

The Cultural Heritage in Rural Areas: Case Study in the Portuguese Central Region

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Strengthening small and medium sized towns in rural areas as focal points for regional development and promotion of their networking

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This policy option taken by the European Spatial Development Perspective – Towards Balanced and Sustainable development for the EU Territory – converges on rural regions and also on the importance of the small and medium size towns regarding their development. The preparation of integrated rural strategies for the development of rural “problematic” regions, must take into consideration the fact that “only” these towns are capable of offering infrastructures and services for economic activities in the region and easier the access to bigger markets and centres.

The problem mentioned above can be approached in different Portuguese rural regions. In the early nineties, the Central Region started the implementation of a strategy for the resolution of problems related to the existence of rural areas in the Portuguese interior-region presenting strong economic decline and facing a depopulation process.

The “historical villages” pilot project appeared as one of the answers to “solve” the problem. The project was implemented within a very restrict group of ten human settlements with an historical and economical well-known value. In fact, this value comes from each human settlement itself but also because the network of villages represents a real value added, namely those co-operating in tourist promotion.

This action have been implemented with quite successful results since 1994.

My informal and unpretentious presentation is centred in this “historical villages” project. I really believe that, in spite of being a micro-scale program, its relevance must be reinforced due to the fact that it will have positive impacts on the development of a poor and depopulated rural region. These projects are an important incentive for its continuity and for the enlargement of other human settlements in decline. The third Community Support Framework established for the period from 2000 to 2006, approaches the spatial dimension, reinforcing the importance of the Regional Operational Programmes and the strengthen of the human settlements in general, and also as regards the medium and small towns in particular, considered as development poles for the regional development. This is a major strategic challenge.

1. An integrated strategy for rural development

Some areas in the interior of Portugal have different kinds of problems resulting from the peripheral location, the gradual weakness of economic bases, the level of dependency, the ageing of population, among other causes though not so relevant. Those areas are still in a depopulation process despite public action related to some investment programmes.

The negative effects emerging from those tendencies have environmental, social and economical consequences and hamper the regional capacity to preserve identity and access the development in a sustainable way. The spatial imbalances remain a major problem to the aforementioned spaces. All those aspects can be found in Central Region, one of the five planning areas of the Portuguese mainland. Our work reflects the state of the art of rural settlements with historical background in the central region of the Portuguese territory.

The Central Region occupies 25% of the surface of the Portuguese mainland. Its territory can be approached in different perspectives, and the changes have shaped its structure, also influencing the transformation process, namely in the urban system and in the functional inter-dependencies existing from city to city and those existing between cities and their surrounding countryside. The asymmetries existing between the coastal zone and the interior region and also between the urban and rural areas are dramatically strong.

The sub-region of the interior, known as Beira, is a mountainous territory with a very particular feature due to its geographical location, namely because of its borderlines with Spain. In fact, it has a peripheral position within the national, regional and European framework.

The sub-region has been losing its importance within the regional and national context and this trend is naturally stronger in those remarkably rural areas. These areas presented a population exodus related to migratory movements and now they have a different configuration. Nowadays people have other destinations and emigration presents lower rates which makes the present situation very different from the one experienced in the early sixties. Some of the human settlements that we have been studying are located in this territory and they are also part of a program, financed by structural funds, namely the ERDF – European Regional Development Fund, within the context of the Community Operational Support Program (1994/99). The aforementioned Program brought new life to those settlements, the so-called “historical villages”, and its efficacy can prove that it has been a successful intervention. The results are rather obvious and, in spite of the pathologies present in those little villages, there are new life opportunities and economical progress emerging in the interior rural areas.

Although these rural settlements have an interesting historical heritage, some of them with a real monumental value, they miss service infrastructures, public facilities, all sort of equipments, comfortable houses and an economical decline (no investment, no jobs...). An economical and social cohesion and a strategic approach must be improved in that territory, in order to increase the attractiveness of those places. These are major challenges for the programme. The touristy promotion was a strand to development.

2. Historical Villages Regeneration: the program

The Regeneration of Historical Villages Portuguese Program was a pilot action started in the Central Region in 1994, (not intending to enlarge too much its scope to other regions of the national territory). Its major goal was to improve the population's quality of life, to increase their income levels and to upgrade their environment. Three kinds of actions were envisaged:

- Interventions of Local Authorities and Central Administration (including all public investments);
- Interventions of private entities, namely those related to the gathering of financial resources for the refurbishing of the houses for tourist purposes, for instance, the creation of tourist lodging (the aids of other funds system couldn't be envisaged). Other activities could be implemented in order to generate new job initiatives of small productivity (investments, as a rule, no more than 100 MEUROS – 100 000 EUROS).
- Interventions of the associations or agents of local development, strongly cooperating with the local people and other entities, namely the Local Authorities.

