JANUS.NET
e-journal of International Relations

PUTTING PORTUGAL ON THE MAP

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Abstract

This paper argues the need to "put Portugal on the map" in a double sense: in a prospective way, in order to place the country on the required map(s), something which entails strategic vision and capacity for action; and in an analytical way – to enable us to understand Portugal from the map(s) it is part of, which presupposes a capacity to analyse and understand the current state of affairs. By drawing inspiration from the polymorphic vision on the spatialities of contemporary societies and economies defended by Jessop, Brenner and Jones (2008), we propose the creation of a unifying reference framework to "put Portugal on the map", using a combination of five elements: territory as a geographic location; territory as a unit of reference of the nation-state; places; geographic scales; and networks. The polymorphic nature of the spatialities that characterize, or should characterize, Portugal's place in the world reflects several, and even contradictory, ethical values, interests, preferences, and options. Accordingly, the supported polymorphic spatialities ought to stir up controversy based on knowledge and arguments that are solid from a theoretical and empirical stance, and should make explicit the objectives and values they are based on.

Keywords

How to cite this article

JANUS.NET, e-journal of International Relations
ISSN: 1647-7251
Vol. 1, n.º 1 (Autumn 2010), pp. 92-101
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Putting Portugal on the map: strategic vision and analytical capacity

The idea behind putting a place, region or country on the map is generally associated with the purpose of conferring it greater visibility, importance, and recognition.

Distinct initiatives, such as joining the European Union, economic diplomacy and territorial marketing actions, the support given to the internationalisation of Portuguese companies, participation in international football tournaments cups, tourism campaigns, or encouragement to participate in science, creativity, and innovation networks, no doubt contribute to putting Portugal (or parts of it) on the map (or on specific maps). Albeit with very different results in terms of intensity and duration, all these initiatives aim to reposition Portugal on various cognitive and power maps on a European, even world, scale.

However, at the same time, Portugal is continuously being repositioned on those maps by external agents and processes with exogenous origin and led from the outside: the global financial crisis, changing international migration flows, pandemics, the relocation of investment or climate change, to name just a few examples, may contribute to a profound change of our position on maps marked by spatialities in constant transformation. So, what does "putting Portugal on the map" mean? Which Portugal and on which map(s)? And how? On our own initiative, through a proactive individual or collaborative effort involving national and external players – *putting ourselves on the map*? Or as a result of an initiative by a third party – *to be put on the map*?

The expression "to put Portugal on the map" has, in fact, a double meaning: a prospective one – *to place the country on the required map(s), which entails strategic vision and capacity for action*; and an analytical meaning – *to enable us to understand our country from the map(s) it is part of, which presupposes capacity to analyse and understand the current situation*.

Efforts with a prospective purpose have, so far, been fragmented and, generally speaking, unarticulated, as they are normally devised from a sectoral perspective to address specific conjunctures as part of one-off initiatives, programmes, or events. On the other hand, the multiplicity of used areas of reference, such as the European Union, the whole of the Portuguese communities scattered all over the world, *Portuguese Speaking Countries*, the *Mediterranean*, *Macaronesia*, the "*North Atlantic*", or *Mercosul* countries, are almost always associated to specific topics and objectives. Prospective

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exercises normally lack a comprehensive view of the whole that would ensure a more systemic strategic stance about the country's position on the world, and on the envisaged outcome. However, broader perspectives can be found in official documents (for example, in the *Programa Nacional da Política de Ordenamento do Território*, or in the *Estratégia Nacional de Desenvolvimento Sustentável* – ENDS 2015), or in the interesting works on possible scenarios for the geoeconomics insertion of Portugal and its regions, which are regularly prepared by the *Departamento de Planeamento e Prospectiva* - DPP[1].

Conversely, from an analytical perspective, we also find that fragmented stances predominate, mirroring the conventional divisions among fields of scientific knowledge. Areas as diverse as climatology, geography, political science, economics, or international relations, attempt to understand the country from the physical, cognitive, and power maps in which it is inserted, but they do so in an autonomous way, almost always ignoring external contributions. It is, thus, paramount, that we develop a broader analytical capacity that is able to scrutinize Portugal from its multiple insertions within vaster spaces and domains.

A reflective approach to the country requires that we confer a broader meaning to the expression "to put Portugal on the map": to propose new futures (strategic vision) implies understanding the present and, necessarily, the past (analytical capacity); and to understand the present, both the one we have inherited and the emerging present (analytical capacity) points to evolution dynamics which, depending on specific cases, must be fought, inflected, replaced, enhanced or completed (strategic vision). We, therefore, need a unifying reference framework to help us bring together strategic vision and analytical capacity. They are, after all, the two sides of the same coin.

