

IS THERE A MODEL OF POLITICAL IDENTITY IN THE SMALL CITIES OF PORTUGAL IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES? A PRELIMINARY THEORETICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The concept of small cities adopted in this article corresponds to urban centres with low relevance in the Portuguese political system. To identify these territorial communities, several classification criteria are suggested (namely the legal status and the political profile of the town) that, after being exploited in monographic studies, may allow conceiving an interpretative model. The most important criterion discussed in this article is the political culture that the *concelhos* (“municipalities”) preserved in the dialogue they established with the crown. It can be asserted that for the 14th century we have not identified any difference between the discourse delivered by the most important and the less important municipalities in this institutional relationship. This is not the case for the 15th century. Indeed, while small cities keep merely defending the legal order, large cities created an autonomous political identity.

KEYWORDS

Portugal, Small Cities, Political Identity, Political Culture.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Lusitania, Parvae Civitates, Identitas Politica, Cultura Politica.

1. Introduction: operative concepts

One could argue that the question that guides this article reflects a circular historiographical construction, particularly detached from external elements inscribed in reality. For this reason, a study that proposes to combine two categories—urban identity¹ and small Portuguese medieval cities—must be preceded by a clear definition of concepts.² Urban identity means the representation that a territorial community produces and conveys about itself. In the present article, to investigate the dissemination of that image I will look at the discourse produced by social actors that have political legitimacy to speak on behalf of a group³ and that formalise it in

1. The topic of urban identity in the medieval period has been widely addressed by European historiography. Because it would be impossible to mention all the articles that somehow address this topic, here are some references to edited volumes, projects and seminars, some of which are mentioned further along in this article: Crouzet-Pavan, Élisabeth; Lecuppre-Desjardin, Élodie, eds. *Villes de Flandre et d'Italie (XIII^e-XVI^e siècle). Les enseignements d'une comparaison*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2008; Chittolini, Giorgio; Johaneck, Peter, coords. *Aspetti e componenti dell'identità urbana in Italia e in Germania (secoli XIV-XVI) / Aspekte und Komponenten der städtischen Identität in Italien und Deutschland (14-16. Jahrhundert)*. Bologna-Berlin: Istituto Trentino di Cultura, 2000; Boone, Marc; Stabel, Peter, eds. *Shaping Urban Identity in Late Medieval Europe*. Louvain: Garant, 2000; Boone, Marc; Lecuppre-Desjardin, Élodie; Sosson, Jean Pierre, eds. *Le verbe, l'image et les représentations de la société urbaine au Moyen Age. Actes du colloque international tenu à Marche-en-Famenne du 24 au 27 octobre 2001*. Anvers-Apeldoorn: Garant, 2002; Asenjo, María, ed. *Oligarchy and Patronage in late Medieval Spanish Urban Society*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2009; Barrio, Juan Antonio, coord. "Espacios de Identidad Política urbana en la Península Ibérica". *Anales de la Universidad de Alicante. Historia Medieval*, 16 (2009-2010): 39-276. For relevant research projects on the topic, see: *Identidad política urbana. La construcción de modelos de identidad en las ciudades de Aragón, Castilla y Navarra (1350-180)* (HUM206-01371), funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology of the Government of Spain. The project *Fundamentos de identidad política: la construcción de identidades políticas urbanas en la península ibérica en el tránsito a la modernidad* (HAR2009-08946)—also funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology of the Government of Spain—has produced outputs, both in the form of individual publications by the researchers and presentations in international seminars, some of which are being prepared for publication: Jara, José Antonio; Martin, Georges; Alfonso, Isabel, eds. *Construir la identidad en la Edad Media. Poder y memoria en la Castilla de los siglos VII a XV*. Cuenca: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2010. In Portugal, see the international seminars organised by the *Centro Interdisciplinar de História, Culturas e Sociedades da Universidade de Évora* in 2010 (*I^o Seminário Internacional Categorias Sociais e Mobilidade Urbana na Península Ibérica no Final da Idade Média*) and in 2011 (*II^o Seminário Internacional Imagem, Identidade e Memória da cidade na Idade Média*), as well as the publication resulting from the first scientific meeting: Vilar, Hermínia de Vasconcelos; Lopes, Filomena de Barros, eds. *Categorias Sociais e Mobilidade Urbana na Baixa idade Média. Entre o Islão e a Cristandade*. Évora: Edições Colibri-Centro Interdisciplinar de História, Cultura e Sociedades, 2012.

2. The need (or rather the obligation) to use categories created in different scientific areas only after careful analysis of the scientific context and of the evolution those categories undergo inside the disciplines of origin, is masterfully argued in the excellent theoretical work produced by Alicia Montero: Montero, Alicia Inés. "Identidad e identidades: La identidad política en la historia urbana medieval. Balance historiográfico y perspectivas de análisis". *Estudios Medievales Hispánicos*, 1 (2012): 121-142. The fact that concepts are absorbed by historiography through common language instead of following a discussion of how it can effectively be used as a category in our discipline leads to anachronisms and imprecision in dealing with certain terms (another topic also addressed by Montero: Montero, Alicia Inés. "Identidad e identidades...": 121-122).

