Rural Portugal in the Movies
between preservation and change

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RURAL MATTERS
PTDC/CS-GEO/117967/2010

COMPETE QREN FCT

Aims

- Analyse the ways in which rural areas and rurality are presented and represented in six Portuguese movies:
  - The main symbols used in the movies
  - The main elements and narratives used in the movies

Cinema as a way to form social representations on the territories

- Cinema, as a means of communication and due to its intrinsic characteristics is an important factor of social and cultural conditioning (Claval, 2006).

- Cinema is part of the so-called creative industries and possesses, in cultural and social terms, an important role as inducer of social representations on events, situations and places, through the way of constructing, presenting and conveying them.

Cinema as a way to form social representations on the territories

- **Organic images**
  - (related to the representations of the places, through indirect means, such as literature and movies)
- **Induced images**
  - (related to promotional messages produced and originated in the places temselves)
- **Lived images**
  - (resulting from the direct experience of places by social actors)

Rural in the movies

- Portuguese rural areas are, since some decades now, experiencing a structural reduction in terms of political and economic power, as well as dramatic losses in terms of population and corresponding social capital (Fernandes e Duque, 2013; Figueiredo, 2011; Oliveira Baptista, 2006).

- Despite that, or maybe because of that, in recent years, Portuguese rural territories seem to be progressively object of (re)discovery, mainly of patrimonial, centered in images of nostalgia, memories, and attempts of recovering ancient ways of relating with nature.

- This (re)discovery occurs in parallel with the increasing of the loss of the productive character of rural territories, as well as with its discursive and institutional reconfiguration as multifunctional places. (Figueiredo, 2011).

Rural in the movies

- Rural Territories – a constant presence in Portuguese cinema:

  - **End of the 19th / beginning of the 20th century**
    - Rural mainly represented as a rough and archaic space, although picturesque and folkloric
    - Space of large population densities
    - Space of emigration (to Brazil, USA, Europe)
    - Progressively declining space

  - **Second half to the end of the 20th century**
    - Rural territories are presented as places of functional diversity, with multiple actors and activities
    - Ruined places in consequence of rural exodus
    - Idyllic places
    - Changing places
    - Plural spaces

  - **Beginning of the 21st century**
    - Movies represent rural areas varying between idyllic and anti-idyllic places
    - Between attractive and repulsive spaces
    - Often as opposing or confrontation with urban spaces.

Methodology

- Six movies were analysed

- The six films were selected mainly based on their diffusion among the general public, as well as on their multiple approaches on rural areas and rurality during the last decade and on its different geographical location

Legenda:
Península Ibérica
Portugal Continental
Limites de Concelho
Filmes

"Mal Nascida" - Codessoso (Concelho de Boticas)
"Ainda há Pastores" - Casais de Folgosinho (Concelho de Gouveia)
"Coisa Ruim" - Valezim (Concelho de Seia)
"Aquele querido mês de Agosto" - Coja (Concelho de Arganil)
"Dot.Com" - Dornes (Concelho de Ferreira do Zêzere)
"Viagem ao Princípio do Mundo" - Caminha - Valença - Vale do Peso*
e Lugar do Teso (Castro Laboreiro)*
* Concelho de Melgaço

