in the process.

Locally, there is, and was, a clear perception of the problem, but not enough for the problem to be dealt with in a coherent way at the national level and consequently at the European level. Currently, and as a

result of the media, society's perception is that the housing conditions for migrants in the territory are horrible. Although dramatic situations do exist, and they cannot exist, the generalization of this image does not correspond to the factual situation in the territory. This perception leads to "lumping all situations together" and prevents the true separation between things that are different and does not help in the systemic resolution of the problem.

In fact, the situation in the territory is similar to what is happening in many urban areas, when it comes to the coming of migrants to Portugal and to Europe. The problem of immigration in precarious conditions is a European issue, which exists in Odemira, in Lisbon, in Spain, in Italy, and in Sweden. Trying to limit the issue as if it is a problem of rural areas is clearly to belittle the subject and to show the inability to find solutions that are transversal to rural or urban areas.

2.2. Existing interventions and actions

In the territory there are formal and informal networks of communication between the different stakeholders, although many of them should operate over expressive and consolidated regulatory frameworks. In practice, many times the discussions create divergences and distinct visions, which end up not generating results, and "next steps" because they end up lacking procedural robustness.

In fact, and as the examples presented in the table below, there are already some programs to promote the empowerment of rural communities and to diversify and improve agrifood economic activities and agrotourism, in particular.

The municipality has its instruments (social and others) and the private ones articulate themselves over these existing instruments or create their own mechanisms of intervention in the territory (some that derive directly from their activities, others created from the specificities of the territory).

This has contributed to the dynamization of social innovation and to the increase of interconnections between rural and urban spaces, not based on the services and products that the rural space "gives" to the urban space, but based on an equitable relationship of rural prosperity.

In relation to immigrants, and their integration, the existence of a guiding document for migrant issues, at the municipal level, has been a strength of the territory. In this particular regard, the collaboration of private parties has been essential so that much has evolved in recent years and the territory can "present", as an excellent example, the integration of immigrant children and young people.

Table 1 – Examples of actions taken by local actors

Fórum do Território de Odemira (*Odemira Territory Forum*)

The Territory Forum is a space for civic participation and reflection for the co-construction (involving and holding everyone responsible) of a territory with a better quality of life, based on the identification of common objectives for sustainable development, based on an innovative model of governance. This is intended to be a space of participation for the entire community, without exception.

Decentralized sessions are being promoted in all parishes, with the objective of bringing the Forum and its [Letter of Principles](#) closer to all citizens, listening and talking to the population about the well-being and quality of life that exists or should exist. The intention is to stimulate participative citizenship, to raise solidarity and local empowerment dynamics, to promote new solutions to identified problems, and to receive contributions for the definition of strategic development priorities for the municipality. These sessions intend to involve the largest number of citizens of all ages

Associação Rota Vicentina

The Rota Vicentina Association (ARV) as a "collaborative network", covering 6 municipalities of this rural area and cutting regional and district administrative barriers to the benefit of an area with strong sharing of diverse issues. The ARV has been leading several reflection processes, based entirely on networking, within the association and with partners of various kinds, besides the community itself (several demonstrable examples). There has been a recurrent dialogue with several actors of the local, regional and national power, in the areas of tourism, agriculture, environment. Highlight for the existence of the ARV's General Council, comprising 54 entities, public and private from the most diverse sectors (tourism, agriculture, security, environment, fishing, culture, etc.)

TAIPA - Organização Cooperativa para o Desenvolvimento Integrado

TAIPA was created in 2000 with the perspective that "things are born because they are needed" by the territory, people and institutions. This collective solution aims to be a concretizing arm of development, having as members a set of collective entities representing the most varied sectors and individuals representing the civil society of Odemira.

To think transversally and locally in a planned and integrated way, in such a vast territory and with so many possibilities of territorial cooperation, was and still is the great challenge of TAIPA, which thus develops projects in several areas such as: training, education, community animation, immigration, gender equality and domestic violence, economic, rural and fisheries development.

TAIPA's guiding principles include:

Empowerment of one and all, in creating contexts that give people and communities the opportunity to control their destiny and make decisions, to learn to match their goals with the means to achieve them, to expand social support networks, and to develop and exercise capabilities.

Diversity as richness, because it develops a wide range of intervention areas, different problems with different professionals, and very different participants/target groups.

3) Connection to the Territory - Strongly linked to the territory - but also considering national and regional objectives/guidelines - TAIPA's Community Development projects observe, discuss, and stimulate the municipality, in a logic of community dialogue and respect for history, characteristics and needs of the places.