3. This research therefore stays away from the search of evidence of feelings of gregariousness that emerge from (or are instilled in) the population, or, alternatively, of signs of identity of specific groups. I am aware that the latter line of inquiry is intertwined with the investigation of the image that the



specific moments and through certain processes. The specific moment analysed is the institutional dialogue established between the *concelhos* (“municipalities”) and the crown,⁴ mainly in the context of *Cortes* (“parliamentary assemblies”), but also when ambassadors and letters were sent to the *Corte*; the processes analysed are the production of written documents making claims or submitting complaints to the king on behalf of the community.

In this article a situational analysis of the construction and dissemination of the identity of a city or town through discourses bounded by the interlocutor, the circumstances in which they are produced, and the particular goals pursued in a specific moment, is therefore proposed. Ultimately, we are dealing with the image of a community designed as a mechanism to interfere in the relationship between a community and the crown. The major hindrance posed by the analysis of these sources rests, as we shall see, in the difficulty in extracting, among the several discursive elements used, those that may convey an identity substance of the community.⁵

Defining the other element of the equation —small cities in 14th century Portugal— is even trickier. Indeed, once the categories unambiguously used in the coeval documents are transposed —cities and *vilas notáveis* (“notable towns”)— which criterion is used to make a distinction between the remaining towns (the ones that were not granted the notoriety epithet) and notable towns? In other words, what sets apart small nuclei that meet what we could call the minimum requirements of urbanity from those that do not?

This question has not been dealt with by the authors of the urban monographs⁶ published in the prolific 1980s and 1990s,⁷ and the concept of ‘Portuguese medieval

community conveys of itself, as often it will not be possible to differentiate between the identity of leading groups and the identity of the urban nuclei formalized by those groups. A systematic overview of the diverse elements that help create an identity extendable to society was proposed by: Val, Isabel del. “La identidad urbana al final de Edad Media”. *Anales de Historia Medieval de la Europa Atlántica*, 1 (2006): 5-28.

4. Often there was a triangular relationship between territorial communities, the king and individuals, groups, or privileged entities.

5. A more detailed explanation of the concept of urban identity used in this article can be found in: Costa, Adelaide Millán da. “En busca de la identidad de las villas medievales portuguesas. El ejemplo de Coruche”, *La ciudad ante su identidad. La Península Ibérica en los siglos XIII al XV*, José Antonio Jara, coord. Cuenca: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2013: 25-58.

6. Except for the summary concerning the nature of the urban phenomenon proposed by: Conde, Manuel Sílvio Alves. *Uma Paisagem Humanizada. O Médio Tejo nos Finais da Idade Média*. Cascais: Patrimónia, 2000: II, 349-352.

7. For the most recent overview of urban medieval historiography in Portugal, see: Andrade, Amélia Aguiar; Costa, Adelaide Millán da. “Medieval Portuguese towns: the difficult affirmation of a historiographical topic”. *The historiography of medieval Portugal c. 1950-2010*, José Mattoso, Maria Lurdes Rosa, Bernardo Vasconcelos Sousa, Maria João Branco, eds. Lisbon: Instituto de Estudos Medievais, 2011: 283-301. To gauge the similarities of the historiographical evolution identified in Spain and Portugal, see: López Pérez, Miguel Ángel. “La ciudad en la historiografía bajomedieval y altomoderna hispana en los últimos treinta años: Líneas para el estudio de la cultura e identidad urbana”. *Miscelánea Medieval Murciana*, 31 (2007): 111-122; as well as the references included in this work; for the case of Castela, see: Asenjo, María. “Las ciudades medievales castellanas. Balance y perspectivas de su desarrollo historiográfico”. *En*



urban world⁸ has been used with a great deal of elasticity. Conversely, the relative importance of cities, or the hierarchical ordering of central localities—to borrow the terminology used by geographers and accepted by historians—, has been widely addressed. In general, the criteria used to classify urban nuclei were based on the combination of factors such as the existence of walls and the number of parishes, churches, notaries, *besteiros do conto*⁹ or even physicians and surgeons in each community.¹⁰

The first general census organised in the kingdom, the *numeramento* of 1527, allows for a quantitative approach. It conveys a more precise idea of the flexibility and the scope of the notion of *Portuguese urban world* in the early modern period. Adopting the criteria of five hundred homes (*fogos*) put forth by Orlando Ribeiro and Magalhães Godinho¹¹ to differentiate between rural and urban areas excludes several small nuclei that were the subject of monographs in an earlier period.¹² Even by lowering the mark to the 200 *fogos* suggested by Sílvio Alves Conde to distinguish between the ‘towns of a certain importance’ and the remaining ones,¹³ a few centres would be left out of that group.¹⁴ This aspect of a territorial community must of course be judged against the elements usually present in a definition of

la España Medieval, 28 (2005): 415-453; and for the crown of Aragon see: Falcón, María Isabel. “Historia de las ciudades y villas del reino de Aragón en la Edad Media. Evolución y desarrollo de los estudios en los últimos veinticinco años”. *En la España Medieval*, 23 (2000): 395-439.