The program aimed to have a structural and durable impact on the area, throughout a triennial investment schemes covering:

- infrastructures (networking / roads, water supply and water drain, gas and electricity, housing / electricity, television);

- rehabilitation of public buildings;
- refurbishment of houses;
- restoring monuments;
- establishing and bringing into use leisure areas;
- recovering and adapting buildings for tourist ends;
- location of lodgings;
- improvement of social and economical activities ;
- promoting technical studies and projects
- developing the tourist activity
- supporting the activities of local associations.

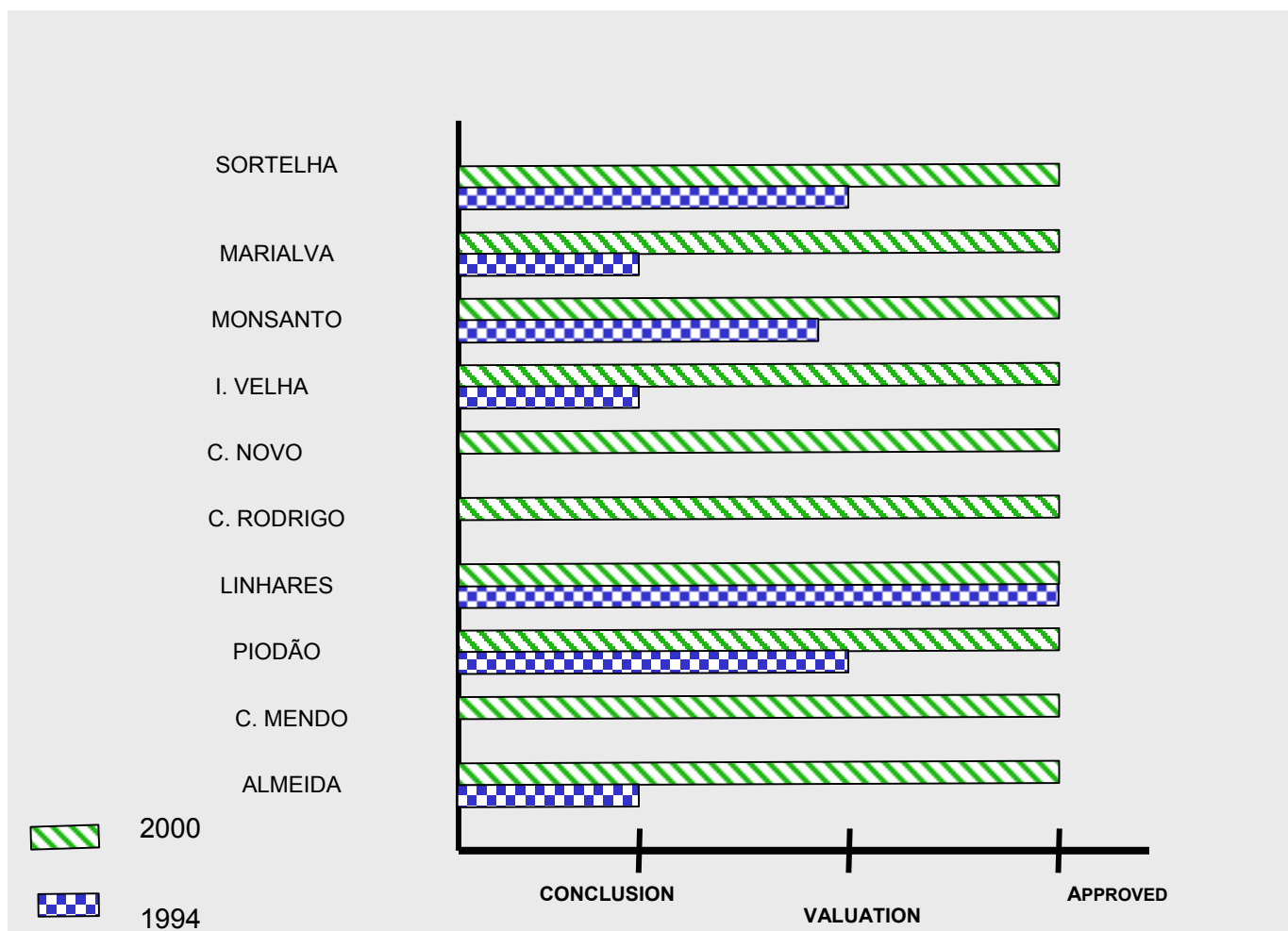
3. The project

This project analysed ten different human settlements:

- Almeida (classified area)
- Castelo Mendo
- Castelo Novo
- Castelo Rodrigo
- Idanha-a-Velha
- Linhares da Beira
- Marialva
- Monsanto
- Piodão
- Sortelha

The selection criteria gave priority to the villages presenting a prestigious and protected built heritage, archaeological and environmental factors of identity, a relevant public space and commemorative sites, a historical-cultural value. The programme had other important objectives as the possibilities to develop tourist and cultural thematic circuits and to avoid desertification. Also the existence of studies elaborated within the scope of the land use planning made by the Local Technical Cabinets (Safeguard Detail Plans), for almost the totality of these establishments, was an important issue as far as the selection process is concerned.

SAFEGUARD DETAIL PLANS



The program has several dimensions:

- It is a development program, intending to stimulate the involved partners so that they establish integrated actions both within the social and economical framework, also undertaking a strong intervention in order to generate new opportunities for the economical local activities in a sustainable way. In fact, this is a major goal of the PPDR (Promotion of the Regional Development Potential);
- It is a tourist program, as the regeneration and the revitalisation of these small urban centres increases its capacity for attracting people, having important consequences in the emergence of new equipments and giving other opportunities to the existing ones.
- It is a cultural program, allowing the rehabilitation of an important part of our cultural heritage in rural isolated areas.
- It is a participated program, involving both the local people throughout their closest representatives and other local agents, namely the Local Development Associations.
- It is an integrated program, since the diversity of aspects of the human settlements and the involvement of a great number of public and private actors in the conception and implementation of the program assume a major relevance.

- It is an accurate program, since its conception and implementation stages involve some instruments and indicators to control the quality of the projects both for the present and future times.
- It is a closed program, because the villages which are object of intervention were selected in advance for the pilot action and the investments are fixed in advance regarding the several intervening entities.

4. The historical villages–brief general characterization

All the historical villages chosen are located in Beira. These settlements present a concentrated structure, related in a large scale to the military architecture. Piódão is an exception to this general characteristics. Some of these urban centres are surrounded by walls, as Castelo Rodrigo, Castelo Mendo, Sortelha, Linhares da Beira and Almeida. Other urban centres like Monsanto and Castelo Mendo present a kind of settlement which grew outside the Castle.

From a constructive point of view and in what concerns the use of constructive materials, we can find three different areas in the aforementioned villages. These areas have some characteristics which represent a decisive factor for the materials used. Unarguably, the largest of these areas is the one with granite stone (Linhares da Beira, Sortelha, Castelo Mendo, Marialva, Idanha-a-Velha and Castelo Mendo). Piódão is a very typical village of the schist area. In Castelo Rodrigo, the granite and the schist exist together. The pine wood or the chestnut tree and the craft ceramic tile are also very traditional materials used in that region.

The glass and the mortars have been more recently employed. These materials were only used by the rich people in the XVIIIth century. The whitewash was imported from other areas of the national territory, appearing in more or less majestic houses or in buildings of religious nature. Most of the buildings have a quite simple aspect, and even today, they present no cemented granite wall.

The most common architectonic typologies are the individual house, with one or two floors, being usually the earthy floor destined to animals or storage. Therefore, the ground floor is usually used for agricultural and livestock activities. Many of these houses have an external stairway connected to the building which has a traditional porch. Sometimes, many of the arcades guards present interesting stone works of a rather good quality.

In what concerns the urban spaces, some of the villages present squares and streets of urban interest and formal quality, also with very good conditions for conviviality and cultural events.

Sometimes we can find some other interesting architectural elements, such as community ovens, pillories, Roman forum, oratories (called “alminhas”), cruises and “sacred ways”.

5. Brief characterization of each one of the historical villages (1994)

Piódão

The urban centre shows strong depopulation tendencies:

Involved population -----	700 inhabitants
Intervention area -----	38 hectares
Number of dwellings -----	377
Public buildings -----	11
Religious buildings -----	2
Depopulation -----	32%
Number of beds -----	132 (municipality site)

Castelo Mendo

The urban centre is in abandonment process with a reduced and very aged population.

