



**Politécnico  
Castelo Branco**

Escola Superior  
de Tecnologia

## **Reversing Urban Marginality in Historic Centres Using DIVE Analysis Tools to Assess and Revitalize the Historic Centre of Castelo Branco**

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## **Resumo**

Este trabalho tem como objetivo analisar e estruturar uma metodologia de reabilitação urbana aplicada ao Centro Histórico de Castelo Branco, recorrendo à metodologia DIVE (Describe, Interpret, Valuate, Enable). Parte do reconhecimento de que, apesar do elevado valor patrimonial e simbólico, o centro histórico perdeu progressivamente a sua centralidade funcional, social e económica, em resultado da expansão periférica, deslocação de serviços e novas exigências e transformação dos modelos de habitar e trabalhar.

A fase Describe permitiu caracterizar a evolução urbana, morfológica e territorial da cidade. A fase Interpret aprofundou as dimensões simbólicas, identitárias e culturais do centro histórico, enquanto a fase Valuate identificou as principais vulnerabilidades e potencialidades. Destacam-se a perda de centralidade, envelhecimento populacional, abandono do edificado e desconexão física com o restante tecido urbano.

Com base neste diagnóstico, a fase Enable define um enquadramento estratégico orientado para a recentralização do centro histórico através da reabilitação, assumindo como eixos estruturantes a regeneração urbana com a criação de habitação a custos controlados, a integração de espaços produtivos e de coworking, a formação de hubs urbanos e a melhoria da mobilidade suave.

O trabalho não apresenta uma solução arquitetónica final, mas estabelece um modelo conceptual e operativo que servirá de base ao desenvolvimento do Projeto II, no qual será elaborado um Manual Estratégico de Intervenção Faseada para a reabilitação sustentável do centro histórico de Castelo Branco.

## **Palavras chave**

Centro Histórico; Reabilitação Urbana; Metodologia DIVE; Regeneração Urbana; Castelo Branco



## **Abstract**

This work aims to analyse and structure an urban rehabilitation methodology applied to the historic centre of Castelo Branco, based on the DIVE methodology (Describe, Interpret, Valuate, Enable). Although rich in heritage and symbolic value, the historic centre has progressively lost its functional, social, and economic centrality due to peripheral urban expansion, institutional relocation and changing living and working patterns.

The Describe phase characterises the city's urban and morphological evolution, while the Interpret phase explores its symbolic, cultural and identity dimensions. The Valuate phase identifies the main vulnerabilities and potentials, highlighting the loss of centrality, demographic ageing, building abandonment and physical disconnection from the rest of the city.

Building on this diagnosis, the Enable phase defines a strategic framework focused on re-centering the historic centre through re-inhabitation, using affordable housing, productive and coworking spaces, urban hubs and soft mobility as key regeneration instruments.

Rather than proposing a final architectural solution, this work establishes a conceptual and operational model that will support the development of Project II, in which a Phased Strategic Intervention Manual for the sustainable rehabilitation of the historic centre of Castelo Branco will be produced.

## **Keywords**

Historic Centre; Urban Rehabilitation; DIVE Methodology; Affordable Housing; Urban Regeneration; Castelo Branco.



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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CM	Câmara Municipal [Municipal Council]
DIVE	Describe – Interpret – Valuate – Enable
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IP	Instituto do Património [Heritage Institute]
IPCB	Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco [Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco]
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PDM	Plano Diretor Municipal [Municipal Master Plan]
PGU	Plano Geral de Urbanização [General Urbanisation Plan]
PGUCB	Plano Geral de Urbanização de Castelo Branco
POLIS	Programa de Requalificação Urbana e Valorização Ambiental das Cidades
RCM	Resolução do Conselho de Ministros [Council of Ministers Resolution]
UOPG	Unidade Operativa de Planeamento e Gestão [Planning and Management Operational Unit]
ZU	Zona Urbana [Urban Zone]
ZUE	Zona Urbana de Expansão [Urban Expansion Zone]



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Project Background and Context

Castelo Branco's historic centre has gradually lost its role as the city's functional and civic core, becoming increasingly peripheral and affected by urban dilapidation, depopulation, and the decline of traditional commerce. Because of this, the historic centre today presents clear signs of urban fragility. In response to this long-term process of degradation, the municipality has promoted several strategies aimed at revitalising the historic area. The first major commitment to urban regeneration dates to 2000, when Castelo Branco adopted an integrated strategy to enhance the attractiveness, vitality, and symbolic value of its historic core.

This strategic vision has more recently been reframed through the RE:GENERAR plan (Planning 4 People, 2023), which maintains the same fundamental objectives: restoring centrality, reinforcing heritage identity, and reactivating social and economic life within the historic centre.

The present document supports this municipal effort by analysing the historical development of the city in order to identify structural causes of the centre's decline and to reveal opportunities for effective urban renewal. It is conceived as a complementary analytical resource to inform future planning and regeneration strategies.

To achieve this, the study adopts the Describe–Interpret–Valuate–Enable (DIVE) methodology. DIVE is defined as an interdisciplinary, dynamic, open analytical framework for the study of cultural heritage in landscapes, cities, and built environments. Its primary purpose is to transform historical and cultural information from a passive descriptive resource into operational knowledge capable of supporting sustainable spatial development and informed planning decisions (Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2009).

Structured around four goal-oriented stages — Describe, Interpret, Valuate, and Enable — the method provides a systematic approach for understanding the historical evolution, cultural significance, development potential, and future opportunities of a place. This structure allows the methodology to be applied across multiple spatial scales and planning instruments, including environmental management strategies, transport planning, master plans, detailed plans, and impact assessments (Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2009).

DIVE was developed through international cooperation projects — SuHiTo and Co-Herit — involving institutions from Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Lithuania, with the objective of promoting an integrated conservation approach that links heritage values to contemporary urban, social, and economic development (Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2009; Co-Herit, 2011). Rather than treating heritage as a static object of preservation, the methodology seeks to convert cultural values into active resources capable of generating economic, social, and environmental benefits.

The practical relevance of the method is illustrated through the case study of Odda, Norway, where former industrial structures were reinterpreted and reintegrated into the urban fabric as part of a broader regeneration strategy, demonstrating the capacity of DIVE to guide the transformation of obsolete heritage into a driver of urban vitality (Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2009).

## 1.2 Project Relevance and Justification

Although several regeneration initiatives and planning instruments have been applied to Castelo Branco's historic centre, the problem of displaced centrality remains unresolved. Existing studies and plans often focus on physical rehabilitation or public space design, without fully addressing the structural and historical processes that produced the current urban fragmentation.

There is a lack of integrated analytical approaches that connect urban morphology, heritage values, functional shifts, and institutional and commercial dynamics over time. This gap limits the

effectiveness of regeneration strategies, as interventions tend to treat symptoms rather than underlying causes.

Addressing this problem is academically relevant because it contributes to the understanding of centrality loss in medium-sized cities, particularly in peripheral and interior regions. Practically, it is equally significant, as it provides local authorities and planners with a critical framework to rethink heritage-led urban regeneration, ensuring that historical centres remain active, lived-in, and socially meaningful spaces rather than static or touristic enclaves.

### 1.3 Project Objectives

The main objective of this study is to identify strategies and principles capable of counteracting the displacement of centrality in cities whose historic centres have become functionally and socially peripheral, using Castelo Branco as a case study.

More specifically, the project seeks to:

Identify the historical and structural causes of the shift in centrality in Castelo Branco.

Recognise the main vulnerabilities and opportunities within the historic centre.

Explore applicable methods and intervention principles to restore its urban, social, and symbolic relevance.

These aims are addressed through the following research questions:

1. What are the main causes of the shift in centrality in Castelo Branco?
2. What vulnerabilities and opportunities can be identified in its historic centre?
3. What strategies can be applied to restore the centrality of Castelo Branco's historic core?

### 1.4 Project Scope and Boundaries

This study focuses on the historical centre of Castelo Branco, analysing its evolution and changing role within the wider urban system. However, the scope is not limited to the historic core alone. Urban areas outside the centre are also considered, as the city's peripheral expansion is fundamental to understanding the centre's gradual loss of centrality (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 - Geographical scope of the project.

The core subject will be a strategic analysis of the historical centre through an analysis of Castelo Branco's broader urban development.

Temporally, the analysis spans from the foundation of Castelo Branco in the 12<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Conceptually, the work concentrates on urban morphology, functional dynamics, heritage values, and planning strategies, as interpreted through the DIVE methodology.

The project does not aim to develop a detailed architectural design proposal; instead, it establishes an analytical and strategic framework to support future regeneration actions.

## 1.5 Structure of the Project

The project is organised according to the four stages of the DIVE methodology:

1. **Describe** – presents the historical and urban development of Castelo Branco, identifying key phases of transformation.
2. **Interpret** – analyses the significance, legibility, and integrity of the urban heritage.
3. **Valuate** – assesses values, vulnerabilities, development potential, and limits for change.
4. **Enable** – defines opportunities and strategic principles for future action and regeneration.

Together, these stages build a comprehensive and critical basis for rethinking the role of Castelo Branco's historic centre within the contemporary city.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 The Rehabilitation Plans of the City of Castelo Branco since 2000

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the municipality of Castelo Branco has adopted a sequence of urban rehabilitation strategies aimed at reversing the progressive decline of its historic centre. These initiatives emerged in response to long-term processes of depopulation, functional displacement, urban dilapidation, and loss of economic vitality, which increasingly marginalised the historic core within the wider urban system.

The first major milestone of this regeneration trajectory was the inclusion of Castelo Branco in the **POLIS Programme** in the early 2000s, marking the city's first comprehensive and large-scale urban rehabilitation effort. This was later followed by the **RE:GENERAR Plan**, which reframes and extends the municipality's regeneration ambitions for the coming decades.

Together, these plans reflect a strategic evolution: from a primarily physical and environmental requalification approach (POLIS) to a more integrated, heritage- and identity-based regeneration model (RE:GENERAR). Both instruments define intervention areas, objectives, and operational guidelines, and have had a significant impact on the spatial, functional, and symbolic structure of the city.

#### 2.1.1 The POLIS Programme (2000–2010)

The POLIS Programme (Programa de Requalificação Urbana e Valorização Ambiental das Cidades) was launched at national level in 2000 as an integrated urban regeneration policy for medium-sized Portuguese cities. Castelo Branco was one of the cities selected for intervention, with the aim of requalifying public space, improving environmental conditions, and restoring the civic role of the urban centre.

#### Goals

The main objectives of the POLIS intervention in Castelo Branco were:

To enhance the environmental and urban quality of the city;

To rehabilitate degraded public spaces in the civic and historic centre;

To improve accessibility and soft mobility;

To reinforce the symbolic and cultural value of the city through heritage enhancement.

### **Scope and Boundaries**

The intervention area concentrated on the Civic Centre (*Devesa/Campo Mártires da Pátria* area) and the historic axis connecting the lower city to the medieval core. Key projects included:

The requalification of *Largo da Devesa* and surrounding public spaces;

The pedestrianisation of central streets;

The creation and enhancement of urban parks (*Jardim do Paço*, Castle green areas, *Miradouro de São Gens*);

The construction of underground parking facilities to improve accessibility;

The creation of new cultural and leisure infrastructures.

### **Impact on the City**

The POLIS Programme significantly improved the physical quality of public space and reinforced Castelo Branco's image as a liveable city. The creation of green corridors, pedestrian areas, and new leisure facilities reactivated parts of the civic centre and strengthened its role as a public gathering space.

However, despite its success in environmental and spatial terms, POLIS did not end the structural displacement of functional centrality. While the civic centre was requalified, large-scale commercial developments continued to consolidate in the periphery, redirecting social and economic flows away from the historic core. This paradox revealed the limits of urban regeneration strategies focused primarily on physical requalification, without parallel economic and functional reintegration.

### **2.1.2 The RE:GENERAR Plan (2019–2040\*)**

\*(indicative timeframe based on strategic planning horizons)

Today, the RE:GENERAR Plan constitutes the municipality's main strategy for the renewal of the historic centre of Castelo Branco. Developed by the Municipality of Castelo Branco in partnership with the urban planning consultancy *Planning 4 People*, the plan was formally presented in 2019 and is conceived as a long-term framework for sustainable urban regeneration.

This strategic programme reviews previous planning initiatives, provides a detailed diagnosis of the current urban structure, and defines proposals and guidelines for implementation (Planning 4 People, 2023).

### **Identified Challenges**

The RE:GENERAR Plan identifies several structural weaknesses affecting the historic centre, namely:

Population ageing and residential abandonment;

Underutilisation of tourism and cultural potential;

Decline of traditional commerce and local services;

Functional marginalisation within the metropolitan structure.

