

Assessment of the Polis Program in Leiria through the stakeholders' satisfaction analysis

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1. INTROUCTION

The promotion of sustainable urban development is emphasized by documents, reports and summits carried out all over the world. The strategies development, objectives and targets that ensure the development and integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions to an urban scale are the base of urban models which have as principle the urban sustainability. The quality improvement of the urban environment and consequently the citizens' life quality is one of the major objectives of the interventions of urban regeneration.

The water element resulted in the formation of many major cities and is a benefit, both for its contribution to the biophysically balance but also for the landscape and identity importance played in the place where it is inserted. The need for integration of riparian urban fronts (green spaces and the presence of water) in the processes of urban planning is repeatedly referred to in European guiding documents such as the Aalborg Charter and Aalborg +10, the Leipzig Charter or the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment which refer to the proper integration of green spaces in the cities as a way of promoting the quality of urban life through the landscape and environmental qualification, thus contributing to urban sustainability (Bernardo *et al.*, 2009).

The interventions of urban regeneration in riparian fronts are increasingly frequent, as they have been regarded as an opportunity for urban requalification and environmental valorization of cities, which is a key factor for the population attraction and hence for the deployment of new activities, which reflects the competitiveness level between cities. The potential of these areas in terms of environment and landscape together with urban regeneration interventions can generate significant benefits in economical terms, resulting from physical and functional change of the space. The evaluation of the interventions' success in urban regeneration is very important because it allows observing the main advantages and disadvantages in the implementation of these measures and establishing them as a process of learning and making recommendations for future interventions.

In Portugal, the Park of Nations Project issued from EXPO'98 was the first large-scale urban regeneration intervention in riparian fronts. Subsequently to the Park of Nations Project appeared the Polis Program (Program of Urban Requalification and Environmental Valorization of the Cities) that had as main objective "*(...) to improve the quality of life in the cities, through interventions in urban and environmental aspects, improving attractiveness and competitiveness of urban centers that have an important role in structuring the national urban system (...)*" (MAOT, 2001: 31).

Among the 28 cities benefited by the Polis program is the city of Leiria. The POLIS intervention in Leiria city began in 2000 and the various actions under the Program Polis are understood as an integrated urban requalification with a strong component of environmental valorization to improve the quality of urban environment and enhance the presence of the natural element that is the Lis River and its connection with the Historic Area (LeiriaPolis, 2000). Therefore, the aim of the current study is to contribute to the evaluation of the Polis program intervention in Leiria this intervention by analyzing the local authorities' satisfaction. To evaluate the intervention success, interviews to stakeholders were conducted in order to record a variety of perceptions about the changes under POLIS in Leiria, but also about the importance of the Lis River for the city.

The evaluation of an intervention's success can be achieved through an appropriate set of indicators. In this context, another aim of this study is to contribute to the explanation of "Indicator 1 - Citizens' satisfaction with the riparian front" (Bernardo e Ramos, 2009) and "Indicator 8 - Governance and sustainable management" (Condessa *et al.*, 2009), developed under the project Riprocity: "Rivers and Cities, opportunities for urban sustainability". This project focuses on the study of the relationship between the city and the river that runs through it, the Fluvial City, with the aim of investigating the contribution of the river's presence in an urban environment in terms of potential and opportunities for a more sustainable urban development (Condessa *et al.*, 2009).

2. THE RIVER AND URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

The waterfronts have always occupied a prominent role in world history and economy. In the past the preference on the watercourses river margins in the implementation of the first cities refers to factors such as water supply and transport easiness along the river and the proximity to the best agricultural land, located in fertile land of the river fronts. Water justifies the city foundation as well as its development, imposing its logic in space and not just marking the territory under its own peculiarities and urban traditions of the place, as well as the local society, thus establishing an identity factor. At the moment, the presence of water in the city assumes structuring functions in the urban landscape: ecological, landscape, water, social and economic functions, playing a key role the image of the city (Castro, 2007; Vaz, 2007).

According to Martins *et al.* (2007), initially urban regeneration interventions focused mainly on port areas, by the decay and obsolescence of urban industrial areas caused by relocation of industries or their abandonment associated to the sector restructuring process marked by the crisis of industrial activities during the 60's and 70's. However, nowadays the urban requalification interventions fall on a wide range of geographical, political, socio - economic and institutional contexts, which provide a broad view on the models of urban management of waterfronts (Hoyle, 2002 *in* Condessa *et al.*, 2009). In this sense, the regeneration of urban waterfronts presents as the result of four stages: (1) an economic transition, (2) interest in the social environment, (3) physical obsolescence and new territorial demands, and (4) environmental quality and sustainable development (Robert, 2000).