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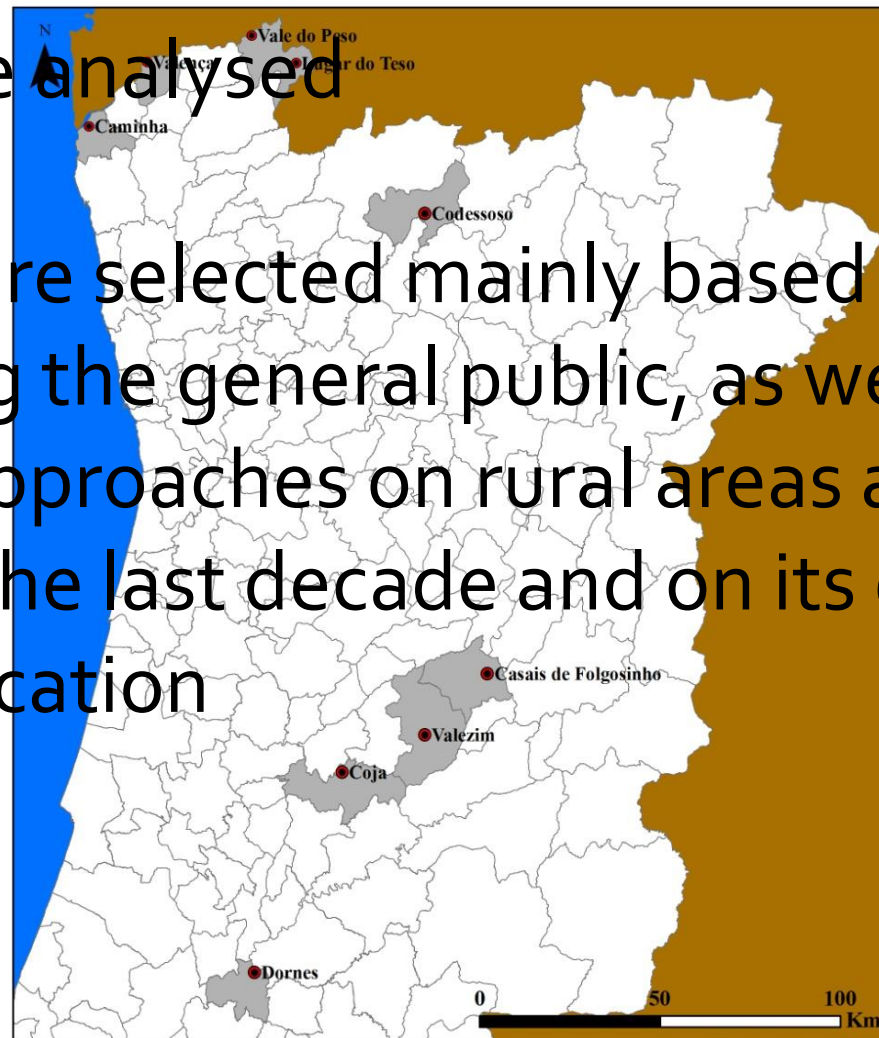
Methodology

- Through the use of a common framework of analysis, built upon the detailed operationalization of the main concepts related to rural and rurality and
- Based on of specific methodological procedures for the analysis of films, we analysed the content of the abovementioned movies:
- The content analysis focused on the main symbols, elements and narratives used in the movies in order to address the representation of rural territories and its characteristics, through the following procedures:
  - Construction of a technical record for each movie (containing information on the direction, production, year, synopsis as well as some elements of geographical and social contextualization)
  - Construction of a framework containing aspects of filmic diegesis
  - Besides the global analysis, a detailed examination was performed on each movie containing:
    - Spatial framework
    - The dominant territorialities of the main characters
    - The more relevant narratives in the representation of spaces
    - Technical issues as photography, colors, sounds…

