European Journal of Geography

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**Received:** 07/10/2024

**Revised:** 11/12/2024

**Revised:** 22/01/2025

**Accepted:** 23/01/2025

**Online:** 25/01/2025

**Special Issue:**
Spatial Humanities & Contemporary Geographical Approaches

**Guest Editors:**
Dr. Seraphim Alvanides
Dr. Joana Catarina Vieira Paulino
Dr. Alexandros Bartzokas-Tsiompras

**DOI:** 10.48088/ejg.si.spat.hum.j.pau.75.89

**ISSN:** 1792-1341

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*Research Article*

# Child Abandonment in 19th Century Lisbon: The Provenance and Distribution of Foundlings Through a GIS Lens

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**Abstract:** In Portugal, until the late 1860's, child abandonment was an anonymous, legal, and generalized practice. The *Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa* (SCML) was responsible for the guardianship of Lisbon's abandoned children, the Portuguese capital and largest city. Nevertheless, the character of such a practice led to increasing numbers. A debate then emerged and became more vigorous over the mid-century, culminating in the decree of 1867. This replaced the wheels, a wooden cylinder which rotated to allow anonymous abandonment, with controlled and justified admissions, the generalization of lactation subsidies, and policing around the institutions. Where did foundlings come from and where were they sent when raised by external wet nurses after their abandonment? Was there a spatial pattern? To produce a spatial and visual representation of this distribution and coverage to address the research questions, this analysis relies on the SCML quantitative reports and on SIGMA, a GIS-database designed to depict the evolutions in Portuguese administrative divisions. We conclude that most foundlings came from Lisbon and, in later years, from those Lisbon parishes hosting the popular and working classes, and later preferably distributed to wet nurses living in the countryside, thereby achieving the institution's goals.

**Keywords:** Foundlings' welfare policy; Child abandonment; Lisbon *Misericórdia*; Lisbon Foundling House; Foundlings' geographical provenance; Foundlings' geographical distribution; Geographic Information System

**Highlights:**

- The end of anonymous child abandonment in Portugal and a case study of 19th century Lisbon.
- The provenance of abandoned children at the municipal (Portugal) and parish (Lisbon) levels through a GIS.
- Distribution of foundlings to external wet nurses & teachers of crafts at the municipal level (Portugal) through a GIS.

## 1. Introduction

In Portugal, until the 1860's, child abandonment was an anonymous, legal, and generalized practice. The infants were placed in foundling wheels, hollow wooden cylinders located in the windows of the Foundling Houses, with a single opening which rotated on an axis, ensuring this practice was anonymous in character. The abandoner would place the child inside the wheel and ring a bell to inform the wheel attendant of the arrival of the abandoned infant. That worker would collect the child and provide him/her with initial healthcare before being sent, as soon as possible, to be raised by an external wet nurse. This welfare policy was not exclusive to Portugal and was common to other European Catholic states, such as Spain, France, and Italy (adopting a different position, Protestant Europe defended parental responsibility resulting in lower levels of child abandonment). In Lisbon, the Portuguese capital and the largest city in the Kingdom, the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa* (translated, literally, the Holy House of Mercy, henceforth the SCML), was the institution responsible for guardianship over the abandoned children and also the entity receiving the most foundlings in the Kingdom.

However, the legality of the anonymous child abandonment led to abuse, coupled with high mortality rates, and institutional debts. This instigated a debate over welfare and foundling policies, which culminated in the closure of the wheels and their replacement by controlled and justified admissions, with parents having to identify themselves, state the reason for the abandonment as well as their provenance. Additionally, other already existing mechanisms were reinforced, such as controls on pregnant women, whose names were registered by the local authorities (single, widow or married and assuming in the latter case that their husbands had not fathered the child), being mandatory to declare the birth of their son or daughter and to sustain their children in pursuit of the goal of parental responsibility. In Lisbon, the SCML implemented this new controlled reception model in late 1870.

This paper aims to analyze child abandonment in 19th century Lisbon through the lens of a Geographic Information System (GIS). This reflects on the geographical provenance of the children abandoned at the SCML and their spatial distribution across the Kingdom following their abandonment. Where were these children from? Which were their origins? After 1870, the SCML aimed to take in only Lisbon children. Was this achieved? And where were they sent to when raised by external wet nurses and crafts teachers? How did the SCML spatially organize the service to control the raising and treating of foundlings? Was there an institutional preference for sending these children to workers from particular municipalities? Were they mostly raised by rural wet nurses and crafts teachers living in the countryside as it was a SCML goal to enable more chances of foundlings being integrated into families? Was there a spatial pattern to the distribution of these children?

