Building Governance in Portugal: some Reflections upon the Digital Cities and Regions Program

MARIA JOÃO SIMÕES
(CICS-UM; UBI)

AND

DOMINGOS SANTOS
(CICS-UM; IPCB)

TENTATIVE GOVERNANCE IN EMERGING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE, OCTOBER 28-29, 2010

Questions to be addressed

- Research objectives;
- Theoretical framework;
- Digital Cities and Regions Program;
- Methodology;
- Main conclusions;
- Operational questions to be addressed on the field of governance;
- Policy measures to strengthen governance.

Research objectives

- To rethink the model, the methodologies and the projects that gave origin to digital cities and regions, in order to improve results.
- To analyse the institutional and social factors, as well as the technological ones, that have contributed to different outcomes in the Portuguese digital cities and regions, focusing into the governance issue.
- To deepen the acquaintance about the knowledge society.
- To outline recommendations that can reinforce a knowledge-based development also in other EU territories.

Theoretical framework

- The analysis model of the relationship between society and technology: reciprocal conditioning.

- The theories of:

  - network society;

  - governance;

  - regional innovation systems.

- An embracing and comprehensive concept of knowledge city and region (KCR) (based in Ergazakis *et al.*, 2006).

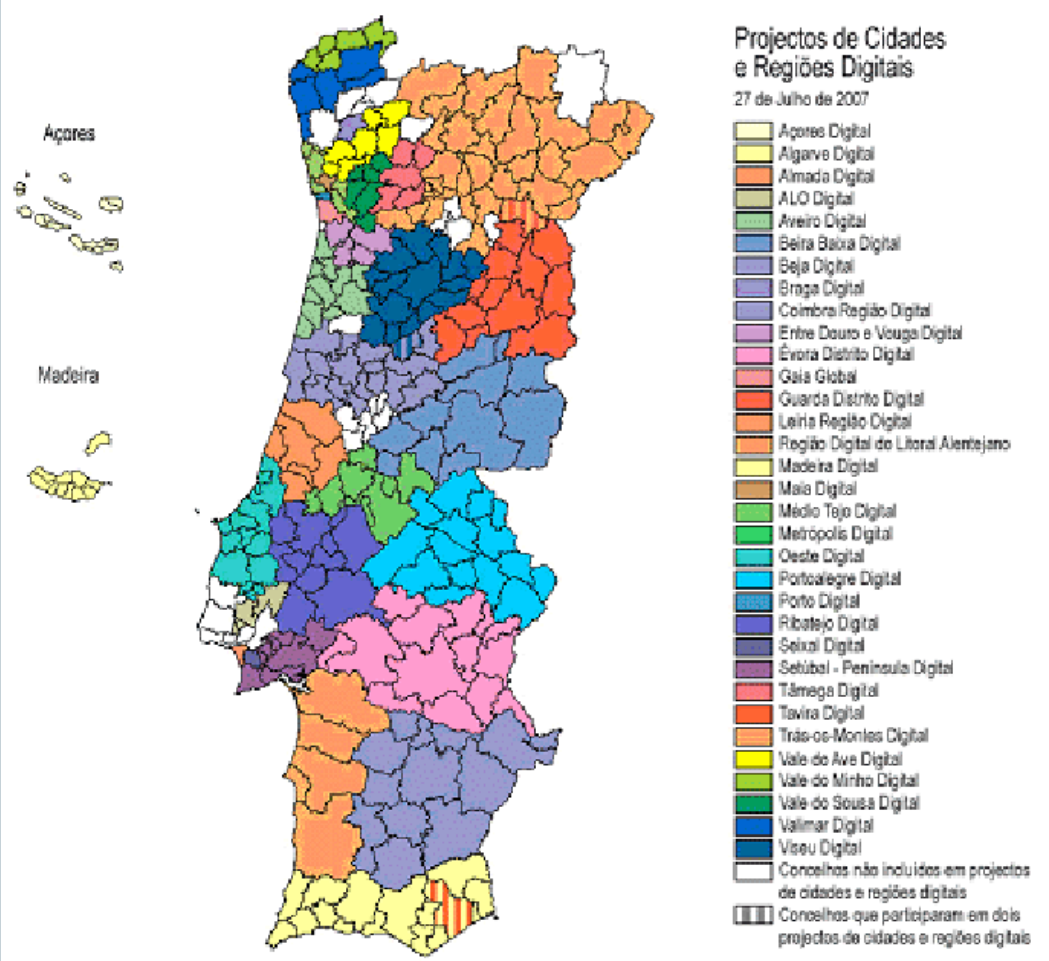
Digital cities and regions program

POS_CONHECIMENTO

Programa Operacional Sociedade do Conhecimento

cidades e regiões Digitais

www.cidadesdigitais.pt



Methodology

- Qualitative and comparative methodology.
- Selected different four case studies (Beja Digital, Évora Distrito Digital, Leiria Região Digital, Gaia Global).
- Identified dimensions of analysis to compare the KCR trough a governance framework: acessibilities, e-government, territorial competitiveness, regional information system.
- Used (e-)governance dimensions: strategic vision; leadership; participation (stakeholders and people); social actors organization and performance; accountability.
- Research techniques: exploratory and semi-directives interviews, websites and documental analysis.

Main conclusions – governance and KCR features

- The digital cities and regions projects have shown different results in Portugal.
- There are no standard solutions for cities and regions - knowledge-based development depends on the specificities of their institutions, history and culture.
- But there are some common features shared by "winners" cities and regions:
  - ✓ the existence of political will and commitment,
  - ✓ the ownership of diagnoses studies adjusted to the contexts,
  - ✓ a strategic framework to guide action,

Main conclusions – Governance and KCR features (cont.)

- ✓ the existence of dynamic leadership,
- ✓ the building of effective and diversified partnerships,
- ✓ the creation of mechanisms to stimulate innovation and support the creation, dissemination and sharing of knowledge,
- ✓ the high qualified human resources and an attractive and conducive context for the establishment of the knowledge workers,
- ✓ the financial support.

- Most common weaknesses in KCR in Portugal likely other countries (projects): deficiencies on the accountability field, weak valorisation of citizens' participation and a deficit of a knowledge-based view of the territory.

Main conclusions – networks and nodes

- The position that cities and regions occupy in the global society depends, to a large extent, on the attributes of their networks (nodes, ties and flows).
