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## **Dealing with Ugliness**

### **Proposals for the re-evaluation of an industrial site**

*“Oliva”* factories at the city of *São João da Madeira* - Portugal

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#### **Abstract**

Last thirty years of Portuguese urban experience brought intense changes to rural and urban landscapes. The case study of *“Oliva”* factories at the city of *São João da Madeira* – Portugal, is an opportunity to discuss the evolvement of policies in design processes. This paper seeks to analyse the results originated by the role of order in planning, in an abandoned industrial site in Portugal, and calls for an enhanced participation between designers (urban agents, architects, communication and product designers, urban planners) the visual artists and politicians (residents, local and European government). The empirical material of this study was produced between 2002 and 2005 and comes from team work between the *University of Aveiro* and the municipality of the aforementioned city. This paper concludes that sites experiencing deep programmatic changes grounded in fragile planning agendas produce always

unavoidable experiences with disorder. Ugliness is there we simply can't miss it. Even, if we do not like or overlook, ugliness is part of the existing conditions of the site.

Moreover, ugliness the same way landmarks do becomes intrinsically imbedded with surrounding architectural fabrics. It coexists with the architectural and social fabrics, and as conditions mature, so does its ability to adapt to the changing conditions through time.

### **Keywords**

Architectural Design; Design and Development; Environmental Design; Sociocultural aspects of Design; Revaluation of the Industrial Heritage.

### **1. Main Ideas**

For many years the city of *São João da Madeira* – Portugal (figures 1 - 6), refrained from any semblance of comprehensive planning. Even considering the projects of the 1980's and 1990's – relocation of industrial areas and urban renewal in the city center represented isolated endeavours rather than parts of an overriding vision. An attitude in planning that is not grounded in comprehensive strategic visions informed with the regulations and opportunities for those European regions in the world context.

The scale of this case study, differs from other case studies, common in planning practice that usually are linked with major projects. However, if we give a close look to small or peripheral industrial cities of southern Europe, which as an overall make an outstanding number, this single case study might be useful for giving a glimpse to the larger picture.

The CEIDET<sup>1</sup> a research center specialized in planning and local governance, resident at the Environment and Planning School of the University of Aveiro was asked by the municipality in 2002 to produce a preliminary study for the strategic plan for the urban area of *São João da Madeira*. A strategic plan that could support the ambitions for remaking much of the city, taking in account the region needs and potentials, and at the same time not being obsessed with the geographic, economic and social frame imposed by the limits of the municipality. Conscious or unconsciously this was the turn page of Fordist production and of Fordist city as well.

As a consequence of this study, the Environment and Planning School of the University of Aveiro took the opportunity to test the flexibility of the proposed strategic plan, hosting in 2005 an international intensive workshop that produced detailed proposals for the city center (the “Oliva” factories today are part of the city center) taking in account the vision given by the strategic plan.

## **2. Case study: “Dealing with ugliness”**

Naming the intensive workshop<sup>2</sup> hosted in 2005 by Aveiro University in cooperation with other five European Universities was not consensual. “Dealing with Ugliness” is a name that instead of making emphasis on the potentials, both aesthetic and conceptual for the “*Oliva*” Factories and the surrounding City, carries a depreciative if not a negative meaning. Although naming ugliness was almost a spontaneous action, the site and the City of *São João da Madeira* have human and territorial potentials of their own. We see this approach as an opportunity for dealing with disorder and use it as factor for rethinking the dwelling experience in an old industrial site that goes through fast and deep programmatic changes.

According to our case study, we would like to understand:

- Why is this kind of settlement commonly considered ugly;
- Why, despite of being classified as ugly, is still interesting and takes part in important fields of debate and research;

City is a concept narrowly connected with order, while order can be considered as an archetype of city. For this reason, urban forms have been seen as shapes over a foreground. Thomas Sieverts refers to urban peripheries and urbanized country side as *Zwischenstadt*, an in-between city. According to Sieverts' quotation of Fritz Neumeyer:

*«There is the great traditional approach of playing with 'figure and background' which has been significant for the city plan since the baroque era... However, this method of imposing and interpreting structure while representing the figure background seems to reach its limits when dealing with the modern semi-urban reality.»*

Sieverts refers to disorder as the origin of lack of legibility in cities. In his book *Cities Without Cities* he refers the concept of para-aesthetic instead of ugliness, developed by David Carrol based on Nietzsche, Lyotard, Foucault and Derrida's works:

*«This concept of para-aesthetics could open up a view on the chaotic richness of forms of the Zwischenstadt which, when measured against standardized ideals of beauty, are regarded as ugly but have long ago been discovered by contemporary art.»*

Is ugliness attractive?

In recent years, we can say in the last two decades, derelicted spaces have been object of different regards (works from photographers like *Gabriele Basilico* are very eloquent on

this respect). Often *Basilico* focuses his look into the emptiness of derelicted spaces or to large scale ensembles. It is part of industrial imaginary the modernist zoning, the legibility of artificial landscapes imposed to nature.

*São João da Madeira* is the oposit of this: intensive and contradictory features combines bucolic residential views with decadent industrial uses, forms and materials. However, in planning terms, this reality is closer to the new paradigm of mixed-use that contradicts the aim of a perfect zoned world, claimed by some modernists. The ugliness that reveals lack of planning is the same disorder that allows the emergence of central, liveable places, combinyng diferent uses.

Ugliness can be seen as “lack of signification” of objects, when above the object itself there is still “an excess of matter beyond representation”<sup>3</sup>

*“ Although we might try to paint over relics or invent a fictitious order, close views of our cities are, in large part ugly”(Liernur 1997, 196-201)*

Jorge Liernur considers ugliness, in the case of Latin America, as the result of permanent destruction of political social, cultural and urban conventions and forms. He refers to reality also as the perception of what doesn't exist, but *could* exist. For Liernur, to deal with ugliness has to be independent from aesthetics, because the moment we try to do that, we imediately “contaminate” ugliness with a value, filling the previous lack of significance.

Dynamics in time and space keeping a continuity is presented as a possibility to deal with ugliness. Quoting Italo Calvino in his «American Lessons» it is in these dynamics that one can find ephemeral points in which “the existing is cristallized in a form”.

Applying aesthetic considerations to buildings and related architectural structures as well as to urban settlements is complex, as factors extrinsic to spatial design (such as structural integrity, cost, the nature of building materials, and the functional utility of the building) contribute heavily to the design process.