In terms of urban sustainability it is crucial to consider the multiplicity of relationships between the river system and the urban system, since they are closely related (Silva and Pinto, 2007). From the analysis carried out by a group of experts in a workshop to reflect on the contribution of the river to urban sustainability, held in November 2006, in the scope of Riprocity project, five dimensions with affect on urban interactions between the river and the city were identified (figure 2.1): institutional, economic, psycho-social, spatial and ecological-environment in the implementation of sustainable policies at the urban scale (Saraiva *et al.*, 2007; Condessa *et al.*, 2009). In the process of regeneration of urban waterfronts are part of the institutional dimension the adoption of sustainable solutions in the implementation of specific projects and intervention procedures for monitoring and regulation to ensure their proper feasibility. The economic dimension includes the opportunities to generate significant capital gains, in the process of physical and functional transformation of the respective projects implementation. At the psycho-social level it's relevant to consider the local authorities' satisfaction regarding the requalification operations of waterfronts, often synonymous with people's reconciliation with the river of their city. In the spatial dimension, a sustainable use of land is determined, establishing strategies for protection of sensitive areas and spatial organization of the territory, including the continuity between the urban network and river system. The ecological environment dimension refers to the ecological and environmental preservation and valorization, taking into account aspects such as water quality, air quality, bioclimatic comfort, fauna and flora preservation and risk management (Saraiva *et al.*, 2007).

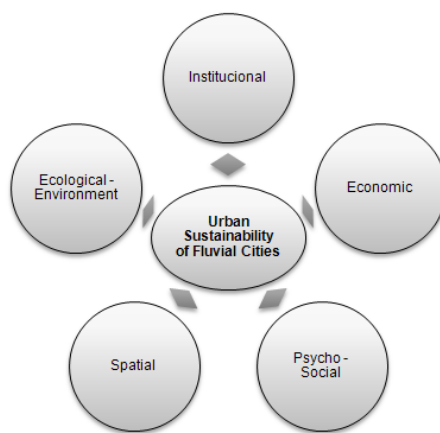


Figure 2.1 - The river contribution for Urban Sustainability (based on Saraiva *et al.*, 2007)

2.1 River Fronts in Urban Planning

To consider the river as an attractive factor in urban planning has been the key to success of some interventions in the world. The possibility of population approach to the rivers has become a new model of contemporary urbanization largely by the cities in strategy development for spatial planning of these areas. The urban projects of this nature implemented in several cities (Docklands of London, New York, Sydney, margins of the Seine, Bilbao, seafront of Barcelona, Puerto Madero in Buenos Aires, and, in Lisbon, the Park of Nations) show that the regeneration of the river fronts is a key factor

for the population attraction and consequently for the implementation of new activities, allowing to generate gains for the entire urban system such as: (1) to meet the challenges of economic and environmental restructuring, (2) to improve water quality, through environmental monitoring processes, (3) to implemented new strategies for urban planning, (4) to improve public access to the riparian zone and (5) to encourage public participation in the management of riparian areas (Estevens, 2009). The physical presence of rivers in cities assumes often a leading role. In Portugal, 77 of the 134 cities reviewed by Silva and Pinto (2007) can be considered as Fluvial Cities, without contemplating those with smaller watercourses.

The concerns about the articulation of the river with the urban system have spread to the urban planning level, in the perspective of integration of social and economic objectives with environmental objectives, more specifically regarding legal charges over the planning and management of river systems. Furthermore the water contemplation as an essential natural resource has deserved special attention by the European Union and the national government developing legal instruments (the Water Framework Directive, National Water Plan, Watershed Plan and the Water Act No. 58/2005), which aim at the articulation between the procedures and regulatory framework of water management with landscape planning. This approach, which considers the river as an urban element of great complexity, refers to the understanding of the river/city relationship, according to several physical, social and economic components (figure 2.2).