Figure 1. Changing maps
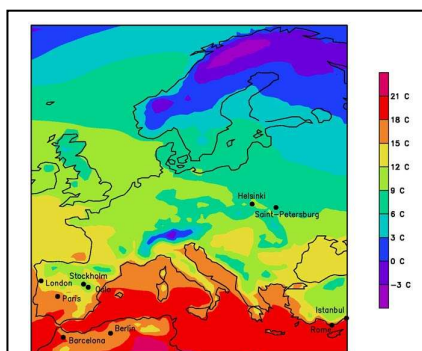

Fig. 1a. Continental drift
The Economist 24May2010

Source:
http://www.economist.com

Fig. 1b. Europe/Climat changes 2071

Source:
http://www.nonformality.org

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[1] See http://www.dpp.pt/pages/pub/estudos.php

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Fig. 1a: several countries are repositioned in the map of Europe, so that they can be closer to other countries with which they share common problems. The United Kingdom, for instance, is placed between the Azores and mainland Portugal, to be aligned with Southern European countries, due to the worrying state of public finances affecting all of them.

Fig. 2a: several cities in Northern and Central Europe are repositioned in the Iberian Peninsula (Stockholm, Oslo, London, and Paris) or even North Africa (Barcelona, Berlin), becoming closer to locations which currently have the temperatures forecasted (in a quite speculative way) for those cities in 2071, according to climate change prospective scenarios.

Portugal on the map: a polymorphic view

Contrary to spatial metaphors announcing a "borderless world" (Ohmae, 1991), the "end of geography" (O´Brien, 1992), or a "flat world" (Friedmann, 2005[2]), we increasingly live in a reality that Jessop, Brenner and Jones (2008) call polymorphic, whereby territory, place, geographic scale and network connect together in a contingent, sometimes volatile, but decisive manner for the development of contemporary societies and economies. In fact, security walls alongside borders which have either been built recently, are being built or whose construction is planned, in such different regions as North America (Mexico/USA), the Near East (Israel/Cisjordan and Israel/Egypt), or in Africa (Ceuta/Morocco; Botswana/Zimbabwe), remind us of the unrealism of the aforementioned spatial metaphors.

By drawing inspiration from the polymorphic vision of the spatialities of contemporary societies and economies defended by Jessop, Brenner and Jones (2008), we propose the creation of a unifying reference framework to "put Portugal on the map", encompassing both strategic vision and analytical capacity, and that includes the following elements:

i) *Territory as a geographic location*

Territory as a geographic location influences the development of countries.

The fact of being located in the southern area of the sea front of the European continent, close to the Mediterranean and in a peripheral position regarding the whole of Europe, means that Portugal's territory is inevitably conditioned by its location. However, that limitation is dynamic and varies along time.

Old Portugal, provincial and rural, that Orlando Ribeiro (1963) described and which persists on a physical or subjective basis in so many aspects of our collective life, was characterized by its significant dependence on factors directly connected to the country's geographic location. The growing modernization and tertiarization taking place from the 1960s have contributed to reducing the country's dependence on those factors. However, recent changes of a very distinct nature remind us how geographic location, even now, continues to be important.

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[2]   See Carmo (2010) for a critique of this view.

As an example, let us highlight the fact that Portugal became politically and economically more "peripheral" with the expansion of the European Union to the east, or how its location makes it particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. It can be negatively affected both by the average sea level rise (location by the sea), and by the intensification of extreme conditions, particularly heat and draught (location in Southern Europe).

ii) Territory as a unit of reference of the nation-state

The territory as a unit of reference of the nation-state is also a key element that is undergoing change.

Portugal's ancient and stable European border, allows us to clearly define its internal and external spaces (with the exception of the one-off and irrelevant episode of Olivença). Accordingly, for Portugal, its territory represents a solid and unquestionable symbol of affirmation of national sovereignty and of differentiation from other States. However, here, too, we find recent changes, of a distinct nature but, nonetheless, significant.

Over the past years, the rigid land border, whose impermeability nurtured, throughout history, well-known lively smuggling activities, has become porous and inexistent, as a result of the free movement of people, goods, and capital within the EU. This fact undermined the importance of our land border in favour of port and airport infrastructures. Furthermore, it even fostered positive interactions on the two sides of the border, which were initially encouraged by high investment, made as part of cross-border European cooperation programmes and, more recently, by the development of active reciprocated employment pools and flows of equipment and services of a cross-border nature.

At the same time, the instability of the sea border increased. This is due to the reduction of our coastal area, which, as a result of erosion and decrease in sediment deposits on our beaches, may reach, in extreme cases, 20 metres per year (MAOT, 2010). This value runs the risk of growing substantially if some of the predictions on the rise of the average sea water level caused by climate change are confirmed (Santos and Miranda (ed.), 2006).