Notwithstanding, architects, planners and other urban agents, can still apply aesthetic principles related with the dwelling experience of residents and users, the meaning, transcendence, and harmony of the built environment.

Uggliness we are referring is the ugliness originated by disorder in planning, often seen in areas subject to high pressure of investors<sup>4</sup> combined with lack or fragile agenda of the local government.

Recent urban legislation in Portugal reffers many times: territorial order. Referring the 2003 Act of Planning Tools to deal with territorial issues, we may find many times allusions to order, organization, and structure. This almost obsession has to deal with a reality composed by discontinuous spaces, lack of structures, disorganization.

Very often, sites that go through deep programmatic changes grounded in the lack of planning strategies produce unavoidable experiences with disorder. Ugliness is there and we simply can't miss it. Even, if we do not like or overlook, ugliness is part of the existing conditions of the site.

Moreover, ugliness the same way landmarks do becomes intrinsically imbedded with surrounding architectural fabrics. It coexists with the architectural fabrics, and as conditions mature, so does its ability to adapt to the changing conditions trough time.

All the different approaches of ugliness tend to refer it as a concept related with beauty and with aesthetics, and aim at making ephemeral and transitory interpretations of how to deal with ugliness, disorder, para-aesthetics.

Ugliness is often used as a value to classify *results* of actions, in opposition to beauty.

In the work we have been doing we propose to deal with ugliness as a *process*, in order to find answers about how to work with it.

Can planning models create ugliness?

The city of São João da Madeira has experienced, as many other Portuguese cities a recent evolution with planning systems. The traditional zoning / land use plans were designed to new areas as to consolidated ones. It is embodied in planning experience that they promote and they should promote changes. However functional changes are in general much more difficult to control with zonings than other kind of changes (like densities, for example)

### **3. Case Study (conceptual frame and analysis): Redirecting our attention to the conditions of the site**

Karl Ganser (Ganser 2002, 11-15) says that the early dynamics of industrial growth have supplanted after the 1960's by the dynamics of differentiation. The most obvious result was the creation of services outside the actual production process, which had impact on the urban structures producing clearly legible changes on the urban programmes. Those results were very dynamic and accelerated most of the situations of abandonment, decay, and transformation of old industrial areas to accommodate new programmes.

This was initially thought as a problem, however it also provided opportunities when a new model of analysis for the revaluation of old industrial areas was very convincingly discussed by Karl Ganser (2002), Thomas Sieverts and Peter Zlonicky (Hegger 2000) taking as a case study the revaluation of the Ruhrgebiet. This new model of analysis avoids the notion of the city and the surrounding landscape as two opposites (a former notion inherited from the 19<sup>th</sup> century idea of city), and allowed to perceive former industrial sites has opportunities for new programmes for the city that have not to be confined to labour.

This was a major contribution that redirected the way we understand today abandoned areas that go through a process of fast programmatic change. Those spaces today may be perceived has dynamic spaces in the process of constituting public spaces has much has they constitute opportunities for the city to launch new programmes supported by strategic plans, which frame the city within a vast social cultural and political context.

In this regard it is interesting to mention that the heydays of the Ruhrgebiet planning programme started in the 1980's with research conducted at the University of Dortmund. A research that took the subject of the decaying industries of the Ruhr area and the extremely difficult social and economical consequences for the cities that hosted those industries as an opportunity for redefining the Ruhr region with an overriding vision. (Sieverts 2003, 133)

A vision that took in consideration the singular changes on the identity of each city at the same time that did diligent work with the central and local government for launching new programmes, that for the first time considered the Ruhr as a overall



region and not single cities competing with each other for supremacy, as it used to be since the industrial revolution era.

On the other hand, this experience and knowledge merged planning with a vaster context coming from the social sciences and the arts, allowing transformations on the idea of public space and its symbolic potentials, brought by the extensive photographic survey on industrial buildings in the Ruhr by *Bernd and Hilla Becker* and the sensibility of engineers such as *Hans Krabel* when reading new programmes for old industrial structures. This set the mood for re-thinking those industrial structures not only as decaying, useless structures expensive to demolish, but also, for some of them, as valuable evidences of the memory, identity and symbolic meaning for the cities that constituted them-selves at the same time that gave the conditions for those structures to prosper.

The idea of Public Space has evolved in a complex manner, possibly due to the myriad of different approaches used by artists, architects, philosophers and politicians on the subject.

Focusing on the work produced by contemporary visual artists, we find a broad view of the contemporary uses of the public built space, not only as the background, for dwelling and socialisation but also as the subject for visual art projects set in the public built space.

For instance the work of *Jenny Holzer*<sup>5</sup> combines the living experience with history, as well as with social, cultural and symbolic experience related to the site. Her work is relevant because she altered buildings fronts and urban spaces with non-architectural messages, addressing effectively the *discursive “skins”* of contemporary places.

*Joseph Beuys*<sup>6</sup> and *Richard Serra*<sup>7</sup> installations are significant not only because of their effectiveness in redirecting (in their own peculiar way) the viewer's attention towards the environment in which the artwork is set, but also because their outdoors artwork (when comparing with other work by the same artists set indoors) confirm the condition of visual art set in the public place, to have an increased exposure to other interpretations<sup>8</sup> beyond the leitmotifs that guided artists when producing such artworks. The *Land Art* movement of the 1960's and 1970's, not only was the pioneer in seeing the visual art not confined to a timeless art object, but also retrieved and extended the contemporary practice of visual art, making clear which context and actors played a decisive role in the make of the identity of places.

However no other artists such as *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*<sup>9</sup>, helped us as much in understanding that the negotiations, debate and involvement with the community are as much a part of their art as the visible artwork. On the other hand the work of these artists is a reference to understand the implications that the public sphere have on the outcome of our experience in the public space.

Differently, the work of *Gordon Matta-Clark*<sup>10</sup> and the projections onto monuments by *Krzysztof Wodiczko*<sup>11</sup>, address a quasi guerrilla quality that visual interventions in the public space might have, which contrasts with the diligent work made with the community by *Christo and Jeanne-Claude*.