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- The **'Landscape'** thematic is the most visible
- **'Rural lifestyle'** is the second most represented category, followed by the one that aggregates **'tradition'** and **'modernity'**, expressed in the movies that convey narratives more related with the degree of permeability of the rural to external influences and processes, but also to time and contemporaneity
 - *(Dot.com; Our beloved month of August)*
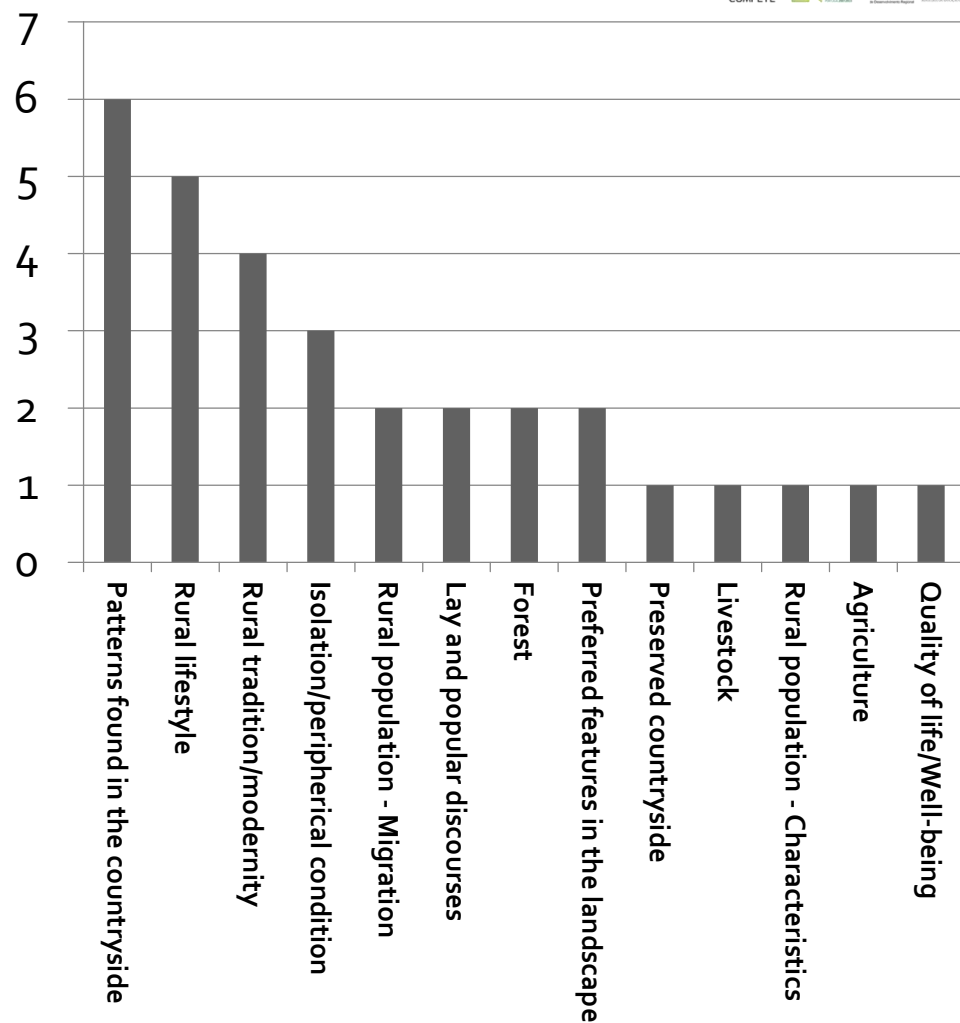
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- The category related to **'isolation'** and **'peripherality'** is the 4th more represented in the movies:
  - *Are there still any Shepherds? ; Bad Blood*