8. Studies prepared along the lines of the Oliveira Marques Plan explained in: Marques, Antonio Henrique de Oliveira. *Novos Ensaios de História Medieval Portuguesa*. Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 1988: 13-42, 43-67 (“Introdução à história da cidade medieval portuguesa”, “As cidades medievais portuguesas (Algumas bases metodológicas gerais)”). The list of these works is widely known and mentioned in several states of the art prepared periodically. See: Andrade, Amélia Aguiar; Costa, Adelaide Millán da. “Medieval Portuguese towns...”: 283-301.

9. *Besteiros do conto* were military contingents supplied by the *concelhos* to the King (see: Monteiro, João Gouveia. *A Guerra em Portugal nos finais da Idade Média*. Lisbon: Editorial Notícias, 1988: 58-74).

10. See: Marques, Antonio Henrique de Oliveira. *Portugal na crise dos séculos XIV e XV, Nova História de Portugal*, Joel Serrão, António Henrique de Oliveira Marques, eds. Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 1987: IV, 15 and following and 181 and following. The authors of the previously mentioned monographs generally resort to all these indicators. Conde added the examination letters of physicians and surgeons (Alves Conde, Manuel Sílvio Alves. *Uma Paisagem Humanizada*. Lisbon: Cascais, 2000: I, 112-118).

11. António Henrique de Oliveira Marques and João José Alves Dias take this value for granted by choosing the 500 *fogos* criterion to describe the density of urban nuclei present in the north and south of the kingdom. See: Marques, Antonio Henrique de Oliveira; Dias, João José Alves. “A população portuguesa nos séculos XV e XVI”. *Biblos*, 70 (1994): 171-196.

12. Including only the urban centres with more than 200 *fogos*, Barcelos, Ponte de Lima, Chaves, Torres Novas, Alenquer, Torres Vedras, Guarda, Arraiolos and Silves would be excluded (see: Galego, Júlia; Daveau, Suzanne. *O numeramento de 1527-1532. Tratamento cartográfico*. Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Geográficos, 1986: 107-109). Considering the profound population variation that occurred since the mid-14th century, we do not assume a direct relationship of proportionality between the data included in the *numeramento* and the data which, in earlier periods, existed about each of these nuclei.

13. Conde, Manuel Sílvio Alves. *Uma Paisagem Humanizada...: II*, 453.

14. Such as Sintra, Cascais, Óbidos and Porto de Mós (see: Galego, Júlia; Daveau, Suzanne. *O numeramento de 1527-1532...: 107-109*).



urban world —the centrality and geostrategic, economic, political, military, and ecclesiastic power, as well as fundamental legal requirements.¹⁵

If we extend the bibliographic review of small towns to European historiography, it is concluded that the issue has been addressed since the eighties, driven by Jean Pierre Poussou and Peter Clark's intention to develop a Franco-British research project. It was precisely the difficulty experienced by these authors to define small town that triggered a wide debate on this issue, resulting in the holding of seminars and publication of conference proceedings.¹⁶ However, this scientific investment did not allow historians to agree. It shall be recalled that in 1995 Bernard Lepetit stated that, at least in the case of France, problems to circumscribe small towns were so great before the seventeenth century, that the effort might be inglorious.¹⁷ That is to say, the explanation of this category requires empirical studies (such as Lepetit wrote) and further analysis that gradually, have been carried out.¹⁸

For now, let us base on the following. It will be difficult to stabilise the concept of 'small cities', since it could be defined in terms of archetypes of cities or towns which can be different according to the level taken into consideration, such as a region or the kingdom (not to mention the European scale). Given these circumstances, in the present article the notion of 'small city' will be taken to mean exclusively the

15. I am obviously referring to the fundamental condition that standardizes urban centres (a necessary but insufficient condition), that is, the fact that every community is endowed with jurisdictional autonomy. José Luis Monsalvo argues that resorting to the concept of *sistema concelhio* ("municipality system") helps compensate for the undefined notions of town, *concelho*, city, urban municipality, and rural municipality (Monsalvo, José Luis. "Los territorios de las villas reales de la vieja Castilla, ss. XI-XIV: antecedentes, génesis y evolución. Estudio a partir de una docena de sistemas concejiles entre Arlanza y el Alto Ebro". *Studia, historica, Historia Medieval*, 17 (1999): 15-86). The definition of *concelho* (not that of *sistema concelhio* with the features that Monsalvo grants it) is, however, insufficient when there is a need to understand the 'nature of the urban' and not simply look at it from the point of view of the organization of power. See also: Val, Isabel del. "La identidad urbana...": 7.

