The urgency of public transport in the context of low-density areas mobility planning - Portuguese case

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TRAN Committee
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND TOURISM
Country with a strong North-South differentiation, both in terms of the size of the property and the number of administrative units.

Portugal: 10,000,000 Inhabitants

¾ of the Portuguese population lives on the urbanized, industrialized, infrastructured and demographically dynamic coast as opposed to a rural, agricultural, underdeveloped and demographically shrunk interior.
22% of the population with an age of 65 and over. 11% over 75 years old. 17% with, at least, one physical disability. A country with a sharp aging increase, more evident in the interior.

A Portugal at two speeds in the generation of wealth. In the interior, it presents a little diversified, capable and family-based business structure with low business volumes.
In Portugal, there isn’t a single global classification for the concept of low density territory.

For the purposes of the National Program for Territorial Cohesion (2016), a multicriteria classification was adopted which considered:

- Population density
- Demography
- The settlement
- The physical characteristics of the territory
- Socio-economic characteristics
- Accessibility
In Portugal, **low-density territories present several problems**, whether demographic, economic, urban, institutional or relational:

- Loss of population and increasing population aging;
- Existence of a less qualified population;
- Insufficient size of most urban centers, revealing lack of support from medium-sized cities and towns;
- Low number of equipment, collective services and quality transport networks that make it possible to reinforce the strategic dimension of these territories;
- Shortage and low diversity of economic activities;
- High rate of inactive population;
- Reduced range of entities with attributions and competencies of proximity;
- Weak partnership networks and deficient population participation and involvement rates…

Portugal sees low-density territories as a declining destination.

In the world, a low-density territory does not always correspond to **low economic density**.
A clear coastal-inland dichotomy in terms of road transport network density.

Higher density does not, on its own, mean a higher level of service, with adequate frequencies.

Historically, in Portugal, the rail network was abandoned, specially on the interior of the country. Now, efforts are being made, and reverse policies are being adopted with the goal of revitalizing...
Low-density areas keep losing population, originating:

- Reduction in demand for scheduled transport services;
- Increased pressure on the financial sustainability of the operation;
- Loss of quality of services provided, leading to scarcity, aging fleets, etc.
- That basic equipment tends to be rationalized and to be more distant;
- It means that the means of transport to reach basic equipment are more scarce.
The provision of an adequate transport network is the responsibility of the State, a right enshrined in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic.

The Legal Framework for the Public Passenger Transport Service (RJSPTP), resulting from the European Regulation 1370/2007, favors the placement of public transport services to competition from the private sector, to the detriment of public initiative.

In low-density territories, public transport networks are unable to support themselves on the basis of revenue generated due to low demand.

It requires compensation by transport authorities who, in these territories, even in the face of scarce financial resources, pay a large bill for an often mediocre service.

The offer, which often ends up not serving the population properly, does not fulfill its social function as well.
European Regulation 1370/2007, which came into force in 2009, gave member states a **10-year transition period** that ended on the 3rd of December 2019.

Portugal transposed this regulation into national law in June 2015, **consuming 6 of the 10 years of the transition period**.

The country has **no tradition in mobility planning** or in **managing public transport networks**, which had been done, mostly and based on the previous legislation of 1948, by private operators.

Transport authorities had about 4 years to assimilate new skills for which they **were not** (nor are they?) **technically and politically trained**.

**No real planning of transport networks and services has been carried out**, but only almost a transposition of the current network, with virtually no adjustment of routes, fares or frequencies to the current territorial realities.
**05 | Proposed measures**

**MEASURE 1 – DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT SUSTAINABLE URBAN MOBILITY PLANS**

- **Plan and articulate all modes of mobility**, including public transport, interfaces and provide stops with safe, accessible and comfortable shelters.

- **Provide comfort in the pedestrian movements**, in the access to interface areas with the public transport network.

- **Improve the overall quality of the transport system**, increase its frequency in order to adjust to people’s travel needs and improve the sector’s ecological footprint.

- **Assure a definite bet on flexible and on-demand transportation** as a way to guarantee transportation in areas where regular transportation is not viable.

- **Promote a polycentric urban system** that provides a more balanced and structured territorial organization, with a diversity of functions that create opportunities and well-being for the populations.
The bet on flexible transport (DRT) will allow to overcome some of the limitations of conventional / regular public transport, namely in the offer of transport in isolated and dispersed rural areas.

To guarantee a transport service in peri-urban spaces, where the population density does not justify the implementation of a regular offer, complementing the existing network;

Responding to the specific needs of the older, school-age population in urban areas;

Serve specific equipment or areas that do not generate a demand that justifies a classic service;

Ensure the mobility needs of people with reduced mobility, who need a specific and proximity service;

Responding to specific nighttime needs through a service that ensures hitting transport interfaces or home connections.
MEASURE 3 - THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCESSIBILITY AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN

- The accessibility and universal design should be mandatorily integrated into transport policies and solutions in territories with a high rate of aging.

- The inclusion of accessibility criteria and universal design should be encouraged in order to enable the use of essential services by all, namely public transport.

- Only the guarantee of conditions of universal accessibility will allow the promotion of true inclusion in society.
MEASURE 4 - PROMOTE THE OFFSET OF SERVICES

- The need to bring essential public or private services to citizens living in low-density territories in order to reduce the effect of interiority.
- Health, administrative, financial and social support services, among others, may be based on a proximity model, “moving” towards people in the form of itinerant units, ensuring that citizens do not need to leave these territories due to the lack of essential services.
- Promote the fixation of new businesses in low density areas through tax reduction measures.
MEASURE 5 - “DISPOSAL” OF BORDERS IN TRANSPORT SERVICES

- Implement cross-border transport networks connecting these territories.
- There is a difficulty to be overcome in terms of the shared use of proximity resources existing in border cities and towns.
- In transport, as in health or education, there are still difficulties to be overcome in order to promote true cross-border articulation.
- The interior of Portugal “is more central than it appears”, being close to medium-sized Spanish cities such as Salamanca, Vigo, Cáceres, Badajoz or Huelva.
Thank you for your attention!
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