From a "portulan chart" perspective that is to say, looking at earth from the sea, Portugal is actually shrinking…

Nevertheless, at the same time, the country may considerably expand its jurisdiction over the current 1.7 million square metres of maritime Exclusive Economic Zone.

The territory as a basic unit of the nation-state is, thus, undergoing change. In some cases this is due to the functional change of its borders, in others this is because this line is physically being redrawn.

iii) Places

People's everyday lives, as well as those of companies and organisations, take place within the context of specific places.

However, the growing mobility stimulated by sub-urban growth enabled by mass public transport and generalized use of private transport implies that current living

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spaces tend to be larger and polycentric, associated to areas of residence, employment, study, consumption and leisure, often quite apart from each other.

Locations and even cities which, until recently, had a relatively compact geography regarding their direct daily influence on population from neighbouring areas, are being replaced by functional areas. These are large spaces or constellations of places where living and proximity forms of socialization, which confer meaning to the lives of individuals and groups, develop and get consolidated. Simultaneously, other agglomerations with ageing populations, uncompetitive activities, and fragile companies become more marginal, undergoing a process of spatial disintegration that contradicts the physical geography that stubbornly keeps them in the same space.

Places where everyday life takes place continue to be based on proximity. However, that proximity increasingly presupposes the intensification and diversification of forms of mobility, underpinned by a dynamic that reconstructs centralities and peripheries, thus shaping a changing geography of winner and looser places.

iv) Geographic scales

Perhaps never so much as today geographic scales have played such a decisive role in analysing dynamics, understanding behaviours, and identifying changes. In this area too, distinct examples abound.

Let us recall, on the one hand, how local and global dynamics increasingly intertwine, even leading to the emergence of the neologism "glocalization", made popular by Robertson (1995). Examples of this growing dialectics between global and local dynamics, observable in several domains, include: globalisation of investment and relocation of companies, fair trade of local products and world markets, climate change and local adaptation strategies, ethnic neighbourhoods, and globalisation of migrant flows.

But, equally, the forms of multi-scale governance, which are so important in the context of the European Union, require that we pay attention to the "geographic scale" component in which the various players – international, European community, national, regional, and local – organize themselves and distribute or share tasks and competences, decisions and initiatives, or use the scales, as Charnock (2010) described it, to build new and successive forms of hegemony.

Unsurprisingly, Portugal cannot escape these two trends.

Thanks to the visibility it offers, enabling us to identify the analytical scale that is more appropriate to each phenomenon through zoom-in exercises, the interactions it allows to detect through multi-scale analysis, and the forms of organization it permits, as pinpointed in the previous paragraph, the "geographic scale" dimension and the reading and hierarchy exercises it permits, constitute a powerful source of intelligibility and power with regard the present and the future of any territory.

v) Networks

We currently live in an increasingly interactive and networked world.

The globalisation of the most varied components of active life – financial world, economy, drug traffic, migration movements, terrorism, media, tourism, social

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activism, etc. – presupposes an intensification of flows and mobility relying on networks with extremely variable degrees of organization and duration, which benefit enormously from the new information and communication technologies and point to plans, strategies and practices that are increasingly conceived on a global basis.

More recently, the expansion of services related to Web2.0 (blogs, wikis and social network sites) enabled the exponential development of online communities, transforming cyberspace into a huge communication platform involving many thousands of networks and many millions of people and organizations.

