

PERSONA: FROM UNREST INTO ADAPTATION

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Abstract: The understanding of needs is a permanent negotiation between short term perceived contexts and longer-term integrated trends. Such negotiation, or compromise, is itself structured through the notions of space, time and cause, and the extension each of these notions may have. The difference between contexts and trends is, certainly, in the value assigned to each, but a greater difference resides in the fact that contexts are immediate and effectively condition Human options, whereas trends are perceived values, thus being conditioned by Human options. For a long time this has produced divergent approaches to humans/environment adaptive relations, either stressing human will and agency or highlighting environmental or other extra-human constraints. This paper starts by characterising contemporaneity and the great acceleration as part of a mask that, rooted in the anxieties driven by immediate contexts, hides a deeper trend of global depression and weakening of the basic rational mentioned notions. It then argues that the social role of the Humanities is to resume sociocultural balance, integrating knowledge, and particularly technology within it, which is a precondition for foresight. Such an integration allows to move from merely considering contextual problems (e.g., taking the SDGs one by one) into facing fundamental dilemmas and resuming a posture that perceives uncertainty as the nature of future, and not as a “problem to solve”. On going societal processes, from growing mobility to identity challenging, may be perceived as part of a process that is redesigning landscapes, i.e., changing the perceptions of territories, and particularly of borders. This, together with digitalization, changes the ground of space, modifies the notion of time and challenges rational causality. Humanities are, likely, the path for moving ahead while resuming rational cognition and its long-term implications, from social inclusion to human driven technology. The paper presents a context of landscape management, as an example, through current projects moving in the directions of overcoming contemporary cognitive divides.

Key-words: Context; Trend; Adaptation; Knowledge; Humanities

ACCELERATION, ANXIETY AND EMERGENCY

The understanding of needs is a permanent negotiation between short term perceived contexts and longer-term integrated trends. Such negotiation, or compromise, is itself structured through the notions of space, time and cause, and the extension each of these notions may have¹.

The difference between contexts and trends is, certainly, in the value assigned to each, but a greater difference resides in the fact that contexts are

¹ Piaget, J. (1954). *The construction of reality in the child*, New York: Basic Books.

immediate and effectively condition Human options, whereas trends are perceived values, thus being conditioned by Human options. In the last three centuries, this has produced divergent approaches to humans/environment adaptive relations, either stressing human will and agency (from Nietzsche to Marx) or highlighting environmental or other extra-human constraints (from Hegel's teleology to Darwin's evolutionary theory).

In either of these approaches, the keyword is “process”, i.e., the envelope within which needs are expressed and human strategies are performed. The current envelope, which led to the current immediate context of perceived “climate crisis”, started to be designed in post-World War II, through a combination of two main drivers: the scientific advances that, from the 1950's, led to the optimism on a “problem-solution oriented strategy”, anchored in isolating problems and solving them one by one through analytics deductive methods; and the social and economic transformations, from the mid-1960's, triggered growing doubts on the capacity of existing management/political models to cope with newly perceived needs, namely those related to individual rights.

The last seven decades expresses, hence, a peculiar trend, which tended to structure a longer-term process not through a set of longer-term goals, or utopias, but through a series of short-term objectives². Certainly, the last decades of the 20th century experienced the growing tension between this trend and the visions emerging from the scientific and humanities reflections, concerning the so-called “great acceleration”³ or “governance”. While the scientist's assessment of environmental and social processes stressed the need for a longer-term strategy (which came to be known as “sustainable

² Oosterbeek, L. (2019). CIPSH and its relations with UAI and UNESCO. In: J.-L. De Paepe; P. Jodogne; I. Algrain (eds.). *From a Republic of Scholars to a Community of Researchers*. Turnhout: Brepols ed., pp. 145-158.

