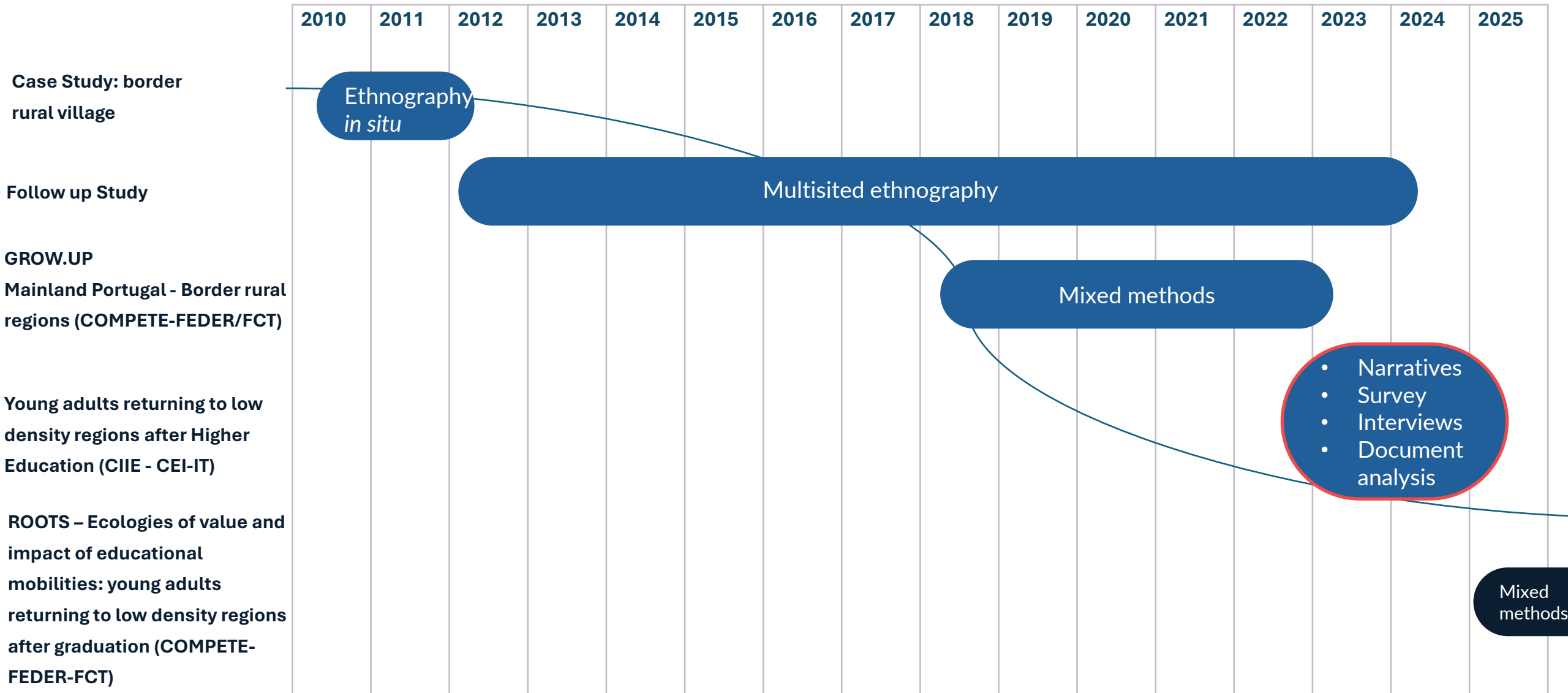


# Young women returning to rural and low density regions: ecologies of investment

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# RESEARCHING YOUNG PEOPLE GROWING UP IN LOW DENSITY AND BORDER REGIONS: MOBILITY



2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025

Case Study: border rural village

Ethnography *in situ*

Follow up Study

Multisited ethnography

GROW.UP  
Mainland Portugal - Border rural regions (COMPETE-FEDER/FCT)