#### **Structural Goals**

In response, the plan defines the following key strategic ideas:

Recreating a functional, civic and social centre for Castelo Branco – giving the city a heart;

Valuing historical heritage, from individual buildings to collective memory;

Enhancing the city's identity by intervening in the Historic Centre with the aim of promoting the rebirth of the city's "birthplace," rehabilitating not only its built fabric but also its symbolic meaning (Câmara Municipal de Castelo Branco, 2019).

### **Scope and Boundaries**

The plan focuses primarily on the historic centre and its immediate surroundings, while recognising the need for articulation with the wider urban system. It integrates spatial, social, economic, and cultural dimensions, proposing interventions in:

- Housing rehabilitation and adaptive reuse;
- Public space and mobility;
- Cultural and creative industries;
- Local commerce and tourism.

### **Strategic Relevance**

Unlike previous interventions, RE:GENERAR adopts a more holistic and identity-based approach. While its core objectives remain aligned with those of POLIS — enhancing heritage and restoring centrality — the plan represents an opportunity to address the structural causes of urban fragmentation through new, more integrated strategies.

It therefore provides a critical reference framework for exploring alternative and complementary means of reactivating the historic centre, not only as a symbolic space, but as a living and functional part of the contemporary city.

## **2.2 DIVE – A Handbook for Urban Heritage**

The DIVE is a methodology of analysis and was developed using the cultural environment method called the DIVE-format: a method to analyse the urban structure. This methodology was developed by 2009 with the international collaboration between researchers, practitioners and authorities and was originated in the Baltic Sea cooperation framework of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Lithuania. We can identify very specific principles in this methodology (Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2009):

**Flexible and open methodology** - adaptable to different contexts and scales of intervention

**Cross-sectoral and collaborative approach** - integrating multiple disciplines (architecture, engineering, urban planning, heritage conservation)

**Adaptable to diverse urban development processes** - applicable to various stages of planning and implementation.

This flexibility makes DIVE particularly suitable for analysing complex historic urban contexts like Castelo Branco city centre, where morphological, functional, and heritage values must be understood holistically before defining intervention strategies.

The methodology DIVE is structured in four sequential steps, Figure 2:

**D** - Establish an overview of knowledge, compile, describe and process information about the area's origins, development, and character. The objective of this step is the historical character of the area.

**I** - Study the historical legibility, significance and communicative content, integrity, authenticity, and condition of the area. The objective of this step is the historical significance of the area.

**V** - Discuss the value, development potential, vulnerability, tolerance limits, and capacity for change of cultural heritage resources. The objective of this step is the area's values and opportunities.

**E** - Define the opportunities for action to activate cultural heritage, propose strategies and principles for management and development. The objective of this step is the area's opportunities for action.

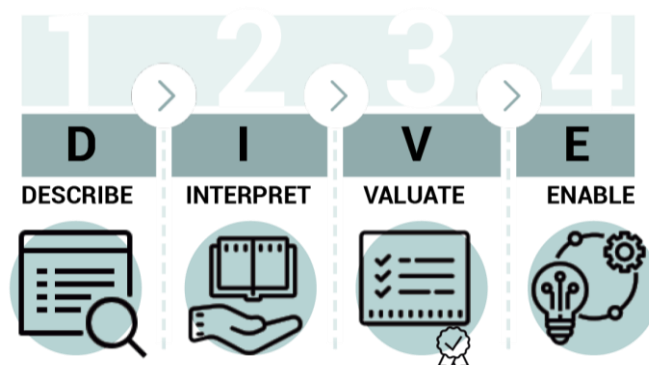


Figure 2 - Diagram of the stages of DIVE methodology.

Each step builds upon the previous one: unlike traditional methods, DIVE is not prescriptive. Instead, it provides a comprehensive framework for sorting, discussing and processing information in planning and cultural environmental analyses. Cultural heritage and territory as a resource opens new opportunities for action, but strategies and tools must be adapted to local contexts and current challenges (Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2009).

## 2.3 Geographic and Territorial Framework

Castelo Branco is located in the Central Region of Portugal and has served as a district capital since 1835. The municipality occupies an area of approximately 1,438 km<sup>2</sup>, making it one of the largest in the region, and is characterised by a highly diverse territorial morphology.

The city is placed at an altitude of approximately 365 metres, on a granitic hill that provided natural defensive advantages during its medieval foundation. This elevated position was decisive in determining the original urban layout, with the castle and fortified nucleus occupying the highest point and subsequent expansions developing along gentler slopes and lower areas.

The contrast between the steep topography of the historic core and the flatter peripheral zones continues to influence urban accessibility, mobility patterns, and functional distribution, playing a central role in the city's long-term process of spatial and functional reconfiguration.

## 2.4 Key Outcomes

The theoretical and contextual framework presented in this chapter highlights the structural conditions that shape the contemporary urban reality of Castelo Branco. The combined reading of planning instruments, methodological foundations, and territorial characteristics reveals a city whose historical centre is caught between strong symbolic value and declining functional relevance.

The analysis of the **POLIS Programme** demonstrates the positive impact of large-scale public space requalification and environmental enhancement, while also exposing the limitations of regeneration strategies that focus primarily on physical intervention. Despite significantly improving urban image and civic space quality, POLIS did not reverse the displacement of economic and social centrality toward peripheral areas.

The **RE:GENERAR Plan** represents a conceptual evolution, introducing a more holistic and identity-based approach that integrates heritage, housing, economic revitalisation, and cultural activation. By acknowledging demographic decline, loss of traditional commerce, and underused

tourism potential, the plan establishes a strategic vision that seeks to restore the historic centre as a living and multifunctional urban core.

The application of the **DIVE methodology** provides a coherent analytical structure capable of linking historical processes, spatial transformations, and cultural values. Its four-stage framework allows the urban environment to be interpreted not as a static entity, but as a dynamic system shaped by layered meanings, functional shifts, and social practices.

Finally, the **geographic and territorial framework** underscores the role of morphology and topography as both defining identity elements and structural constraints. The hilltop historic core, while central to the city's origin and symbolism, today constitutes a physical and functional barrier that reinforces urban fragmentation and accessibility challenges.

Together, these outcomes confirm that the displacement of centrality in Castelo Branco is not the result of a single intervention, but of a cumulative process shaped by planning decisions, economic forces, institutional dynamics, and territorial conditions. This synthesis provides the conceptual and analytical foundation for the subsequent chapters, where the city's historical evolution will be described and interpreted in detail through the DIVE framework.

### 3. Methodology – The DIVE Application

#### 3.1 D | DESCRIBE

The purpose of the **D-DESCRIBE** chapter is to establish the analytical foundation upon which the subsequent stages — *Interpret, Valuate, and Enable* — are developed. It presents a structured description of the urban evolution of Castelo Branco, tracing its main phases of transformation. In addition, representative architectural examples from each historical period are introduced in order to illustrate the spatial, morphological, and cultural characteristics that have shaped the city (figure 3).



Figure 3 – Diagram of the Describe step of DIVE methodology.

##### 3.1.1 Ancient Occupation

Human presence in the region dates to prehistory. The archaeological site of *Castra Leuca*, although located outside the current urban limits, is a testament to Roman occupation, revealing urban structures, baths, and walls integrated into the Roman road and administrative network (Dorigemlusa, n.d.).

### 3.1.1.1 1165-1500 Medieval Foundation

In 1165, King Afonso Henriques donated the *Herdade da Açafa* to the Knights Templar, who established a fortified settlement (Câmara Municipal Castelo Branco, n.d.). The castle was built on Cardosa hill, and the urban layout developed around this defensive structure (Ibid.). The charter granted by Pedro Alvito in the 13<sup>th</sup> century legally organized the town, promoting economic and social growth. The historical area forms the founding core of Castelo Branco, comprising the upper part (within the walls, the medieval area) (see **Figure 4**) and the lower part (later expansion) (Ibid.).

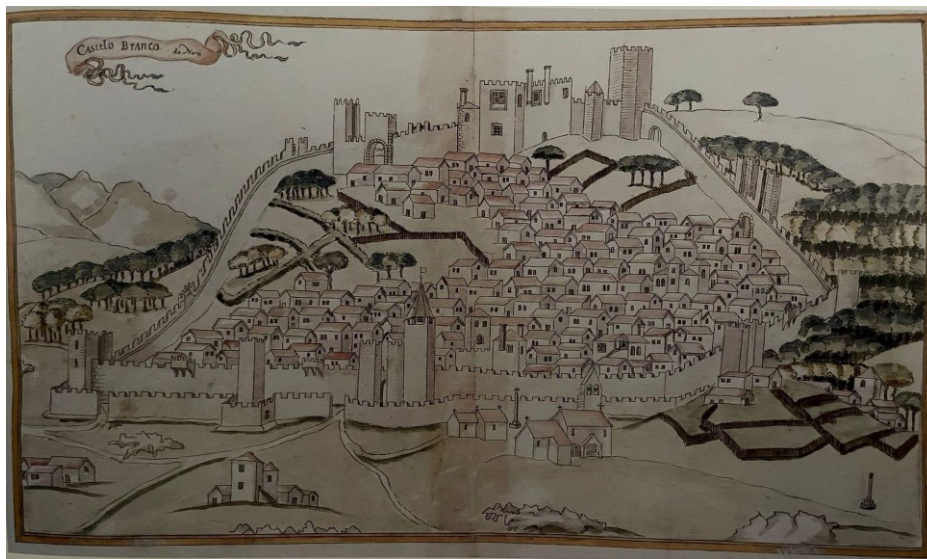


Figure 4 - Drawing of Castelo Branco, 16<sup>th</sup> century. (Alamy, n.d.).

The castle and its walls defined the first urban perimeter, the “upper part” (see **Figure 5**) with an organic and irregular shape adapted to the topography. Within the walls were located the Church of *Santa Maria do Castelo* (the original religious nucleus) (see **Figure 6**), the Episcopal Palace, and small stone dwellings of irregular layout. The medieval street plan is spontaneous, made up of narrow and winding streets with steep slopes, alleys, and cul-de-sacs linking small open spaces such as squares, viewpoints, and courtyards. (see **Figure 7 and 8**)



Figure 5 - Castle and city walls of Castelo Branco. Photo: OrdoTemplum (n.d.)

The city's compact, hilly form reflects an urban structure shaped by defensive needs and by the constraints of its enclosing walls.



**Figure 6** - Church of Santa Maria do Castelo (inside walls). Photo: Câmara Municipal de Castelo Branco (n.d.e).



**Figure 7**- Portado quincentista Rua da Misericórdia. Photo: CM de Castelo Branco, (n.d.).



**Figure 8-** Rua Arco do Bispo. Photo: Blogspot (2024).

### 3.1.1.2 1500-1771 Modern Consolidation

Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the city experienced a period of limited expansion beyond the walls, giving rise to the lower part or expansion zone (see **Figure 9**). New, wider, and straighter streets developed, destined for commerce and services, following the gentler topography. The Church of São Miguel (the Cathedral) (see **Figure 10**), built outside the wall, marks the new urban and religious centre of the Renaissance city. The episcopal gardens were built during the end of this period (1711) (see **Figure 11**).



**Figure 9** - Street in the lower part of Castelo representing urban expansion beyond the medieval walls between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Photo: Blogspot (2017).



**Figure 10** - Church of São Miguel (the Cathedral), built in 1213, with main architectural intervention campaigns occurring in 1682. Photo: Câmara Municipal de Castelo Branco (n.d.)



**Figure 11** – Jardim do Paço Episcopal - The Bishop's Garden, built in the 18th century. Photo: Câmara Municipal Castelo Branco (n.d.c).