And finally, the work of architects *Herzog & de Meuron*<sup>12</sup> is important to understand that simple and gentle moves may re-direct the viewer/resident attention to the site by transforming common buildings into monuments, using often explicit interactions between architecture and other fields such as painting, photography and sculpture.

This gives a context for reading *Bernd and Hilla Becker's*<sup>13</sup> work from their earliest publication titled tellingly *Anonyme Skulpturen*<sup>14</sup>, a seminal photography book and body of work that for the first time redirected our sensibility to previous invisible potentials of industrial sites. This created a new reading on the visibility<sup>15</sup> and monumentally<sup>16</sup> inherent to the industrial sites at the same time that shaped the way we see today the industrial heritage.

The industrial buildings photographed by the Becker's most of them constructions without architects, fascinated the first modernist generation (Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn or Le Corbusier) because these anonymous architectures were not built based in an architectural concept aesthetics, but in pragmatic agendas which would be guided by function, budget, time.

Becker's' books on Industrial buildings clearly display their serenely cool, rigorous approach to the structures they photograph as variations on an ideal form.

The Becker's make no attempt to analyse or explain their subjects. Captions contain only the barest of information: time and place. These photographs give the lie to Louis Sullivan's often misunderstood motto, "form follows function," because the external appearance of the factory buildings portrayed are hardly determined by their internal working processes. For this reason, Becker's' photographs do not really illustrate the development of modern industrial architecture, nor the achievements of functionalist building, but rather the achievements of banal, everyday architecture, produced by builders trained in crafts or by engineers trained in the needs of the industrial process, that later, today gained a new reading and contributed to the make of the identity of places.

### 3.1. Industrial heritage after the publications of Bernd and Hilla Becker

In a conversation with Jean-François Chevrier<sup>17</sup> the Becker's said that in the early 1960's discovered that evidences of a industrial world was going to disappear, and at first had the idea of fixing it, then got involved and learned the nature of the subject, and the subject determined the way they photographed. So they had to learn about its nature, its function, the different landscapes and the way people think about them.

*“There was also the idea that these industrial landscapes will not be there for eternity; even if they last for fifty years they change all the time. They are nomadic forms of architecture, they come and go almost like nature. This was interesting for us.”<sup>18</sup>*

Five approaches converge in the published work of Bernd and Hilla Becker:

- Photography as an analytical, documental and aesthetic media;
- Photography as a tool for representing architectural contents;
- Photography and its ability to isolate typologies and sequences – the series;
- Photography and its ability to underline significant landmarks;
- Photography and its ability in redirecting the viewer attention to the indexed information.

The photographs of the Becker's record the transient existence of functional structures and reveal different meanings that those structures had trough time and contexts. Some of them, at the date of their construction had only a functional use defined by the production line and proposes. Today, some of those structures are important anthropological heritage, significant for the identity of those cities/regions, and in some cases become landmarks. However, when compared with other structures of the same typology that are not important anthropological heritage or landmarks, the destruction

of less significant industrial structures would not constitute a loss on the industrial heritage and therefore not a cultural loss.

The work of Bernd and Hilla Becker does not claim for the preservation of all architectural and functional large scale constructions, instead by doing an inventory by series of typologies, stimulates comparison between images as a method of work and leaves open room enough for rethinking the significance of those constructions when their original functional use changed.

Constructions that in some cases beyond the fact that their original use changed, are so deeply part of the collectively symbolic, that they remain not only landmarks but also part of the process for combining the construction of the collectively symbolic with the changing identity of the place. In this case constructions became containers and justify their preservation.

The Becker's industrial vision has become an essential part of the way we see today industrial heritage. Much of the fascination of these photographs lies in the fact that these metallic, concrete or brick structures, presumably built with little concern for their visual impact, are almost invariably striking in appearance.

Their experience portrayed in photographs and photography books show evidence of a peculiar rhetoric of the industrial world that before them was unknown. Later, in the 1980's, this rhetoric was appropriated by the Faculty of Spatial Planning of Dortmund, giving a new insight to the potentials of these dormant structures within the context of a vast region, the Ruhrgebiet.

The successful planning strategies tried first at the Ruhrgebiet opened way for new

approaches to abandoned industrial areas and set the conceptual frame for a comprehensive approach in the area of *São João da Madeira*, which includes the perception of a vast region. Porto's Metropolitan Area<sup>19</sup> is a diffuse territory in which as Álvaro Domingues<sup>20</sup> says the "canonical" city gives place to the "generic" city.

### **3.2. Public Space and Public Sphere**

Indeed, all attempts to constitute ideal spaces proved the impossibility to confine their use and meaning accordingly to the ideas that guided their birth. In this respect we would like to recall *Vito Acconci's* aphorism "*Today's built public space is made and not born.*" Consequently, the make of a public space produces a public place. In this case, public place is where the collectively symbolic reinforces (not imposes) aspects of the identity.

In their essence, public places find always ways to exceed all attempts to circumscribe their purpose to idealistic situations. Indeed, public places have vacant spaces arranged for the purpose of providing space or set up for people to meet, ensconce community and to arbitrate social conflict. It should be remarked that through the analysis of different public places the condition of being human in this world can be discovered, and this (the heterogeneous condition of humankind) can't be circumscribed to idealistic situations.

Applying utopian ideas (the exclusion of other ideas for the sake of almost complete, almost perfect ideas) on the make of the public space can only lead to the death of what makes it public.

*"Today's built public space is made and not born (...) what's produced is a 'production': a spectacle that glorifies the corporation or the state (...) A*

*space is public when it either maintains the public order, or changes the public order. (...) A public space is a civic space, and a civilized place: within its boundaries is a world of civility, manners, and codes. (...) A public space is occupied by private bodies. (...) A public space is not a space in itself but the representation of space (...) The space becomes a network of parallel spaces, physical space, projective space, topological space, that mix into one intertwined space transmitted through telephone, television, computer. (...) The function of public art is to make or break a public space." (Acconci 1993, 11-16)*

In today's public space, physical presence and location cohabit with multiple representations of other spaces including its own. We think that this produced something that is much more dynamic and elusive than the public space before the media and digital revolution. This new dynamics and elusiveness produced new ways for people to gather, producing new public spaces that are not necessarily confined to the physicality of the site. Nevertheless the human need for gathering with other people, to be viewer and viewed, to make critical public speech, to harass or be harassed, persists. It is a need that has sought satisfaction using whatever means are available throughout different times.