³ Santos, F.D. (2007). *Que futuro? Ciência, tecnologia, desenvolvimento e ambiente*, Lisboa: Gradiva pub.

development”) and Humanities scholars reiterated the historical and value-oriented dimension of human choices, the reality of the past decades has been dominated by the shrinking of time-planning and the focus on short-term deliveries. This explains the great success of societal advances in individual rights (from women and children citizenship recognition to gender or ethnic balances) but, also, the failure of the sustainability strategies (challenged both by the interests of corporate lobbies, such as energy producers, and by chaotic social movements, such as the “gilets jaunes” in France) and the decay of the Humanities (unable to cope with the short-term agendas, which contradict their nature and relevance).

A series of disruptive mechanisms explain the anxiety of contemporary societies, having pushed them into the short-term approaches. The new cultural processes initiated with the collapse of the colonial model of economy, destroying a long-established geo-strategic matrix and paving the way for the new emergence of the Asiatic cluster, but also leading to the collapse of the Bretton-Woods financial structure, seat at the basis for a new model of financial acceleration (or inflation), which in a first moment enabled positive answers to several short-term demands without questioning the system, but ultimately led to the system close-to-collapse that we experience today. The digital revolution, changing the value of labour in economy and consolidating the financial shift of the economy from production to distribution, accelerated the transformation of a non-questioned but living, and thus transformable, system.

The combination of the distribution economy (in which property and tangible resources lose relevance in face of short-term consumables) with digitalization (in which the notions of time distance and space difference tend to be destroyed by the perception of simultaneity and of “non-places” of circulation) led, finally, to an impoverishment of the brain connections related

to motricity and, thus, of the notions of space, time and rational cause⁴. All this process has been potentiated by the combination of a longer life expectancy with a global ageing related to a decrease in birth rate.

ECONOMIC AND COGNITIVE CHALLENGES

Behaviour virtualization, expansion of short-term agendas, ageing and the shift towards a STEM and market-oriented education, are components of the same trend, interdependent and feeding each other in a destructive “great acceleration”, in which public debate and dispute is replaced by totalitarian one-perspective, simplified, vision, which operates as a mask that, rooted in the anxieties driven by immediate contexts, hiding a deeper trend of global depression and weakening of the basic rational notions, mentioned above.

In strict economic terms, we assist already to the collapse of the system as it has been designed seven decades ago, through a new long-term depression⁵, for which the year 2008 may be indicated as a milestone, but resulting from the integration of four main drivers: economic reorganization of the world market main clusters, from the emergence of Asia to the collapse of the international monetary system; social transformations, through the disruption of intergeneration’s connections and knowledge transmission, unemployment being risen by digital economy, ageing or the shift of education from knowledge production into market circulation⁶; incapacity to adapt to environmental challenges, from energy to water supply, since these require long-term culturally informed strategies, and not only short-term technical solutions; cultural clashes across identities, triggered by growing

⁴ Castells, M. (2010). *The Rise of the Network Society: Economy, Society, and Culture*, 2.^a Ed., Vol. I Information Age. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

⁵ Krugman, P. (2013). A permanent slum? In: *International New York Times*, Nov. 19th

⁶ Oosterbeek, L. (2017). Encrypting and decrypting territories: training, education and communication within landscapes. In: Oosterbeek L., Gudauskas R., Caron L. (eds, 2017). *Education, training and communication in cultural management of landscapes. Transdisciplinary contributions to Cultural Integrated Landscape Management*. Mação: Instituto Terra e Memória, série *Arkeos*, vol. 42., pp. 11-18

mobility, the collapse of frontiers and states, these being replaced by cities, as in pre-modern and more violent times. The current calls for “emergency”, despite their often well-intended wishes and their addressing of real concerns, fall into the short-term trap, and contribute for building a “mask” that prevents from understanding the confluence of transformations that characterises a new “great depression” in the end of which, like in 1929-1946, or in 1873-1896 before that, the whole global equilibrium will certainly be different from what we know today, although it still remains totally uncertain.

However, it is in the cognitive dimension that the effects of the current process are more dangerous, since for the first time in human evolution the economic growth may be rooted not only in social inequality but in cognitive alienation⁷.