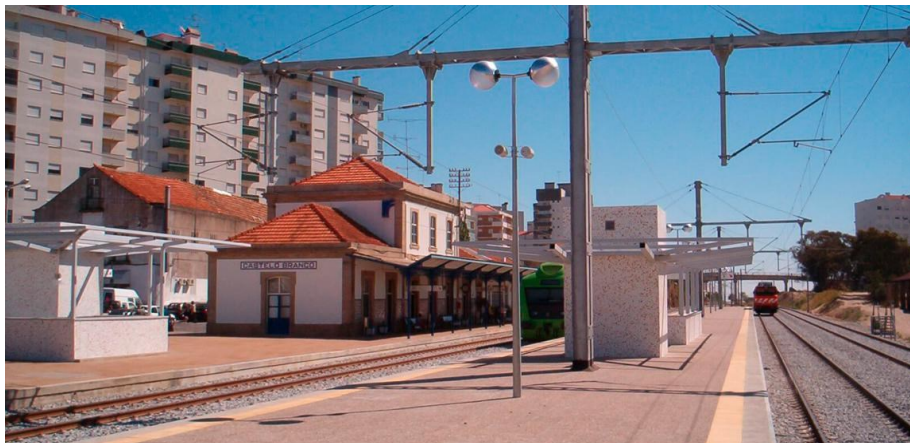
### 3.1.2 District Capital and Industrialization

#### 3.1.2.1 1771-1900 City status

The late 1700s to the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the city grow beyond the city walls, albeit in a modest growth. In 1771, it was elevated to city status by King José I (Câmara Municipal Castelo Branco, n.d.). Following the city's new status as a city, the old medieval town walls were demolished in order to make way for the city's expansion (Belo, 2016). The walls were further

damaged as a result of French occupation during the Napoleonic wars (Ibid.). The city's population in the year 1800 was around 5000 (Millán da Costa & Prata, 2021).

In 1835, Castelo Branco was designated as the district capital (Belo, 2016). The arrival of the railway in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the development of industrial facilities boosted urban and economic growth (see **Figure 12**) (Millán da Costa & Prata, 2021). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the city expanded with new neighbourhoods, industrial zones, and public facilities (Ibid.). Nevertheless, the city, starting from around 1850, experienced only modest growth. The city's main industries were agricultural. 63-66% of the population worked in the agricultural sector at the turn of the century, and the city had grown to around 7000 inhabitants (Ibid.). The city's new rail, inaugurated in the year 1891, primarily served to export its agricultural products to the country's major urban hubs (Ibid.).



**Figure 12** - The Estação Ferroviária de Castelo Branco, Castelo Branco's train station, built 1891. Photo: IP Património (n.d.).

At this point, the city had still not grown much beyond its old historic urban centre. However, it is also during this period that Castelo Branco's gradual shift in centrality began. A few buildings outside the historical boundaries of the city, in the area now known as the *Devesa* area (also colloquially known as *Campo Mártires da Pátria*), namely the *Quartel de Cavalaria*, were built in 1814, home to the newly formed 11th cavalry regiment (see **Figure 13**). In due course, these newly developed areas would constitute the new urban centre (Belo, 2016).



**Figure 13** - Quartel da Cavalaria n.º 8, built in 1814. Photo: Câmara Municipal Castelo Branco (n.d.c)

### 3.1.2.2 1900-1975 - Estado Novo Era

The middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw significant shifts in the urban landscape of the old historical centre. The interventions between the 1930's to 1960's in Portuguese cities followed a desire by the *Estado Novo* in remodelling cities for propagandistic purposes and was predominated by historicist, rationalist, and hygienist views (Belo, 2016).

The Estado Novo was an authoritarian political regime that governed Portugal between 1933 and 1974, under the leadership of António de Oliveira Salazar and, later, Marcello Caetano. It was characterised by strong political centralisation, censorship, repression of opposition, and an ideological emphasis on nationalism, tradition, order, and moral conservatism. Urban and architectural policies during this period were used as instruments of state propaganda, promoting historicist and monumental aesthetics while simultaneously adopting rationalist and hygienist planning principles to “modernise” cities and reinforce symbolic representations of national identity. These strategies sought to control urban form, regulate social life, and visually express the values of the regime through space (Rosas, 2012; Belo, 2016).

For Castelo Branco, these predominating views would be expressed by João Aguiar's 1945 Antepiano, which saw significant amounts of dwellings demolished, motivated by the predominating views of the regime (Ibid.). The demolitions were motivated by a desire to sanitize and decongest building plots, or by the view that the buildings slated for demolition lacked aesthetic or historical value (Ibid.). The demolitions were also often prompted by a desire to highlight exceptional buildings or complexes of greater aesthetic and historic value. A notable example of this was the demolitions around Castelo Branco's cathedral, creating what is now known as *Largo da Sé* (Ibid.). But demolitions were also conducted in the old city, in order to regularize building plots, open up avenues to “attractive” spaces, such as *Praça de Camões*. Hence, many avenues in the historic centre were widened to their current appearance during this time period (Ibid.).

Besides the demolition of dwellings, and in line with a desire for historicist urban planning, the reconstruction and repair of segments of the old city walls, and significant part of the castle tower, was also done during this time period (Belo 2016). Hence, a significant portion of today's “medieval” fortifications are in fact not older than 100 years (Ibid.).

The desire for conservation of the historical centre also resulted in a clear delineation in planning documents, which relegated the historical centre to residential uses, while the areas outside the city walls, which already at this point contained several administrative buildings, would constitute the administrative and economic centre of the city (Belo, 2016). As such, plans from 1945 on marks the old city centre as primarily residential in use, while buildings in their immediate surroundings in the *Devesa* area would constitute the city's new administrative and economic centre (Ibid.).

From this time period, several buildings appear, many of them in the direct surroundings of the historical centre. The *Cine-Teatro Avenida* was built in 1954 (see **Figure 14**) (Câmara Municipal Castelo Branco n.d.a) and the *Caixa Geral de Depósitos* (see **Figure 15**) (Aroundus, 2025), completed in 1942, constitute examples of this shifting centrality.

The aim was to distinguish the historic area from the civil centre sector, which was now expanding outside the city walls (Belo, 2016). The area outside the city walls already had some facilities and the plan thus was to provide additional civil facilities. The *Devesa* area would constitute the new city centre and would take on a more symbolic value in terms of the town's identity. A number of buildings were demolished around the *Campo Mártires da Pátria* area in order to accomplish this (Ibid.).



**Figure 14** - A photo of the Cine-Teatro Avenida, built in 1954 following the city's 1945 Antepiano. Photo: Câmara Municipal Castelo Branco (n.d.a).

Throughout this period, the city only experienced modest growth. The city's regional and national importance remained in its agricultural sector, which continued providing agricultural goods to Portugal's urban centres (Millán da Costa & Prata, 2021). The metallurgies (see **Figure 16**), located near today's train station, produced looms, cement mixers, plows, and irrigation engines. The factories were active from the 1930's to the 1990's (Reconquista, 2017).



**Figure 15** - The Caixa Geral de Depósitos, built in 1942 Photo: Aroundus (2025).



**Figure 16** - The Metalúrgica factory, founded in the 1930s, built tools for the agricultural sector. Photo: António Veríssimo Bispo (2015).

### 3.1.3 1975 - Post-revolution

#### 3.1.3.1 POLIS Programme and subsequent expansion

The urban evolution of Castelo Branco since 1975 is inseparable from the political and socioeconomic transformation that followed the *Revolução dos Cravos* (Revolution) *dos Cravos*. For an interior district capital, the post-revolutionary period not only meant the establishment of democracy but also the confrontation of deep structural challenges, namely population aging and rural exodus. The political context following the April 1974 revolution established a significant ideological break with the past, visible, for example, in the residual use of the word 'portugalidade' in speeches and literature (Configurações, 2013). The emphasis was placed on consolidating democracy and freedom. However, the materialization of these ideals in the country's interior required the adoption of active policies to counteract depopulation trends.

Administrative planning was a starting point. By determination of the constitutional precepts of 1976, Portugal was organized into districts (Castelo Branco included), a structure that the Superior Council of Statistics would later codify in 1994 to establish the national division into NUTS, necessary for the National Statistical System (Morais Nunes & Lourenço Nunes, 2016).

Despite the democratic euphoria, Castelo Branco, as a municipality, faced a structural crisis. Demographic analysis shows that, in the decades that followed, population growth rates remained low or negative, a trend observed in the evolution of the Censuses (from 1900 to 2011). The need to preserve the ideals of April, while safeguarding the future of generations, tacitly implied the injection of new engines for settlement and development in the territory. This institutional and demographic gap in the first post-revolution years (given that the first General Urbanization Plan (PGU) would only appear in 1991 (População Distrito de Castelo Branco, n.d.) meant that any initial urban expansion tended to be reactive and not framed by rigorous planning instruments (Assembleia Municipal de Castelo Branco, 2024) (see **Figure 17**).



Figure 17 - Núcleo urbano da cidade de Castelo Branco. Photo: PBase (2018).

### 3.1.3.2 The Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco as an Institutional Response and Instrument of Territorial Fixation (1979)

The main vector of development and urban centrality for Castelo Branco after 1975 was the creation of the Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco - Branco - *Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco* (IPCB). Founded in 1979 and starting its activities in 1980 (see **Figure 18**), [Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco, n.d.] the IPCB is part of the national strategy for decentralizing higher education, aiming at development, innovation, and the fixation of knowledge in interior territories (Andrade, 2010)

The creation of the Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco (IPCB) in 1979 occurred in a context of institutional fragility and limited territorial planning. During the first decade after its foundation, Castelo Branco still lacked a comprehensive urban planning framework, as the city's first General Urbanization Plan (PGU) would only be approved in 1991 (População Distrito de Castelo Branco, n.d.; Assembleia Municipal de Castelo Branco, 2024). As a result, urban growth during the 1980s was largely reactive and fragmented, driven more by immediate functional needs than by a coordinated territorial strategy.

In this period, IPCB began to consolidate as a new pole of attraction, stimulating demographic inflow, housing demand, and service expansion, while the municipality remained structurally unprepared to absorb these pressures (Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco, n.d.). The absence of regulatory instruments meant that residential and infrastructural development followed dispersed and low-density patterns, reinforcing the westward expansion of the city (Assembleia Municipal de Castelo Branco, 2024).

Consequently, IPCB did not simply integrate into the existing urban fabric but instead contributed to the formation of a new centrality, increasingly detached from the historic core. This institutional growth, unaccompanied by coherent urban planning, laid the foundations for the spatial fragmentation and functional displacement that would later be formalised through the PGU (1991) and the Municipal Master Plan (PDM) of 1994 (Câmara Municipal de Castelo Branco, 1994).

The growth of the IPCB was gradual and continuous, representing a true institutional expansion. It began with the Superior School of Agrarian Studies (1983) (see **Figure 19**) and the Superior School of Education (1985) (see **Figure 20**), followed by expansion in the 90s with the Superior School of Technology and Management, which would unfold into the Schools of Management and Technology (see **Figure 21**) (1997). The Superior School of Applied Arts was

created in 1999 (see **Figure 22**) and the Superior School of Health Dr. Lopes Dias in 2001 (see **Figure 23**) (Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco, n.d.).



**Figure 18** - Central Administration of the Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco. Photo: Cernas (2024).



**Figure 19** - Escola Superior Agrária do Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco, 2012. Photo: Diário Digital Castelo Branco (2012).



**Figure 20** - Escola superior de educação de Castelo Branco, 2025. Photo: Diário Digital Castelo Branco, (2025).



**Figure 21** - Escola superior de tecnologia de Castelo Branco, 2025. Photo: Diário Digital Castelo Branco, (2025).



**Figure 22** - Escola superior de Artes Aplicadas de Castelo Branco, 2018. Photo: Diário Digital de Castelo Branco (2018).



Figure 23 - Escola Superior de Saúde Dr. Lopes Dias, 2021. Photo: Diário Digital de Castelo Branco (2021).

This academic expansion resulted in a new urban centrality and direct pressure on the city. The IPCB, due to its size and longevity (celebrating 45 years of existence in 2025), assumed the role of the main engine of development, complementing the traditional administrative function of the district capital. The critical mass of students and academics attracted by the IPCB began to demand more services, commerce, and, above all, housing, influencing the city's morphology and introducing a flow of young population (age group 15-24 years) that mitigated the general aging of the municipality (Assembleia Municipal de Castelo Branco, 2024, Andrade, 2010).

### 3.1.4 Territorial Planning and Urban Structuring (1991-2000)

The 90s were crucial for the formal structuring of Castelo Branco's urban expansion, coinciding with Portugal's entry into the European Economic Community and the need to adopt more robust planning frameworks, essential for attracting structural funds (Assembleia Municipal de Castelo Branco, 2024).

#### 3.1.4.1 Managing Urban Growth: The 1991 General Urbanization Plan and the 1994 Municipal Master Plan of Castelo Branco

The formal milestones that regulated land use post-revolution appeared at the beginning of this decade. The General Urbanization Plan of Castelo Branco (PGUCB) came into force in 1991, with publications in the *Diário da República* in March and December of that year. This was followed by the Municipal Master Plan (PDM) Regulation of 1994. These instruments represented the legal basis for guiding the city's growth, which until then proceeded in a more organic or reactive way (Câmara Municipal de Castelo Branco, 1994, Câmara Municipal de Castelo Branco, 2025).

