

# OBSERVATORY OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES OF THE REGION OF ODEMIRA – AN INNOVATIVE TOOL IN THE RESEARCH AND DEFINITION OF LOCAL EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

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## Abstract

Because of its territorial dispersion (1721Km<sup>2</sup>) and low population density (15.10 inhab/km<sup>2</sup> | 26036 inhab. total), Odemira is seen as a low density region.

Grounded in an involved and team work, and having this in mind, the Local Education Plan (PEL) was built as the anchor to the research, planning and concretion of the educational policy in Odemira. Featuring distinctive guidelines and built on scientific basis, the PEL quickly stood out being the “most innovative in the country”, according to Professor António Rochete (University of Coimbra).

Connecting these levels of innovation with the great effort that the City put on studying seriously the conditions that contribute to the existence of certain local educational indicators (some of which lower than the Portuguese average), it was possible to draw a path involving all actors of the educational community in the way of change and social innovation in the definition of an educational policy.

Under the PEL and within a straight partnership with TAIPA and University of Évora, Odemira started the implementation of an “Observatory of Educational Policies of the Region of Odemira” (OPECO). This pioneering tool aims to define a methodology of data collection and analysis which is expected to promote a better monitoring of the academic course of students in this region, from pre-school to the conclusion of higher education. It will also contribute to support the definition and implementation of public policies that promote the development and improvement of indicators of education and training in the region.

OPECO will consist in two related digital media: the new PEL (Odemira: Território Educativo - 2014-2016) website and a tool for data collection, analysis and for granting public access to them (with different levels of access). Both website and OPECO tool are developed by Portugal Telecom, one of the most important Portuguese enterprises in this field, and this project was first page of one of the most important Portuguese daily paper (Jornal Público) in march, and Odemira, with this project, was considered in November the second best Portuguese municipality to study in “Future Education” Prizes.

This communication's seek to present the foundations, features and the potential of the OPECO as an innovative element in the management of local educational policies.

Keywords: Observatory of Educational Policies of the Region of Odemira, Innovations, Research, Data collection and analysis.

## 1 CONTEXTUALIZATION

Located in the Alentejo southwest coast of Portugal, Odemira is the most extensive municipality in the country, counting 1721 Km<sup>2</sup>. According to the 2011 Census [1], the 26106 inhabitants living there represent a population density of 15.1 people per km<sup>2</sup> (only 39 of all the 308 Portuguese municipalities show lower values). Dispersion is a major characteristic of the territory: some locations are as far as 40 km away from the county seat and the average distance of locations from each other is 25 km. This, together with the lack of an efficient network of public transport, creates difficulties of mobility and access to populations, especially in what concerns the services concentrated in Odemira village. Besides these "inner distances", significant "external distances" from major urban centers (200 km from the capital city of Lisbon and 120 km from Faro) and facilities (90 km from the nearest Hospital, in Santiago do Cacém; 100 km from the Polytechnic Institute in Beja or 120 km from the University at Faro) reinforce its "territorial isolation".