

# 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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# TERRITORY: INTERNAL COUNTRY REORGANISATION AFTER THE UNIPOLAR MODEL AND THE UNRAVELING

José Reis

The territory does not generally benefit from the attention of the political economy and the social sciences. Except in the case of the more specific disciplinary analyses, it is used, if anything, in the form of a descriptive category. Even when one tries to understand how certain institutional architectures are formed and their consequences for collective organisation, the territory is generally a missing variable.

The idea that this is an essential issue of good collective organisation has always had its determined advocates. And they know, unlike those who have hasty responses, that a territorial vision is, by nature, multiscale: it is local, regional, urban and rural, it is national and may even be foreign and therefore international. It does not propose simplistic ideas like the reducing of territorial cohesion to a vague notion of paternalistic relationship with “the interior”, as has happened among us, or the idea that fragile territories be given conditions of a general nature, since there is no point in insisting on them as they have little to give back.

In the two decades of this century, Portugal had the greatest territorial upheaval of our contemporaneity: it consisted in a profound change in relations between regions, whose developments became asymmetrical and as disparate as never before. This resulted from very specific circumstances: a form of unipolar growth, centred on the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon (MAL), with losses to all other spaces, whether urban, rural, coastal or interior.

The most significant consequence of all this was what happened with the medium-sized cities, which generally regressed in demographic terms, leaving us without an adequate national urban system.

Given these trends, the possibility of relevant territorial crises emerging was quite plausible, even if such a heavy “normality” were to continue.

Attention to medium-sized towns, small communities, regions and different territories is essential to rebalance the country. We will only obtain this capacity if each area can take care of its own economies – industry, agriculture, public services, housing, different ways of ensuring local well-being; if we have an idea for each of them, on the appropriate scale – that is, if we think in terms of development and not in terms of assistance.

The territory implies coherence between a development model and the society that sustains it. It is now time for all of us to understand that the challenge is to put the economy back in relation to the community it is supposed to serve. And with the purpose of life. To de-globalise, to break dependencies, to focus the country’s economy on aspects that save us, such as health, science, supplies (with enabling infrastructures and the networks that guarantee them): “returning to national production and reindustrialising”. Now, there will be no re-focusing if there is no territorial vitality and regional articulation.