

Portugal: National report on future socio-economic trends

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Quality is an innovative, quantitative and qualitative research project that aims to examine how, in an era of major change, European citizens living in different national welfare state regimes evaluate the quality of their lives. The project will analyse international comparative data on the social well-being of citizens and collect new data on social quality in European workplaces in eight strategically selected partner countries: UK, Finland, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary and a candidate country for EU enlargement, Bulgaria.

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Introduction

The Portuguese QUALITY's scenario session took place on March 19, at the University Institute for Social Sciences, Business Studies and Technologies (ISCTE), Lisbon, with the participation of a group of six researchers (2 males, 4 females) from this university and from the Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES-ISCTE). The session had the duration of 3 hours and started with a brief presentation of all participants.

Due to daily agenda's incompatibilities, it was not possible to organize the session before this date. All participants were personally contacted and the objectives of the session were presented, as well as the QUALITY project, its objectives and preliminary results. At first, we aimed to take on two different expert meetings. One based on the contributions of a group of researchers, and the other linking the participation of experts from companies, unions and politicians. It was not possible to take on the second, due to the experts' unavailability, but we nevertheless obtained important insights from the first exercise.

It was a concern of the organizing team to have a heterogeneous group, so the participant researchers came from different fields of work.

Participant A – Research work on Public local management, Health management and Public Policies; PhD research project on professional conflicts between doctors and managers when defining new ways of health organizations' management

Participant B – Research work on education, ethnic minorities and migration; PhD research project on Gender, identities and sexuality

Participant C – Research work on family and technologies

Participant D – Research work on Education and socialization

Participant E – Research work on Territory, habitation and life styles; PhD project on Habitation and Life Styles

Participant F – Research work on Socialization, Education and Work; researcher in the Portuguese Observatory for Inequalities and Social Exclusion

Description of the process

The scenario session started with a concise presentation of future known trends concerning economy, work, employment, social protection demography, migrations, gender and family. After that, the participants were asked to indicate future trends they perceive will be affecting the quality of life and work in Portugal and to point out their degrees of likelihood, as well as with their probable impact.

Although it was a small group, it was considered to be important to split it in two, so that at the end two different scenarios could be discussed.

Each group worked in a private room, with one of the organizing team members. Holding the role of monitors of this process, the team elements switched the room at least once, to balance the work that was being done.

One of the groups took more time to finish the tasks than the other, something which also contributed to the emergence of some differences between the two proposals.

Discussed trends and uncertainties

The trends firstly indicated showed some diversity concerning their major themes. Most trends indicated were related to Politics, Environment, and Economy, but some of them referred to Health and Living conditions.

Regarding **politics** at the national level, some transformations in the political context, especially in what concerns the political parties, were pointed out. Two different hypotheses were presented: whether Portugal would face a situation of concentration of political power in two major parties, or if it would emerge a situation of political fragmentation, characterized by the existence of many different parties with low levels of representation, and the establishment of new movements of citizenship.

The decrease of importance of national policies in relation to EU orientations was also presented as a possible trend, associated with the increasing importance of politics' role in defining the various countries' social orientations.

At the same time, the participants suggested as a trend the reduction of State's financed social functions and facilities, especially in what concerns health care, with the privatization of the public health service.

At a transnational level, the trends indicated pointed towards the emergence of conflicts with Spain due to the management of Border Rivers. The intensifying Middle East conflicts and the possibility of terrorists' attacks affecting Portugal were also indicated.

On the subject of **economy**, the participants indicated the possibility of a stock market crash, at a global level, in association with the rupture of oil stocks and related oil price increase. Also at a global level, it was suggested the rise in the prices of basic goods.

Nationally, it was prospected the bankruptcy of the national pensions' fund, leading to the poverty of elders. The introduction of new management models in companies, and the emergence of new actors/agents in production, was also indicated.

A special trend, related to the professional characteristics of the participant group, suggested the decrease of the investment in research.

Some trends relating to **living conditions**, at the local level, were pointed out. It was the case of the desertification of the interior regions of Portugal, and the improvement of accessibilities due to increased variety and quality of national public transports services.

At a national level, a middle class crisis would lead to the increase of poverty. The economic deprivation of the population should also cause the increase of criminality.

Meanwhile, in what concerns social inequalities, it was suggested a more equal society could emerge, with the importance of gender and ethnics decreasing. More women in politics, academia, and management, were specially indicated. On the other hand, the ageing of population, and the emergence of an elderly society would possibly bring some difficulties in terms of living conditions.