In 1951's lecture "Building Dwelling Thinking" Heidegger describes *Geworfenheit*, (Heidegger 1971, 145 - 161) the sense of being thrown, that is, we live in the situation of being thrown in the space of architecture. What could it mean to be thrown into architecture, given the fact that we are always being thrown, from the beginning, into space? We think that dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth. Dwelling is not restricted to the experience of living in buildings; actually it is the experience of inhabiting a space.

The question of what is public and private space has elastic boundaries, depending on the context (institutions, individuals) upon which is experienced. In 1992, in a lecture at

the Avery Hall - Columbia University, Derrida<sup>21</sup> said that from the beginning he, among others, was interested in the authority of space over or in language and in the necessity of analyzing what rhetoric is figured in the spatial. This is essential to understand the tangible institutional power projected in the space that we inhabit, defining not only what is public or private, but also prescribing "the acceptable" modes of behavior in a space. Rethinking the link between public spaces, public sphere and dwelling could draw a number of consequences. What rhetoric is figured in the spatial? Definitely a subject when thinking of large-scale visual art set in the public space.

Following up on Derrida's ideas about the rhetoric figured in the spatial, Rosalyn Deutsche indicates the need to reinvent and extend the field of what constitutes public space and public sphere. In her essay "Evictions" she underlines the need to *"prevent the conversion of the public sphere in a private possession, which is so often attempted today in the name of democracy."* (Deutsche 1996, 327) Deutsche enters and questions public sphere as a particular interdisciplinary space - a discourse that combines ideas about art, architecture, and urban design on one hand, with theories of the city, social space, and public space, on the other. She calls this interdisciplinary field *"urban-aesthetic"* or *"spatial-cultural"* discourse.

Questions raised by Deutsche, such as: which political issues are at stake in the discourse about art and space? Which political relationships organize the space of the discourse? - Become relevant for a better understanding, not only of what constitutes the public sphere, but also how the public sphere embodies today's rampant transformations of places.



A critical aspect in the case of *São João da Madeira* is to produce public spaces, in former collective places designed for production – the border between these two statuses is more important than usually they seem to be. The process of turning into public is seen often just as a matter of changing the use of the container and the content will become public by some unknown automatic effect. In practice, *São João da Madeira* has to deal with a past full of collective memories but where at the same time the sense of public is much more associated with ancestral rural practices, than with production of space, enhancing disconnections between public space and public sphere. In fact during the workshop very few or almost none features showed us social or cultural practices related with societies that are simultaneously rural and industrial. On this respect, decisions in terms of functional programs, should be a bottom – to – up action which can be contradictory with up – to – bottom real estate's strategies.

### **3.3. A debate concerning the need for planning and sensible projectual approaches for the make of public places**

Old industrial regions are simultaneously places and non-places.

They are social places because they are historical from the moment that they combine identity with relations, giving to those that inhabit it the landmarks and the modes of behavior that do not have to be prescribed by an outsider ubiquitous identity. The landmarks and modes of behavior that produce a place are anthropological. (Augé 1995, 77-78)

They are non-places because they perform a contract based on the individual status/identity of the transient (spaces formed in relation to certain ends: transit, production, commerce); and the relation that individuals have with these spaces.

Once old industrial regions pass through the stage of neglect and abandonment, they are anymore anthropological in the sense described before and become vast transient spaces. At this point it would be desirable to think of these vast areas not as vacant areas but instead focus on their potential to ensconce identity, aesthetic qualities and an opportunity for establishing new programs. In these processes local government, investors and residents play an important role. However, to incite a research concerning the identity and the aesthetic qualities of these old industrial areas it would be wise to rely not only in the work produced by planners, historians or other consultants, but also having an open competition for art curators, visual artists, designers and other creators to produce site specific events and art pieces. Indeed these works coming from different fields may help to understand the continuous redefinition of important issues such as identity, aesthetic qualities, visibility and the construction of meaning associated with a specific old industrial area going through renovation. An understanding not only in relation to the site itself but also in relation to the intertwinement of this site with the adjacent areas and the city.

Contemporary planning and design approaches sensible to the intertwining between culture and economical sustainability (Hawkes, 2003) give always visibility to the collectively symbolic, reinforcing aspects of the identity of the place that otherwise wouldn't be noticed. This is an important issue to stimulate the sense of place and therefore contribute for a sensible dwelling<sup>22</sup> on the sites of old industrial regions.

### **3.4. Residents: Social, cultural and symbolic experience related to the site**

To realize the significance of architectural environments, it would be desirable to grasp the “elastic” experience of inhabiting those environments rather than give too much importance to their physicality as objects.

When we say: to grasp the “elastic” experience of inhabiting those environments, we mean that the experience of inhabiting an environment cannot be perceived only by its physicality and historical context. It should also be considered the phenomenological experience of inhabiting it. This experience is an “elastic” experience that can’t be sharply delimited. According to *Husserl* the experience of the observer cannot be separated from the essences of the environment, which obviously includes the environment, the observer, and experience of the observer (resident, artist/designer, planner, architect, politician, investor,).

Contemporary and former approaches to the places going through fast programmatic changes would be better understood if we do not rely only on the historical context and the physicality of those sites. We should also rely on the singular experience of its inhabitants; either they are investors, users, creators, or commentators, confronting the actual urban space with the individual experience in it.

However, the process in the case of the city of *São João da Madeira* reaches an interesting level of public discussion (at least in terms of certain urban agents and in comparison with other cases).

When the Environment and Planning School of the University of Aveiro was asked by the municipality to define a strategy for the urban area of *São João da Madeira*, this task included the programs for urban areas for which, the municipality wanted to

produce detailed plans. At a first stage the technical team from the university had an approach with the director, architects and engineers from the local urban management department. After an acknowledgment of the city through the eyes of these special partners, there was a sequence of meetings with several local and regional representative agents in order to debate strategies for the city. This approach enabled this university's team to propose to the municipality a strategy and a master sketch of intervention in the chosen areas.

Looking to the transient existence/meaning of industrial structures in the city of *São João da Madeira* we perceive that some of them today, became part of the public agenda and of the public space of the city.