16. Poussou, Jean-Pierre; Loupès, Philippe, eds. *Les Petites villes du Moyen-Age à nos jours: colloque international du Centre d'Études des Espaces Urbains (Bordeaux, 25-26 octobre 1985)*. Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique 1987; Poussou, Jean-Pierre, dir. "Dossier Petites villes". *Revue du Nord*, 70/279 (1988): 667-787; Clark, Peter, ed. *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge (UK)-London: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

17. Lepetit, Bernard. "In search of the small town in early nineteenth-century France", *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*, Peter Clark, ed. Cambridge (UK)-London: Cambridge University Press, 1995: 173.

18. See: Fray, Jean-Luc. *Villes et bourgs de Lorraine. Réseaux Urbains et centralité au Moyen Âge*. Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2006; Gloriès, Cécile. "Une 'grille d'urbanité': proposition pour l'analyse systématique des critères urbains, l'exemple du réseau de villes de Quercy à travers des convocations des communautés d'habitants aux assemblées d'ordres (1261-1673)", *Les petites villes du Sud-Oeste de l'Antiquité à nos jours. Actes du colloque d'Aiguillon (Aiguillon, 12 et 13 mai 2000)*, Jean-Pierre Poussou, dir. Mamers: Société d'Histoire des Petites Villes, 2004: 97-119; Costa, Adelaide Millán da. "Quand les médiévistes arrivent aux petites villes", *Petites villes européennes au bas Moyen Âge: entre l'histoire urbaine et l'histoire local*, Adelaide Millán da Costa, ed. Lisbon: Instituto de Estudos Medievais, 2013: 145-148 (for more information: Costa, Adelaide Millán da. "Petites villes européennes au bas Moyen Âge: entre l'histoire urbaine et l'histoire local". *Instituto de Estudos Medievais*. 27 June 2014 <<http://iem.fcsh.unl.pt/ebooks/estudos11>>).



status the territorial community enjoys in the political system.¹⁹ The classification criteria will be established further below. We are aware that there is not, necessarily, a link between a community's political relevance and other economic, demographic or geostrategic criteria that traditionally underpin hierarchy of cities and towns.

2. The contexts and the texts conveying an urban identity

Over 25 years ago, Armindo de Sousa published a seminal study about the political representation of urban nuclei in Portuguese Parliament.²⁰ He proposed the definition of Parliament as a substructure of the Portuguese medieval political system, and identified its rules of procedure, the functions it performed, and, in general, the connection parliamentary assemblies established with local power authorities.

In terms of the cities and towns represented, the composition of the parliamentary assemblies was not static during the medieval period. The kingdom's geographical representation in 1481 is thoroughly known, and it was kept rather stable until the 1530s.²¹ Representatives of eighty cities and towns, hierarchically distributed across the physical space of the assembly, took part in the opening session. An uncertain number of other towns would be summoned to attend the session (or would show up at the assembly's venue). Armindo de Sousa concluded that, between 1385 and 1490, 120 territorial communities participated in parliament.²²

The political hierarchy among urban centres with parliamentary representation had obvious repercussions in the discourse that was produced on behalf of all the

19. A systematic ordering of the elements that make a political interpretation of the medieval urban world possible can be examined in: Costa, Adelaide Millán da. *Projeção espacial de domínios. Das relações de poder ao burgo portuense*. Lisbon: Universidade Aberta (PhD Dissertation), 1999: 155 and following; Costa, Adelaide Millán da. "Projeção espacial de domínios. Das relações de poder ao burgo portuense". Universidade Aberta. 27 June 2014 <<https://repositorioaberto.uab.pt/bitstream/10400.2/2426/4/Tese%20de%20doutoramento%20-%20Adelaide%20Costa%20%281999%29.pdf>>; Costa, Adelaide Millán da. "Elites and oligarchies in the late medieval Portuguese urban world". *Imago Temporis. Medium Aevum*, 2 (2009): 69-70.

20. Sousa, Armindo de. *As Cortes Medievais Medievais Portuguesas (1385-1490)*. Porto: Instituto Nacional de Investigação Científica-Centro de História da Universidade do Porto, 1990: I. Apart from this work, based on his PhD dissertation, Sousa authored several key works about the medieval Parliament. Luís Miguel Duarte recently made a positive review about this question in: Duarte, Luís Miguel. "The Portuguese Parliament: are we asking the right questions?". *e-JPH*, 1/2 (2003); Duarte, Luís Miguel. "The Portuguese Parliament: are we asking the right questions?". *Brown University*. 27 June 2014 <http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese_Brazilian_Studies/ejph/html/issue2/pdf/duarte.pdf>.

21. For more on the representation of cities and towns with a seat in the opening sessions of the *Cortes* over time, see: Costa, Adelaide Millán da. "O impacto urbano no discurso jurídico da baixa Idade Média em Portugal. Uma abordagem possível". *Edad Media. Revista de Historia*, 15 (2014): 59-78; Costa, Adelaide Millán da. "State-building in Portugal during the Middle Ages: a royal endeavour in partnership with the local powers?". *Empowering Interactions: Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe, 1300-1900*, Wim Blockmans, André Holenstein, Jon Mathieu, eds. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009: 227-230.