Another trend regarding social conditions of Portuguese inhabitants indicated the possibility of the disclosure of finance/bank information of the population, leading to general lack of privacy.

Trends regarding the **environment** specified climate change, including geo-bio-physical transformations of soil and nuclear disasters affecting Portuguese rivers and effluents. Environmental destruction due to overexploitation of natural resources was indicated as a possible trend, directly related to the need of using renewable energies (optimizing Portuguese resources). Portuguese society would become more concerned with the environment, and this preoccupation would lead to growing obstacles to all damaging actions.

Also, climate change could bring the emergence of an uncontrolled epidemic.

On **work**, the main trends pointed the decrease of the stability in contractual arrangements and the rise of unemployment rates. Increasing flexibility and instability of work would intensify the debate on quality of work vs. quantity of work.

At the same time, a special element indicated as central in work issues was the importance of formal qualifications.

Due to the present Portuguese and European context, some of the trends indicated at first were considered to be likely and with strong impact, such as:

- Bankruptcy of the national pensions' fund
- Reduction of Government's social functions in Portugal
- Ageing of society
- Decrease of the stability in contractual arrangements
- Increase of unemployment rates
- Rupture in oil stocks and rising oil prices
- Increase in the prices of basic goods
- Desertification of the interior regions of Portugal
- Decrease of investment in research
- Environmental destruction due to overexploitation of natural resources
- Improvement of the national public transports services
- Increase of criminality
- Intensifying debate on Quality of work vs Quantity of work
- Disclosure of finance/bank information of inhabitants, affecting its privacy
- Increasing importance of formal qualifications
- Climate change with geo-bio-physical transformations of soil and environmental concerns

Others were presented as unlikely, but with great impact on quality of life. It was the case of:

- Stock market world crash
- Nuclear disaster in Spain, affecting Portuguese rivers and effluents
- Conflicts with Spain due to the management of the rivers
- Uncontrolled epidemics
- Military conflicts in the Middle East
- Privatization of the National Health Service
- Terrorists attacks in Portugal
- New actors/agents in production – introduction of new management models
- Decreasing importance of gender and ethnics – more equality in society
- Crisis of middle classes – increase of poverty
- Environmental conservation with obstacles to damaging actions
- Emergence of two political parties or emergence of many political parties with low representation
- Emergence of citizens movements
- Increase of importance in the role of politics in the definition of societal orientations
- Decrease of importance of national politics in relation to EU
- Use of renewable energies

The scenarios

Each group came to a specific scenario and both of them were constructed in reference to the axis PESTLE (Politics, Economy, Social, Technology, Legal, Environment).

Group one

Group one worked on the correlation between the use of renewable energies and the models of citizenship.

Scenario A

One of the scenarios presented the total use of renewable energies with the integration of new models of citizenship. This was the most positive scenario, the “*better world*”. The incorporation of new models of citizenship, integrating the participation of all citizens, promotes political stability. The total use of renewable energies promotes, at the same time, the dinamization of economy and the emergence of new economical activities relating to energy. In association to these aspects, employment rates should increase. The introduction of new energies would stimulate the emergence of new ecological practices and the increase of socioeconomic investment in energy. Technologies would also develop, with the emergence of new consumption practices and lifestyles, and the use of electronic cars and the emergence of efficient public transports. In legal terms, the control over damaging environmental practices would be intensified. Environmentally, all would result in better health for inhabitants, as well as more sustainability.

Scenario B

The other scenario showed the association between traditional models of citizenship (without extended participation of all inhabitants) and the use of non renewable energies. In this scenario, political instability dominates the living conditions of the population, promoting economical crisis (associated with the over exploitation of oil and its high prices). Concerning social aspects, living conditions should be dominated by the decrease of household income and the emergence of new generational conflicts due to the reaction to traditional patterns of living. In technology, the maximization in oil use would lead, in the participant's opinion, to the stagnation of development. Legally, with this scenario, the policies over-consumption would be more restrictive, as a result of the lack of oil. Pollution would increase and this would lead to the intensification of health problems.

<p>1) Total use of renewable energies Integration of new models of citizenship</p> <p>P - Political stability, political cohesion E - Economical dinamization; emergence of new activities S - Increase of employment, more environmental practices of consumption; emergence of ecological practices; increase of socioeconomic investment T - Development of new technologies; massification of electronic cars; efficient public transportation L - Increase of control over damaging environmental practices E – better health; more environmental sustainability</p>	<p>2) Total use of renewable energies Traditional models of citizenship</p>
<p>3) Use of non-renewable energies Integration of new models of citizenship</p>	<p>4) Traditional models of citizenship Use of non-renewable energies</p> <p>P - Political instability E - Economic crisis S - Decrease of income; new generational conflicts (reaction to traditional patterns of living) T - Maximization of oil usage; stagnation of development L - Restrictive policies over consumption E – Pollution; Development of health problems</p>

Chain of events

After creating the scenarios, the participants were asked to choose one scenario and to identify the chain of events that would lead to it.