Despite of the fact that most of these structures were built with a lack of architectural design, they were informed by aesthetical concerns by civil engineers, constructors, etc., as well as influenced by references of innovation in architecture imported from Central Europe. (figures 7 - 11) At the beginning of the 20th century, to design buildings such as some main buildings of “*Oliva*” Factories in *São João da Madeira* was a gesture of modernity, evolving speed efficiency and technology. We should not forget that those buildings were also a landmark (the clock tower of “*Oliva*” Factory is one of the most eloquent architectural elements) and corporative show room next to the main Portuguese road that, at that time linked the two main Portuguese cities of Lisboa and Porto.

However in a not distant time, at the same time that “*Oliva*” and other factories searched for good accessibilities, their owners found the same street and national road as a unique location in terms of social representation for their residences.

As the effects of Industrial Revolution were not as strong as in other European regions, also the process of de – industrialization caused less side effects. The city still has a strong industrial profile, although tertiary activities become more important. Some of these factories are still working, at the same time that the improvement of accessibilities to the territory evolves the city into regional dynamics.

Today, some of those industrial structures are important anthropological heritage, if not landmarks significant for the identity of *São João da Madeira*, and the old national road became simultaneously structure and fact of disorder by mixing a vast array of typologies so often “responsible” for what we call ugliness.

#### **4. Results of the team work between the University and the Municipality**

The collaboration mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, was a jump start for the municipality to be sensitive to attitudes in planning that are able to balance bottom up and top down approaches in planning. One interesting result was unplanned, came bottom up, and is now in the municipality agenda: A group of designers, architects, visual artists, together with professors and researchers of Aveiro University (School of Planning and School of Communication and Arts) and in some cases residents, constituted a discussion group “Design and Sustainable Development – DS2” (see appendix 1) This discussion group works in collaboration with a research center of the Aveiro University, (CEIDET) specialized in planning and local governance, and the municipalities of the cities of Arouca; Espinho; and São João da Madeira.

The approach of DS2 to planning is not placed entirely in conventional planning tools but on the synergies between Design and Planning. This produced a multi-municipal

project based in methodologies organized by projectual approaches in Design, Design Management and Territorial Planning.

These approaches take into the projects deductive and inductive methods common in Design and Planning, However, differently than in planning, take with ease into the project, qualitative methods much needed to combine with the conventional quantitative methods. This methodology helped in combining anthropological and cultural issues with territorial competitiveness.

During the past century, the aforementioned municipalities had consistent interdependency, as much as they were competing with each other. Interestingly, only recently these municipalities moved from the long lasting competition attitude to accommodate now inter-municipal and regional collaborative work.

Past experiences such as the Ruhrgebiet or the new EU cohesion policy, emphasizes the role of cities for the period 2007-2013.

*"The Commission intends to reinforce the place of urban issues by fully integrating actions in this field into the regional programmes"*  
(...)

*"New roles and new locations are emerging for institutions, universities, research centres, firms, science parks and so on. This change activates a number of forces that creates new "urban situations" and transforms the traditional and consolidated use of places. However, cities remain fulcrum of territorial competitiveness."*<sup>23</sup>

This macro frame of the European policy, produced incentives for cities that during the past decades experienced fast and deep programmatic changes produced by the displacement and abandonment of industries to other regions of the world.

This is certainly the case of our case study: The “*Oliva*” factories at the city of *São João da Madeira*, but also the case of many other European small or peripheral cities

As said before, during the past decades *São João da Madeira* experienced deep programmatic changes grounded in fragile planning agendas producing unavoidable experiences with disorder. This reached to an extent that residents of the city started not feeling proud of their city. This had implications, on the places chosen by people to spend their leisure time, shopping, as well as on the real-estate business, and most of all on the self-esteem of residents living in this city.

What we said in chapter 1 and 2 gives the context for the proposals that came recently bottom up regarding the proposals for “*Oliva*” factories at the city of *São João da Madeira*, now under negotiation between the municipality and the discussion group “Design and Sustainable Development – DS2”

In summary the proposal for the re-evaluation of “*Oliva*” factories is grounded in the following:

1- Legal Frame: “*QREN – Quadro de Referência Estratégica Nacional* – January 1st, 2007 to December 31th, 2013” in summary states that the local policy for sustainable development has a central strategic role for the sustainable development of all European Countries<sup>24</sup>

2- Strategic Frame: The study for the strategic plan commissioned by the Municipality of *São João da Madeira* to the research center CEIDET at Aveiro University,

3- Actors: The Municipality of *São João da Madeira*<sup>25</sup>; The program “Aveiro Norte of Aveiro University”<sup>26</sup> the “*Oliva* – factories”<sup>27</sup>, the research center CEIDET and the discussion group “Design and Sustainable Development – DS2”

#### 4- Action plan:

- To install in one building of the factory, a center of design with the mission to be proactive for stimulating synergies between Design and the Industries of northern Portugal;
- To install the northern branch of the Portuguese Design Center;<sup>28</sup>
- To rent studio space for the design practice;
- To install a shop that promotes off-line and on-line sales of publications and products designed with the support of this design center;
- To produce related cultural and educational programmes, not necessarily confined to the factory facilities.

#### 5-Results expected from the action plan:

- To produce a new reading of a city area, that still has strong connections with the self-pride of the inhabitants of this city. A pride linked to entrepreneurship and the good quality of their industry. However, that pride today can not be portrayed by the decaying industries resident in these premises.
- The collective memory and the identity of a place, a city, is a dynamic entity that needs to be explored in an archaeological manner until it is recognizable and taken as departure point sensitive to the needs of its inhabitants.
- It is expected that an intervention in a landmark with the symbolic importance of *Oliva* factories is a difficult job, and a challenge for learning with the dynamics of identity and an opportunity for renewal. A renewal that set in premises with such symbolic qualities and visibility, easily overcomes the area of intervention to become a political statement concerning the future of a region. A renewal informed by the larger context defined by world competitiveness, education and culture, sustainability and local singularity. A



renewal that takes cautious steps towards what needs to be kept and what needs to be transformed.

In 2006 this proposal was submitted to the municipality and the programme “Aveiro Norte of Aveiro University”. It is now under negotiation.

This is the case of a local action informed and supported by the European policy for the cohesion and competitiveness in the European Union as much as it is informed by design and planning methodologies for the re-evaluation of an abandoned industrial site, of a peripheral small city of southern Europe.