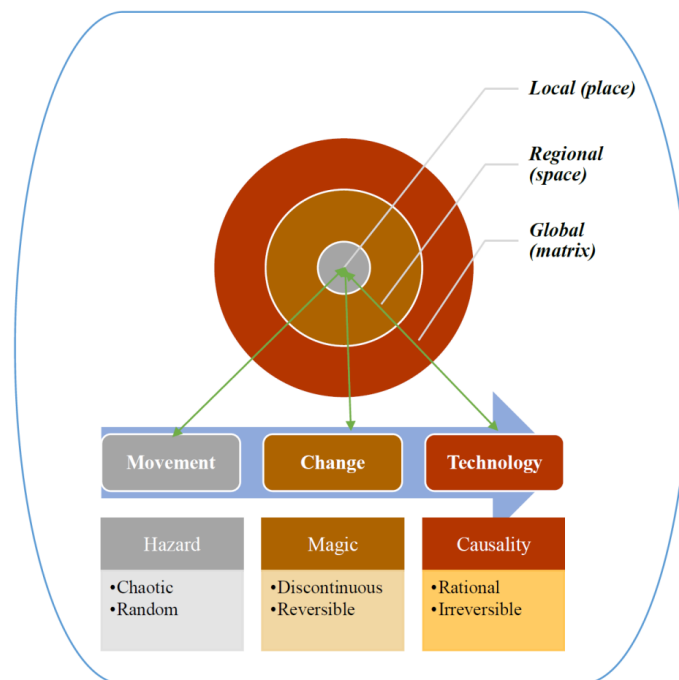


Figure 1 – The structuration of the notions of space, time and cause (©Luiz Oosterbeek).

⁷ Porter, M.; Kramer M. (2011). Creating shared value: how to reinvent capitalism and unleash a wave of innovation and growth. In: *Harvard Business Review*, Jan-Feb, pp. 2-17

A main advantage of mammals and, namely, of humans, is the capacity to master notions of space, time and a specific rational and immanent notion of cause. This tripod enables humans not only to control the space they are in, and the time and effort required to satisfy immediate needs (as when a lion prepares to attack its prey), but to transform the conditions of life in due course, engaging into a long-term cultural strategy anchored in foresight.

The notions of space, time and rational cause are not “naturally given”. Even if a preliminary notion of own’s place may be structured by our senses (touch, smell, sight, taste, hearing), it is only through muscular coordination and movement that we may experience differences in space, while the understanding of space as a continuous and homogeneous matrix dimension is a pure abstraction. Three main mechanisms intervene in this structuring of space beyond places⁸ (see fig.1): movement (by performing the movement of our bodies we create the conditions for experiencing different landscape perceptions “things” change in front of us when we move), change (eventually, we get to the conclusion that some of those changes are independent from our observation, because they occur while we don’t move) and technology (we understand that we may use tools to produce changes). Each of these cognitive advances in the structuring of the notion of space also allow for the emergence of the notion of time, first as a hazardous dimension of movement (chaotic, random and hence unpredictable), then as a magic process embedded in change (from animism to transcendentalism) and then as rational, irreversible, set of causal nexus (implying a relation between cause and effect). At the basis of this tripod seat human muscles movement, and this is precisely what is currently challenged by features such as child obesity, replacement of sports by computer games alone and, throughout life,

⁸ Duarte, F. (2017). *Space, place and territory A critical review on spatialities*. London: Routledge.

replacement of analogic by digital processes governed by a growingly limited diversity of gesture⁹.

Technology stands as the foundations of the breaking apart of humans with the rest of nature¹⁰ (also symbolic, as in the myth of *Prometeus*), generating a predominantly cultural and not biological evolutionary mechanism, and structuring both the economic and cognitive dimensions of human behaviour. However, new digital technologies, and namely artificial intelligence, accelerate the economic dimension with the risk of collapsing the cognitive one: the risk is not of humans to be governed by machines, but that humans lose their reflective diverse competence and become, in a sense, analogic machines¹¹. The issue here is not of attacking technologies, this being like *venire contra factum proprium*, since they are a core component of human extra-somatic behaviour. Yet, preserving tangible processes remains crucial for cognitive development, and the main challenge of contemporary societies is precisely on how to do so.