The 1991 PGUCB initially defined 27 Urban Zones (ZU, *Zonas Urbanas*). The establishment of this framework was of strategic importance to predefine the geographical vectors of future growth. By determining urban parameters and construction indices, based on a "very rigorous survey" of built spaces and urban areas, the PGUCB created the matrix for the subsequent major transformations.

Without this regulatory framework, the massive interventions that followed in the 2000s, including the expansion of the IPCB, the new commercial areas, and, most notably, the POLIS Programme (which required Detailed Plans), would not have had the necessary legal support. The 1991/1994 planning not only controlled growth but also directed it, implicitly, towards the areas where large surfaces would later emerge, such as the Industrial Zone/*Alto de Montalvão*, through the delimitation of Urban Expansion Zones (ZUE, *Zonas Urbanas de Expansão*) (Câmara Municipal de Castelo Branco, 1994, Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, 2003).

### 3.1.4.2 The IPCB and the Demand for New Infrastructure

The pressure exerted by the continuous growth of the IPCB and the increase in the academic community had immediate implications for urban infrastructure, especially housing capacity.

Although the IPCB was the main driver of young population settlement and an institutional success, the analysis of the evolution of the number of dwellings revealed a structural flaw. Census data from 2001 and 2011, projected until 2019, indicated a "tremendous drop in the housing sector growth curve in Castelo Branco," with a worrying average value of only 3 new homes built per month in the city during certain periods (Câmara Municipal de Castelo Branco, 2021).

This indicator suggests a critical failure in the articulation between institutional planning (IPCB expansion) and municipal urban planning (PGUCB/PDM). The fact that the induced demographic growth (the influx of new students) was not matched by a proportional housing supply in the market led to increasing pressure on accommodation, whose structural consequences would fully manifest in the following decade.

### 3.1.5 The Era of Redevelopment and Urban Tensions (2000–2010)

The first decade of the 21st century in Castelo Branco was marked by competition between public intervention for the redevelopment of the historic centre and the private and accelerated expansion of large-scale retail on the periphery, generating tension between civic centrality and functional centrality.

#### 3.1.5.1 The POLIS Programme: Enhancing the Civic Center

Castelo Branco was one of the Portuguese cities covered by the POLIS Programme (Program for Urban Redevelopment and Environmental Enhancement of Portuguese Cities) (Parque Expo, 2008). The main objective was integrated urban redevelopment and environmental enhancement, with a total investment in the city's intervention budgeted at 40 million euros. The detailed plan for the POLIS intervention was approved and ratified by Resolution of the Council of Ministers (RCM) 49/2003 of February 28<sup>th</sup> (Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, 2003, Prezi, 2015).

The POLIS intervention focused on revitalizing the civic and historic centre, which was already "devalitized due to the dispersion of commerce and services generated by their installation in peripheral areas of the city, namely the Industrial Zone". The program acted as a planned countermovement, using the qualification of public space as a structuring and qualifying element of the cities (Belo, 2016, Pinto et al., 2016).

The structuring projects included the road restructuring of the Civic Centre (*Largo da Devesa*) (see **Figure 24**), the pedestrianization of streets, the enhancement of urban parks (such as *Jardim do Paço*, the green area of the Castle, and *Miradouro de S. Gens*) (see **Figure 25**), and the creation of public facilities (Centre for Environmental Monitoring and Interpretation). To ensure accessibility, a crucial aspect for revitalizing the centre, POLIS included the construction of underground parking, projecting 850 spaces, namely in the *Largo de S. João* area and at the entrance of a parking tunnel (Parque Expo, 2008, and Monteiro, n.d.).



**Figure 24** - Largo da Devesa City Square in Castelo Branco. Photo: Mateo Arquitectura (2015).



**Figure 25** - Miradouro de São Gens Castelo Branco. Photo: Wikimedia Commons (2019).

The POLIS Programme, by investing massively in public space and improving physical accessibility (parking), sought to restore the attractiveness of the historic core, recognizing that functional decentralization was already an established reality at the turn of the millennium [Belo, 2016].

### 3.1.5.2 Commercial Expansion: Consolidation of the Functional Periphery

In stark contrast to the redevelopment effort in the centre, the same decade saw the consolidation of commercial expansion on the periphery, confirming the migration of consumer flows. The first major venture was the Fórum Castelo Branco, which opened to the public on October 31, 2007 (see **Figure 26**). This project represented an investment of 54 million euros and introduced the large-scale shopping centre format to the city, accounting for over 30 million visitors in its first decade of operation (Youtube, 2017).



**Figure 26** - Forum Castelo Branco, opened in October 2007. Photo: Distribuição Hoje ( 2012)

Shortly thereafter, Alegro Castelo Branco was inaugurated (around 2008, with the Alegro format later in 2018) (see **Figure 27**), resulting from the expansion of the Auchan/Jumbo anchor. Alegro, with 56 stores and a Gross Leasable Area of 19,500 square meters, represented an investment of 40 million euros upon its launch (Distribuição hoje, 2008).



**Figure 27** - Centro Comercial Alegro, opened in December 2008

The almost simultaneous opening of these two shopping centres, in a medium-sized city like Castelo Branco, created a situation of "double peripheral commercial centrality," generating strong competition and market saturation. The Fórum, positioned more favourably, closer to residential and commercial areas, managed to attract more brand stores and maintain an operation considered 'normal'. On the other hand, Alegro, located deeper in the Industrial Zone, has faced occupancy difficulties, heavily relying on its anchors (Auchan) and entertainment services (cinema and bowling) to attract visitors, being perceived at certain moments as an "empty" space.

This dynamic demonstrates that, even with the civic qualification promoted by POLIS in the centre, the scale and attractiveness of large retail (Fórum and Alegro) consolidated the periphery as the city's main consumer centrality, challenging the economic sustainability of the historic core.

### 3.1.6 Demographic Dynamics, Urban Planning, and Contemporary Challenges (2010-Present)

The city's most recent urban evolution is characterized by a maturation in territorial planning, which moves away from uncontrolled growth and focuses on regeneration and sustainability, while the city's demography remains structurally dependent on its academic hub.

#### 3.1.6.1 Urban Planning Review and Paradigm Shift

After the impact of major interventions, territory management required a review of its planning instruments. The Review of the General Urbanization Plan of Castelo Branco (PGUCB), initiated in 2004, but subject to various constraints (such as legislative changes and the need for updated cartography), was restarted in 2018 and published in 2025 (Câmara Municipal de Castelo Branco, 2025).

This review signalled a change in urban priorities: the transition from the "growth at all costs" paradigm to "sustainable regeneration." The original 1991 PGUCB contained 27 Urban Zones (ZU), while the subsequent review proposal increased to 33 ZU's. However, the increase did not represent indiscriminate expansion, but rather a reorganization, including the subdivision of large areas (such as *Quinta do Bosque*) and the incorporation and detailed management of existing neighbourhoods (e.g., *Bairro de S. Gens*, *Bairro da Fonte do Tostão*, and *Bairro do Barrocal*). This strategy aims to equip all urban areas with finer planning instruments (Detailed Plans and Operational Units of Planning and Management - UOPG) (Câmara Municipal de Castelo Branco, 2025).

The most relevant aspect of the review is the active restriction of expansion in sensitive areas. The classification of Urban Expansion Zone was withdrawn from areas such as ZUE N1 (*Barrocal* geosites area) (see **Figure 28**) and ZUE J (*Alto de Montalvão*) (see **Figure 29**), which are being converted into Parks. This measure demonstrates a priority in safeguarding natural and scenic resources, combating the deterioration of landscape quality at the city entrances, in line with the new strategic objectives of environmental preservation and the creation of a Green Structure (Câmara Municipal de Castelo Branco, 2025).



**Figure 28** - Barrocal Park. Photo: Economista (2020).



Figure 29 - Montalvão Urban Park. Photo: Rádio Castelo Branco (2023).

## 3.2 I | INTERPRET

The objective of the **I-INTERPRET** stage is to transform the factual historical description (from the *Describe* phase) into interpretative knowledge. While describing answers "**what**," interpreting answers "**why**" certain periods, places, and processes were decisive for the city's formation.

In Castelo Branco, this phase evaluates the following criteria:

- **Historical Legibility:** The presence of physical traces (streets, facades, monuments) that allow the city's evolution to be "read" in the current territory.
- **Integrity and Authenticity:** Assessing the condition of physical remains as carriers of historical significance and how much they have been preserved or altered.
- **Communicative Significance:** Understanding the social, functional, and symbolic meanings of urban spaces and identifying elements vulnerable to loss.
- This interpretation provides the critical basis for the next phase, Valuation, by defining the historical significance of the area as a whole.

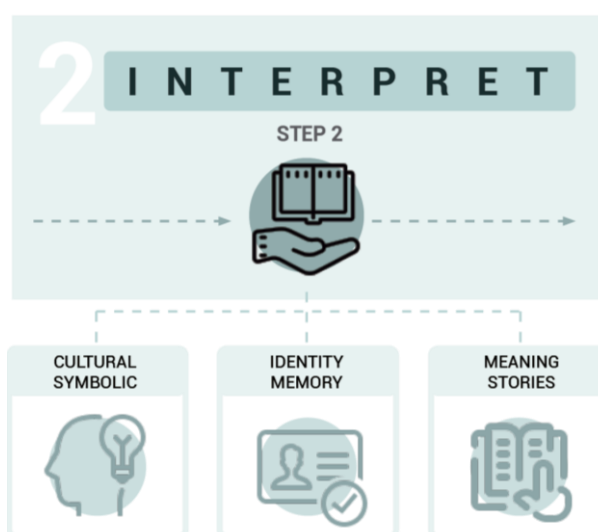
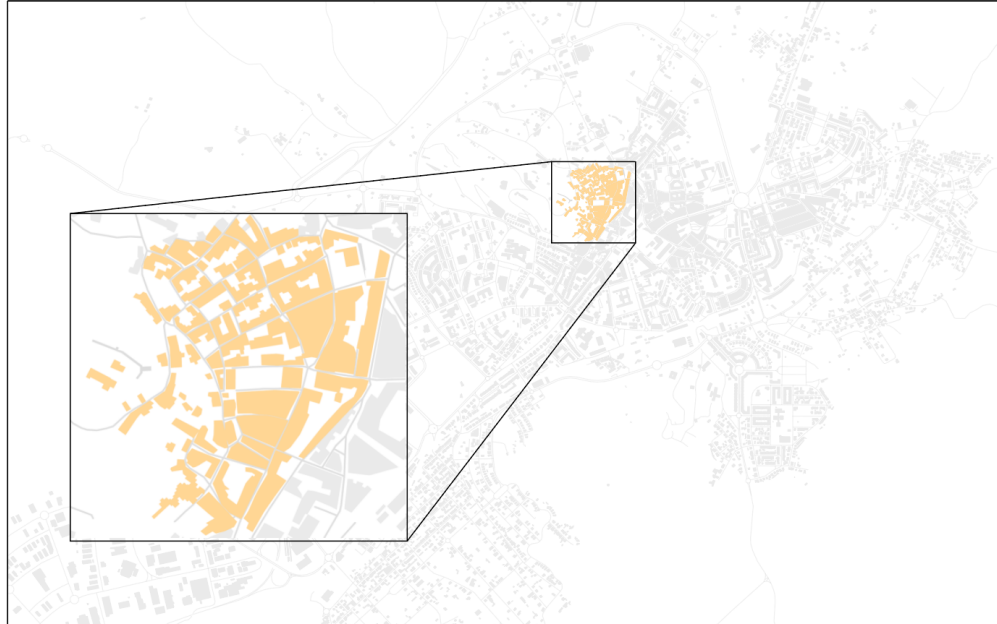


Figure 30 - Diagram of the Interpret step of DIVE methodology.

### 3.2.1 Pre-Modern Period (1165–1771)

**Summary:** This period covers the city's foundation by the Knights Templar and its subsequent Renaissance and Baroque expansions, which established the "Upper" (medieval/military) and "Lower" (commercial/administrative) dual urban structure, **Figure 31**.



**Figure 31** - The historical centre of Castelo Branco.

**Evidence:** The organic layout of narrow, winding streets and cul-de-sacs on the Cardosa hill (intramural) contrasts with the regular, hierarchical fabric of the expansion zone outside the walls. Physical evidence includes the Castle, the Manueline portals in local granite, the Cathedral of Saint Michael (Sé Catedral), and the Episcopal Palace Garden (1711).

**Significance today:** As the "birthplace" of the city, this area concentrates the highest density of heritage resources. It represents the transition from a defensive military stronghold to a seat of regional religious and civil power.