- It is also related to the marginalization, distance and eccentricity of rural territories
- It is worthwhile to note the reduced expression of categories related to **'local population characteristics'** and local economic traditional activities
- The category '**Migration**' has a strong presence in movies such as
  - *Our beloved month of August* and *Voyage to the Beginning of the World*
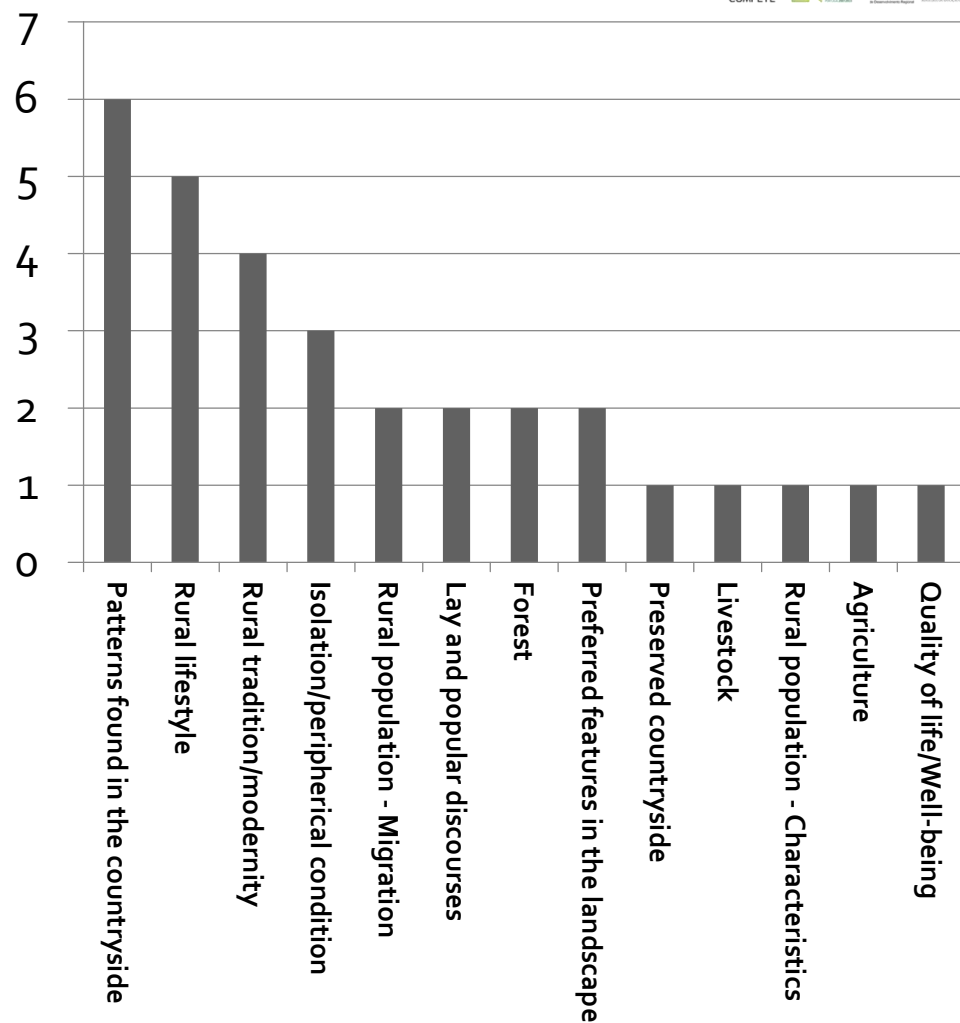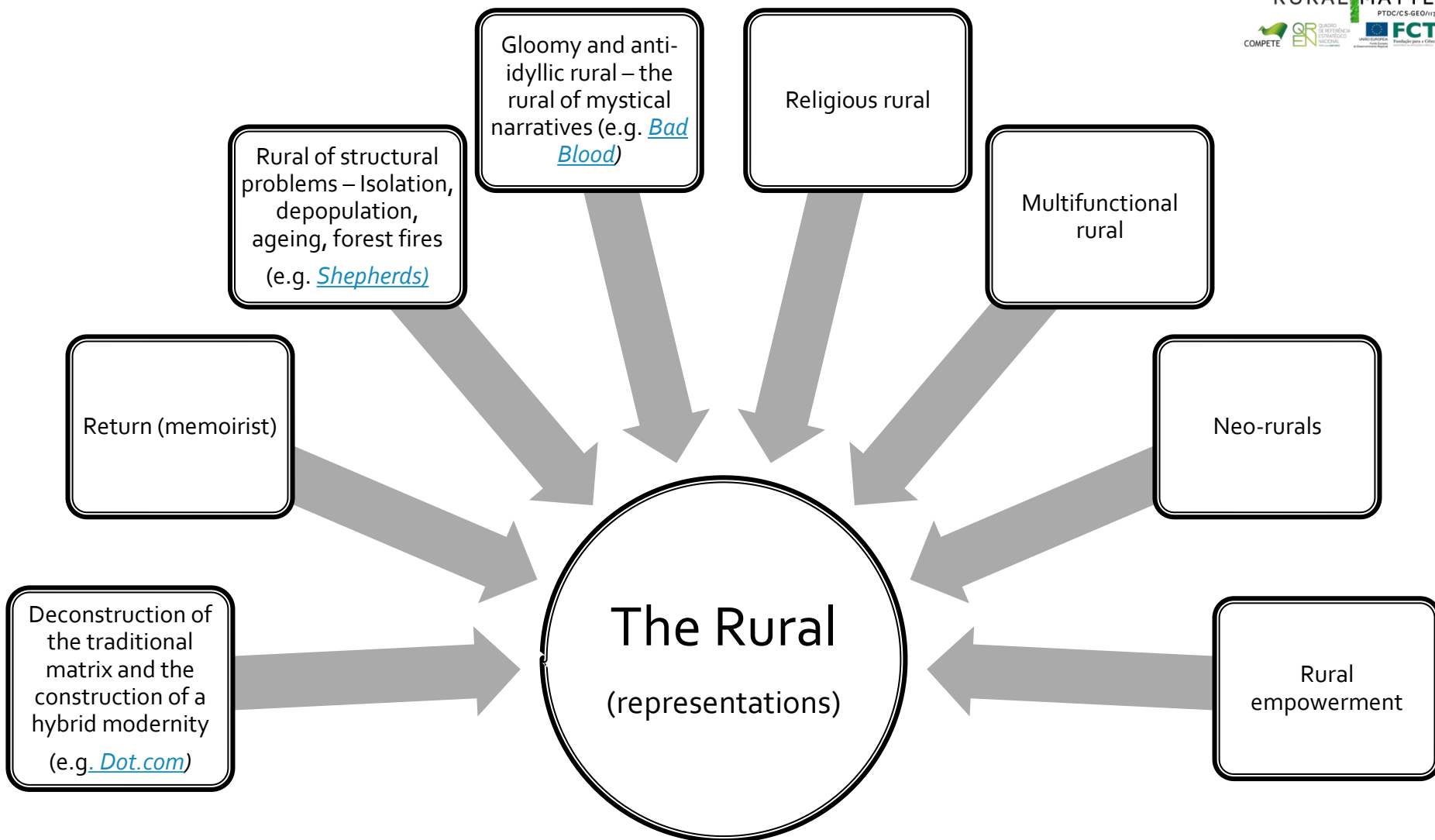
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- It is a rural represented as a 'stage' for diverse actors, containing both the ones that stay as the ones that leave, as well as the ones that return