The major challenge is to re-direct the attention of the residents and of other actors playing a role in the sustainable development of this region, not as much to the regional boundaries, but to the emergent possibilities opened up to the region by cherishing the cultural heritage, as much as: knowledge, research, competitiveness, cohesion and sustainable development, a challenge that an outstanding number of small or peripheral industrial cities of Europe are now facing.

## **5. In Summary**

### **Public sphere as a complex result of actions, inter – actions and actors**

Awareness of the aforementioned context creates better opportunities for feasible proposals/projects and stimulates new readings that go beyond the visibility and monumentality inherent in such abandoned industrial sites. These projects use the contemporary public space, not only as the background, but also as the subject. It is intended that such projects may become catalysts for a sensible dwelling on the sites for

which they are proposed.

It is rather important to take this into consideration if it is there is the intention to stimulate a dwelling experience based on a recollection and projection between the essences of the sites and the ones that experience them, promoting the constitution of places within non-places.

Projects such as these become landmarks or refer to existing landmarks. In these cases, sensible planning on vast regions may produce, reinforce or even unveil landmarks, giving to places a sense of placeness.

### **Architecture serving ugliness**

Recent architecture in São João da Madeira increased diversity without creating new icons, large social housing areas, new public buildings in the centre, post-modern interventions in the public space are just some of the new signs and significances of the city. On the other hand, works on rehabilitation of architectural heritage in some cases aim at preserving images, such as the “*Hat Museum*”, installed in a former factory next to “*Oliva*”. In other cases, use lobotomy processes by separating exterior and interior architecture, and developing the latter in small autonomous programmes, as seen at the old theatre transformed into a shopping center. Moreover, new institutional buildings confirm different ideas of the city; Town-hall, Country-Court and landscaping. These different ideas of public representation, reveals also an apparent lack of coherence.

An informed look to *São João da Madeira* shows evidence that urban iconography is one of the weaknesses of this site. Nevertheless there is a strong link between many of the former industries and Portuguese collective memory. The goods produced in *São*

*João da Madeira* were highly related with families' consumption (like shoes, pencils, pencils and school's materials, hats and gloves). To re-use these spaces implies to choose which target one wants to reach, a target that may be closer to the public memory, than to the formal appearance of buildings and surrounding areas.

### **Bad qualities or urban form**

Urban form is becoming an under – statement – fashionable issue at the same time that is still considered as an anathema (Secchi, 2003). This is a very complex issue that legislation and law enforcement, only can't solve.

In the Portuguese case, the 1999 Act of Planning Instruments, revised in 2003, refers constantly order, organization, and structure as main goals of these instruments. This quasi obsession has to deal with a reality composed by discontinuous spaces, lack of structure and disorganization.

Our perception of ugliness can be the result of the turn of page in cities' history. Most of urban changes are slow and in general absorbed through human experience. When processes end it doesn't mean an immediate change of physical form. Instead it is more the fact that we start to look at them with new eyes.

### **5.1 Recommendation: Concerning the responsibility of architects, designers, visual artists, investors and local government**

We can still learn about the way people lived and thought from looking at a factory. However, the idea underlying industrialisation and global commerce is Calvinism and geographical indeterminacy – a kind of dissimulated voluptuous Calvinism, concerned with the idea of making money, doing things fast, being efficient and more recently

being evasive. Most of the industrial architecture formerly produced derives from this idea. Evasiveness came later and produces today's global economy responsible for accelerating the process of abandonment, decay, and deep programmatic changes of industrial sites throughout Europe and the North America.

### **Functional disorder, lack of significance**

That fact constituted a heritage that accelerated the growing placeless and homogeneity of urban environments and industrial areas. These conditions, today, claim the importance of being sensitive to the vernacular and historical as well as the social in order to give to places a sense of placeness. We would argue that interventions in old industrial areas but also their history needs to be critically looked at in order to see what the different paths to be taken are. A solid point of departure for understanding the scope of interventions in the areas going through fast and deep programmatic changes would be to acknowledge that the reciprocity between planning and site altered the identity of each, blurring distinctions between them and preparing the ground for the enhanced participation of planning in wider cultural and social practice.

Actually there is the need to bring planners into the procedures common in design. Design knowledge and procedures should be part of the political agenda of planning teams since the beginning. At the stage of the reading and understanding of a territory. Therefore it is important to stimulate public opinion and consequently the public sphere for the benefits (economical, environmental, aesthetic and social) in giving to those who inhabit or to the transients in our cities, a sense that combines the construction of the collectively symbolic with the identity of the place. This is a subject that calls for an

enhanced participation between designers (urban agents, architects, communication and product designers, urban planners) the visual artists and politicians (residents, local and European government), a challenge that an outstanding number of small or peripheral industrial cities of Europe are now facing.

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A special mention should be made with regard to accessibility of information provided by the Municipality of the City of *São João da Madeira* and the contribution of Ângela Fernandes (CEIDET) for collecting and organizing the material used for the Strategic Plan commissioned by the aforementioned Municipality.

## Appendix 1

DESIGN  
DESENVOLVIMENTO  
SUSTENTÁVEL  
GRUPO DO SOTO



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## Figure Captions

Figure 1 – Europe

- São João da Madeira is a city included in the conurbation of Porto, close to the city of Aveiro. It is part of the southern western European periphery in geographical and economical terms.





Figure 2 – Detail of Europe

- Iberian Peninsula - Portugal: see pin marking the location. – The conurbation of Porto is part of an urban fringe of around 500 km of length by 50 km of width concentrating more than half of Portuguese population (which is around 10 million). This area extends from Lisbon Metropolitan Area in the south, to Galicia in the north.



Figure 3 – pin shows location of “S. João da Madeira” in relation to the cities of Porto and Aveiro – An intense fragmentation of land property combined with small scale entrepreneurial skills made of the north of Portugal one of the most dynamic regions of the country, with high mixed-use patterns.