## 2. Literature Review

Since the 1980's, studies on child abandonment have proliferated, both published in publications and discussed at scientific meetings. They focused particularly on the 18th and 19th centuries and with Foundling Houses from European cities and regions, such as Côtes-du-Nord (Le Boulager, 2011), Paris (Fuchs, 1984), Milan (Gordi, 1974; Hunecke, 1985, 1989), Madrid (Revuelta Eugercios, 2011, 2012), Cádiz (Perez Serrano, 1991), among others, standing out geographically. In this context, studies also took place on this practice and institutions in Portuguese jurisdictions – for example, Alenquer (Reis, 1993), Braga (Sá, 1993), Coimbra (Roque, 1982; Lopes, 2000), Faro (Ferreira, 1995), Loulé (Cortes, 1991), Ponte de Lima and Alto Minho (Fonte, 2004, 2005), Oporto (Sá, 1995), Tomar (Santos, 2002), Viana do Castelo (Fonte, 1995; Tiago, 1998). Others stood out thematically, despite relating to certain countries, regions or cities. They approached the education of foundlings in Spain (Bartolomé Martínez, 1991) and Lisbon (Alves, 2013), their social integration in France (Jablonka, 2006) and in Oporto (Sá, 2000), gender importance in the act of abandoning in Italy (Kertzer, 1991), foundling mortality rates in Tarifa (Criado Atalaya, 2009) and in Italy (Kertzer, 1999), their adoption (Medina Plana, 2014), among others.

Nevertheless, there is no in-depth study on child abandonment in 19th century Lisbon, a period of change not only in the welfare system for foundlings and the transition to the new admission model, but also for the city itself. During the 19th century, Lisbon's population grew, in part due to immigration, driving urban, economic, and social change, an interesting context for the study of abandoning in this city. In fact, in the second half of the century, Lisbon was the 16th most important city in Europe and the largest and most populated in Portugal – in 1864, it accounted for 33% of the national urban population, rising to 41% in 1900. In relation to the welfare system, the city was also an exception to the overall context. For example, in Italy and France, foundling guardianship relied on brotherhoods, church authorities and lay and clergy committees, while in Spain it relied entirely on the church. In Portugal, until 1836, the central power played a major role through municipalities and *Misericórdias*. By that year, only municipalities should take the responsibility, with Lisbon becoming an exception. There, the SCML continued caring for the abandoned children.[1]

Additionally, across international and national historiography, there is no spatially focused research, applying a GIS to study and visually address the origins of these children and their distribution to wet nurses and crafts teachers. This shortcoming becomes starker when considering how recourse to GISs applied to historical research dates back to the mid-1990s enabling the integration of place, time and space and establishing what we now define as the Historical GIS. Indeed, this tool provides the means "to structure, integrate, manipulate, analyse and display data in ways that are either completely new, or are made significantly easier" (Gregory, 2007, 1), thereby unveiling historical patterns.[2]

## 3. Methods & Sources

To answer the research questions, this paper is divided into two main sections in accordance with a triple approach: qualitative, quantitative, and spatial.

Firstly, we contextualize child abandonment in 19th century Portugal, adopting Lisbon as the main case study, combining macro and micro spatial analysis. This qualitative approach relies on the study and problematization of the sources on the trends in foundling welfare, which are rich and very well preserved. These stem from government sources, such as the Ministry for Internal Affairs (in Portuguese, *Ministério do Reino*) and legislation. This also draws on local government sources, specifically Lisbon Municipal Council, as well as works by doctors and intellectuals. Institutional sources also feature prominently in our analysis, not only those from the Lisbon Royal Academy of Sciences, but especially documentation produced by the SCML, essentially, Board of Administration minutes and reports.

Those reports underpin the second study stage as they integrate geographic information (as defined by Gregory, (2007): a clearly defined location in the institutional statistics). This enables the production of visual quantitative analysis, portraying the spatial provenance of the foundlings and their later distribution throughout the kingdom. The SCML reports contain statistics on the institution's services and including the Foundling House (Figure 1). Despite first appearing in 1836, their quantitative data only became homogenous as from 1850, published every decade after that with annual data. After 1870, when parents had to justify the reasons for the abandoning and their own identities, the quantitative information becomes still more diverse and detailed. Thus, we access data regarding the characteristics and origins of foundlings and their parents at the municipal level and at the parish level for Lisbon, enabling not only study of the children's provenance but also relating their abandonment to Lisbon's growth in the second half of the 19th century.