DISPLACING SPACE THROUGH TIME: THE ROLE OF HUMANITIES

The needed negotiation between short term perceived contexts of digital changes and longer-term integrated trends that may improve or disrupt the lives of humans and their ecosystems, is clearly a task for the humanities and it may be argued it is the most urgent task¹².

⁹ Oosterbeek, L. (2014a). Changing the gestures of the eyes to invent new landscapes. In: Oosterbeek, L.; Pollice, F. *Cultural heritage and local development Local communities through heritage awareness and global understanding* Ravello: appendix to *Territori della Cultura n 18*, pp. 108-117.

¹⁰ Leonhard, G. (2016). *Technology vs Humanity*. UK: Fast Future Publishing.

¹¹ Carr, N. (2011). *The shallows: What the internet is doing to our brains*. NY: W.W. Norton & Co.

¹² Oosterbeek, L. (2018). The 21st century agenda of modernisation: a humanities challenge. In: Gomes, M.C.A.; Floresta, M.G.S. et al., *Pesquisa em ciências humanas e sociais aplicadas. Desafios e possibilidades*. Viçosa: Universidade Federal de Viçosa. pp. 24-37.

The social role of the Humanities is to resume sociocultural balance, integrating knowledge, and particularly technology within it, which is a precondition for foresight¹³. Such an integration allows to move from merely considering contextual problems (e.g., taking the SDGs one by one) into facing fundamental dilemmas and resuming a posture that perceives uncertainty as the nature of future, and not as a “problem to solve”¹⁴.

Ongoing societal processes, from growing mobility to identity challenging, may be perceived as part of a process that is redesigning landscapes, i.e., changing the perceptions of territories, and particularly of borders. This, together with digitalization, changes the ground of space, modifies the notion of time and challenges rational causality. Humanities are, likely, the academic path for moving ahead while resuming rational cognition and its long-term implications, from social inclusion to human driven technology.

In this sense, the Humanities do include some dimensions of problem-solving (what may be labelled as “human sciences”, which must then do more than describe and raise hypothesis, but need to address and solve doubts, for instance on what explains certain specific trends in societies evolution and options), but go beyond those establishing a rational bridge between the perceived past of traditions and memories (which is a frozen, mythical and often ethno-centric and xenophobic approach to the past) and a rational understanding of the past (rooted in common methodologies and portraying the diversity but also the converge of the common past of humans)¹⁵. Such a bridge is essential for understanding cultural continuities, recurrences,

¹³ Böhme, G. & Stehr, N. (1986). *The Knowledge Society: The Growing Impact of Scientific Knowledge on Social Relations*. Dordrecht, D. Reidel Publishing Company.

¹⁴ Oosterbeek, L. (2016). Becoming Human. New approaches for uncertain times. In: Oosterbeek, L.; Quagliuolo, M.; Caron, L. (2016, eds.). *Sustainability Dilemmas. Transdisciplinary contributions to integrated cultural landscape management*. ITM, série ARKEOS, vol. 38-39, pp. 85-107

¹⁵ Oosterbeek, L. (2012). Looking at a global disruption in three steps, plus one to overcome it. IN: *Territori della Cultura*, n° 8, pp. 14-21.

discontinuities and innovations, all of these being fundamental for designing mid and long-term foresight¹⁶.

The Humanities allow to frame short-term needs within a longer-term understanding, thus building the senses of meaning, value and priority. Tangibility being, in the current context, a core need for societies to reinforce human adaptive cultural competences, tangible cultural heritage has, today, a greater relevance than ever: each material feature significance being a condensed expression of space (where from), time (when), cause (how it was made), meaning (why it was produced), value (which role did it originally play) and priority (which was its importance, and how does it relate to the importance we may assign to it today).