22. Sousa, Armindo de. *As Cortes Medievais Medievais...*: I, 201.



communities, that is the discourse contained in the *capítulos gerais*. These texts were created during the assembly proceedings, and according to Armindo de Sousa they can be divided into three parts: (i) the facts that support the request or complaint, (ii) the request, and (iii) the arguments put forth to persuade the king. The *capítulos gerais* were in theory the result of the evaluation of the complaints submitted by the *procuradores* (“representatives”) of all the communities. Ultimately, though, the king was only informed of the goals and problems faced by the major cities and towns, but drawn up as if they were shared by the whole population. In sum, the political representation of the various urban communities in parliament was, understandably, very unequal.

The *capítulos gerais* studied by Armindo de Sousa were, however, only one of the different types of documents produced in the context of the *Cortes*. Another example is the *capítulos especiais*, complaints submitted on behalf of each specific territorial community, rather than the whole people. It is important to emphasize that these texts were produced and voted in local assemblies held in the cities or towns before the emissaries were sent to the *Cortes*. Furthermore, unlike the *capítulos gerais*, the *capítulos especiais* were not drafted by legal experts in the atmosphere of the *Cortes*.

The aim of the most recent research on the *capítulos especiais* is not to understand the substance of such requests —the facts that support the request—, but instead the arguments which supported them,²³ thus capturing the political culture²⁴ that

23. The argumentative dimension of justifications for *capítulos especiais das Cortes* has been advocated by: Coelho, Maria Helena da Cruz. “Riba Côa em Cortes (séc. XV)”, *O Tratado de Alcanices e a Importância Histórica das Terras de Riba Côa. Actas do Congresso Histórico Luso-Espanhol (12-17 de setembro de 1997)*. Lisbon: Universidade Católica Editora, 1998: 235; Coelho, Maria Helena da Cruz. “O poder concelhio em tempos medievais: o «deve» e «haver» historiográfico”. *Revista da Faculdade de Letras. História*, 31/7 (2006): 26; Coelho, Maria Helena da Cruz. “O discurso de Guimarães em Cortes”, *Actas do 2º Congresso Histórico de Guimarães*. Guimarães: Camara Municipal de Guimarães, 1997: VI, 29, 31-32; Coelho, Maria Helena da Cruz. “A Guarda em Cortes nos séculos XIV e XV”. *Revista Portuguesa de História*, 35 (2001-2002): 126-127; Martins, Rui Cunha. *A fronteira antes da sua metáfora. Cinco teses sobre a fronteira hispano-portuguesa no século XV*. Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra (PhD Dissertation), 2000: I, 149-235.

24. By political culture I mean the set of beliefs about the foundations of power and about the rules that organize it that are accepted by several structures that perform in the political system. This category may include factors such as the legal order and the legal culture and also, for the 15th century, sets of coherent values more or less formalised. These factors do not need to be accepted by every political actor, but should be part of a horizon of acceptability. That is, in a same system different appropriations of political culture exist. For a more in-depth analysis about the concept of political culture used in this article see: Costa, Adelaide Millán da. “A cultura política em ação. Diálogos institucionais entre a Coroa e os centros urbanos em Portugal no século XIV”. *En la España Medieval*, 36 (2013): 9-29. Analyzing the texts that reflect the relationship between the *concelhos* and the crown is not the only option when trying to capture political culture. There are other ways, such as the archival procedure of the documents put in place by the municipalities. On the ideological scope of the creation of such document repositories by urban communities, see the works of Ana Filipa Pinto Roldão, especially her PhD Dissertation: Roldão, Ana Filipa Pinto. *A memória da cidade. Administração urbana e práticas de escrita em Évora (1415-1536)*. Lisbon: Universidade de Lisboa (PhD Dissertation), 2011. Roldão, Ana Filipa Pinto. “A memória da cidade. Administração urbana e práticas de escrita em Évora (1415-1536)”. Universidade de Lisboa. 15 September 2015 <http://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/4858/1/ulsd061714_td_Ana_Roldao.pdf>. An example of the use of this method to perceive the urban identity of a small community can be found in Costa, Adelaide Millán da. “En busca de la identidad...”: 25-58.



sustained the agents of local power. Can the hypothetical urban identity of the cities and towns that filed *capítulos especiales* also be captured?

3. Toward a political definition of 'small cities'

The goal of this section is to establish the classification criteria for cities and towns in order to identify the categories that allow us to evaluate the importance that a community holds in the political system. An attempt at providing a systematic arrangement of the multiple criteria that have been used in historiography to form a typology of territorial communities as a subsystem of the medieval political system yields the following table.

Table I. Political classification criteria of territorial communities

Legal status	Formal acknowledgment of autonomy
	Privileges granted by the crown or the landlords
	Jurisdictional definition (crown land or seigniorial land)
	Dependence upon other communities (of an administrative or judicial nature)
	Local government status (organization, complexity and autonomy)
Political profile	Representation in parliamentary assemblies (<i>Cortes</i>)
	Political mobilization skills of other communities
	Political ambition, as expressed in the community's ideological

Such categories are the result of an intellectualization, of a logical and coherent ordering of the information transmitted by the documents. A research organised according to this logic will allow us to outline the possible model pointed at in the question in the title of this article (or to conclude that there such a model does not exist).