Physical and virtual networks complement and strengthen one another, resting on strategic connections and players who know how to take advantage of the enormous potential offered by connective proximity, which may be accompanied, or not, by the intensification of movement of people, capital and goods.
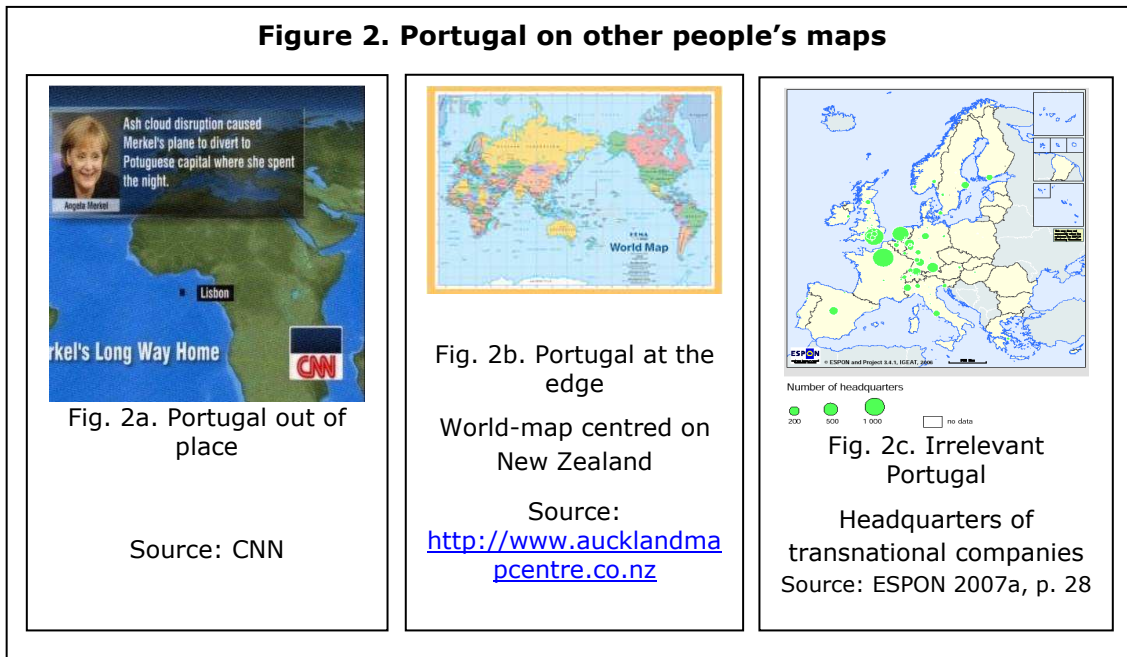
Our strategic understanding of the spatialities of today's societies and economies requires us to know how the several aforementioned components – territory, place, geographic scale and network – specifically combine in distinct contexts. This means we need to decipher the polymorphic nature of those spatialities according to existing or desired situations.

For example, the analysis and strategic management of cooperation networks involving cities scattered around the various member States of the European Union with very distinct hierarchal positioning within the European urban system mobilizes, simultaneously, the territory, place, and geographic scale and network components. The higher the capacity all the players involved have to understand and foster the polymorphic nature of this complex relations network, the more productive and powerful they will be.

"To put Portugal on the map" requires a systemic view on those various components that is able to integrate the spatialities of distinct powers – political, economic, and social. These components are currently taken into account in areas such as geography, modern and postcolonial geopolitics, and geoeconomics (Cowen and Smith, 2009). This systemic view must, nevertheless, go beyond these domains and have, as a reference, the "geographic" relational matrix advanced by Jessop, Brenner and Jones (2008).

This relational matrix involving the territory, place, geographic scale, and network components has, however, a nature that is, above all, instrumental. It only makes sense in the light of integrated versions, and is desirably developed from distinct viewpoints that complement each other. Portugal, as perceived by local communities, as a national project, as part of the European Union or in the context of global decisions will mobilize, necessarily, distinct aspects and combinations of the four elements mentioned above.

The scenario exercises developed as part of ESPON – *European Spatial Planning Observation Network* on Europe's role in the world (ESPON 2007a) and on the future of Europe's territory by 2030 (ESPON 2007b) – which obviously include Portugal – illustrate how important it is that we understand territorial dynamics better, and consider territorial objectives in politics and policy agendas aiming at building visions that favour a more promising future.

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Figure 2. Portugal on other people's maps

Fig. 2a. Portugal out of place

Source: CNN

Fig. 2b. Portugal at the edge

World-map centred on New Zealand

Source: http://www.aucklandmapcentre.co.nz

Fig. 2c. Irrelevant Portugal

Headquarters of transnational companies
Source: ESPON 2007a, p. 28

Conferring intelligibility and meaning to Portugal by putting it on the map(s)

The polymorphism underlined by Jessop, Brenner and Jones (2008) does not vary in time and space only. It also changes according to the perspective and analysis adopted.

This point is particularly important, as it implies accepting that there is no such thing as a "correct polymorphism" for Portugal, or any other country or area in the world, associated to each historical and geographical context, able to be identified and deciphered with precision and objectivity. On the contrary, there are several combinations of the elements of reference referred to earlier, and these combinations inevitably mirror distinct, even contradictory, ethical values, interests, preferences, and choices, both from an analytical and a strategic stance, which means they are subject to controversy and opposition.

The actual construction of global and contrasting projects in and for Portugal is manifestly insufficient, reflecting aspects as diverse as the lack of a culture of interdisciplinarity, the scant dialogue among the scientific, political, entrepreneurial communities and civil society, and the total absence of stable and credible think-tanks.

The scientific community ought to give the first step by making available for public scrutiny a research agenda aiming at the collective construction of more integrated and prospective visions that allow putting Portugal on the map(s) which confer it intelligibility and meaning.

These responsibility and ambition are inalienable. The use of the extensive collection of the Janus Magazine and of the Observatory for External Relations that supports it can, no doubt, help attain this goal.

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Figura 1a.

http://www.economist.com/realarticleid.cfm?redirect_id=16003661

Figura 1b.

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Figura 2a.

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Figura 2b.

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Figura 2c.

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