Territorial management is an example of how Humanities intervene in current societies' challenges. From a long-term perspective, the governance of societies, i.e., the state of dynamic equilibrium that allows for transformation without collapse, may be considered a function of the combination, through time, of two main ratios (see fig. 2): between perceived resources (Env) and available techniques and technologies (Tec), which condition the possibilities of a society, and between the available logistics and the social processes that condition the access to such logistical resources (i.e., greater or lesser social equity). While the first ratio is studied by natural sciences, the second has been the focus of social sciences. However, the multiplier element of this double ratio is culture through time, without which all societies would be alike. This is the domain of study of the Humanities and its specific contribution to landscape management studies and planning¹⁷.

¹⁶ Werlen, B. (2016). Everyday actions, global understanding, and sustainability. In: Oosterbeek, L.; Quagliuolo, M.; Caron, L. (2016, eds.). *Sustainability Dilemmas. Transdisciplinary contributions to integrated cultural landscape management*. ITM, série ARKEOS, vol. 38-39, pp. 109-132.

¹⁷ Oosterbeek, L. (2014). Gestão Integrada de Território em Morro do Pilar: uma nova visão para o uso inteligente do território. IN: Oliveira, L.C. (coord.) *Morro do Pilar: cultura, memória, sustentabilidade e a antecipação do futuro*. Morro do Pilar: Instituto do Espinhaço, pp. 288-313

$$f(G) = K \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \left(\frac{Env}{Tec} + \frac{Log}{Soc} \right)$$

Figure 2 – The function of governance (©Luiz Oosterbeek).

A translation of this approach to specific contexts of territorial management start by replacing the focus on territories alone (i.e., discrete entities that may be studied by natural sciences) by incorporating the notion of landscape (i.e., of human perceptions of the territories) and understanding that human decisions are taken on the basis of such perceptions. Without questioning the importance to characterise as much as possible the natural variables, including the social components, Humanities build on those to question the triggers of human agency grounded in the perception of needs and possibilities.

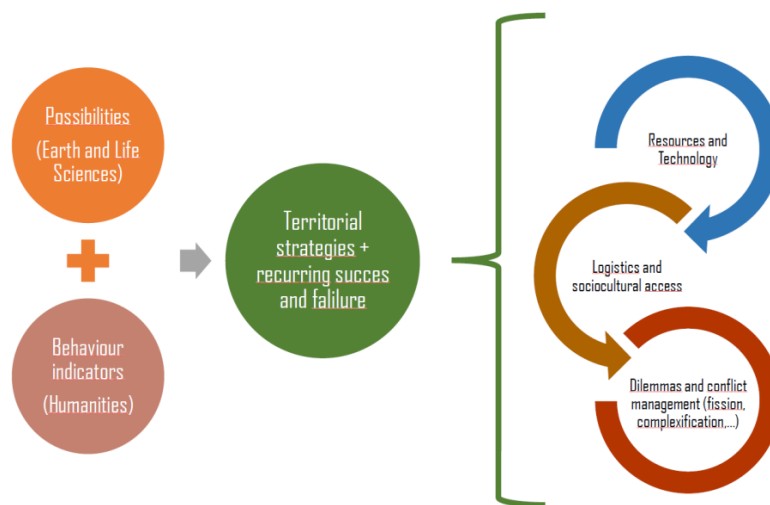


Figure 3 – Landscape Management model (©Luiz Oosterbeek).

This leads to a specific model of analysis and management (see fig. 3) that combines the assessment of those possibilities and behaviour indicators in order to design, or identify, territorial strategies (and the related perceptions of success and failure) which, apart from the two ratios mentioned above, decline the cultural multiplier through the assessment of dilemmas and

conflict management strategies (from slow evolutionary practices, such as social fission, to accelerating transformative ones, such as complexification).

