Dear Reader,

At the time of writing, the country is discussing the new budget for 2011. Some contextual conditions - internal and external - completely changed however, and, it seems, forever. Indeed, the present times of financial and economic difficulties are unlikely to simply come and go, according to the economic cycles, as they happened throughout the past time our memory can reach.

The drastic cuts and constraints this new budget announces, and that will surely affect our research funding system, are unlikely to be compensated or removed in the near future. We need to get prepared for this scenario of a longer and deeper crisis. As we know, the causes are profound and wide ranging in nature.

For the first time, the global economy, like a true boomerang, is hitting some of the so-called western economies, while most of the world, from China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea and other eastern economies, to South America, Brazil, Chile or Argentina, or even most countries of the African continent, e.g. Angola, Namibia or South Africa, are experiencing an unprecedented period of economic growth and, in some cases, prosperity.

In accordance, the world geography of research production is changing and our urban planning field is no exception. The traditional Anglo-Saxon dominant position is steadily being diluted into new and more diverse contributions from other latitudes and cultures.

If our economy and national accounts desperately need a boost in the export sectors, the research sector can also, albeit modestly, contribute as well to the national economy, producing knowledge of worldwide relevance and capturing external funds and technical and human resources.

At present, CITTA’s external funding, through networking, joint research and participation in EU projects, have already largely exceeded the contribution of national based funding. In any case, we should start looking more carefully to wider horizons beyond the enlarged Europe or North America. New challenges and opportunities are continuously emerging elsewhere. It is not just a question of diversifying funding sources but of being aware that the nature and the geography of planning research is also changing, and rapidly.

Paulo Pinho
The research unit “Urban Planning and Housing” has been focusing on the study of urban policies and new forms of governance, as well as on the development of policy and plan evaluation methodologies.

These two general objectives have been achieved through various types of projects, with themes covering several concerns: the issue of urban and territorial policy coordination at “micro” (intra-urban) and “meso” (metropolitan and regional) scales; the relationships between different governance modes, analyzing the possibilities of institutional convergence between territorial perspectives and sectoral based perspectives; the importance of urban policy evaluation with the purposes of innovation and collective learning; the creative city issue and urban regeneration policies; organizational change in housing policies and its role in the development of the social (rented) market concept and practice; and the involvement of children and young people in a participative land use management model for the local level. From this range of topics we now present some research focus and its results.

On the urban and territorial policy coordination topic special attention has been given to the analysis and evaluation of the role of ‘territorial coalitions’ in the design and delivery of territorial policies with transversal and strategic effects. The research includes a systematic comparison between Portuguese experiences and similar Italian experiences, in order to expand the knowledge about the relationships between spatial planning at inter-municipal scale and their correspondent institutional settings. The case studies include several territorial governance experiences, such as the emergence of different kinds of inter-municipal institutions and new instruments of territorial policy development programs, particularly the Ave Valley Integrated Development Operation, the PROSIURB Programme and the Sousa Valley Territorial Pact for Employment. Accompanying the emergence of these new instruments, the formal spatial planning system also faced significant transformations. These experiences are compared with similar events occurred in Italy, particularly in the regions of Campania, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto. We intend to evaluate the role of these experiences in overcoming some of the most significant outcomes of spatial and institutional fragmentation, and in boosting relational competences among the different territorial agents at local level.

The relevance of policy initiatives and programmes as learning instruments has been also an important research topic in other projects carried out in the research unit “Urban Planning and Housing”. Special attention has been given to the development and the dissemination of evaluation methodologies sensitive to the creation of collective capacities, namely through the ways each initiative or programme builds capacities, the ways these experiences in overcoming some of the most significant outcomes of spatial and institutional fragmentation, and in boosting relational competences among the different territorial agents at local level.

Creativity and innovation are now main issues in the literature dedicated to urban change and policy. The recently finished “Urban Policy, creativity and cohesion” project, financed by FCT, has been centered on the complex location patterns of the so-called creative and knowledge-intensive activities, in Porto Metropolitan Area, as well as their workers residential preferences. This project aims to bring out the issues of ‘creative cities’ in Porto Metropolitan Area, an agglomeration that over the last two decades experienced considerable transformations in different domains of urban creativeness. It also aims to analyze innovation in urban policy experiences, and to debate how some of these experiences may represent an opportunity for the diffusion of creative and socially innovative solutions across the region. Social innovation is then adopted as a useful concept to integrate social objectives in the “creative cities” agenda.

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