**Risks:** The historic centre faces severe depopulation and population aging. There is a risk of losing authenticity through selective restoration or decay, leaving the core as a static "postcard" space without practical significance for daily life.

**Analysis:** The pre-modern process created a morphological dichotomy that remains the defining feature of Castelo Branco. The Templar foundation dictated a compact, defensive occupation adapted to steep slopes, while the Renaissance expansion introduced wider, straighter axes intended for commerce, shifting the city's centre of gravity from the Castle toward the flatter southern areas. This dual system is integrated by historical vertical axes (like *Rua d'Ega*) that connect the high and low parts, creating a continuous urban unit that still directs modern pedestrian and tourist flows.

### 3.2.2 Industrialization period

**Summary:** Castelo Branco experienced only moderate growth during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, the city had a regional economic and political importance and its economy consisted primarily of agricultural goods that provided for the country's main cities (Source: Content). Industrialization and the train line, completed in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was seen as an opportunity to connect the city and its economic strengths with the rest of the country. The city's primary industrial zone was located in the Barrocal area of Castelo Branco, which housed the city's metallurgical plants (which produced tools for its agricultural sector) and its rail line, which arrived

on Largo do Rei D. Carlos on Avenida Nuno Álvares. The neighbourhood had a central importance to the city during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, **Figure 32**.



**Figure 32** - The historical industrial area of Castelo Branco.

**Evidence:** Barrocal area still contains traces of its industrial heritage. Some buildings from the industrial plants remain, as do the chimneys. Train and bus lines still connect to the Barrocal area.

**Significance today:** Today, most of the industrial buildings were demolished to make way for new neighbourhoods. Some chimneys remain, and the railway. The city's development in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the latter half, tended towards the west, thus the city's traditionally industrial neighbourhoods have been made peripheral. The city's bus and rail lines are located here. Geographically centrally located.

**Risks:** The trainway has created a significant "barrier" effect, effectively closing off new developments south of the railway. Peripheralization has also made this geographically centrally located, and once central location, peripheral compared to new developments westwards (IPC, Forum).

**Analysis** The city's historical industry was deeply intertwined with the municipality's exports. Transports and the city's industrial zone were concentrated in the city's Barrocal zone. Today, elements from this period remain, including (but not limited to) architectural elements, as well as the city's train and bus lines. As the city's shifting centrality takes place, and shifts westwards, the Barrocal zone risks losing its central importance and historical context. Functionally, connecting train lines and bus lines are increasingly disconnected from the city's centrality, which is shifting westwards.

### 3.2.3 Memory and Reconstructed Heritage under Estado Novo

**Summary:** The old city centre was made increasingly peripheral by the 1945-antepiano, which zoned commercial and administrative uses in *Campo Mártires da Pátria/Devesa* area of Castelo Branco. As a result, the *Estado Novo* built important administrative and commercial buildings in the area directly south of the old town. The result was a gradual shift in the centrality of the city, and the transformation of the old town into a peripheral residential zone feeding a new economic and administrative centre. The regime also wanted to redesign the historic areas under historicist and hygienist pretenses. As a result, large areas which were estimated to lack aesthetic or historic value were slated for demolition. As a result of the hygienist, historicist remodelling of the city, and the rezoning of these spaces, the historic areas had become frozen, "postcard" spaces which

existed in practice but lacked any practical significance, as all developments were relegated to outside these zones.

**Evidence:** Separation of zoning between historical zone and the rest of the city. Large avenues and modernist planning beyond the historical centre, contrasting the medieval layout in the historical zone. Large open spaces outside historically significant buildings (eg. Cathedral of Castelo Branco), reconstructed medieval walls.

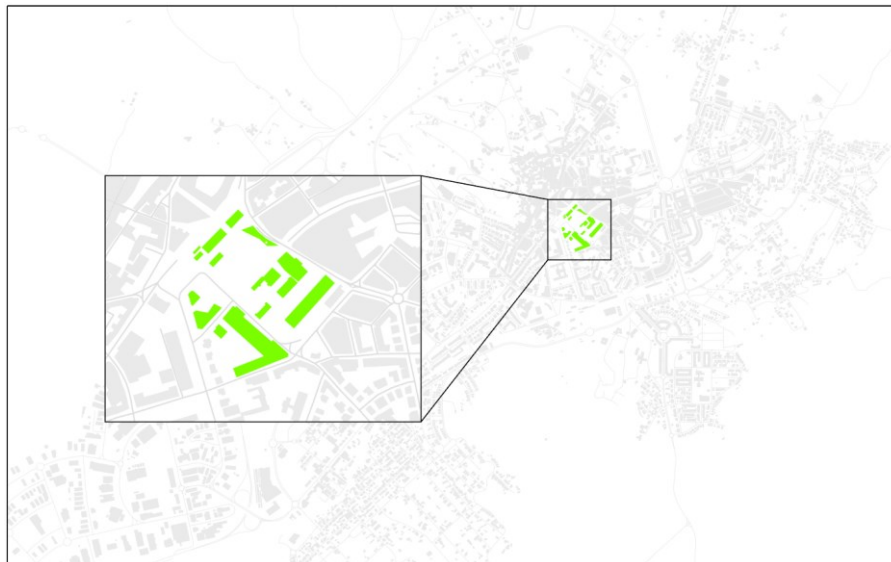
**Significance today:** Tourists visit the historic centre, but otherwise the historical centre lacks any significant traffic. A lot of administrative and cultural buildings still exist in the *Devesa* area. A lot of buildings from the *Estado Novo* remain from this period of redevelopment and recentring.

**Risks:** Segregation and marginalization of certain zones, the historic city centre loses its historical purpose and identity.

**Analysis** The legacy of planning practices during the twentieth century, combined with a shift in urban centrality, has produced a historical zone that is increasingly peripheral and effectively frozen in time. This area was functionally planned with a regime of conservation, while the city's economic nodes have been relocated outside the historical centre. As a result, there are few reasons for residents to visit the historical zone in their daily lives, as it currently lacks significant economic activity. Retail, office spaces, and municipal functions are largely situated beyond the historical core. The *Estado Novo's* attempt to simultaneously preserve the area while fostering development elsewhere has therefore contributed to the stagnation and "freezing" of the historical zone.

### 3.2.4 Programa POLIS

**Summary:** The POLIS Programme in Castelo Branco was an urban regeneration initiative aimed at improving the city's environmental and urban quality, focusing on enhancing public space, creating green infrastructure, and revitalizing the historic centre. The programme integrated interventions along the centre, creation of urban parks, and improved accessibility, seeking to reposition Castelo Branco as a more attractive and sustainable city, **Figure 33**.



**Figure 33-** Implementation area of the POLIS-program (the *Devesa*).

**Evidence:** Creation of the City Centre , integrating green areas, pedestrian paths, and cycle lanes

Regeneration of *Praça de Camões* and the historic axis of the city

Construction of new soft mobility infrastructure and peripheral parking  
 Enhancement of built heritage through restoration of historic buildings  
 Implementation of modern and sustainable public lighting systems  
 Creation of cultural and leisure facilities (outdoor amphitheatre, multipurpose spaces)

**Significance today:** The legacy of the POLIS Programme remains relevant in Castelo Branco's contemporary urban structure. The public spaces created continue to serve as main leisure and social gathering areas, promoting community cohesion. The implemented green infrastructure contributes to climate change mitigation and improvement of urban air quality. The programme established a precedent for future urban interventions based on sustainability principles and quality of life, influencing subsequent municipal territorial planning policies.

**Risks:**

- Progressive degradation of created infrastructure due to lack of adequate maintenance and continuous funding
- Underutilization of some created public spaces, resulting in abandoned or unsafe areas
- Partial gentrification of regenerated zones, potentially excluding lower-income populations
- Loss of local identity due to standardized interventions that did not sufficiently respect cultural and historical specificities
- Lack of effective integration between intervened areas and existing urban fabric, creating functional discontinuities
- Vulnerability of green infrastructure to extreme climate events (droughts, floods) without robust climate adaptation plans

**Analysis**

The POLIS Programme represents a critical inflection point in Castelo Branco's urban trajectory, revealing both the potential and limitations of large-scale regeneration initiatives in Portuguese cities.

The programmes' most significant impact was the acceleration of centrality displacement from the historic core. By concentrating investment in new peripheral interventions (*Campo Mártires da Pátria*, urban parks,..) while applying only superficial improvements to the historic centre. The creation of attractive new public spaces outside the historic fabric diverted social and economic activity away from the traditional centre, exacerbating the very problem the heritage enhancement component aimed to address.

### 3.2.5 Peripheral Commercial Transformation

**Summary:** The peripheral commercial transformation in Castelo Branco resulted from the establishment of large shopping centres outside the historic core, which came to concentrate the city's main consumption and leisure functions. This process altered the urban functional structure, shifting economic and social flows from the traditional centre to the periphery, **Figure 34**.

**Evidence:** The consolidation of peripheral commercial transformation in Castelo Branco is evidenced by the establishment of large shopping centres, namely Alegro Castelo Branco and Fórum Castelo Branco, which assumed a central role in the population's consumption and leisure habits. These facilities began to concentrate a diversified offer of commerce, restaurants, and services, attracting users not only from the municipality but also from neighbouring towns.

Their location outside the historic centre, combined with good road accessibility and available parking, contributed to the progressive displacement of commercial and social flows to the periphery. Therefore, traditional commerce in the historic centre lost prominence, with a decline in daily economic activity and pedestrian movement.



**Figure 34** - Castelo Branco's primary shopping malls, Alegro (north) and Forum (south).

**Current Significance:** Currently, the periphery plays a dominant role in the city's commercial and leisure flows, functioning as the main consumption destination for residents and visitors. This transformation reinforces dependence on the automobile and contributes to a more dispersed urban organization. At the same time, the historic centre loses part of its traditional economic function, becoming more dependent on administrative, institutional, and tourist activities.

**Risks:**

- The concentration of commerce in the periphery has clear and multifaceted urban impacts, reflected in the city's morphology, dynamics, and daily life:
- Economic emptying of the historic centre, with loss of urban and social vitality.
- Difficulties in maintaining built heritage, due to reduced local economic activity.
- Increased urban fragmentation, with a city divided between a weakened historic centre and a functionally dominant periphery.
- Excessive dependence on large commercial operators, making the local economy more vulnerable to market changes.
- Polarization of the city, with the periphery functioning as the new economic core and the historic centre losing essential functions.
- Reduced economic activity in the centre leading to lower investment in conservation and maintenance of built heritage.
- Abandonment or underutilization of historic buildings altering the urban aesthetic and symbolic value of space.

**Analysis** The peripheral commercial transformation in Castelo Branco fits into a generalized trend of medium-sized Portuguese cities, where factors such as accessibility, land availability, and market logic favoured the relocation of commercial functions outside consolidated centres.

Although this process expanded commercial offerings and modernized consumption habits, it also contributed to the weakening of historical centrality. From the perspective of urban analysis, these dynamic highlights the need for policies aimed at requalifying the urban centre, promoting complementarity between traditional commerce, new urban uses, and cultural activities.

The academic institutionalization and peripheral commercial transformation in Castelo Branco constitute complementary dynamics that illustrate the contemporary challenges of medium-sized Portuguese cities. IPCB stands out as a driver of demographic regeneration and territorial

cohesion, fostering knowledge circulation and cultural vitality. In parallel, the commercial periphery modernizes consumption habits and expands service offerings but weakens historical centrality and accentuates dependence on large economic operators.

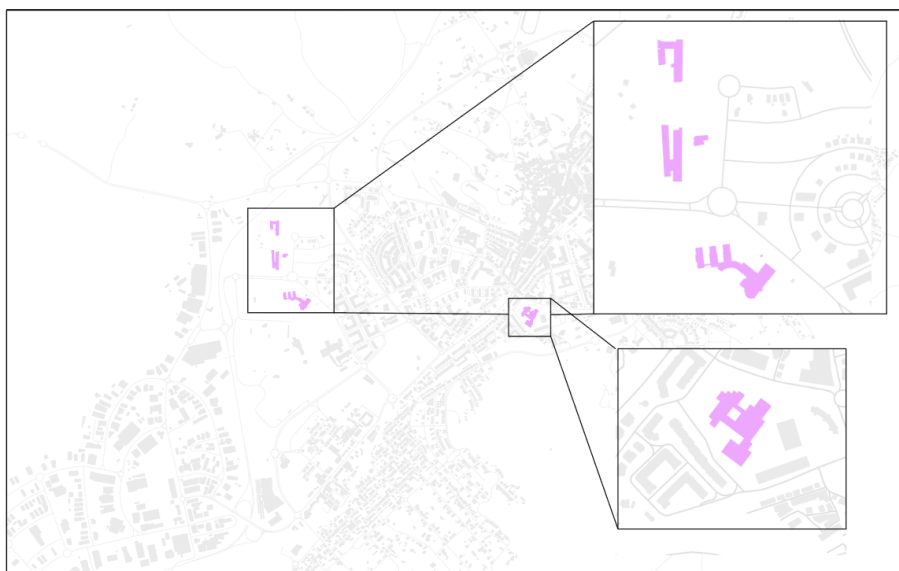
In this context, the urban future of Castelo Branco will depend on the ability to articulate integrated policies that promote complementarity between academia, commerce, and historical heritage, ensuring that growth translates not into polarization, but into sustainable and balanced renewal.

