# A CENTURY OF URBANIZATION IN PORTUGAL AND EUROPE: SOME INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this last chapter is to provide some international comparisons for understanding Portuguese urbanisation against a European background. In this introduction we shall present the concepts, the sources and the indicators used.[1]

Although we recognise the role and the importance of functional criteria, it is difficult to assess such qualitative characteristics in an international comparative analysis. Thus, we have decided to use the traditional demographic definition of urban centres based on the quantitative criterion of the number of their inhabitants. The choice of the size has been 100,000 inhabitants. This choice was based upon the availability of homogeneous data and the accuracy of this threshold.

Of course this is a simplifying criterion and it must be stressed that this threshold has a very different meaning at the end of the nineteenth century, when we begin our analysis, as opposed to the 1990s. In any event, in 1850 the forty largest European cities all had more than 100,000 persons; one hundred years later, in 1950, all of these centres exceeded sixfold that threshold, and today there are more than three hundred and fifty European centres above it ([Hoenberg 85], p. 227). Such a criterion provides a concrete way of looking at the urban subject.

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[1]We thank Álvaro Ferreira da Silva and Nuno Valério for bibliographical information and for discussions on this subject. We also thank Marjan Balkstein and José Maria Lopez Garcia for information on data for the Netherlands and Spain, respectively. Any errors which may remain are our own.