Mixed methods

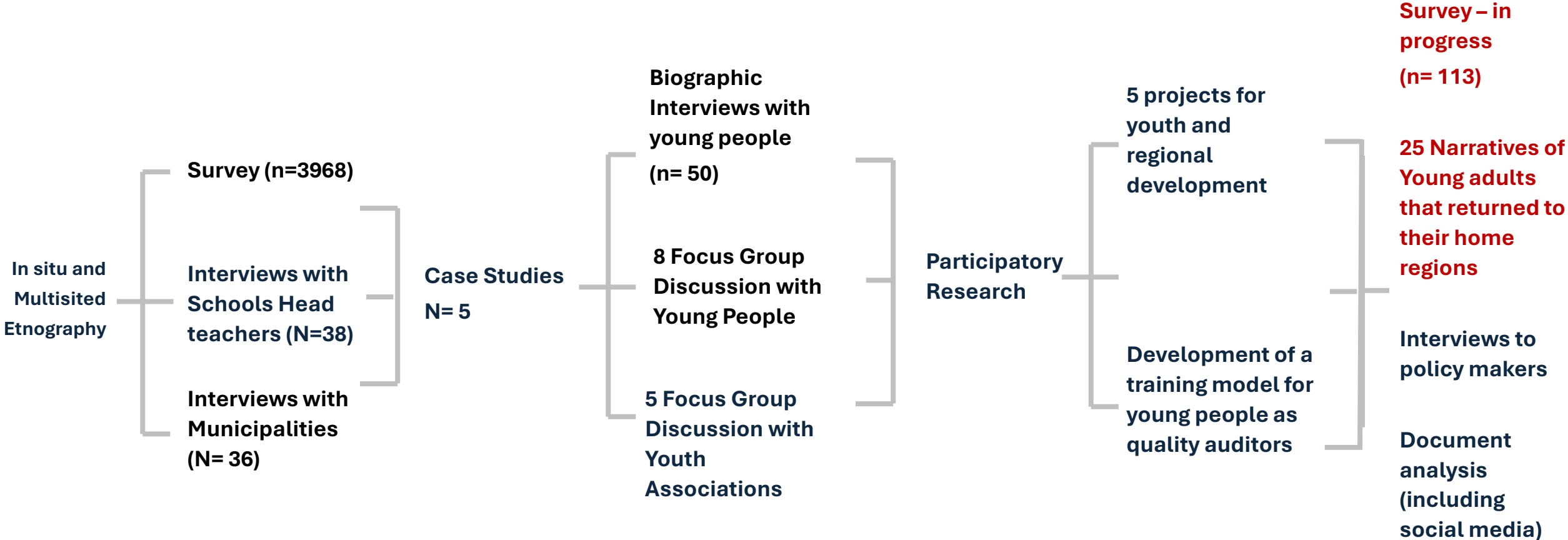
Young adults returning to low density regions after Higher Education (CIIE - CEI-IT)

- Narratives
- Survey
- Interviews
- Document analysis

ROOTS – Ecologies of value and impact of educational mobilities: young adults returning to low density regions after graduation (COMPETE-FEDER-FCT)

Mixed methods

# RESEARCH DESIGN



# PROJECT: YOUNG GRADUATES RETURNING TO THEIR HOME REGIONS

1. To analyse patterns of internal migration and interregional mobility of young people.
2. To investigate the motivations behind young adults' decisions to return to their regions of origin after higher education, exploring emotional, economic and social factors.
3. To understand the adaptation strategies adopted by young people returning to their regions to cope with the constraints existing in those regions.
4. Map the main areas of investment, identifying sectors with an economic, social and cultural impact.
5. To explore the relationship between young people and their regions of origin, including issues of an emotional nature, when they leave to pursue higher education and decisions to return.
6. Assess the role of young people who return in the socio-economic development of their regions, analysing their impact on different areas of growth.
7. Identify and analyse local policies and initiatives that encourage the return and settlement of qualified young people and suggest new action strategies that could strengthen these movements.

# **FOCUS OF THIS PRESENTATION**

**Experiences of young women who return to their home region after graduation to invest in their life and professional projects.**

# EMOTIONAL GEOGRAPHIES, MOBILITY AND MEANINGFUL PROJECTS

- Young people's and young adults' relationship with their regions, their sense of belonging and attachment are some of the reasons for their returning; Individual perceptions about a place affect their sense of belonging to this space. Young people from *peripheral* regions have a multi-dimensional relationship with their home regions that are equally meaningful and contribute to place attachment (Hörschelmann, 2018)
- Mobility is part of their biographies and of regional social practices. Research on youth mobility has made substantial contributions to our understanding of young people's relationships with place, decisions regarding their future and leaving, staying, or returning to their home regions. Concepts such as mobility capacity, mobility imperative, or mobility requirement have been developed in order to account for mobility patterns and drivers (Silva et al., 2021).
- Women are more likely to put down roots in a rural area if their professional project is directly linked to that region and are meaningful (Baylina & Roó-Zárate, 2020).

