

Space matters: fine-tuning the variable geometry of cities

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The boundaries of what is interdependently urban have long ago overflowed a coherent, recognizable entity, both in the territorial as in the social sphere. Cities have a multi-scale geography, a virtual territory larger than themselves, resulting from a series of juxtaposed layers that operate in an analogy to variable geometry, as their non-coincident scale, meaning and boundary generate their general integrity. Notably, there is a difference between geographical and relational distances, and the relevant scale problems operate in that distinction.

Nevertheless the physical dimension and territorial context of city-regions must be included in the debate on how cities use certain projects as catalysts to detach from their geography and re-centre their position in broader and more fluid maps. Detachment from geography is not the same as independence from it, and relational effects and deferred interactions are forms of emergence of traceable spatial processes.

Taking Porto's metropolitan area as a case study, the paper will try to show that, quoting author Edward Soja, "*space takes precedence*". The city-region's morphology shows us a pattern of complementarity of centrality factors spread over a wide territory, leading to the idea of centrality over an axis. But at the same time, the political frames for decision-making are too broad, too narrow or too weak. All these scales must be fine-tuned according to the specifics of our territorial context, for potential catalysts to achieve their purpose. The region's spatial context must be internalized by a model of governance and by a strategy of parallel processing of urban nodes.

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