Additionally, the chronological scope of SCML reports provides for comparisons between the distribution of foundlings before and after the ending of anonymous child abandoning in the Portuguese capital and to evaluate whether the changes on the welfare policy impacted on their geographic coverage in accordance with the SCML objective of concentrating foundlings in specific municipalities and rural areas to assure their eventual family integration.

We are thereby dealing with a 19th century subject and data with our goal to visually approach these contents through a GIS. According to Knowles, a GIS constitutes "a spatial database that integrates map-based information about the historical location of certain entities (such as census districts, industrial firms or rivers) with quantitative or qualitative information about those entities (such as population, product or level of pollution)" (Knowles, 2000, 452). Taking the historical perspective into consideration, and deploying the quantitative geographic data from SCML

[1] In the Portuguese context, there was also denser institutional geographic coverage while, for example, in Spain and Italy, their numbers were lower and concentrated in the main cities (Lopes, 2008).

[2] On the history of Historical GIS, see Knowles (2016). On the Historical GIS in Portugal, see Silveira (2014) and Alves (2016).

reports, we strive to be as accurate as possible in representing past Portuguese spatial phenomena, in reference to its original territorial units and spatial configuration.

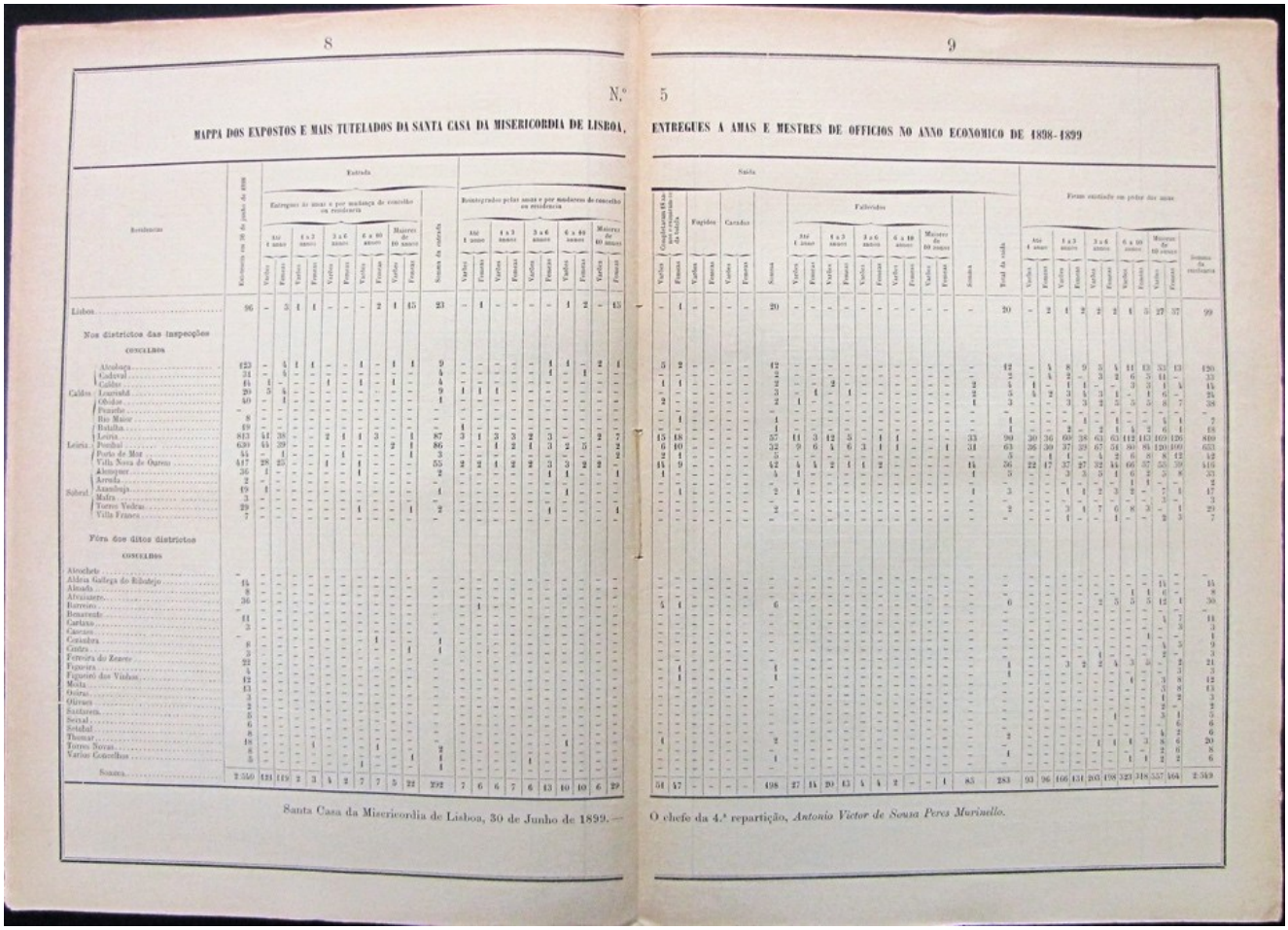

**Figure 1.** A SCML report featuring quantitative geographic data on the foundling service. Source: SCML, Relatório…, 1898-1899, 8-9.

Silveira (2001) identified two problems in studying the Portuguese population, particularly in the first half of the 19th century – the lack of credible data, and the difficulties raised by the major changes in the administrative system between 1832 and 1836 (Silveira, 2001, 9). We may also add the changes ongoing throughout the century. Focusing on the latter, as from 1993, a problem-solving solution for studies on the historical Portuguese (mainland) administrative divisions between 1758 and 2001 was developed within the scope of projects coordinated by Luís Espinha da Silveira. Entitled *SIGMA – Geographic Information System and Data Modelling Applied to the History of Portugal* (Figure 2), and its online version, *Atlas - Historical Cartography* (http://atlas.fcsh.unl.pt/cartoweb35/atlas.php?lang=en , last accessed December 3rd, 2024), this ensures recording, managing, and cartographing any information related to the system's chronological scope across the different levels of the Portuguese administrative structure (provinces, districts, municipalities, and parishes). This also allows for evolutive and comparative approaches.