For now, let us look closer at the information conveyed by contemporaries through an analysis of the discourses they produced, namely (i) the ordering of cities and towns made by the crown, (ii) how territorial communities themselves established comparisons, and (iii) the representation of the community that local political bodies convey to the outside world.



The hierarchy of cities and towns produced by the crown can be perceived through several elements. Given that the king has the power to summon the *concelhos*²⁵ to the *Cortes* by sending them a letter asking for their presence, the record of political participation of “the people”²⁶ is thus determined by the king. Even though every community, as well as every individual, has the right to appeal to the king, many of them were barred from engaging in formal dialogue with the crown.

Apart from this fundamental regal right to establish a primary hierarchy of importance among territorial communities, the very setting of the scenic space where the opening sessions of parliament were held created a hierarchy. The representatives of fifteen nuclei identified as cities and *notable towns* indeed had a seat in the three front long benches, of a total of sixteen reserved for the delegates of the *concelhos* during the sessions. In fact, this symbolic hierarchy resulted from negotiations between the *concelhos* and the crown, and it changed over time, thus reflecting the evolving status of several towns.²⁷

Other than the way the space was organised in the opening session of the *Cortes*, there is another revealing source: legal texts. It is precisely in the *Ordenações Afonsinas*,²⁸ a mid-15th century compilation of laws, that a distinction between cities,²⁹ notable towns³⁰ and other towns is established. In the *Ordenações Manuelinas*,³¹ dated from the first quarter of the 16th century, this categorisation had adapted to the new reality.³²

These legal texts allowed for a less clear-cut yet important analysis. An attempt was made at identifying the discursive circumstances in which specific urban nuclei are mentioned in these compilations of the late Middle Ages³³ and whether

25. In legal discourse, the notions of ‘cities’ and ‘towns’ mostly mean *concelhos*, territorial communities with an autonomous political existence, not ‘urban units’.

26. An expression popularized by Armindo de Sousa in his different works about this subject.

27. An analysis over the *longue durée* allowed us to conclude that the hierarchical ordering of the prestige of the *concelhos* crystallised in the seats in the *Cortes* follows the same course of the change in status recognised to urban centres, even if with a measure of delay, surely caused by tradition and acquired rights.

28. *Ordenações Afonsinas*, ed. Mário Júlio Brito de Almeida, Eduardo Borges Nunes. Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1984, 5 vols. (reproduction of the 1792 edition).

29. The nine episcopal seats: Braga, Porto, Coimbra, Lisbon, Évora, Silves, Guarda, Viseu, and Lamego.

30. Beja, Elvas, Guimarães, Leiria, Santarém, and Tavira. *Ordenações Afonsinas...*: II, 19 (liber 2, tit. 2, par. 5).

31. *Ordenações Manuelinas*, ed. João José Alves Dias. and intr. Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos da Universidade Nova de Lisbon, 2002: I (reproduction of edition of Valentim Fernandes —Lisbon, 1512-1513—); *Ordenações Manuelinas*, ed. Mário Júlio Brito de Almeida. Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1984: I (reproduction of edition of Real Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, in 1798).

32. See: Dias, João José Alves. *Gentes e Espaços (em torno da população portuguesa na primeira metade do século XVI)*. Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian-Junta Nacional de investigação Científica e Tecnológica, 1996: I, 183-193; Costa, Adelaide Millán da. “O impacto urbano...”: 59-78.

33. The analysis from which these findings were drawn was carried out in the already mentioned compilations, as well as *Livro das leis e Posturas*, ed. Nuno Espinosa Gomes da Silva, Maria Teresa Campos Rodrigues. Lisbon: Faculdade de Direito, 1971; *Ordenações del Rei Dom Duarte*, ed. Martim de Albuquerque, Eduardo Borges Nunes. Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1984. See: Costa, Adelaide Millán da.



those references help to gauge in a comparative fashion the status given to those communities in the context of the Portuguese political system.

The reference to certain cities and towns in the several laws included in the compilations reflects the scope of the values, norms and behaviours in which the legislator or the editor of a compilation are involved, opening the door for the dense knowledge of political culture. This investigation corroborated the conclusions already drawn on the importance of the cities and notable towns by examining the role they play in legal discourse.

Let us now turn to the evidence on the hierarchy of the territorial communities perceivable through the image that a few *concelhos* convey about other *concelhos*. This line of inquiry, unlike the previous ones, has not yet been pursued; therefore it will only be possible to present sporadic elements that result from the familiarity with sources. In other words, the conclusions reached need to be backed by a deeper empirical analysis. In the documents produced by cities and towns for the outside world, especially in the petitions addressed to the king, a comparison with other urban centres conveying a categorisation can be identified. For instance, by arguing for the extension to its community of a certain privilege held by another community, a major urban centre like Porto chooses Lisbon as a reference point.³⁴ On the other hand, a town of reduced political, economic and geostrategic proportions compares itself with similar communities. It is clear that these analogies are not strictly made in terms of comparable political status —other elements are taken into consideration, such as geographical proximity. Even though this research approach has not been explored, it may convey a perspective on how *concelhos* saw themselves and others.