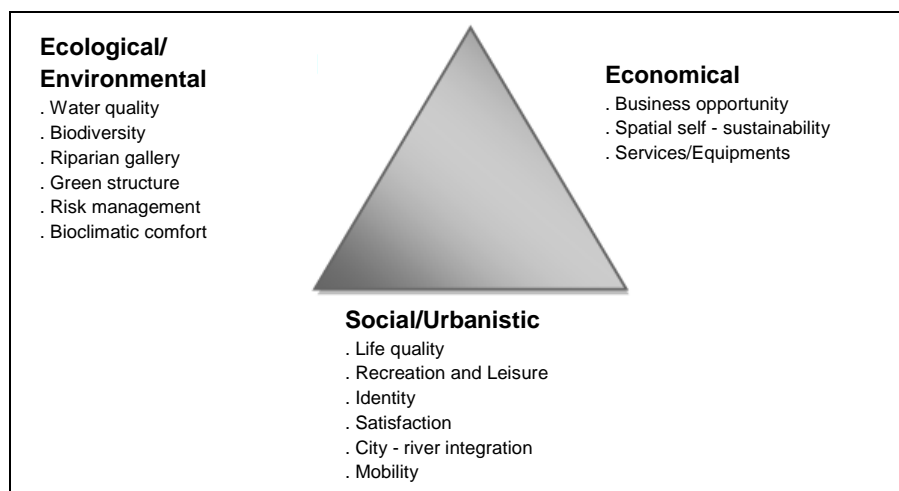


Figure 2.2 – Influence of the river system in the urban system dynamics (adapted from Vaz and Saraiva, 2007)

In this context the Riprocity project developed a total of eight indicators, adapted from a set already tested¹ (figure 2.3), which are considered relevant to the sustainability assessment in Fluvial Cities. By giving particular attention to interventions arising from the Polis Program, these indicators aim to

¹ In a joint initiative of the European Commission (Environment GD), European Environment Agency and Urban Environment Expert Group. The report "European Common Indicators" is available online on page <http://euronet.uwe.ac.uk/www.sustainable-cities.org/indicators/ECI%20Final%20Report.pdf>.

enable the evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of the urban requalification processes of this nature, serving as the basis for decisions in future similar projects.

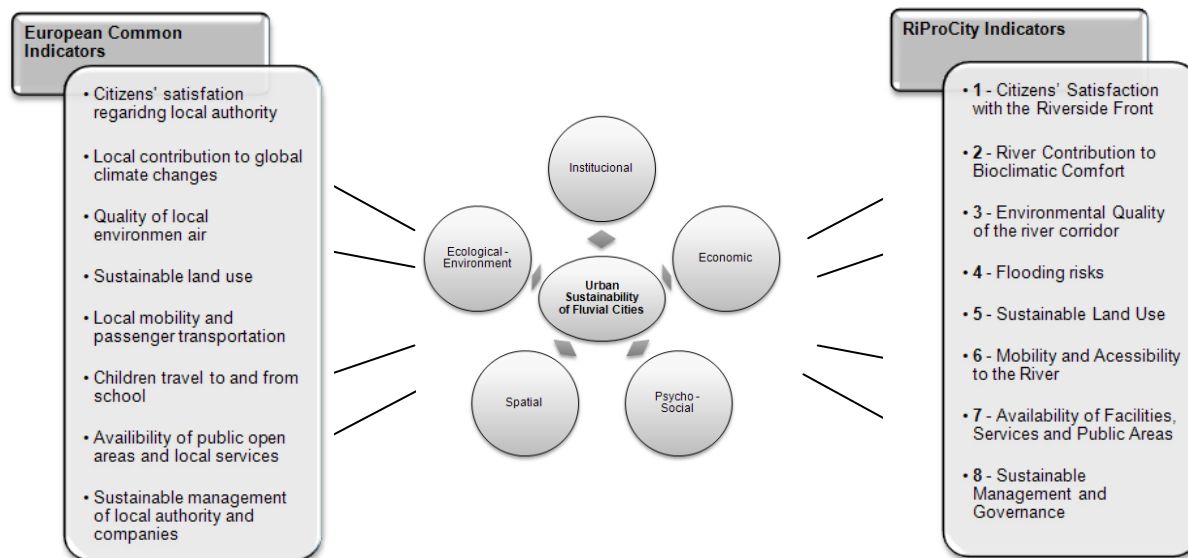


Figure 2.3 – Evolution in Riprocity indicators formulation (adapted from Condessa *et al.*, 2009)

The effectiveness of requalification, rehabilitation and regeneration interventions in riparian fronts is not only due to the articulation of these areas in the urban space, but also to the perception and their use by the population. Thus, interventions in riparian fronts can help to promote the environmental value of these areas and to increase population awareness about the value of the river in their city. This awareness may contribute to a greater commitment to the use and maintenance of such spaces. The citizens should consider that the interventions were a genuine improvement to the quality of urban life. In this sense the **Indicator 1** – “Citizen’s satisfaction with the riverside front”, aims to assess the citizens’ satisfaction regarding the riparian areas intervention.