### 3.2.6 Institutionalization through IPCB

**Summary:** The institutionalization of higher education in Castelo Branco, through the creation and expansion of the Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco (IPCB), significantly transformed the demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural profile of the city and its surrounding region. Since its foundation in 1979 and the beginning of its activity in 1980, IPCB has become a structuring element of the territory, promoting the settlement of young people, generating economic dynamism, and strengthening ties with the local community and institutions (IPCB official website, (n.d.)), **Figure 35.**

**Evidence** IPCB began its activity in the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and gradually expanded its academic offerings and its student and teaching body. Today, it includes six higher schools across various scientific areas, from education and agriculture to technology and management, attracting thousands of students to the municipality.

In 2019 a study estimated that IPCB had, in 2017, an annual economic impact of around €39.3 million in the region of Castelo Branco and Idanha-a-Nova, equivalent to 5.3% of the GDP of these municipalities (Diário de Notícias 2019). Most of this impact derives from the expenses of students and staff associated with the institute, reflecting the importance of its presence for the local economy. According to this study, more than two-thirds of students move from other municipalities to study at IPCB, and a considerable percentage of teachers and staff either commute daily or settle in the municipality because of the institution. IPCB also provides several student residences in Castelo Branco, with capacity for hundreds of beds, which are essential to accommodate students coming from other locations.



**Figure 35** - IPCB schools.

**Current Significance** Today, IPCB is one of the main drivers of demographic renewal in the city and an active agent of cultural, social, and economic dynamism. By attracting young people to the city, it contributes to:

- Renewal of the local population's age structure and greater demographic diversity;
- Job creation and economic dynamism, both directly and indirectly;
- Expansion of cultural, sports, and leisure services, reinforcing urban life;
- Increased regional and international visibility of the city, through cooperation and mobility projects.

**Risks** Despite its positive impact, the strong academic presence poses challenges that may limit its beneficial influence:

- **Pressure on the housing market:** The arrival of students increases demand for accommodation, which may drive up prices and reduce availability for local residents.
- **Insufficient urban planning:** The lack of coordination between the expansion of academic infrastructure and urban planning may generate problems of mobility, services, and integration between the academic community and permanent residents.
- **Economic dependence:** Excessive reliance on a single institution as an economic driver may make the city vulnerable to changes in higher education policies or demographic fluctuations.

**Analysis** The consolidated presence of IPCB can be understood as an instance of urban institutionalization that dynamically reconfigures the city of Castelo Branco. Over more than four decades, the institution has not only provided higher education to thousands of students but also acted as a catalyst for demographic and economic change.

Like other medium-sized European cities with higher education institutions, Castelo Branco has been integrated into an urban model in which academia functions as a hub generating cognitive capacity, professional practice, and cultural vitality. This transformation aligns with studies that identify higher education institutions as important levers in the development of low-density cities, contributing to job creation, revenue generation, and the strengthening of the urban fabric.

In the specific context of inland Portugal, where demographic desertification and lack of opportunities are persistent challenges, IPCB emerges as an instrument of territorial cohesion and demographic regeneration, integrating young people into the urban fabric and fostering the circulation of knowledge.

### 3.2.7 Considerations and Key Outcomes

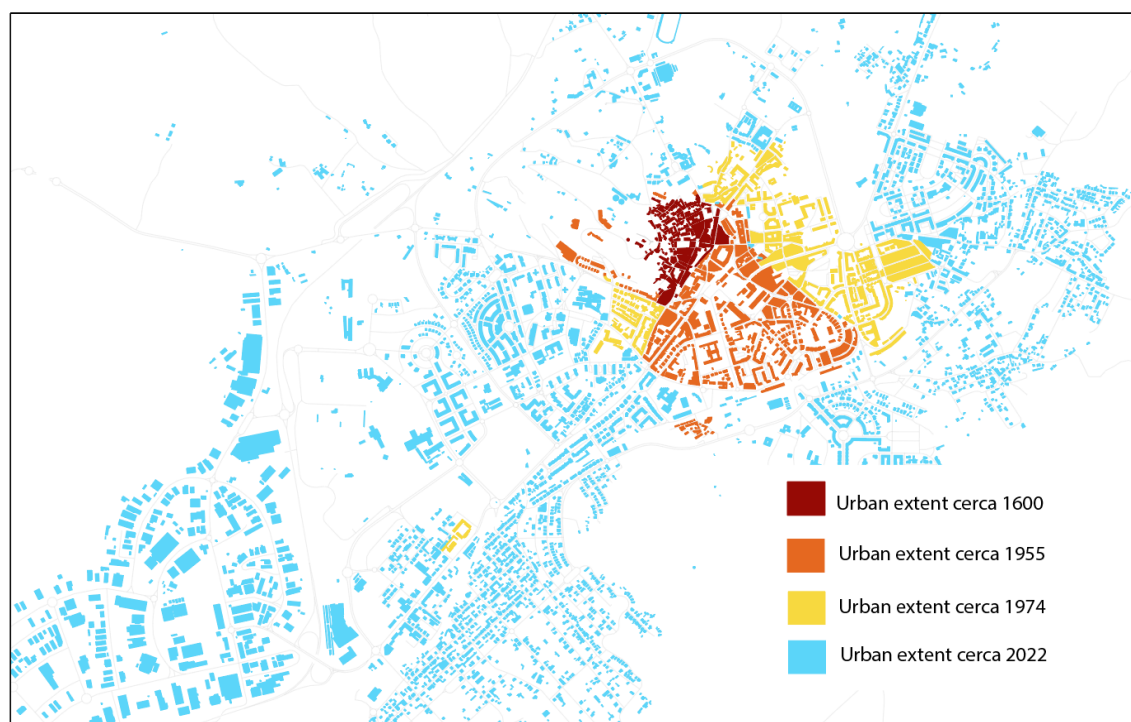
#### Displaced Centrality

Over the last century, the functional, civic, and commercial heart of Castelo Branco shifted from the historic core to peripheral areas and new administrative hubs. The evidence of this relates to above mentioned urban developments, i.e.:

The 1945 Antepiano (João Aguiar): This plan relegated the old town to primarily residential use, moving administrative functions to the *Campo Mártires da Pátria* area.

**Peripheral Retail Hubs:** The opening of Fórum Castelo Branco (2007) and Alegro (2008) consolidated the periphery as the primary destination for consumption, leading to the decline of traditional commerce in the centre.

**Academic Expansion:** The growth of the IPCB (since 1979) created a new functional pole to the west, **Figure 36**.



**Figure 36** - Map showing the historical urban expansion of Castelo Branco.

A combined analysis of the city's overarching developments, starting with the rezoning of the city's commercial and administrative assets to the *Devesa* area in the 1940's, and continuing with more recent urban developments, including (but not limited to) the transformation of commercial assets to the periphery of the city and the establishment of IPCB schools in the city's periphery, have had a chilling effect on the city's historical centre.

An urban planning policy for the historical centre fixed on superficial urban transformations of the city centre (chief among them, the POLIS-program, but also the historicist and hygienist plans of the 1940's) have not led to the desired effect of revitalizing either the historical zone or the *Devesa* area. The historic centre retains its symbolic and heritage value—reinforced by the POLIS Programme (2003–2010)—but lacks economic vitality. It attracts tourists but suffers from reduced daytime activity for the local population. Core among the causes, as discussed above, are that core drivers of economic life have continuously concentrated further afield from the city's historical centre.

Thus, the city's historical urban developments have created an urban fragmentation, splitting the city between a functionally dominant periphery and a weakened, marginalized centre unable to sustain its built heritage. Addressing these underlying drivers of shifting centrality could help realign the city's urban history with its contemporary functional structure, **Figure 37**.

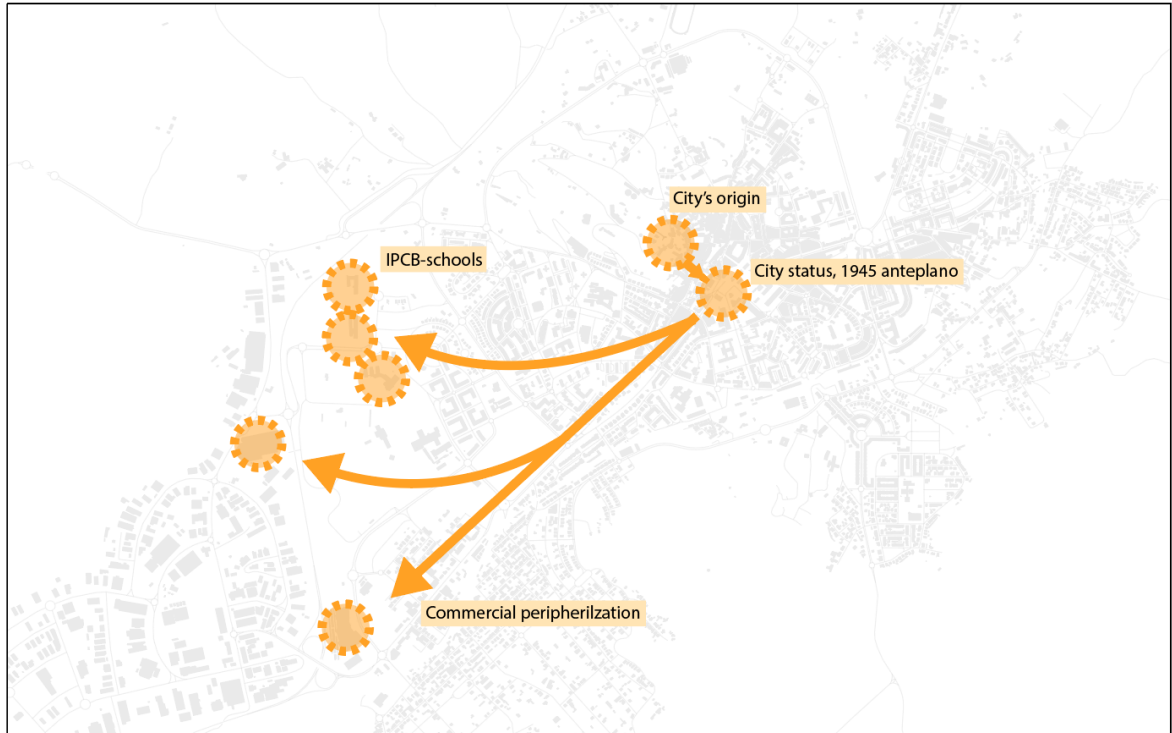


Figure 37 - Map showing the displaced centrality of Castelo Branco, chiefly westwards.

### 3.3 V | VALUATE

The **V – Valuate** phase of the DIVE methodology aims to critically assess the values, vulnerabilities, development potential, limits, and capacity for change of the cultural and urban heritage identified in the previous stages. While the *Describe* and *Interpret* phases focused on understanding the historical development and significance of Castelo Branco, the *Valuate* phase shifts the analysis towards a strategic reading of what is at stake: what must be preserved, what is at risk, and where opportunities for transformation exist.

In this phase, cultural heritage is not understood as a static asset, but as a dynamic resource embedded in social, economic, and territorial processes. The aim is to identify how historical structures, urban morphology and symbolic landscapes can support future development, while also recognizing the vulnerabilities and conflicts that threaten their sustainability, **Figure 38**.

*Valuation* in the DIVE framework is not limited to aesthetic or historical merit. It integrates multiple dimensions:

**Cultural and symbolic values**, which contribute to identity, memory, and sense of place;

**Functional and social values**, related to everyday use, accessibility, and urban life;

**Economic values**, connected to tourism, commerce, and institutional presence;

**Environmental and morphological values**, linked to topography, landscape, and urban form.

At the same time, the Valuate phase addresses:

Vulnerability, identifying risks such as depopulation, functional displacement, infrastructural barriers;

Development potential, highlighting opportunities for regeneration, reuse, and reactivation;

Tolerance limits, defining the thresholds beyond which intervention may compromise authenticity or integrity;

Capacity for change, assessing where transformation is possible without loss of identity.