This model has been tested against past contexts (namely the assessment of the dawn of food production in different parts of the world¹⁸) also builds from contemporary contexts in which the Humanities play a core role. This is the case of Mação, in Portugal, a small municipality, with less than 8.000 inhabitants, a very large territory and a growing ageing trend.

While Cities have been identified as a priority for Sustainability within the current SDGs, the low demographic density territories tend to be neglected by national policies of the various countries and by international conventions. However, it should be stressed that although 68% of the population is expected to live in major urban areas by 2050, according to the Revision of World Urbanization Prospects¹⁹ report produced by the UN in 2018, the rural populations by then will still account for at least 3.1 billion people. It is ineffective to define SD goals related to inequality, quality education, decent work and beyond, simply arguing that the issue is to foster urban concentration. Even if such an approach would be correct, which we strongly disagree with, it is clear it will not happen for at least a third of the world population in the next three decades. Helping to raise attention to these communities and designing specific strategies to build on them for a more encompassing sustainability of the whole planet, is a Humanities competence, by combining practical experimentation with academic research, through a bottom-up approach aiming at co-design within an horizontal articulation of vision and action: collaborative, continuous, scientific, innovative and

¹⁸ Oosterbeek, L. (1994). O Alto Ribatejo e o Mediterrâneo. Espaço contínuo ou hierarquizado? *Trabalhos de Antropologia e Etnologia*, vol. 34, PP.119-32

¹⁹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision (ST/ESA/SER.A/420)*. New York: United Nations.

intergenerational labour. This reinforces the cultural multiplier in those territories, revisiting their possibilities and constraints.

For over a decade now, the municipality of Mação, in Portugal, has pursued a strategy of territorial development, rooted in regional historical sustainable knowledge and practices, combined with novel approaches which encompass challenges posed by globalization. This strategy has identified two main pillars of development: cultural heritage in all its dimensions and agroforestry sustainable practices, both requiring new scales of approach and management practices. The approach has been designed following intense debates, engaging the majority of the population, enhancing its diversity and fostering convergences that build from common trends conditioned by three main variables: peripheral relation to main economic national drivers of growth; ageing and low demographic density with strong population dispersal; connected processes of abandonment of formerly occupied areas, currently suffering environmental degradation (e.g. major fires destruction), aggravated by the effects of global warming (for years Mação has been monitored as a territory of expansion of the Iberian SE desertification) and of the invasion of alien vegetation species.

In response to this picture, specific tools have been co-designed with the population and experts in different fields. These tools also take into consideration the resilience of the community, despite its difficulties. Such resilience is expressed through widespread voluntary work, namely within a large number of very active NGOs, and several cultural artistic and other initiatives, which also benefit from a strong collaboration of the municipality. In the domain of agroforestry, building from a very fragmented pattern of land properties and the refusal of approaches of expropriation of traditional owners' rights, a discussion with hundreds of these supported the proposal to establish "village enterprises", which allow for keeping traditional land-owning while securing common management of much larger, and

economically sustainable and viable territorial production units, this having, simultaneously, economic (production), social (employment), cultural (tradition) and ecological (biodiversity and endemic species preservation) consequences. This constitutes an acquired territorial, social and organisational experience for a novel relation of the communities with their forest environment, including social inclusion and cultural diversity at the core of the chain of value of the so-called “green economy”.

In the specific domain of cultural heritage, a network of museum and memory centres has been co-constructed, largely managed by local populations (with the technical support of professional experts), strengthening cultural diversity (Mação having both riverine and mountain communities) within a common shared framework of resources. Such network fosters resilience in face of societal challenges, namely depopulation related to education drop-outs, through generating new knowledge emerging from unconventional knowledge centres, thus favouring new settling related to the economy of culture. This strong network is the backbone of an internationally known centre for the Humanities and home to a UNESCO Chair, itself connected to higher education and delivering research degrees, one of which allowing to train precisely on how to manage low density territories. The programme will implement, from 2020, an archaeoparc conceived as a social inclusion resource, in which archaeological experimentation and traditional knowledge will be combined in order to resume relevance of tangibility and gesture, with all its cognitive implications. This will be combined with an innovative set of digital experiences of augmented reality and virtual reality, which are conceived for leading the users to feel the need and get interest in resuming tangible experiments in order to maximise the digital experiences.