The chain of events for the first scenario would start, according to the participants, with the introduction of renewable energies. This would happen, in scenario one, as a result of the over exploitation and high

price of oil. As Portugal has a great variety of natural resources, the exploitation of a new type of energy appears as a logic and reasonable way of escaping high prices and avoiding damaging the environment.

At first, the emergence of this new type of energy will have some costs to the Portuguese economy, but, in a short period of time, with the dinamization of economy, due to the emergence of new activities, Portuguese economy will meet a period of growth.

As the living conditions of the population get better, the inhabitant's motivation to participate in public life will increase, so that new ways of citizenship, including the participation of all citizens, will be created.

Group two

Group two created a scenario articulating the existence of terrorist attacks affecting Portugal and the nature of the National Health Service.

Scenario C

In the first scenario, group two presented the event of a terrorist attack in Portugal, with a totally privatized national health service. In this scenario - characterized by political instability due to political conflicts with Spain - the destruction caused by the attacks and the social instability promoted economical crisis. This, in association with the privatization of the National Health Service, would increase social inequalities and intensify poverty and lack of medical assistance for people in need. In this scenario, Portugal will experience a great technological development, at first, to respond to the attacks, and also to develop medical procedures. In legal terms, the control of national borders would be tighter and Portugal would suffer with environmental destruction.

Scenario D

In the second scenario, with no terrorist attacks in Portugal and a public national health service, politics would be more stable. At the same time, in what concerns the economy, public expenditure would increase, which would cause the implementation of restrictive policies concerning health (like prohibiting smoking, stimulating sports...). In what concerns the access to health services, social inequalities would decrease and technologies would be used as an instrument to improve medical care. Although without direct correlation, environment should promote a better health.

<p>1) No terrorist attacks in Portugal Private National Health Service</p>	<p>2) Terrorist attacks in Portugal Private National Health Service P- Political instability E- Economical crisis S- Increasing Social inequalities T- Technological development (to respond to attacks and to develop medical procedures) L- Tighter control of national borders E- Environmental destruction</p>
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<p>3) No terrorist attacks in Portugal Public National Health Service</p> <p>P- Political stability</p> <p>E- Increase of public expenditure</p> <p>S- Decrease of social inequalities in what concerns to health access</p> <p>T- Development of technology to improve medical care</p> <p>L- Implementation of restrictive policies concerning health (no-smoking, sports...)</p> <p>E-Improvement of healthy environment</p>	<p>4) Terrorist attacks in Portugal Public National Health Service</p>
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Chain of events

Group two chose scenario D and developed the chain of events that would lead to it. The chain of events would start, in this case, with an Iberian Summit.

At the Iberian Summit of 2008, Portugal and Spain wouldn't reach an agreement in what concerns the management of the rivers. Diplomatic relations became fragile and Spain initiates terrorists' attacks to Portugal. Due to the money spend trying to respond to Spanish attacks, Portugal economy would fall down and public services, as health services, would become inexistent. The health private sector would grow and social inequalities would become more visible in what concerns to health access.

Policy recommendations

At the end of this exercise, participants were asked to reflect on possible policy recommendations. There was no sufficient time to explore this in detail, but it was possible to identify some policy developing areas.

Social protection and work were two main areas for policy intervention. Assuring a good education system and quality health services, were two elements indicated as possible ways to promote an equal society and to reduce poverty. Government action was pointed as essential in mediating employers-unions relation and promoting a responsible work regulation.

The environmental concerns showed in the exercise guided policy recommendations with reference to the use of energies. It was pointed out the need to control and punish damaging practices, as well as to stimulate the development of renewable energies, taking benefit from national natural resources. Promoting efficient public transports and reducing the use of private transport were concrete examples of simple practices needed to ensure environmental sustainability.

Reflection on the exercise

In the participants' opinions, the scenario session was an interesting exercise to take on. The organizing team also agreed that this was an enthusiastic and enriching experience not only for QUALITY project, but also as a research methodological procedure in a general way.

Time planning was revealed to be difficult. Ideally, one day would be needed to properly organize the activity, with enough time for the exchange of reflections and ideas.