

## ***Special Session G2 - Open Spaces in peri-urban areas. Emergent tools and solutions for planning, managing and design***

### **Environmental planning in the peri-urban territory of Oporto metropolitan area: a critical appraisal**

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The expansion of metropolitan areas brought along the spreading of urban areas into more unoccupied territories, some with strong rurality. The transformation of these territories introduced a set of environmental issues related to the lack of natural conservation, incapacity in maintaining habitats and fragmentation of ecosystems, among others. The metropolitan area of Oporto is a good illustrative case of a territory that has evolved from a rural pattern with some scattered urban agglomerations throughout the region. The suburbanization process occurred with the growth of the main city and the principal centres around it in the larger peripheral municipalities. Urban decentralization trends have been reinforced by large investments leading to the residential decentralization that was accompanied by the displacement of employment, resulting on a new edge city on the outer ring of the metropolitan area. The superposition of new patterns of territorial occupation on the traditional rural landscape, characterized by a dispersed type of settlement, generated a strong fragmented territory.

In these peri-urban areas, open spaces are the remaining spaces of an evolving territory, increasingly characterized by urban footprints. Shopping centres, large residential developments and still some industrial complexes can be easily found. The lasting environmental structures are typically fragmented, for the exception of some preserved areas, as a result of some disordered urban expansion that took place for some decades, in the 80s and 90s.

Environmental planning in this territory around the city of Oporto has been lacking for quite some decades. Only recently, less than a decade ago, some initiatives showed efforts in developing an environmental structure in the metropolitan area. In particular, the regional metropolitan agency developed a Strategic Plan for the Environment. The plan intends to: (i) correct some environmental problems occurring in the region, (ii) define the path towards sustainable development, (iii) Reinforce active and responsible citizenship, and (iv) integrate sectoral policies and promote regional articulation. Municipalities have also been preparing municipal ecological plans as part of their municipal plans. In this context, it is interesting to analyse these instruments and their effectiveness.

The paper will, then, focus on a critical analysis of the instruments and tools at the metropolitan and municipal level. The discussion will highlight that these interventions, due to the nature of specific actions, have still very limited impact on the overall environmental structure. An evaluation of the planned interventions and real actions in this territory, as well as an understanding of the socio and cultural role of these spaces will be developed. Our conclusions will evidence the importance of more integrated interventions in the territory.