

# WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis  
A collective work by CES



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Centro de Estudos Sociais  
Universidade de Coimbra



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# CULTURE AND TERRITORY

Cláudia Pato de Carvalho

The interior of Portugal consists of a vast, unequal and uneven territory (in relation to the coastal zones), with a set of natural, patrimonial, human and social resources we know little about and of which there is no structured and longitudinally organised inventory. In cultural terms specifically, inland areas present major challenges with regard to public policy formulation. Most of these policies focus on cities and areas of greater economic intensity and interaction and lack the capacity to adapt to the specificities and needs of inland areas. For this reason, inland territories have an unequal access to acceptable standards of quality and are faced with increasing economic, social and environmental difficulties in terms of employment, business, cultural and logistical opportunities. These regions are normally seen as unattractive and characterised in terms of distance, rurality and, in some cases, harsh weather conditions.

On the other hand, it is possible to predict the potential of some remote and low-density areas, where creating differentiated employment, valuing material and immaterial resources and creating a sense of community are more likely to become reality than in some densely populated regions.

The lockdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis may require a paradigm shift in the way in which we look at these territories.

Perceptions should not be too focused on economic gains but rather on the cultural and geographical uniqueness of peripheral and semi-peripheral regions, as well as on the identification of a variety of culturally related resources that offer a distinctive character to those particular locations. Firstly, the notion of innovation needs to be expanded. Traditionally, innovation tends to be limited to research and development (R&D) taking place in large urban centres. However, innovation also takes place (in traditionally less attractive places) in other ways, allowing for other, equally impactful articulations. Cultural practice – as an activity, a policy, a space for intervention and reflection – can create conditions to rethink these territories from innovative perspectives.

This paradigm shift can arise from an exercise of cultural mapping. It is a systematic approach for identifying, recording and classifying the cultural, material and immaterial resources of a community. It is considered an interdisciplinary research field and a methodological tool in participatory planning and community development. The aim is to evidence how local cultural assets, stories, practices, memories and rituals can turn areas into meaningful places. Cultural mapping can influence cultural planning and cultural policies and it can help define an integrated strategy for cultural action.