Baylina, M.; Rodó-Zárate, M. Youth, activism and new rurality: A feminist approach. *J. Rural Stud.* **2020**, *79*, 189–196.

Hörschelmann, K. (2018). Unbound emotional geographies of youth transitions. *Geographica Helvetica*, *73*, 31-42. <https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-73-31-2018>.

Silva, S. M. d., Silva, A. M., Cortés-González, P., & Brazienn, R. (2021). Learning to Leave and to Return: Mobility, Place, and Sense of Belonging amongst Young People Growing up in Border and Rural Regions of Mainland Portugal. *Sustainability*, *13*(16), 9432. <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/16/9432>.

# RURAL VALUE AND TIES: THEORIES EXPLAINING THE RETURN OF GRADUATES

- Trend reversal in the appreciation of rural areas in environmental and cultural dimensions (Dolci et al., 2019)
- Non-material motivations.
- Collective logics and ties can explain the return, in contrast to the traditional formulas for explaining mobility, which are based on individual logics (Rérat, 2014):

‘the decision to return is more than simply a logical output of the labour market. Attachment and sense of belonging to the region, for example, are central; the rural living environment and quality of life are also part of the narrative of return- ing migrants’ (p. 83).

# DATA FOR THIS PRESENTATION

## SURVEY

**Questionnaire** distributed to young adults who have returned to their home region after graduating from university ( $n=113$ , of which 65.5% were female and 34.5% were male)

Silva, S.M.; Faria, S. (2023). *Questionnaire on socio-educational mobility for young people in low-density regions*. FPCEUP: Porto

Two scales from a previous questionnaire (Silva & Silva, 2016) and four scales on young adults returning to their regions of origin after higher education training.

### Structure:

- Socio-demographic data
- Motivations for leaving your region
- Experiences in higher education and ties to the context of origin
- Motivations for returning to their region of origin after higher education
- Perception of contribution to regional development
- Sense of belonging to the community (Silva & Silva, 2016)
- Resilient communities (CRS-Y\* Silva et al., 2022)

Silva, Sofia Marques da, Silva, Ana Milheiro, Faria, Sara, & Nata, Gil (2022). *Development and validation of a Community Resilience Scale for Youth (CRS-Y)*. *PLoS ONE*, 17(8): e0269027. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0269027>

Silva, Ana Milheiro, & Silva, Sofia Marques da (2022). Development and validation of a scale to measure the resilience of schools: Perspectives of young people from vulnerable and challenging territories. *Improving Schools*, 25(3), 260–275. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480221991742>

## BIOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS

Participants: young adults - 22-45 years old

### Structured according to the following subtopics:

- Youth and educational experiences before entering higher education: decision-making for further studies and educational choices
- Transitions to higher education and expectations.
- Experience of higher education and links with regions of origin.
- Decisions that led to their return, their role in the development of their regions and challenges.

### Analysis

Simple descriptive analyses and student's t-tests for independent samples were performed using SPSS (version 30) for MacOS.

Thematic analysis

# RESULTS SURVEY

YOUNG PEOPLE RETURNING LOW DENSITY REGIONS AFTER  
GRADUATION

# MOTIVATIONS TO RETURN BY GENDER (I)

Variables ( <i>range 0-5</i> )	Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>P</i>
1. when I left my region to study, I already intended to return	F	74	2.84	1.836	<i>Ns</i>
	M	39	2.62	1.756	
2. I returned because I felt I had a responsibility to my region	F	74	1.72	1.609	<i>Ns</i>
	M	39	2.23	1.709	
3. I returned to help my family	F	74	2.22	1.853	<i>Ns</i>
	M	39	2.49	1.620	
4. I returned because I felt out of place in other contexts	F	74	1.30	1.602	<i>Ns</i>
	M	39	1.59	1.446	
5. I returned because I felt oppressed in other contexts	F	74	.82	1.378	<i>Ns</i>
	M	39	.67	1.221	
6. I came back because I feel safer in my region	F	74	2.18	1.868	<i>Ns</i>
	M	39	2.23	1.597	
7. I came back because I feel more included in my region	F	74	2.05	1.865	<i>Ns</i>
	M	39	2.10	1.774	
8. I returned because of the quality of life in my region	F	74	3.35	1.824	<i>Ns</i>
	M	39	3.51	1.604	
9. I came back because of the social ties I have with the region	F	74	3.12	1.820	<i>Ns</i>
	M	39	3.49	1.393	
10. I came back because I feel that this is where I belong	F	74	3.11	1.847	<i>Ns</i>
	M	39	3.28	1.605	<i>Ns</i>