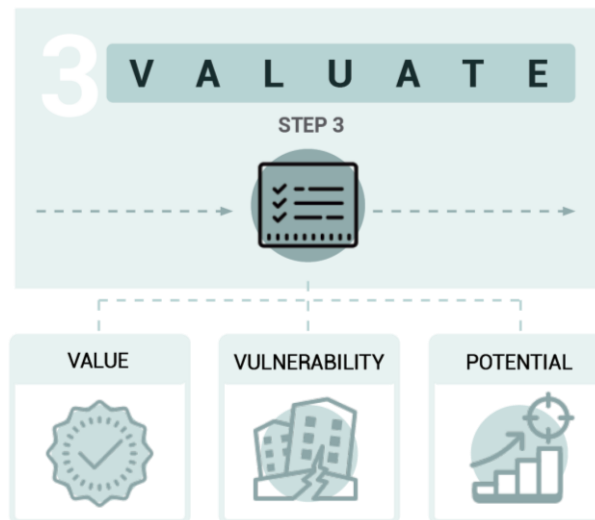


Figure 38 - Diagram of the Valuate step of DIVE methodology.

In the case of Castelo Branco city, this valuation is particularly critical due to the long-term displacement of centrality, the peripheralization of commerce, the institutional weight of the IPCB, the morphological constraints of the historic hill, and the legacy of 20<sup>th</sup>-century planning practices. These processes have produced a city marked by strong heritage value but weakened functional vitality, especially in the historic core.

The following sections therefore evaluate the main structural themes that shape Castelo Branco today — including mobility, heritage, institutional dynamics, morphology, housing, and commercial centrality — in order to identify both constraints and opportunities. This valuation constitutes the analytical bridge between interpretation and action and provides the strategic foundation for the subsequent **E – Enable** phase, where concrete opportunities for intervention will be defined.

### 3.3.1 Morphology and Topography - soft mobility

The founding identity of Castelo Branco lies in its physical setting at an altitude of approximately 365 meters on a granitic hill, which dictated its original defensive purpose. The Castle, located at the top of the hill, represents the medieval starting point and the city's highest symbolic value. However, urban evolution from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onward marked a transition to the "lower part" or expansion zone. In this flatter area, the gentler topography allowed for a more regular street plan and the growth of commercial and administrative functions outside the medieval walls. This difference in elevation creates a dual urban system with high scenic value but significant functional vulnerabilities. Whilst the "upper part" preserves its organic mesh and local granite, its accessibility is severely limited by narrow, winding streets and steep slopes. This contributes to its isolation from the contemporary city that flourished on the peripheral plains. The potential for development lies in revaluing the historical vertical articulation axes which function as dynamic connectors between the historical "birthplace" and modern life. For this to work, soft mobility must be prioritized to mitigate the physical barrier of the hillside. The area's capacity for change is restricted by the absolute need to preserve the integrity of the hill's silhouette, which remains an irreplaceable visual landmark in the regional landscape.

### 3.3.2 Mobility and Connectivity: to overcome Urban Fragmentation

A major valuation challenge on Castelo Branco is the car prevalence and the existence of physical barriers like the railway line and the N18 road. Although the city has favourable topography in its flat zones, the daily use of bicycles and soft modes is minimal, and existing bike

lanes are peripheral and disconnected. This makes the historic centre vulnerable to physical isolation and environmental degradation caused by traffic.

The potential lies in creating a pedestrian continuum that links the Castle hill to the *Devesa* and the new peripheral centres. Installing soft transport systems, such as surface lifts or an electric shuttle, could resolve the problem of high elevation, making the "upper part" accessible to the elderly and tourists. The capacity for change is high through "urban acupuncture" interventions—such as eliminating architectural barriers and planting trees along pedestrian paths to improve connectivity and reduce costs for residents and investors. Overcoming the "barrier effect" of infrastructure is vital for integrating historical heritage into a contemporary, sustainable movement dynamic.

### 3.3.3 The Value of Heritage

Castelo Branco possesses an exceptional density of classified heritage, ranging from the Cathedral (*Sé*) and the Manueline Portals to the Episcopal Palace Garden, a landmark of Portuguese Baroque. These elements hold aesthetic and rarity values that constitute the city's primary tourism assets. The POLIS Programme reinforced this value by redeveloping public spaces and monuments, restoring dignity to sites like the *Cruzeiro de São João*.

However, this heritage faces the vulnerability of "museumification". There is a noted risk that certain areas have been "frozen" as postcard-perfect scenes that lack genuine social vitality. A significant threat is that material authenticity may be sacrificed for a simplified "old-world" visual aesthetic, particularly in 20<sup>th</sup>-century reconstructions perceived by the public as truly medieval. The potential lies in the adaptive reuse of large buildings for cultural or "charm" tourism purposes, integrating them into living routes rather than passive contemplation. The capacity for change must focus on using authentic materials (granite, lime, and wood) in rehabilitation efforts that respect historical volume while allowing for contemporary functional needs.

### 3.3.4 Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco

The analysis of Castelo Branco's social values identifies the IPCB as the most robust engine of regeneration over the last four decades. The IPCB injects a young population (ages 17-24) that counters the regional trends of aging and desertification. This academic community represents a "knowledge resource" that is vital for the city's long-term sustainability.

The core vulnerability is the lack of articulation between academic expansion and municipal housing planning. Despite being prioritized for residential use in the 1945 *Anteplano*, the historic centre suffers from abandonment and a lack of housing suited for students or young professionals. The development potential involves transforming vacant buildings - which represent a significant portion of the core-into student residences or coworking spaces. This strategy would capture young population flows for the old town, regenerating the social fabric without relying solely on seasonal tourism. The tolerance for change in building use is high, provided that the human scale and block typology are maintained.

### 3.3.5 Displaced Centrality

The historic centre faces a functional vulnerability crisis caused by the migration of economic centrality to the periphery, specifically to large shopping hubs like *Fórum* and *Alegro*. Traditional commerce has lost its competitiveness, resulting in an emptying of daytime activity and an over-reliance on administrative functions in the *Campo Mártires da Pátria* area. This urban fragmentation splits the city between a weakened symbolic centre and a dominant commercial periphery.

Despite this, the centre retains a value of proximity and scale that large shopping centres cannot replicate. The potential for valuation lies in creating supported commercial rental programs and incentivizing creative industries and local gastronomy within the historic core. The centre's capacity for change depends on its ability to offer a differentiated consumption experience linked to memory and heritage, functioning as an "open-air shopping mall". Regenerating vacant spaces and

introducing new uses into public areas are fundamental to restoring the city's "heart," as outlined in the RE:GENERAR plan.

### 3.3.6 Public Transport

The peripheralization of key commercial destinations has led to a transportation network predominated by car-use, to the detriment of pedestrians and cyclists. Forum, and *Alegro* in particular, are key destinations which currently hold important shops and restaurants and are a common place to visit. Both shopping centres – *Alegro* in particular – are located far away from the city centre and from most houses and is only easily accessible by car. The result is an incentivization of car-based transport in the city, including in the planning of the city infrastructure. Furthermore, current public transport systems lack clarity in scheduling, waiting times are long and bus-stations lack any accommodations to the detriment of public transport usage. An investment in public transport could be a cheap way to incentivize alternative locations, including the city centre.

### 3.3.7 Commercial peripheralization

Commercial peripheralization has led away from the historic city centre and the urban development of the city, which once centred around the *Devesa* area and led eastwards toward the *Barrocal* area (train station). The result is a disconnect between key infrastructures and the centrality of the city shifting westwards. The result is a de jure city centre located in the *Devesa* area that is no longer treated as so de facto. People living in suburban area have little incentive to visit the city centre unless they have work there, as much of what they need can be found in *Alegro* and *Fórum*. The historic city centre, which was already made peripheral by the 1945-antepiano and the rezoning of it to residential use (in favour of the *Devesa* area), has been made another degree separated by the peripheralization of the *Devesa* area. By increasing the relevance of the *Devesa* area, it is possible to make the historic city more relevant and central by extension.

### 3.3.8 Shifted centrality

Over the past century, the role of Castelo Branco's historical centre has gradually shifted. The 1945 "antepiano" urban plan designated the historical zone primarily for residential use, further marginalizing it to a suburban role, despite its central geographic location. Car-centric policies, the movement of key commercial activities to the periphery, and the relocation of the main functions of IPCB to the outskirts of the city have all contributed to this shift, pushing the heart of the city westward. Today, the administrative functions remain concentrated around the *Devesa* area, while commercial activities have been displaced further west. As a result, the historical centre, though centrally located, now functions more like a suburb. While there are still some cultural sites—such as the *Museu Cargaleiro*—present in the area, it has increasingly been used for residential purposes. The once-vibrant core has been relegated to the periphery, with the *Devesa* area losing much of its former traffic due to the relocation of key urban functions.

### 3.3.9 Accessibility

The hilly nature of the historical zone – its defensive nature was a central reason for the city's location – now makes it inaccessible and difficult to work with to build urbanity. Accessibility remains a key question when positing how to bring centrality to the historic city centre.

### 3.3.10 Considerations and Key Outcomes

The Valuate phase demonstrates that Castelo Branco's historic centre is defined by a fundamental contradiction: it concentrates the city's highest cultural, symbolic, and landscape values, yet simultaneously exhibits the most severe functional, social, and economic vulnerabilities. This tension reveals that the loss of centrality is not the result of a single planning decision, but rather a cumulative process produced by morphological constraints, infrastructure barriers, institutional relocation, and the progressive peripheralization of commerce.

One of the most significant outcomes of this analysis is the recognition that morphology and topography are not only constraints, but also latent assets. The hilltop location of the historic core, while limiting accessibility, offers exceptional scenic, identity, and symbolic value. When combined

with soft mobility systems and vertical connections, this elevated landscape can become a driver of urban distinction rather than a barrier.

A second key outcome concerns mobility and fragmentation. The dominance of car-based transport and the barrier effect created by the railway and N18 have weakened spatial continuity and reduced the historic centre's everyday accessibility. The evaluation shows that centrality cannot be restored without redefining movement hierarchies, prioritising pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport, and establishing continuous connections between the Castle, *Devesa*, institutional areas, and peripheral centres.

The assessment of heritage values confirms their strategic importance for identity and tourism but also exposes the risk of museumification. The historic centre must therefore evolve from a passive heritage enclave into a productive cultural landscape, where adaptive reuse, contemporary functions, and everyday life reinforce authenticity rather than undermine it.

The Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco emerges as the most powerful regenerative actor within the city. Its young population represents a unique opportunity to reverse ageing trends and reintroduce social vitality into the historic core. However, without integrated housing, mobility, and functional strategies, this potential remains structurally disconnected from the area's most in need of regeneration.

Finally, the analysis confirms that displaced and shifted centrality lies at the heart of Castelo Branco's urban crisis. The relocation of commerce and services to the periphery has fractured the city into disconnected poles, leaving the historic centre symbolically central but functionally marginal. Although its scale, the proximity and heritage character provide a differentiated urban offer that peripheral commercial hubs cannot replicate.

Overall, the Valuate phase establishes that the historic centre of Castelo Branco is not a declining relic, but a strategic resource for future urban regeneration. Its reactivation depends on transforming heritage, landscape, and institutional presence into active drivers of urban life. These findings form the critical bridge to the Enable phase, where integrated strategies can be developed to restore centrality in contemporary, inclusive, and sustainable ways.

### 3.3.11 From the diagnosis to the strategy

The Valuate phase demonstrated that the historic centre of Castelo Branco cannot be understood as a failed urban area, but more as a territory of high cultural and spatial value, currently limited by a set of structural vulnerabilities.

## 3.4 E | ENABLE

The **E-Enable** phase represents the transition from analysis and critical interpretation to strategic action. Although the previous stages of the DIVE methodology (Describe, Interpret and Valuate) allowed the identification of the historical, symbolic and functional dynamics of the historic centre of Castelo Branco, this phase focuses on defining how can these results be translated into real opportunities for regeneration.

Enable phase does not propose a finished design solution but rather establishes the strategic principles and priority themes that will guide the development of Project II. In this way, Enable functions as the conceptual bridge between diagnosis and intervention, transforming values and vulnerabilities into a coherent framework for action (see figure 39).

In the case of Castelo Branco, this phase is entirely centred on the rehabilitation of the historic centre as the main driver of urban recentralisation, defining housing, productive uses, mobility and public life as the key instruments for restoring centrality and long-term sustainability.