2.3. Recommendations from the MAP

2.3.1 Recommendations for future rural policies

Overall, some "starting points" have been defined that should underlie the definition of future rural policies:

- Issues should be openly discussed with stakeholders and the community before the basis of any strategy is designed. Their development should be monitored regularly
- Public discussion processes about investments and planning tools with regional and local impact must be improved. Forums or platforms are not enough; there must be methods of co-construction.
- Local initiative working groups should be strengthened, trying to stabilize interests and defining their relative importance and "layers" of action, in order to define later the constraints of local action and therefore allow the definition of local interventions to implement national/European measures

- Good practices should be promoted, so that good examples are disseminated and visited by national and European policy makers
- The Local Action Groups/LEADER cease to be entities that manage community funds and become Groups that promote local action for development, with the capacity to act in the territory and not only with administrative functions

At the local level, the following recommendations have been identified:

- Creation of an Economic and Social Council at local level, with representation of the living forces of the region, and that would articulate the results of its action with local, national and EU structures
- Improvement of the Territorial Forum model so that participation at the local level can be meaningful in local choice processes; one suggestion is to base the process on the "Sociocracy 3.0" project
- Encourage the structuring of local collaborative networks, integral cooperatives, and other groups that foster the circular, endogenous, and integrated economy
- Capacity building and empowerment of parish councils, which have a crucial role in solving concrete problems of local populations
- Capacity building of the institutions' leaders, who are often afraid of dialogue due to lack of knowledge about methodologies of co-creation of solutions
- Information and knowledge regarding vulnerable populations, namely immigrants

At the European level, the following recommendations were identified:

- Creation of a European Program focused on local action, with the corresponding financial counterpart, managed by local entities through the definition of contractualized and evaluated goals
- Creation of the figure of a "Local Focal Point" in the regions so that the debate on policies is effectively done at a local level and without the filters of each member state
- Harmonize a common immigration policy
- To invest in the creation of cross-border networks that alert Brussels that the immigration problem is a global problem; good practices of accompanying workers from their origin to their place of work in Europe
- To invest in a European policy of categorizing the migrant's journey from the place of origin to the place of work in Europe. This requires, first of all, diplomatic structures that no European country has at its disposal, but which all of them together have to a large extent

2.3.2 Recommendations for future research agendas

In terms of future research agendas, the following were identified:

- Assessing the changing social and economic profile of rural territories. What are the challenges in the face of demographic changes and new opportunities arising from information and communication technologies
- To deepen and quantify the relationship between tourism and the (integrated) occupation of the territory, the landscape, the agricultural and forest mosaic, ecosystem services, and the local economy
- To define models that allow, in a practical way, to contribute to a greater governance literacy and participative citizenship

- Assess the profile of immigrants (skills, socio-biographical, individual mobility map (how long, where they go, etc.), motivations, reasons for immigration)
- Deepen the level and characteristics of the inclusion of migrants by resident populations
- Analyze the true impact of migrants, namely through the quantification of remittances. there is certainly data from money transfer companies that can illustrate the distribution of migrants across the territory, as well as their contribution to the economy
- Study the impact that Social Economy can have in the revitalization of depressed rural areas
- Discriminate positively research initiatives that have the participation of local actors or that foresee their discussion with local populations

Conclusions

In Southwest Alentejo, we can conclude that there should be local management of priorities and that there may be financial instruments for the realization of a set of activities, and that allow local actors to realize the ability to act and thus increase their involvement in decisions. This local management of priorities does not exist, and has contributed to the estrangement of people.

The definition of some incentives - multilevel - based on local realities can be one of the drivers for the empowerment of local populations. Defining the potential and the trade-offs of fulfilling this potential, of a given territory, should help local actors to define regulatory frameworks that are more stable and resistant to time and political cycles.

In the particular case of the MAP SW territory, the immigration issue is a particular stimulus for more active participation of the population. In this regard, there must be greater transparency in decisions and for greater clarity in discourse and in the adoption of policy measures. It is important that local populations feel that decisions have been made according to local needs and are not conditioned by other interests or ideologies.

National and European policies should ensure that their local implementation is adjusted and that there is coherence between different policies.

Acknowledgements

We thank all MAP members who actively participated with their contributions to this discuss.

References

Tavares, A. and Sousa, L. (2018). Qualidade da governação local em Portugal. Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos. Retrieved from <https://www.ffms.pt/sites/default/files/2022-07/qualidade-da-governacao-local-em-portugal.pdf>

Annex 1 Methodology used by the MAP

- Sharing of SHERPA Discussion Paper

The cycle's work started with share of the SHERPA Discussion Paper, translated into Portuguese and sent by email.

- Questionnaire

MAP members were invited to respond to a questionnaire on the topic (<https://forms.office.com/e/X7mQ653SZ9>)

- Interviews

In addition to the collection of written responses, a set (6) of interviews were conducted with MAP members to delve deeper into the contributions of the MAP.

It was not possible to hold any MAP meeting, but a subsequent meeting was scheduled to discuss this topic with local authorities.