# MOTIVATIONS TO RETURN BY GENDER (II)

Variables ( <i>range 0-5</i> )	Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>DP</i>	<i>P</i>
<b>17.I'm attracted to rural life</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>2.07</b>	<b>1.875</b>	<b>.043</b>
	<b>M</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>2.82</b>	<b>1.819</b>	
18.I consider my return to my region to be a sign of failure	F	74	.58	1.205	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	.64	1.347	
19.My return is more valued because I have qualifications	F	74	2.12	1.790	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	2.51	1.805	
20.I had several life choices, but I chose to go back	F	74	2.50	1.903	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	3.03	1.799	
21.I have always felt that my field of study has made it easier for me to return to my region	F	74	1.76	1.750	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	2.23	1.693	
<b>22. I think my region has many attractions for those who want to settle here.</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>1.88</b>	<b>1.663</b>	<b>.020</b>
	<b>M</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>1.675</b>	
23. Before deciding to move back to my region, I considered other possibilities	F	74	2.34	1.769	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	2.95	1.761	
24. My region offers a range of services and public goods that are important for those who want to settle here	F	74	2.11	1.593	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	2.51	1.715	
25. My region needs to invest in support for young people who want to return or settle down	F	74	3.78	1.474	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	4.21	1.128	

# SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE COMMUNITY BY GENDER

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P
1. I feel I belong to my community	F	74	3.84	1.098	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	4.08	1.085	
2. It's family that makes me connected to this region	F	74	4.09	1.009	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	4.15	.988	
3. it's my friends that make me connected to this region	F	74	3.45	1.229	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	3.62	1.138	
4. it's the school that makes me connected to this region	F	74	1.81	1.094	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	2.03	1.112	
5. the culture and history of this region are part of who I am	F	74	3.55	1.326	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	3.95	1.025	
6. This region limits my life opportunities	F	74	2.54	1.184	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	2.79	1.260	
7 Being from a rural region is an advantage	F	74	2.86	1.338	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	3.08	1.178	
8. There are advantages to living in the inlands	F	74	3.36	1.267	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	3.69	1.195	
9. As a young person, I have a lot to give to the region where I grew up	F	74	3.42	1.293	<b>.002</b>
	M	39	4.10	.995	
10. I feel that I have to contribute so that the traditions of my region don't disappear	F	74	3.31	1.334	<b>.006</b>
	M	39	3.97	1.112	
11. I'm far away from everything that's important to a young person	F	74	1.92	1.070	<i>ns</i>
	M	39	2.41	1.352	
12. Living in the interior of the country means being far away from everything	F	74	2.53	1.274	<i>Ns</i>
	M	39	2.49	1.467	

# PERCEPTIONS ON RESILIENT COMMUNITIES BY GENDER

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P
1. There are several initiatives in my region to help young people in their life paths	F	74	2.35	1.091	ns
	M	39	2.54	1.166	
2. In my community I have opportunities to organize useful actions (e.g. awareness campaigns, volunteering, etc.)	F	74	2.97	1.249	ns
	M	39	3.18	1.233	
3. People in my community take part in actions organized by young people	F	74	2.85	1.155	ns
	M	39	3.05	1.234	
4. In my community there are opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making (e.g. local assemblies)	F	74	3.08	1.144	ns
	M	39	2.79	1.196	
5. There are opportunities to participate in local initiatives	F	74	3.43	1.074	ns
	M	39	3.26	1.093	
<b>6. There is a lot of mutual help between the people in my community</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>2.93</b>	<b>1.064</b>	<b>.036</b>
	<b>M</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>3.36</b>	<b>.986</b>	
<b>7. In my community people are accepted equally, regardless of their ethnicity, gender or other differences</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>2.69</b>	<b>1.084</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
	<b>M</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>1.046</b>	
8. In my region there is a very strong investment in education	F	74	2.78	1.138	ns
	M	39	2.97	1.135	
9. People in my community are worried about young people leaving the region.	F	74	2.80	1.334	ns
	M	39	3.00	1.338	

# RESULTS NARRATIVES

YOUNG PEOPLE RETURNING LOW DENSITY REGIONS AFTER  
GRADUATION

# INVESTMENT IN PROJECTS WITH DISTINCTIVE BRANDS AND PLACE BASED CONCEPTS

**Marcia (38) – Social Work** – Went to study in a regional university, but away from home. Always wanted to work in a big city, but ended up in her home village, managing a day care centre and developing a beauty brand.