Involved population -----	120 inhabitants
Included area -----	4 hectares (parish)
Number dwellings -----	99
Public buildings -----	2
Religious buildings -----	3
Depopulation level -----	60%
Number of beds -----	(Just in municipality site, 19 km away)

Castelo Novo

The local population have tried very hard to maintain the particularities of this urban centre. However, about a third of the houses present no living conditions and needs refurbishing

Involved population -----	520 inhabitants
Included area -----	6,5 hectares
Number of dwellings -----	320
Public buildings -----	2
Religious buildings -----	4
Depopulation level -----	40%
Number of beds -----	(Just in municipality site, 15 km away)

Castelo Rodrigo

The little village is in risk to loose its identity and there is a very strong abandonment. Only five dwellings are in good living conditions.

Involved population -----	70 inhabitants
Included area -----	4 hectares
Number of dwellings -----	90
Public buildings -----	-
Building religious -----	1
Depopulation -----	70%
Number of beds -----	46 in municipality site

Idanha-a-Nova

The village is in a derelict stage. However, its historical value has a significant importance.

Involved population -----	84 inhabitants
Included area -----	4,5 hectares
Number of dwellings -----	70
Public buildings -----	2
Religious buildings -----	3
Depopulation level -----	50%
Number of beds -----	352 in municipality site

Linhares da Beira

The urban centre needs rehabilitation works

Involved population -----	300 inhabitants
Included area -----	4 hectares
Number of dwellings -----	200
Public buildings -----	2
Religious buildings -----	2
Depopulation -----	40%
Number of beds -----	150 in municipality site

Marialva

This small village is losing its identity and revealing depopulation tendencies

Included population -----	75 inhabitants
Included area -----	6,5 hectares
Number of dwellings -----	153
Public buildings -----	3
Religious buildings -----	5
Depopulation level -----	50%
Number of beds -----	34 (Just in municipality site, 7 km away)

Monsanto

An human establishment with a degraded housing park

Involved population -----	200 inhabitants
Included area -----	18 hectares
Number of dwellings -----	370
Public buildings -----	-
Religious buildings -----	3
Depopulation -----	20%
Number of beds -----	352 In municipality site

Piódão

Human establishment lacking rehabilitation works

Involved population -----	126 inhabitants
Included area -----	4,6 hectares (parish)
Number of dwellings -----	150
Public buildings -----	2
Religious buildings -----	1
Depopulation level -----	40%
Number of beds -----	96 (Just in municipality site, km away)

Sortelha

Human establishment lacking rehabilitation works

Involved population -----	34 inhabitants
Included area -----	4,5 hectares
Number of fires -----	50
Public buildings -----	1
Religious buildings -----	2
Depopulation -----	50%
Number of beds -----	2 (Just in municipality site, 14 km away)

6. The regulative aspects

This pilot action aims the promotion of a development potential, and it is integrated in the sub-program of local and rural development. It is a measure of support to the economical development in rural nucleus with a regulation basis. Its purpose is to establish the technical, administrative and financial standards of intervention, within the scope of a Global Rehabilitation Plan, for each one of the human establishments herein selected.

This document defines the beneficiaries of the actions. These are: the central administration services, the Local Authorities involved in the action, the Local Development Associations and the private promoters. The document also defines a set of access

conditions, the eligible and non eligible costs, the criteria of selection for the private projects. The financial support of the projects take in consideration their own nature and objectives, thus being assumed as a non-returnable grant. It will follow the rules stated below:

- Projects of public interest
 - 75% of the community financial support for the eligible costs of the projects whose final beneficiaries are Local Authorities, services of the Central Administration or other public bodies. The domestic financial support is assured by the corresponding beneficiary. The Fund of Tourism might also grant an amount according to the situation. In what concerns the projects presented by the Local Authorities, there will be a contract celebrated between the Local Authorities and the Fund of Tourism. This contract will describe the global intervention of the Autarchy and the respective financing plan.
 - 75% of the community financing regarding the eligible costs for projects of patrimonial interest, whose beneficiary is a private entity. The candidacy can be presented either by an organism of the Local Administration or by the Local Development Association. The national financing will be granted by the beneficiary.
 - 75% of the community financing of the eligible costs concerning the projects involving social and economical activities and whose promoters are non-profit entities, as the Local Development Associations or organisms of the Local Administration. The national financing will be granted by the beneficiary.
- Projects of entrepreneurial nature
 - Up to 70% of the eligible costs are granted. 75% come from structural funds (75%) and the remaining 25% are financed by the Tourism Fund. The candidacies can be presented by private investors or by the Local Development Associations. The amount will be determined according to the valuation criteria.