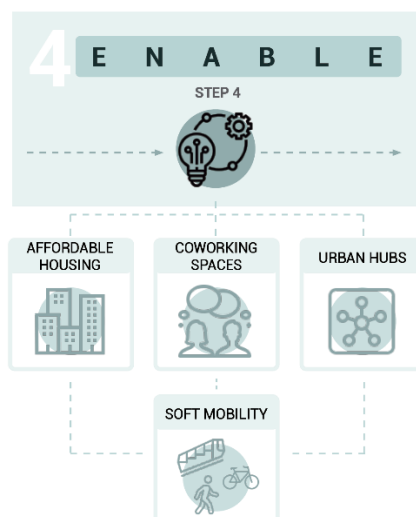


Figure 39 - Diagram of the Enable step of DIVE methodology.

### 3.4.1 Strategic framework for the Historic Centre of Castelo Branco Rehabilitation

The Enable phase is the operative step of the DIVE methodology in which analytical and interpretative findings are translated into true strategic action. In the case of Castelo Branco, this transition involves a conceptual redefinition whereby the historic centre should no longer be seen as a marginalised fragment of heritage, but rather as the structural core of future urban regeneration.

The previous phases have shown that the decline of the historic centre does not result from natural abandonment, but from a long-term process of functional displacement. Over the time, administrative, commercial and institutional activities were progressively transferred to peripheral areas, reshaping the urban system.

As a consequence, the historic core remains geographically central and symbolically significant, yet increasingly marginal in social, economic and functional terms. The Enable phase responds to this condition by seeking to reverse this trajectory, repositioning the historic centre as a primary space for housing, services and everyday urban life.

### 3.4.2 Housing as a strategy for urban centrality

Urban centrality cannot be reduced to a question of location. It is shaped by the presence of people, by everyday activities and by the meanings collectively attributed to space. For this reason, the rehabilitation of the historic centre cannot rely solely on physical restoration but must be grounded in a strategy of re-inhabitation and functional reintegration.

The introduction of housing at controlled costs within the historic fabric, particularly the targeted at young families, young professionals and the remote workers, plays a central role in this approach. In this context, the persistent lack of affordable housing options has been a major issue behind depopulation and suburban expansion. By creating accessible housing within rehabilitated buildings, the historic centre can once again be considered a viable residential choice, offering an alternative to peripheral neighbourhoods. In this context, housing is understood not only as a social necessity, but as an active instrument capable of reorienting demographic flows and supporting urban regeneration.

### 3.4.3 The potential of the new ways of work

Changes in contemporary work patterns, especially the growing of remote and the hybrid work, opened new perspectives for the historic centres of cities. As daily work becomes less dependent

on centralised office locations, aspects such as quality of life, identity and spatial character gain increasing importance in residential and professional decisions.

In this context the integration of coworking spaces, creative studios and shared work environments within the historic centre can attract users who value flexibility and cultural context. These spaces support economic activity. Also, by encouraging daily presence, informal encounters and collaboration, they contribute to social interaction and community formation. In this way, the historic centre can develop as a productive urban environment, rather than remaining confined to symbolic or touristic functions.

#### **3.4.4 Urban hubs as a strategy for progressive regeneration**

If we want a regeneration that is socially inclusive and spatially coherent, rehabilitation should happen progressively through the formation of urban hubs within the historic centre. Instead of isolated interventions, these hubs combine affordable housing, shared semi public spaces, local services, ground-floor commerce and coworking facilities within specific areas.

Each hub operates as a small-scale centre of activity, capable of reinforcing social relations and generating local dynamics. Over time, these micro-centralities can expand and interconnect across the historic fabric of the city. This incremental approach allows regeneration to be monitored and adjusted as it unfolds, while also reducing the risk of speculative gentrification and abrupt social displacement.

#### **3.4.5 Accessibility**

The topography of the historic centre, that was once a defensive advantage, contributes now to its physical isolation. Steep slopes and limited accessibility and fragmented mobility systems creates a constrain in its everyday use and reinforce marginalisation.

Addressing this condition requires a shift toward soft mobility solutions that prioritise pedestrians and collective transport. Vertical connections between the Castle and the lower city, together with electric shuttle services and continuous pedestrian routes linking the centre to the *Devesa* area and the IPCB, are essential for the restoration of the urban continuity. In this context, mobility should therefore be understood not only as a technical challenge, but as a spatial tool capable of re-integrating the historic centre into the wider urban system.

#### **3.4.6 Public Life, Commerce and Culture**

The revival of public life and local commerce represents another key dimension of the Enable strategy. Ground floors play a crucial role in this process and should be activated through incentives for local businesses, creative initiatives and temporary uses. These interventions reinforce the historic centre as a place of gathering, everyday exchange and social interaction.

At the same time, heritage must be approached as a dynamic cultural landscape rather than a fixed object of preservation. Through interpretative routes, public art, cultural programming and participatory initiatives, the historic centre can be continuously reinterpreted. This approach allows collective memory to remain present while accommodating contemporary forms of use and expression.

#### **3.4.7 Long-Term Implementation**

The implementation of this strategy depends on an integrated governance structure capable of coordinating public authorities, academic institutions, private actors and local communities. A dedicated regeneration unit focused on the historic centre could support planning, funding, monitoring and participatory processes, ensuring coherence between housing, mobility, economic development and cultural policies.

Rehabilitation must be understood as a long-term and adaptive process rather than a finite and pinpointed project. Only through continuity and flexibility can the historic centre of Castelo Branco gradually recover its role as a functional, social and symbolic reference within the city.

### 3.4.8 Strategic Synthesis Framework

The Enable phase is guided by a central idea: urban centrality can only be restored by bringing life, function and connectivity back into the historic centre.

This idea is translated into an integrated approach that connects identified problems, guiding objectives, instruments and expected outcomes. The main goal is to re-centring the city by prioritising housing.

From this objective, four related instruments were defined:

- Affordable housing, as an active instrument capable of reorienting demographic flows and supporting urban regeneration;
- Productive spaces and coworking environments, supporting new forms of work and economic diversification;
- Urban hubs, structuring regeneration through progressive and spatially defined clusters;
- Soft mobility and accessibility, reconnecting the historic centre to the rest of the city.

Together, these instruments are expected to contribute to demographic renewal, functional diversity, economic activation, improved spatial continuity and a stronger urban identity. This synthesis does not propose a finished project, but a guiding structure for the phased interventions to be developed in Project II.

### 3.4.9 Considerations and Key outcomes

The Enable phase brings together the main conclusions of this research. First of all, it becomes clear that the rehabilitation of the historic centre of Castelo Branco cannot be achieved through isolated physical interventions, symbolic actions or tourism-oriented strategies alone. Instead, and more importantly, it requires a redefinition of the centre's functional role within the city. In other words, the historic centre needs to function again as a lived, productive and socially active urban space.

For this reason, re-inhabitation is identified as the main driver of regeneration. Without a stable and diverse residential base, it is difficult to sustain economic activity, public life or long-term heritage preservation. Also, the lack of permanent residents contributes directly to the functional emptiness currently observed in the historic core. The introduction of affordable housing aimed at young families, young professionals and remote workers responds directly to this condition. Housing is therefore not treated as a passive land-use category, but rather as an active instrument capable of supporting everyday life and re-centering social and economic dynamics.

At the same time, the Enable phase highlights the importance of new forms of work for inland historic cities. As work patterns change, and as remote and hybrid models become more common, the historic centre gains the possibility to accommodate productive activities once again. The integration of coworking spaces and creative environments allows economic activity to coexist with heritage, while also reducing dependence on seasonal tourism or occasional cultural events. In this sense, work becomes another factor that supports daily use and continuity.

Another outcome of the Enable phase is the definition of progressive regeneration through urban hubs. By concentrating housing, workspaces, services and shared spaces within specific clusters, regeneration can be implemented incrementally. This approach allows for adjustment over time and supports social continuity. It also helps to limit speculative dynamics by distributing change gradually across the historic fabric.

Mobility and accessibility also emerge as decisive conditions for success. The historic centre's isolation, reinforced by topography and existing infrastructure, continues to limit its everyday use. Because of this, the Enable phase treats mobility as a central urban issue rather than a technical one. By prioritising soft mobility and vertical connections, accessibility becomes a tool for re-establishing functional continuity between the historic centre, the *Devesa* area, the IPCB and the rest of the city.

Finally, the Enable phase confirms the need to move from heritage conservation to heritage activation. The value of the historic centre is not preserved through immobilisation, but through continuous use and reinterpretation. Cultural routes, public spaces, creative practices and everyday activities all contribute to keeping heritage present in daily life. In this way, the historic centre functions as a living landscape of memory rather than as a static object.

In conclusion, the Enable phase frames the historic centre of Castelo Branco not as a declining relic, but as a strategic resource for urban regeneration. Through housing, productive activity, improved accessibility and cultural activation, the centre can gradually recover its role as the functional, social and symbolic heart of the city.

## **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

This work was developed as an analytical and strategic support for Project I. For this purpose, the DIVE methodology was applied to understand the historical evolution, functional changes and main vulnerabilities of the historic centre of Castelo Branco. The analysis carried out throughout the work provides the basis for the conclusions presented in this chapter.

This document does not propose a final design solution. Instead, it defines a working basis and a set of guiding principles that will support the development of the next project phase. For this reason, the conclusions should not be understood as an end point. Instead, they establish a starting position for future design decisions, spatial strategies and programmatic choices.

The analysis confirms that the historic centre is not a declining or obsolete area. However, its current condition reflects a long process of functional displacement and loss of everyday use. The historic centre can therefore be understood as a hidden urban resource. Its reactivation depends on the reintroduction of life, uses and regular presence. In this context, the loss of centrality is not a fixed condition, but a situation that can be addressed through project-based strategies

### **4.1 Main Findings**

The historic centre of Castelo Branco has progressively lost its role as the city's functional and social core. This process is mainly associated with the relocation of administrative, commercial and institutional activities to peripheral areas. As a result, depopulation, population ageing, building vacancy and reduced urban vitality have become increasingly evident.

Several public-space requalification projects have improved the image and environmental quality of the historic centre. However, these interventions have not been sufficient to restore everyday life. For this reason, centrality is not understood as a matter of location or heritage value alone, but as a result of use, presence and daily occupation. This issue remains central to the project.

The analysis also shows that housing, work, mobility and public life are closely connected. Without permanent residents and regular users, the historic centre cannot sustain local commerce, services or collective spaces. In practice, these effects become visible over time, especially in areas with high vacancy rates.

### **4.2 Contributions to Project II**

The main contribution of Project I is the definition of a conceptual and methodological base that supports the development of Project II. In this sense, Project I functions as a preliminary phase.

Through the application of the DIVE methodology, adapted to the context of Castelo Branco, this work defines a step-by-step approach to phased urban rehabilitation. This approach links historical analysis, territorial diagnosis and general strategic direction. For this reason, it

establishes a structure that will be translated, in Project II, into a *Manual Estratégico de Intervenção Faseada*, organised by time horizons, technical actions and evaluation indicators.

Finally, this project provides the conceptual structure for the additional phases to be developed in Project II, including the Phased Action Plan and the Evaluation System. This establishes the transition from analysis to application and from strategy to monitoring.

### **4.3 Recommendations for Practice**

The development of Project II should follow the principles defined in Project I. These principles should be translated into clear and operational actions.

For this reason, the *Manual Estratégico* should organise interventions into short, medium and long-term phases. This organisation allows the municipality and local stakeholders to act progressively. Each phase should define physical, functional and environmental interventions, identify responsible entities and indicate possible urban and financial instruments.

It is also recommended that the manual integrates technical, social and environmental dimensions. Rehabilitation should therefore not be limited to structural repair alone. It should also promote housing reoccupation, functional diversity, accessibility and public life. In this context, particular attention should be given to affordable housing, productive reuse and soft mobility. This aspect is taken up again in Project II.

The manual should also adopt a clear and accessible visual language. The use of diagrams, phased maps and simplified schemes can support communication with technicians, decision-makers and local communities.

### **4.4 Future Research and Project development**

Project II represents the direct continuation of the present work. While Project I focuses on analysis and structure, Project II will focus on application and testing. This transition marks an important step in the development of the overall methodology.

Future work will involve the design of a phased intervention plan, supported by spatial representations, timelines and monitoring tools. In practice, this will allow the proposed approach to be tested and adjusted over time.

Beyond Project II, further research may explore the application of this methodological model in other medium-sized historic cities, particularly in inland contexts facing similar challenges. This issue remains open for future investigation.

## 5. Rerefences

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