“Initially, no. I wasn't really thinking about staying in the village, because **there was also a stigma that if you stayed here, you'd be stuck, or you wouldn't develop.** Now, staying here, I don't feel that way. Last year **I created my own brand** - I make face creams and lipsticks from natural products, in other words, everything natural”

**Rose (43) – Sports** - Grew up with her grandmother in a village; went to study in a university located in an urban area. After HE had different jobs; returned to her home region to open a business in a family farm related to mind and body wellness.

“Well, **I'm building my gym from scratch now**; a gym in a farm, which used to be my parents' farm. It's all glazed and faces outwards, with the possibility of TRX training outside, with the possibility of training inside. The roof will be landscaped, so we'll also have a slab on top for training. **It's all geared more towards the outdoors, a different concept. I've got myself into this madness, I hope it's a good madness, we'll see. I'd really like to be a reference,** and for it to be said, in a while, **that my gym isn't just a gym,** that it's a place where you train your body and a place where you free your mind and open up horizons. **That's my great utopia.** Will it get there? We'll see.”

# INVESTMENT IN HIGH QUALITY AND EMPOWERING PROJECTS

**Marisa (33) Teaching**– Went to study in a big city and didn't want to return right after the graduation. Traveled to other European countries try professional experiences. When she returned she had the opportunity to work in a community music Project.

“Today I think the community recognise that if it weren't for us, there would be a huge gap in the cultural offer. **They recognise the quality.** Especially when it comes to music, they say: I don't know the artist but if it has your name underneath I'll like it. The same goes for theatre, for exemple. So, I think it ends up being a **stamp of quality** attached to what we do and I think people recognise that today. It's been 8 years of this project”

**Inês (30) – Civil Engineering** – Went to study in a urban area. Went back imediatly after graduation to her home region. Works in the field of engeneering and it is very involved in cultural projects, that started before going to HE.

“As far as the philarmonic band is concerned, I'm on the board. In the last term, the president invited me to be vice-presidente. **I told the presidentt that it was essential to bring more women onto the board, and to give young people a voice.** If the band is made up of so many generations, young people are also fundamental to being heard. It's important for an association to be intergenerational, without a doubt”

# INVESTMENT IN PROJECTS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE: COMMUNITY AND FAMILY

**Mafalda (35) - Communication** – Went to study in a university located in a urban area . Very much attached to her home region, family and friends. Involved in the community thorgh diferente cultural projects. It started as a hobbie and it is now her job.

“The idea was always to leave, but at the same time I was maintaining this connection with a cultural Project, even though it wasn't formalised and things were growing in parallel with my profession, until there was a need to make a choice. Obviously, my mother didn't understand very well because, we were taking on a project that we didn't know how it was going to progress. It was a risk that we took, of course. I was still very young, **but I already believed that I could make a difference here** and it was that decision that made me stay here. **It is a mission.** But yes, there was a period when I was trying to leave”

**Luana (Psychology)** – Went to study in a university in the inlands, but away from her home region. After graduation, went to work in diferent places, mainly in the Centre and South of Portugal.

“My parents have a company and my father is already retired, my mother also helps out in the company and gives a lot of support to it and I decided to come and risk everything in V., and my goal was **to take over my parents' company and upgrade it**”

“For example, this year at the associativo, we created the **women's volleyball project** and this was possible because most of the staff are people who do a lot of **voluntary work**. A local person wanted to be a volleyball coach, he came to the association and we all helped and created the women's volleyball team”

# ADDED VALUES: TIME, COSTS, COMMUNITY

“I actually think it's becoming more and more appealing to go inland than to the seaside or the big cities. Not just because of the pace of life, which in my opinion we have a much healthier pace of life than cities. I teach eight classes a day, **but I still have a lot of free time**. If I was in Porto doing these eight classes a day, the rest of my free time would be spent travelling around trying to solve one little thing”. (Rose)

“I also think we have a better quality of life, because the costs here are cheaper. And I have the possibility of having a farm and I gather the products from the land: potatoes, cabbage, carrots... I hardly buy these things and I give them to my closest friends. And these things are added value, more attractive. (Marcia)

“I think we have extremely good conditions. The municipality is beautiful. I feel good and happy here” (Inês)