Lastly, let us consider the element that we are most concerned with -the hypothetical identity discourse of cities and towns, in other words the image that the local political bodies disseminate to the outside world about the community. The research carried out until now allows us to conclude that in the 15th century a few politically powerful urban nuclei created true ideological constructions. Even if detailed narratives about the history of those communities are lacking, coherent self-representations exist. Furthermore, the very dialogue between those municipalities and the crown, mainly reflected in the *capítulos especiais* presented in the *Cortes*, makes this self-representation evolve.

“O impacto do discurso jurídico da Baixa Idade Média em Portugal”. *Edad Media. Revista de Historia*, 13 (2014): 59-78.

34. Costa, Adelaide Millán da. *Projeção espacial de domínios...: 124-130*; Costa, Adelaide Millán da. “O discurso político dos homens do concelho portuense na época medieval”, *Discursos de Legitimação. Actes du Colloque International (Lisboa, 26-29 de setembro de 2002)*, Danielle Buschinger, Maria João Ranco, Rosa Maria Sequeira, eds. Lisbon: Universidade Aberta, 2003. Online version: Costa, Adelaide Millán da. “O discurso político dos homens do concelho portuense na época medieval”. *Universidade Aberta*. 15 September 2015 <<https://repositorioaberto.uab.pt/bitstream/10400.2/1554/1/ComACosta.htm>>.



While the texts regarding Lisbon, the *caput regni*, have not yet been investigated, Porto³⁵ and Elvas³⁶ ideological discourses have already been thoroughly addressed. The superior level of production of the identity of an urban centre is an ideological discourse. In such cases, elites (showing a great deal of maturity), build a perfect discourse to legitimate the urban centre's participation in the political system, imparting unique features on its community.

Thus far we have presented the basic circumstances, or rather an overview of the criteria, both the historiographical criteria and the ones suggested by actors in the Middle Ages, that allow us to identify the importance a community holds in the political system. Let us now take into consideration the two key topics of this article: political identity and 'small cities'. In order to be recognised as part of the political system, a given local community had to be autonomous, in other words it had to have received a *foral*, to have a legal, judicial and administrative structure. This does not mean that the community was required to have urban features in social, economic, cultural, or morphological terms.

In the term 'small cities', the adjective 'small' means politically not very relevant, according to the existing political culture. And that relevance will be gauged by the criteria spelled out above. In general, small cities are those whose representatives occupy the back seats in the opening session of the *Cortes*, or that simply are not summoned by the monarch to attend parliamentary assemblies.³⁷

Let us then rephrase the question that guides us in this article: to what extent do small cities build an explicit political identity discourse? In other words, to what extent are the arguments included in the petitions (*capítulos especiais*) presented by the cities and notable towns in the *Cortes* (or in other instances of dialogue with the King) similar to those used by the remaining towns, or do they convey a qualitative difference?

4. Between the political culture and the urban identity of Portuguese 'small cities' in the late Middle Ages

The subtitle of this paper makes clear that this is a preliminary theoretical approach. Its preliminary nature is a consequence of the fact that the question it

35. Costa, Adelaide Millán da. *Projeção espacial de domínios...*; Costa, Adelaide Millán da. "O discurso político dos homens...".

36. Costa, Adelaide Millán da. "O discurso político dos concelhos portugueses na Baixa Idade Média: convergências e especificidades, o caso de Elvas", *Des(a)fiando discursos. Homenagem a Maria Emília Ricardo Marques*, Dulce Cravalho, Dionísio Vila Maior, Rui De Azevedo Teixeira, eds. Lisbon: Universidade Aberta, 2005: 265-272.

37. *Capítulos de Cortes* corresponds to discourses made by elite members of the community in order to influence the decisions of monarchs. In these circumstances, as already emphasised at the beginning of this text, the biggest problem they pose to historiographical analysis is to distinguish recurrent discursive topics of particular topics, in each city or town. On the subject see: Sousa, Armindo de. "O discurso político dos concelhos nas Cortes de 1385". *Revista da Faculdade de Letras. História*, 2/2 (1985): 9-44.



addresses does not yet constitute an established line of enquiry. In this section, an attempt will be made to draw relevant elements for the present study from conclusions reached in relevant works.

Let us go back to the initial question: is there a model of political identity in the 'small cities' of Portugal in the late Middle Ages? Firstly, the chronology needs to be addressed by refining the excessively wide concept of late Middle Ages. A comparison of the information on the mid-14th century and that on the 15th century reveals differences in the discourse used by the *concelhos* in the context of their relations with the crown. Bearing in mind the goal of studying the arguments used in the *capítulos especiais*, about 300 of these, presented in the parliamentary assemblies held in the mid-14th century, were analysed.³⁸ The symbolic political status of the *concelhos* that filed the complaints was uneven. Presumably,³⁹ their representatives would indeed take a seat between the 1st and the 6th bench of the opening sessions of the *Cortes*. However, given that, as mentioned above, there were 16 long benches, all these communities ended up having a seat in the front row. Thus it is not possible to draw any direct conclusion about the 'small cities'.