The **Indicator 8** – “Sustainable management and governance”, intends to analyze the effectiveness of management models of the river and its contribution to urban sustainability. Since the river fronts are considered of high ecological and environmental potential areas and are often subject to legal regimes that restrain the urban uses and utilizations it is necessary to ensure that the interventions in these areas meet these conditions. Thus it is important to analyze whether the current models of river fronts planning and management promote the sustainable urban policies and improve the urban quality of life, particularly as regards the Polis Program in Leiria. In this context it was defined a set of measures, with a threefold analysis perspective (strategies and objectives, level of execution and institutional articulation), applicable to case studies, through which conclusions draw about the contribution of institutional models adopted in urban rehabilitation, renovation and/or regeneration interventions in Portugal for a more sustainable management of riparian areas (Condessa *et al.*, 2009).

This study intends to contribute to a better understanding of Indicators 1 and 8, by conducting interviews to local authority as a complement to the inquiries performed to the local population. It is also intended to focus on the relationship between the psycho-social and institutional dimensions and the urban system, which are part of the indicator 1 and indicator 8, respectively, in order analyze the present models of riparian margins management through the citizens' satisfaction regarding the final result.

2.1.1 From EXPO'98 to Polis Program

With the accession of Portugal to the EEC in 1986, arose the need to link the existing policies for regional development and spatial planning to the policies in practice at European level which has widened the interest in urban phenomenon (Gaspar, 1995). The great impulsion took place with the recovery of the area that served as the venue for the implementation of the Lisbon World Exposition in 1998 followed by its conversion with the Park of Nations project. After the completion of EXPO'98, the ParqueExpo SA, the intervention manager, operated the revision of the urbanization that retrofitted the exposition area in a new urban centrality, the Park of Nations. With this new project, intended to upgrade the city's relationship with the Tagus River, restoring the environment and landscape, converting the uses of this area, ensuring the integration of this space in the tissue of the "city" and participation in its identity. After the success of the project Park of Nations that "(...) had a very significant impact across the Country and has contributed to establish a new quality paradigm of urban space and valorization of its environmental components (...)", the Polis Program arouses, Urban Requalification and City Environmental Valorization Program. This program aims to promote interventions that reproduce as much as possible and to the scale of each urban center, the virtues of EXPO'98 in terms of public space requalification with a strong environmental valorization component" (Correia *et al.*, 2000: 26).

The Polis Program includes in its history the achievement of urban interventions that promote quality of life through the creation of more efficient mechanisms for intervention in urban spaces, between the State and local authorities which may be an example in terms of urban regeneration procedure (Condessa *et al.*, 2009). Polis Program was designed taking into account the deep changes in Portugal in the last three decades reflected with great intensity in spatial planning, particularly in the urban structure resulting from the economic development, based on industrialization (Gaspar *et al.*, 1989; Barata Salgueiro, 1992; Portas *et al.*, 2003; Marques, 2004). This much accelerated transformation has created several different situations of degradation in cities, such as the explosive growth of metropolitan areas and its suburbs, the disqualification and the abandonment of the historical centers with pulverization of their traditional social roles, the degradation of natural elements inserted into the urban tissue, leading to the abandonment of riverbanks and sea-fronts waterfront both river and seas.

3. APPLICATION TO THE STUDY CASE: Polis Program in Leiria

Seat of County and District capital, Leiria is located about 140 km distance from Lisbon and 70 km from Coimbra. Its location is one of the main factors that contribute to its growth and development. The Municipality of Leiria is located in the Central Region, the Sub - Region of Pinhal Litoral. Presenting as an area of great social - economic influence and strongly representative of the total Region, the county of Leiria has 128 537 inhabitants and a population density of 226 inhabitants/Km², data for 2008, according to the National Institute of Statistics. The Lis River is the main fluvial line with 39.5 km length that drains most of the County, running from South to North, and along its margins is the most fertile land. The riverhead is in Lugar das Fontes, close to Cortes, and after passing near the pine forest of Leiria, it flows in the Atlantic Ocean, in Praia da Vieira². The Lis River resulted in Leiria city formation, which developed along its margins.