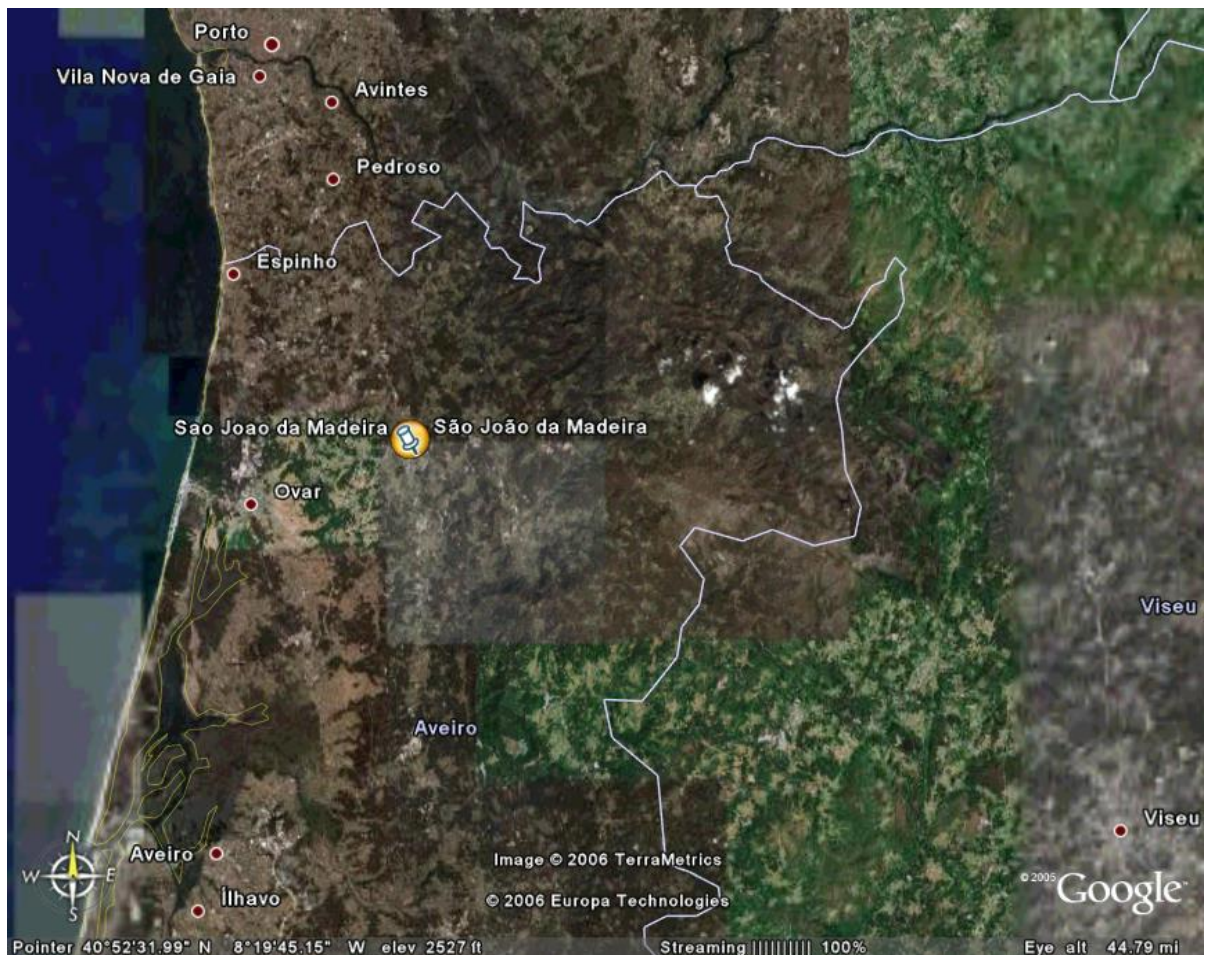


Figure 4 – Patterns of fragmented urbanization are very important in this territory, as we can see in this view from the city and its surroundings.