“I also returned because it's a quiet town and we have the mountains and the sea very close by and I really like sport so I really like walking up to the mountains and going to the beach for a walk and sunbathing” (Luana)

# ADDED VALUES: HERITAGE, CULTURE AND PLACE ATTACHMENT

“I also like to know that we are so rich culturally, not only because of our Roman heritage, but also because of the thermal springs and the water. I'm very connected. I have a degree in sports, but I really like the tourism sector and I've done some work in the hospitality sector. And I like hosting people, I like telling stories about the place I live in and I'm proud of the place I have” (Rose)

“I needed to come to V. P., **because it really was my home, my peace, my family, my friends...**” (Inês)

“But I also came back because **in V. I have all my roots**, because I have my childhood friends. (Luana)

# SOME CONCLUSIONS

Women had higher mean levels of intention to return after leaving their regions to study when compared to men and consider less that people are considered and equally accepted by their communities. They are also less positive regarding mutual help in their communities.

Young men feel more responsible for their home region and are more attracted to rural life, possibly because they have a more positive perception of these places than young women.

Both young men and young women believe that the motivation to return is more related to the quality of life they associate with their region, as well as their sense of belonging to a place and social ties.

The results suggest that these young women do not have a romanticised view of their regions, namely an idyllic view, although they may return for emotional reasons related to family, friends or place. They return because they see a space where they can develop their project and because they attribute additional educational value to themselves in order to invest and find opportunities.

# RESULTS

## STUDY 1 – YOUNG PEOPLE ANTECIPATING STAY, LEAVE AND RETURN

Project Grow.up – Young people growing up in border regions of the Mainland Portugal

# PERCEPTIONS ABOUT LEAVING AND RETURNING STUDY 1

## GIRLS

- Those who **most intend** to go to higher education.  
 $t(3928; 3410.566)=13.047; p=.000$   
⇒ **Mean difference=.546**
- Those who **most think** about studying or working in another region.  
 $t(3922;3717.045)=9.620; p=.000$   
⇒ **Mean difference=.360**
- Those who **most believe** that in the future will need to leave the region.  
 $t(3917;3798.559)=5.795; p=.000$   
⇒ **Mean difference=.220**
- Those who consider the most that their region limits their life opportunities.  
 $t(3906;3810.131)=4,747; p=.000$   
⇒ **Mean difference=.184**

## BOYS

- Those who most like to be able to **continue studies in their region**.  
 $t(3915;3762,108)=-8,547; p=.000$   
⇒ **Mean difference=-.364**
- Those who most intend to **start working** after 12<sup>th</sup> grade.  
 $t(3901;3740,258)=-6.861; p=.000$   
⇒ **Mean difference=-.310**
- Those who agree more with the **certainty of returning**, even if they have to leave the region one day.  
 $t(3921;3841.262)=-7.038; p=.000$   
⇒ **Mean difference=-.289**

Those who **are most afraid to leave the region**.

$t(3916;3472.353)=-4,851; p=.000$   
⇒ **Mean difference=-.193**

# DISADVANTAGES OF GROWING UP IN BORDER REGIONS: motives for leaving (open question)

## As a boy

### 553 valid responses

- 270 references about disadvantages related to **local specificities**: helping parents in **agriculture**, lack of privacy, low **mobility and lack of transportation**
- 283 references to disadvantages regarding **lack of opportunities**; job market, sport, **leisure**, culture education

## As a girl

### 824 valid responses

- 399 references about disadvantages related to **local specificities**: helping with **domestic work**; **lack of privacy, gender, LGBTI discrimination**; low mobility and lack of transportation
- 425 references to disadvantages regarding **lack of opportunities**: **job market**, education, culture, **sport, shopping**

# ADVANTAGES OF GROWING UP IN BORDER REGIONS: motives for staying (open question)

## As a boy

### 847 valid answers

- **Freedom** (248)
- **Peaceful** and **safe places**, fresh air, contact with nature and clean environment (234)
- Stronger **friendships** (173)
- Less traffic, more free time (83)
- Interaction with and learning other cultures/languages and travelling to **Spain** (53)
- Other (56)

## As a girl

### 527 valid answers

- **Peaceful** and **safe places**, fresh air, contact with nature and clean environment (189)
- **Life quality** (93)
- Easier to **make friends** and more interactions (82)
- **Freedom** (63)
- More **protection** from parents (31)
- Contact with **Spain** and learning cultures and an extra language (45)
- Other (24)