The candidacy must be followed by the completion of an appropriate form and by the identification of the entity and beneficiary. A descriptive memory of the project must also be included. After the presentation of these elements, the candidacy becomes official. On a subsequent phase, the Management Unit will analyse the candidacy processes within a period of thirty days, starting from the date of delivery. The Management Unit is chaired by a public entity (a body pertaining to the regional administration and experts working for other departments of the Central Administration).

7. Ten years later

History and human settlements have left strong marks in Central Region territory. These are present all over the regional territory: a precious cultural heritage featuring the religious, military and civil patrimony which reflects the life style of the population.

We must have a profound knowledge of this patrimony and we must also preserve it so that the future generations might be able to enjoy it as well. The major concerns are related with the urban monuments that benefit from its visibility but specially with the small rural heritage which represents a serious threat. The importance of this rural heritage comes especially from a "site perspective" in spite of the importance of the isolated elements.

The historical villages programme has proved to be an important initiative in order to face the arising challenges:

- It is a chance to intervene in patrimonial groups and it constitutes an experience that must be continued as a cultural intervention and as a mean of rehabilitation of the rural space, involving the local agents throughout local development associations;
- as a mean of research and knowledge, giving a contribution to a vast domain of new technologies application;
- as one of the main sources of tourist revitalisation of the area. And it must be able to transmit the knowledge on the history, the people and the region. An intelligent combination of all these factors might bring into place competitive tourist products for both the domestic and external markets.
- as a set up of interpretation elements that allow the visitor (national or foreigner) to apprehend the historical meaning of the monument, thus protecting it from the pressures and aggressions of the visitors;
- as a mean to develop employment and economical activities, not only in the domain of the tourism, but also in all those areas comprehending the patrimony recovery and conservation. These areas must gather the necessary elements: immaterial conditions, namely a business manager that knows how to organize the respective market, to mobilize and to apply the production means (strategic thought), technical competencies (including innovation and development competencies) and know-how (or the ability to create an immediate human resources training).

Besides these inherent aspects, there were other projects/actions connected to this pilot action. As for instance, the Letter of Leisure of the Historical Villages, an intervention structured in the promotion of the regional development, bringing tradition and modernity together, fully accessing the new technologies and accepting to be part of a set of institutions participating on the Operational Programs, in this particular case, the Plan for the Potential of Regional Development.

This document constitutes an emblematic project that associates the historical, cultural and ecological patrimony existing in these human establishments with the existence of three nature reserves: Natural Park of Serra da Estrela, nature reserve of Serra da Malcata, Protected Area of Serra do Açôr and the Archaeological Park of Côa, thus benefiting the national tourism with a group of instruments

The question is to gather the information concerning the resources of an area, making that information understandable and accessible to all the involved entities. During the last ten years, this area registered a substantial investment in “stone”. But its economical and human resources can be strongly materialised through the creation of a different “tourist product” modelled by its human, physical and ecological dimensions, regarding the selected set of ten human establishments

8. A new beginning

From all that has been stated, one underlines an obvious new beginning. The Central Regions, and specially those territories, have received to little investments from the public bodies. Nevertheless, these areas present major potentialities which are vital for the settlement of a modern vision of the country. It is essential to protect the “quality of the environment”, to value the most dynamic territories and to strength the most fragile areas presenting a low density, by establishing and integrating the necessary interventions.

It is necessary to integrate these actions within specific areas featuring strategic opportunities of development, throughout valuable resources and dynamics and the inadequacies needing to be corrected. This is the main purpose of Eixo II - integrated territorial Actions pertaining to the Operational Program of the Central Region from 2000 to 2006.

The work must be well grounded in order to succeed. In what concerns this particular situation, this programme will develop innovative and revitalising interventions in those human settlements located in depressed areas of our national territory. It will feature five guidelines: the village contracts, the historical villages, the rural centres, the digital and teleworking villages.

The village contracts will include projects related to the basic infrastructures nets, the improvement of the accessibility towards the villages and the conditions of internal travelling, the rehabilitation of public spaces (squares, fairs and markets) and the recovery of the rural and collective patrimony, using them as a local community service and as a tourist research mean. It also includes valuation interventions and village information (signalling, animation and promotion of the local products).

The historical villages will feature projects including the qualification of infrastructures and town planning arrangements, the recovery of monumental patrimony. Throughout the recovery and adaptation of properties for tourist services (lodging, tourism stations), encouraging the economical activities covering the leisure and lodging areas. It will also include global valuation actions towards the "historical Villages" and tourist and cultural promotion initiatives.