By including in a typology the arguments put forth by the *povos* ("people"), we can conclude that between 1331 and 1361 the rhetoric of the texts produced by local elites from diverse communities is not significantly differently, even if divergent discursive trends can be identified.⁴⁰ The first type of argument put forth, the defence of moral and political values, is seldom used. As for the defence of the order of things, in other words refusing change in administrative, economic or social practices, it is a recurrent argument and all the *concelhos* resort to it. The third category of arguments that support petitions is the defence of the legal order. In most cases it rests on custom, *foros* and regal privileges granted to different cities and towns.

For the same time frame, documents concerning small nuclei without parliamentary representation that resorted to similar arguments based on the legal order⁴¹ and emphasizing in particular local laws, exist. The conscience of having a legal personality, translated in the defence of its autonomy, could be the first level of perception of territorial communities' political identity.

According to the known data for the mid-14th century, we could argue that rather than the narrative of cities and towns claiming their own identity, there is a basis

38. Costa, Adelaide Millán da. "A cultura política...": 9-29.

39. The possibility that the symbolic ordering of the *concelhos* reflected in the distribution of seats in the opening session already existed in the mid-14th century cannot be safely stated.

40. Even though the universe of analysis is small, it is safe to say that the more general arguments that mention reason and the law —the defense of moral and political values— are used by major *concelhos*.

41. See, for instance: Marques, José. "O concelho alentejano de Figueira e a Ordem de Avis". *Revista da Faculdade de Letras. História*, 5 (1988): 95-112; Saraiva, Maria Teresa Monteverde Plantier. *Figueira. Comenda da Ordem de Avis (Publicação de Fontes)*. Lisbon: Edições Colibri, 1997; Marques, José. "A ordem de Santiago e o concelho de Setúbal em 1341", *As Ordens Militares em Portugal e no Sul da Europa*, Isabel Cristina Ferreira Fernandes, Paulo Pacheco, eds. Lisbon: Colibri, 1997: 285-305. These references are mere examples, as there are many studies on *agravamentos* ("appeals") filed with the king by the *concelhos* that yield the same findings.



of a shared political culture to guide the performance of territorial communities in their dealings with the crown.

Let us now address the 15th century. As we have seen, communities with a strong political weight, such as Porto and Elvas, built an image of themselves as unique entities and projected that conception on to discourses that were part of institutional dialogue, as a way of obtaining returns. The analysis of *capítulos especiais* presented to the *Cortes* (or preserved) by smaller towns does not confirm the existence of a similar representation by the respective local governments.⁴²

A first question must be asked. Could the discursive coherence identified in a few important urban nuclei be due to a more effective preservation of documents? In other words, are the conclusions drawn about the construction of an image for the outside world from politically relevant *concelhos* based only on the amount of evidence available? Or, conversely, is there a real qualitative line separating communities that remain attached to the defence of the local order, seemingly crystallised in time, from others with enough 'political ambition' to create an autonomous image of themselves?

Continuing with this argument, the greater the ability of local leaders to create a unique and specific identity in discursive terms, the more elaborate the identity of an urban nucleus would be. It could also be argued that this change in self-representation of some cities and towns, perceivable in the 15th century,⁴³ may be related to the crystallisation of elites in municipal government and their resulting professionalization, duly assisted by legal experts. The creation of these structured local identities is therefore linkable to how the members of the ruling elites appropriate the status of communities.

For now, it is safe to argue that there is a political culture shared by the several structures that participate in the political system. Reaching a higher level of inquiry—the specific identity of a city or town— would require extracting from the discourses the shared arguments that support them and identifying the elements that are specific to each nucleon. And it will be mainly on the basis of this analysis of the discourses of 'the people' that a political classification of territorial communities will be outlined.

In an upcoming study, I intend to propose not a preliminary theoretical approach, but an explanatory theory, translated in a possible model on the political identity of 'small cities' in Portugal in the late Middle Ages. This goal will only be reachable after several monographic studies are conducted.

42. Among many possible examples, I chose the case of Coruche. See: Sousa, Armindo de. *As Cortes Medievais Medievais...*: I, 192; Armindo de. *As Cortes Medievais Medievais...*: II, 44; Museu Municipal de Coruche. Tombo da Vila de Coruche. Tombo da vila de 1687, f. 2-12. The *capítulos especiais* presented in the parliamentary assemblies or outside them were analysed by several authors but under a perspective that does not emphasize the unpacking of the arguments used. See the systematic list of works in: Costa, Adelaide Millán da. "A cultura política...": 16-17.

43. In the city of Porto this change was perceivable from the late 15th century.