- The nodes - social actors, particularly the collective ones - are a decisive constituent of networks.
- There seems to occur a situation where networking was based on building new networks or focusing only on ICT where technology took a central role – instead of nurturing existing networks.
- Public and private actors may, in a process that is difficult and complex, transform the regions into winners or losers, depending of their governance processes, institutional capacity, and quality of ties and flows they are able to formulate and implement.

Main conclusions – technology and society

- ICT does not prescribe a knowledge-based development. In that sense, one suggests the designation: knowledge cities and regions.
- The term digital refers to a technologically deterministic perspective that is embedded in policy formulation and current indicators leading to an intervention almost exclusively focused on infrastructure and not in intangible aspects.
- Bridging initiatives seem to have a strategic role to play to minimise the relational, informational and knowledge gaps.
- Standalone projects should be avoided unless there are no other opportunities to piggyback on others or the need for innovation with ICT can open the doors for additional partners and resources.
- There is yet a deficit of sociological and economic research in the area of KCR and also in their various dimensions namely on e-governance and e-government.

Governance: operational questions to be addressed

- How to overtake the persistence of a clear deficit of qualified actors to face the challenges of the knowledge society?
- How to (re)define the changing behaviour of local/regional governments towards new governance models?
- How collaboration between the local/regional actors should be externally organized?
- How to reduce difficulties due to mismatches between national and local policies and to build up joined-up approaches?
- How to answer to the bipolar effect: globalisation *vs* territorial embeddedness?

Governance: operational questions to be addressed (cont.)

- How to reduce the predominance of public intervention and of public actors, underplaying private and third sector actors?
- How to unleash capacities, promoting political leadership that is empowering and providing space to both state and non-state actors?
- How knowledge creation and innovation oriented work should be organized internally among the different actors?
- How to overtake the inability to formulate an integrated strategic planning vision – instead, of sectoral approaches ?
- Which are the critical steps in order to move from a digital management perspective to a knowledge empowerment approach?
- How to stimulate transparency and accountablity?

Policy measures to strengthen governance

The need to:

- build up governance approaches that are not fuzzy, confusing or discontinuous – a **local/regional agenda**;
- answer the relational gap among territorial actors – a **local/ regional platform**;
- guarantee pivotal institutions – a **local/regional leadership**;
- assure the creation, dissemination and absorption of strategic knowledge – a **local/regional collective learning dynamics**;
- address the challenges of inclusiveness, assuring more effective stakeholder's participation, people's participation, transparency and accountability mechanisms – a **local/regional target**;
- delegate centrally-administered power to local and regional governments – a **regional innovation policy**.