- "São João da Madeira" lat=40.902 N, lon=-8.490 W

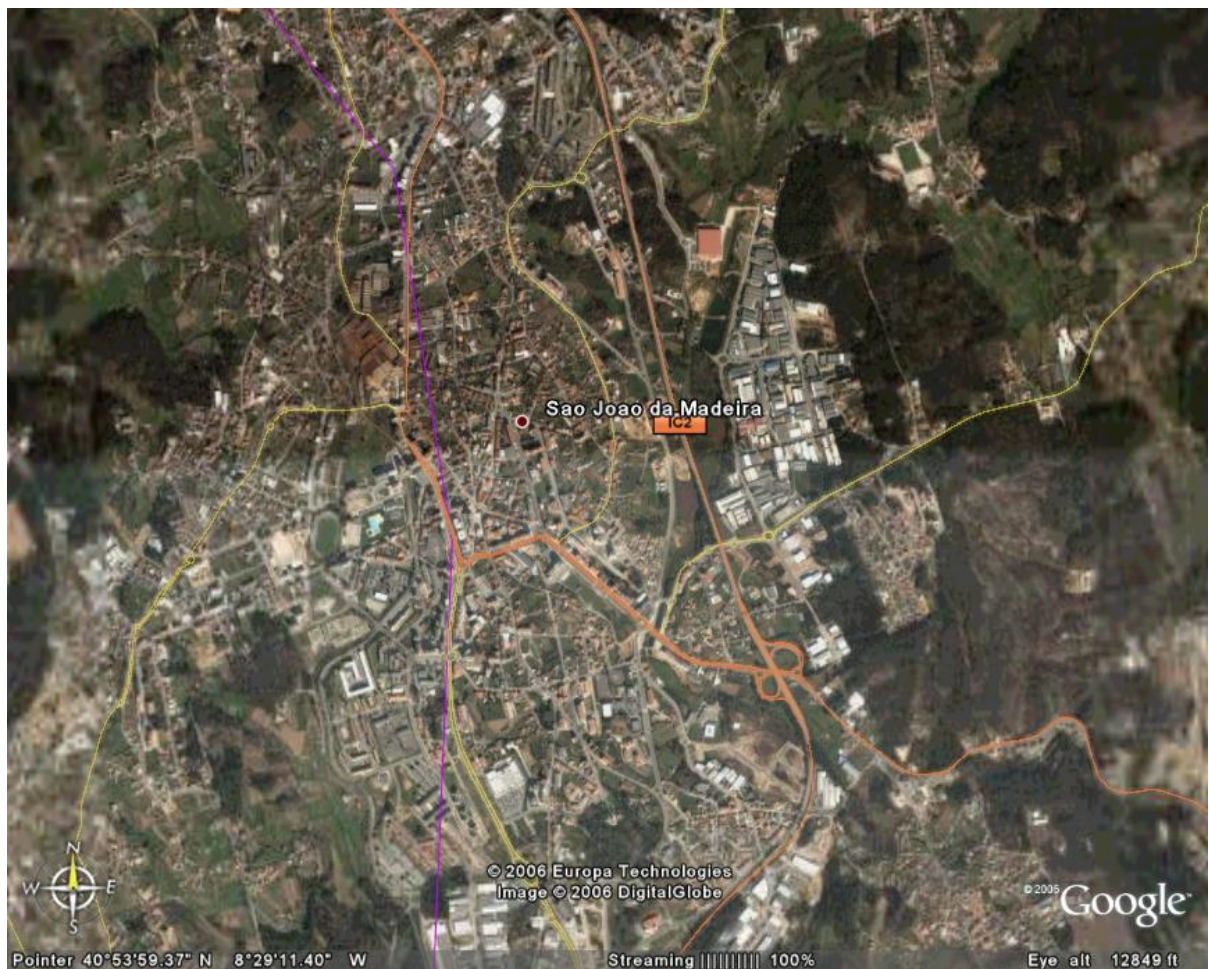


Figure 5 – Detail showing “OLIVA” factories next to the city center

– In the city centre, the former national road number 1, connecting Lisboa and Porto, separates *Oliva* factories in the west part, next to the river and the railway from the city center.



Figure 6 - The “OLIVA” factories - The mixture of uses, but also the mixture of scales is very evident inside the city.



Figure 7 – view SW (see figure 6 to pinpoint this photograph)

- The rural, industrial and urban layers of this territory.



Figure 8 – view NE (see figure 6 to pinpoint this photograph)

- The modernist buildings of *Oliva* factories are part of “anonymous” architectural industrial heritage.



Figure 9 – view NW (see figure 6 to pinpoint this photograph)

– The most eloquent element of the architectural settlement occurs next to the national road nr. 1.



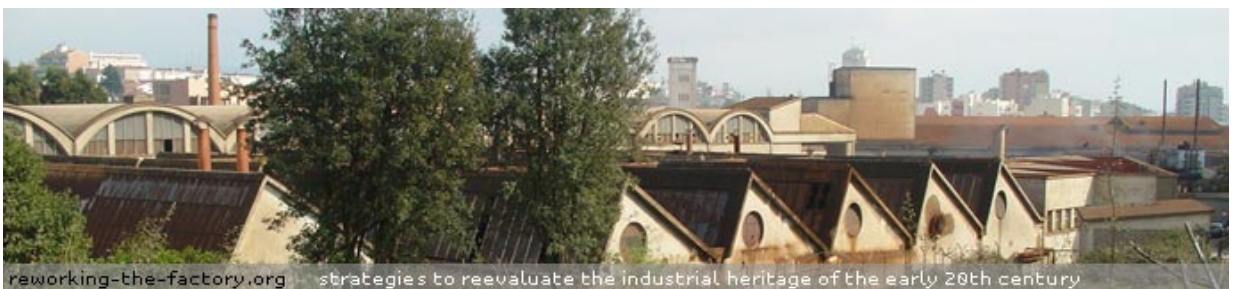
Figure 10 – view SE (see figure 6 to pinpoint this photograph)

– Fragmentation of production stimulated fragmentation of forms: actually the spaces are partially empty and the ones under usage belong to different companies.



Figure 11 – view NE (see figure 6 to pinpoint this photograph)

– The diversity of forms in a “form follows function” context.





## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dao.ua.pt/CEIDET/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.reworking-the-factory.org/workshops/aveiro/index.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Liernur quoting Cousin.

<sup>4</sup> The pattern of small land property defines at the same time that is defined by real-estate investors as an important resource for economical development at a small scale. The emergence of Porto's conurbation so well characterized by several authors is the solution for housing problems, combined with agriculture and industries of different sizes.

<sup>5</sup> American artist (b. 1950)

<sup>6</sup> German artist (1921 – 1986)

<sup>7</sup> American artist (b. 1939)

<sup>8</sup> In most cases is motivated by significant changes in the context of their usufruct.

<sup>9</sup> American artists (b. Bulgaria and Morocco 1935)

<sup>10</sup> American artist (1943 – 1978)

<sup>11</sup> American artist (b. Poland 1943)

<sup>12</sup> Swiss architects (b. 1950)

<sup>13</sup> German artists (b. 1931 and 1934) For nearly four decades this renowned German husband-and-wife team of photographers has been paying tribute to the industrial landscape. Their work ranks internationally among the most significant achievements in the field of industrial photography.

<sup>14</sup> Becher, Bernd und Hilla: *Anonyme Skulpturen*, Düsseldorf, 1970

<sup>15</sup> A concept, which context and meaning has various configurations. It may be associated with the visibility given to the rhetoric of the contents displayed, the visibility granted to those sites and consequently to those who commissioned or transformed those constructions, the visibility given by the uses and new uses of these constructions, the increased visibility of some constructions that became landmarks, the visibility granted by mass culture, the awareness by governments and corporations of the intertwining between different fields such as cultural production, world visibility and global commerce.

<sup>16</sup> A concept, which context and meaning has various configurations. It may be associated with the striking size of these constructions, the uses by the powerful of the monumental scale (not necessarily size) to reiterate their power, the monumentally based on the extent of the repercussions that constructions had at their time and on future epochs.

<sup>17</sup> Chevrier, Jean-François and James Lingwood ed. *“Another Objectivity / Un'altra Obiettività”* Millan, Idea Books, 1989, p.57-62: revised translation, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 58

<sup>19</sup> São João da Madeira is part of Porto's Metropolitan Area.

<sup>20</sup> According with «Deambulação» from Álvaro Domingues published in *Público* from 8th of June 2005.

<sup>21</sup> *Columbia Documents of Architecture and Theory (D)*. 1992, p. 13

<sup>22</sup> Sensible dwelling means the experience of residing in a place where the sense of placeness (place) superimposes itself to the sense of space (non-place). It is an experience where the collectively symbolic reinforces aspects of the identity of the place.

<sup>23</sup> A conference in Vienna (February 2006) <http://www.planum.net/plenum/call2.htm>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.europa.eu/scadplus/leg/pt/lvb/l34004.htm>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.cm-sjm.pt/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.aveiro-norte.ua.pt/>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.olivatubos.com/indice.htm>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.cpd.pt/>