Figure 3.1 – Geographical location of Lis River in Leiria city (GoogleEarth, 2009)

The Polis Program intervention in Leiria City began in 2000 and had as main objective the requalification and valorization of the Lis River, targeting primarily the articulation of urban space with the river, through the creation of a continuous green structure which included bicycle and pedestrian paths along its margins, with landscape integration and the implementation of residential areas and recreational and leisure facilities along the River³.

² Câmara Municipal de Leiria - http://www.cm-leiria.pt/pagegen.asp?SYS_PAGE_ID=803122

³ Câmara Municipal de Leiria - http://www.cm-leiria.pt/pagegen.asp?SYS_PAGE_ID=830603

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on the contribution to the evaluation of the Polis Program in Leiria, through the local authorities' satisfaction, conducting interviews with open questions to local authorities, which allow to recorded several views and perceptions about specific actions arising from the implementation of Polis Program in Leiria.

As a contribution to the explanation of the Indicator 1 – “Citizens’ satisfaction with the river front”, developed under the project Riprocity and based on responses to the interviews, one can consider that the intervention of the Polis Program contributed to the city development in terms of quality promotion of the public space and quality of life, but also to awareness of the importance of public space and to increase the territorial attractiveness of Leiria city, reflecting the local authorities’ satisfaction regarding POLIS intervention.

As a way of explanation of indicator 8 - Governance and sustainable management, developed under the project Riprocity, it's important to mention, in a global perspective, that there are three weaknesses in POLIS intervention in Leiria, which can be corrected in the implementation of future projects of similar nature, such as those supported by the POLIS XXI Program: (1) the lack of public documents with the structuring of the intervention costs and maintenance costs of the spaces constructed, (2) the non contemplation of expropriation, which restrains the intervention, and (3) the establishment of unrealistic deadlines for completion of the interventions.

Regarding the implementation of future projects like Leiria Polis Program in other cities, it is considered that the following recommendations could help improve the final results of such interventions:

- Enforcement of public participation procedures in the projects discussion in order to articulate the population needs and expectations with what is projected. In special is the example of thematic bridges that, contrary to what was considered by the municipality, the majority of the local authorities mentioned the corridor bicycle/pedestrian paths as the most emblematic project of the intervention. This is reflected in the fact that local authorities consider most important the projects that actually effect direct changes in their daily lives, such as the bicycle/pedestrian corridor which had a very positive consequences in terms of mobility and accessibility to the river and the city but also because it is regarded as a propitious area for leisure physical activities. It is considered that the thematic bridges are a reference project, by the qualification of their projects in architectural terms, but more to “foreign” people than for the local population.
- Coordination between the authorities responsible for water quality and managing entities of programs with the characteristics of the Polis Program, so that the interventions at the river margins are not restricted only to the requalification of these areas in terms of aesthetic and landscape but also in terms of environment, more specifically the water quality level. AS an example is the case of Leiria, in which the whole “River - System” was valorized, but

nevertheless local authorities feel that the intervention will only be completed when the cleaning of the waters of River Lis chapter will be closed.

- Public cost structuring of structure and intervention and cost for maintenance of the spaces created in order to establish a standard of what is really acceptable in terms of financial costs to the implementation of a program with the specifics of the program Polis in Leiria.
- Contemplation of the expropriation code in the implementation of these programs, in order not to drawn up unfeasible projects. Take as example the case of Vala Real Garden in Leiria, which was not developed because the municipality and the owner of that area did come to an agreement.
- Elaboration of studies that consider the potential of the created areas in terms of supply and demand of the local population but also of potential visitors. As an example is the case of Radical Park, where the fact that it could be a great attraction for the younger population local, regional and even national was not taken in account and as such support equipment was built in this area, not even sanitary facilities, which is really a weak point. There has been a high regional and national affluence to Radical Park, since to the date of its construction there was only another park with these characteristics in Lisbon.
- Coordination between the managing entities of programs like Polis Program and the environmental and heritage protection entities of each region, for example OIKOS in order to preserve the ecological species in the intervention area. Take as example the case of Lis River wall towing which had a major impact on biodiversity, particularly in birds that moved from those areas.

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