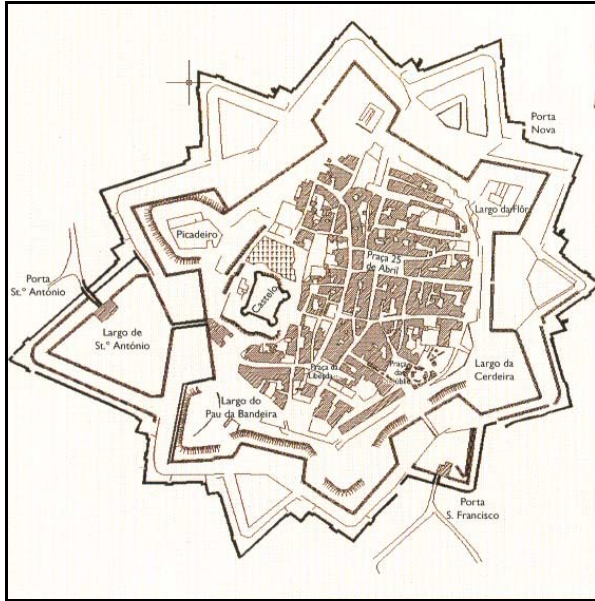
The rural centres will integrate the recovery of small equipments (stables, haystack and mills), the landscaping recovery thus creating conditions for use and preserving the quality of the natural spaces.

The digital villages are based on the adaptation of facilities for the use of information and communication technologies, on the acquisition of equipments, as long as they are integrated within projects that favour a better access to services and information that are relevant for the local community. Promotional interventions of the rural area and the corresponding potentialities throughout the use of information and communication technologies.

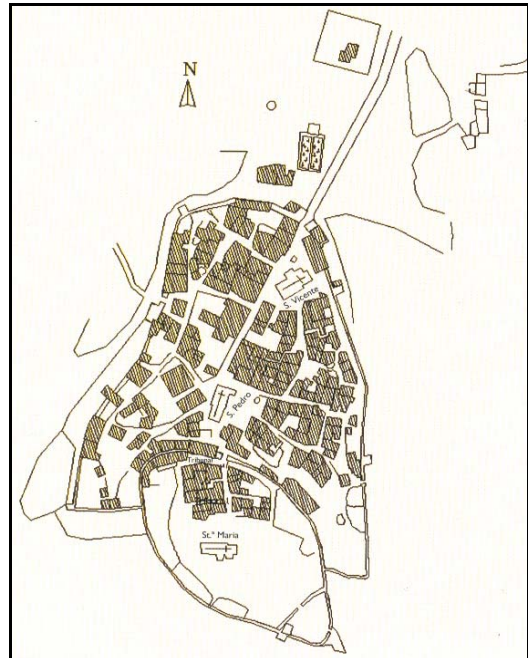
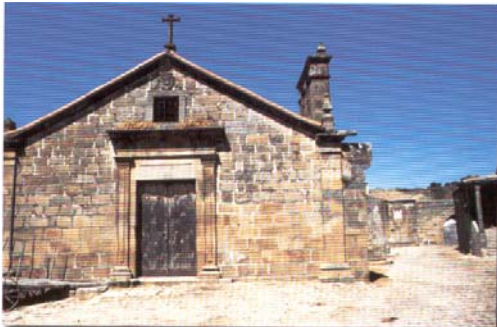
The implementation of these projects include the creation of general information infrastructures and computing equipment, the teleworking and support applications adapted to several profiles, the insertion of terminals in public work centres and the marketing campaigns of the centres and existing business initiatives.

These five intervention types complement the work accomplished until now and they might reinforce the fruition of the rich natural patrimony, therefore creating the main conditions for a local based economical development and contributing to an improvement in the life quality and better incomes for the corresponding populations.