While these two main pillars strategies actively engage over 30% of the population, a third fundamental dimension of the territorial strategy concerns education. Mação is part, since 2016, of the UNESCO Global Learning Cities

Network, with an ambitious programme that involves the whole population from pre-school, through several formal and informal platforms: library, senior university, senior club, spaces of memory, museum and, of course, the cluster of public schools. This one, itself part of Asp-Net (the UNESCO schools network), has implemented a new concept of public open schools, which boosted education results and led it to become part of the limited number of “schools of excellency”, despite all its geographic constraints. It is the interconnection of these pillars that will, through strengthening the cohesion of the territory and its openness to external inputs and immigration, allow for the development or related activities (e.g. tourism and communication).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the case of Mação, the territory is conceived as an intelligent landscape and an open school, with several door ways, places for exchanging learning experiences, also helping to access more specific networks which interwind there, from archaeology to contemporary design, digital innovation or performative arts. This is exactly the opposite of development strategies that are failing because they focus only in the natural and social drivers, obliterating the conditions for critical human agency. It is also the opposite of STEM²⁰ and of any approach to education not as apart of a human basic need²¹ (following the neoteny evolutionary path²²) but as one more market, in which students are no longer individuals to consider, and not even numbers to be framed, but clients to be satisfied with tailor-made products designed for short-term concerns²³.

²⁰ Sousa, D.A. & Pilecki, T. (2013). *From STEM to STEAM*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin

²¹ Bruner, J. S. (1974). *Beyond the Information Given: Studies in the Psychology of Knowing*. London, George Allen and Unwin

²² Gould, S. J. (1977). *Ontogeny and phylogeny*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

²³ Schwartzman, R. (2013). *Consequences of commodifying education*. *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, 17(3), 41-46.

While it is not possible to counter global national and international trends of depopulation of areas like Mação without a new vision to be shared with main urban centres, Mação initiated a process to render visible the effects of these policies of integration, co-design and co-construction, also involving an alliance of all relevant stakeholders. Many other territories make attempts in this direction²⁴ but fostering their convergence and suggesting that alternative ways are possible, is still a need.

In face of uncertain future, it is a strategy for uncertainty that is needed, which needs short term solutions but requires resuming the basics of human adaptation: the redefinition of frontiers and common territories, not focusing only on “safe harbours” (the cities) but extensively caring for the whole landscapes and keeping their flexibility, making full use of the knowledge of geography or linguistics; the understanding of mobility and cross-cultural contacts as a main adaptive strategy, which encompasses risks if its merely considered as a socioeconomic process, but triggers innovation if the tools from anthropology or philosophy are used; the protection of past knowledge and the development of new techniques and technology, through processes that prevent cognitive alienation, making full use of contributions from archaeology or aesthetics; the redefinition of the value of past heritage, which may only occur if its tangible presence is preserved²⁵.

²⁴ Scheunemann, I.; Oosterbeek, L. (Eds).2012. *A new paradigm of sustainability : theory and praxis of integrated landscape management*. Rio de Janeiro, IBIO, 211 pág.

²⁵ Particular attention should be paid, in the near future, to the progress of projects such as “Art and Society” engaging the arts and creativity, with the Humanities, for the dynamics of societies (<https://arts-and-society.org/>), BRIDGES on new ways and procedures to consider and implement sustainability science (<https://en.unesco.org/news/toward-establishment-bridges-action-promote-sustainability-science>) or the Global History of Humanity, an attempt to build a multidisciplinary historical assessment of the Human past, considering its diversity but also its fundamental unity (<http://cipsh.net/web/focus-23.htm>). These, among other, are project that counter the perceptions of “no way-out” and despair, favouring flexibility and adaptation