- The characters, both local inhabitants and external agents, represent different types of narratives on the rural, conveyed through opinions, moods, outbursts, nostalgia, '*saudade'*, regrets or criticism.

- All these feelings are mixed and externalized, crossing the six movies, as for instance in the discourse of the returning emigrant (*Voyage to the Beginning of the World*) or in the narrative of the neo-rural (*Bad Blood*), as well as on the shepherd discourse (*Are there still any Shepherds?*) which feels loneliness and a profound lack of urban lifestyle but, at the same time, confesses that he is unable to live without his sheep.

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Gloomy and anti-idyllic rural – the rural of mystical narratives (e.g. *Bad Blood*)

Religious rural

Rural of structural problems – Isolation, depopulation, ageing, forest fires (e.g. *Shepherds)*

Multifunctional rural

Return (memoirist)

Neo-rurals

Deconstruction of the traditional matrix and the construction of a hybrid modernity (e.g*. Dot.com)*

The Rural

(representations)

Rural empowerment

Some Conclusions

- The movies analysed present an **asymmetric** rural with diverse rhythms that hardly fit in a single matrix

- Despite that, some prevalent and common themes are:
  - Abandonment
  - Return
  - Isolation
  - Opposition to urban
  - Difficult balance between tradition and modernity
  - Rural multifunctionality

Some Conclusions

- A disruption, both spatial and temporal, between the more nostalgic and based on the past narratives and those that integrate diversity and change

- We have found a complex myriad of alternative representations of the rural between the films that have a particular focus on recording the rural 'as it is', before it disappears, therefore appealing to the audience's nostalgia and the films that present a changing rurality, caught between tradition and modernity.

- All the images and narratives conveyed by the films seem able to affect both the social representations and the demands and consumptions regarding rural territories, although further empirical evidence is needed.
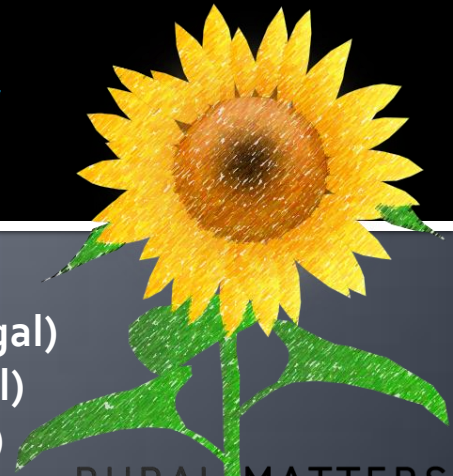
Re-imagining Rurality: Conference and Exhibition

27 & 28 February 2015
Faculty of Architecture & the Built Environment,
University of Westminster, London, UK

Muito Obrigada
Thank you very much

http://ruralmatters.web.ua.pt

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