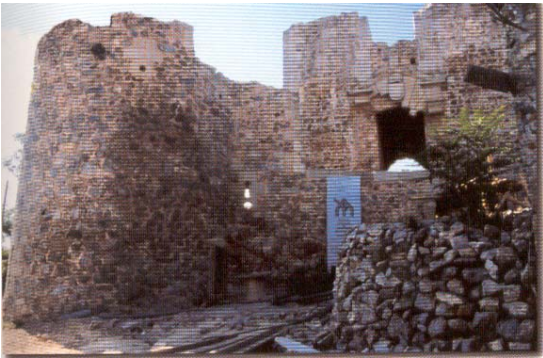
ALMEIDA



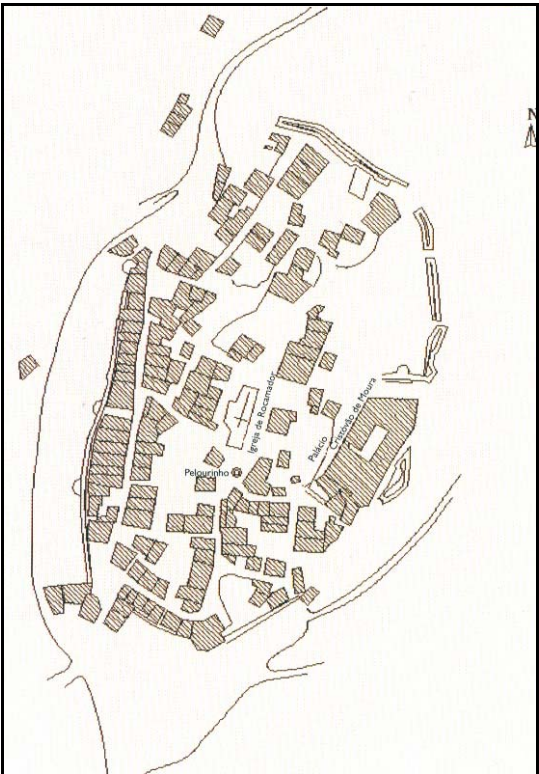
CASTELO MENDO



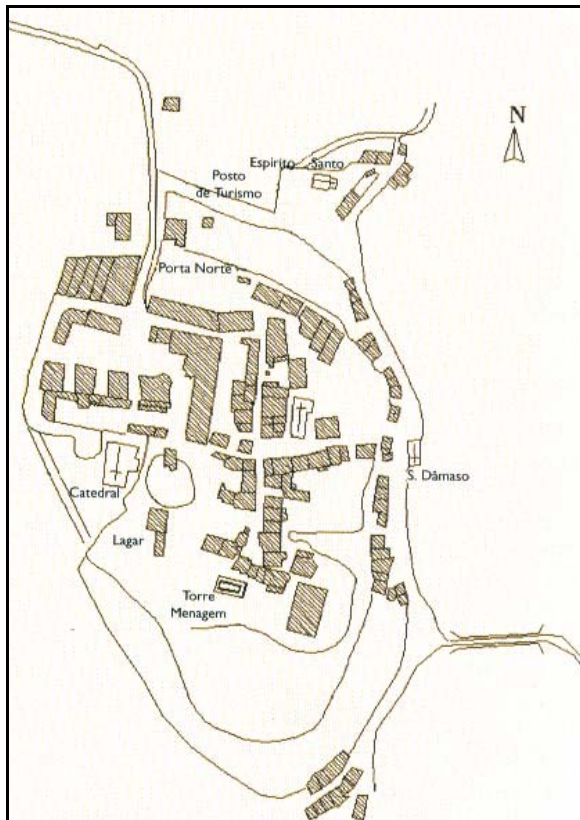
CASTELO NOVO



CASTELO RODRIGO



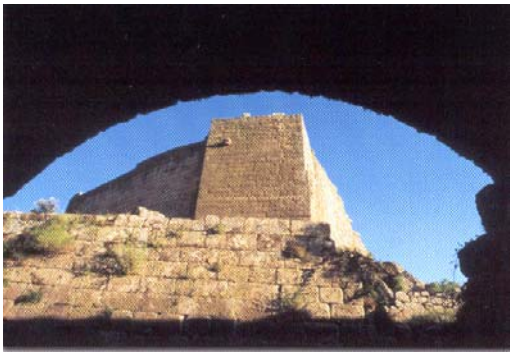
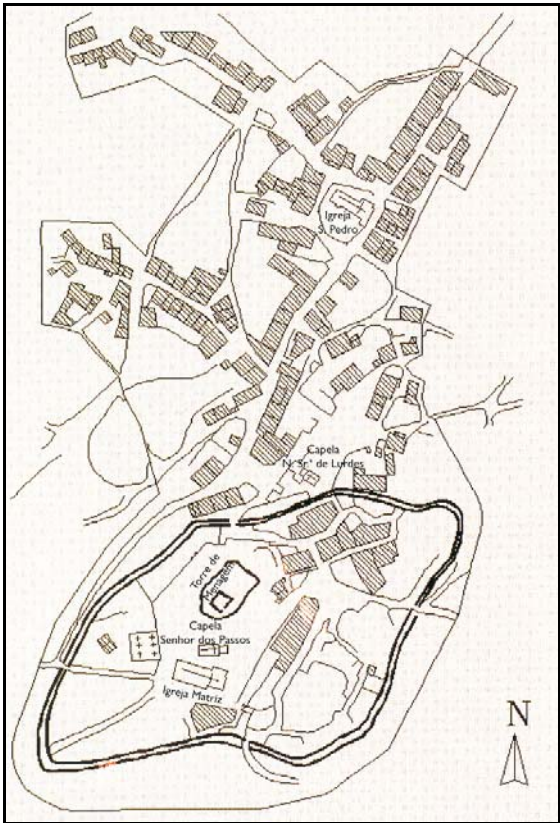
IDANHA – A – VELHA



