

# **Evaluating the impact of territory plans on urban compactness: the case of Northern Douro Valley**

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This paper identifies the urban areas dynamics between 1994 and 2004 in the seven Municipalities that belong to the Northern Douro Valley. The research consisted of using a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify the trends of urban expansion in the decade under study and the pattern of compactness of the urban clusters. Furthermore, the development of urban areas is compared with urban expansion areas as mapped in municipal plans as to analyze its compliance with the legal Municipal Plans of the nineties (PDM, a similar plan to Unitary Development Plans in England).

Albeit urban sprawl can be found in all Municipalities, the intensity of this phenomena varies and more than one set of outcomes was obtained depending on the specific Municipality. In some Municipalities, the existence of the Plan seems to have made some inflexion upon urban sprawl trends while in other Municipalities, past urban sprawl trends were kept independent of the existing plan proposals.

This leads to the need to identify another range of existing or non-existing policies, namely housing policies in order to fully explain the different obtained results. Cultural context has also to be brought in the framework of analysis, namely the economic value of the vineyard lands.

Therefore, the assessment of the impact of the territory plans in fostering more compact urban areas needs further analysis and unsustainable trends have to be singled out and researched as there might be local causes as this paper points out.

Nevertheless, lack of strategic regional implementation policies as well as lack of housing policies towards urban regeneration seem to be a major cause for the persistence of unsustainable trends of urban sprawl in Northern Douro Valley.

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