LINHARES DA BEIRA



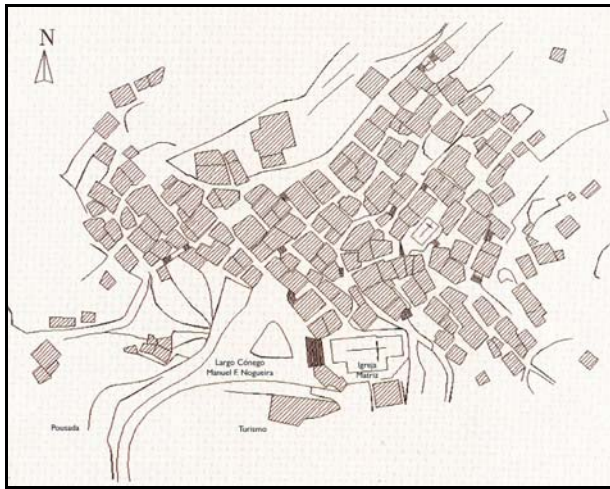
MARIALVA



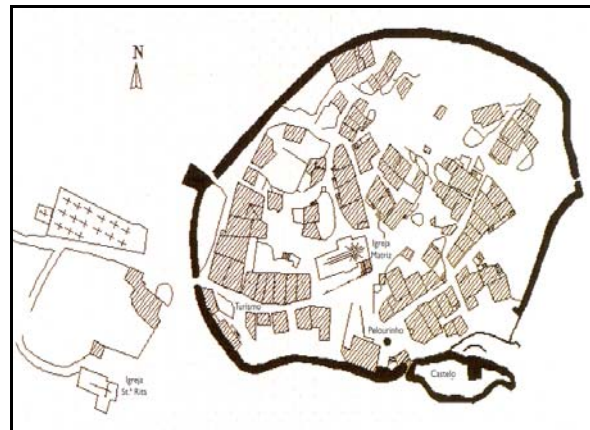
MONSANTO



PIÓDÃO



SORTELHA



CONSTRUCTIVE MATERIALS



NO CEMENTED GRANITE WALL



MORTAR WALL



WHITEWASH

URBAN SPACES



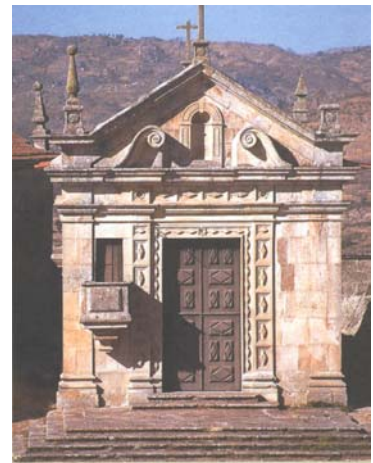
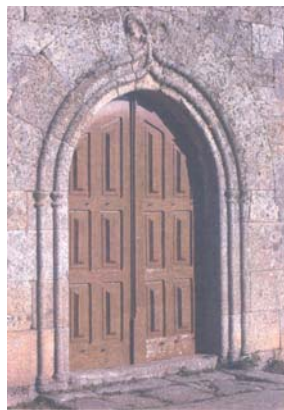
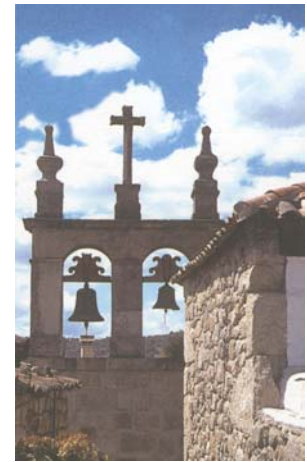
SQUARE / CHURCH SQUARE / STREET



ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS



STAIRWAY WITH PORCH



CISTERN



ORATORY



"MANUELINO" STYLE



PILLORY

NEW ACTIVITIES



COFFEE SHOP



TOURISM OFFICE



RURAL TOURISM



RESTAURANT

INVESTMENT DISTRIBUTION PER VILLAGE