By applying *SIGMA*'s geographic data as the basis for our visualization, we may cross-reference its geodata with historical sources, visually building and reinforcing historical arguments.[3] In this sense, our spatial visualization is based on the 1890 municipal and parish shapefiles produced within *SIGMA*'s scope, and the historical cartography produced by using the free QGIS software. During the 19th century, not only did the municipalities change but so did Lisbon's parishes. In 1885, a new administrative division attributed Lisbon with 10 new parishes drawn from the neighbouring municipalities of Belém and Olivais. One year later, the city integrated the Camarate and Sacavém parishes that formerly belonged to Loures. This division best matches the geographical information contained in the SCML sources, specifically in its reports (like that presented in Figure 1).

Thus, we begin by delving into the Historical GIS just as Knowles stated "that its source data typically include archival material that must be converted from analog to digital form" (Knowles, 2000, 452).

## 4. Trends in the foundling welfare policy in Portugal and the Lisbon case study

The *Ordenações Manuelinas*, a compilation of 16th and 17th century laws, stipulated that responsibility for children firstly lay with parents, followed by relatives, hospitals and hospices. In places where there were no foundling hospitals or shelters, the raising and funding of the abandoned children rested with the local authorities. When the later lacked assets, taxes were levied. Some *Santas Casas da Misericórdias* (literally,

[3] *SIGMA* has been deployed by different projects interconnecting historical phenomena with spatial analysis – for example, studies on Lisbon shopkeepers (Alves, 2010) and working classes (Alcântara, 2019) in the late 19th century, among others.

the Holy Houses of Mercy, and hereafter referred to as *Misericórdia* (singular) or *Misericórdias* (plural)), charity and welfare brotherhoods focused on helping the poor, ill, and prisoners, based on religious values (but created and protected by the royal power, as an attempt to organize welfare), voluntarily took charge of caring for foundlings by running hospitals (particularly in urban contexts), funded by the local authorities. This happened in Lisbon, the first *Misericórdia* to be created, in 1498. After 1564, the SCML started managing the capital's major hospital, Todos-os-Santos Hospital (later called São José Hospital), which hosted the Foundling House (Lopes, 1993, 501-515).

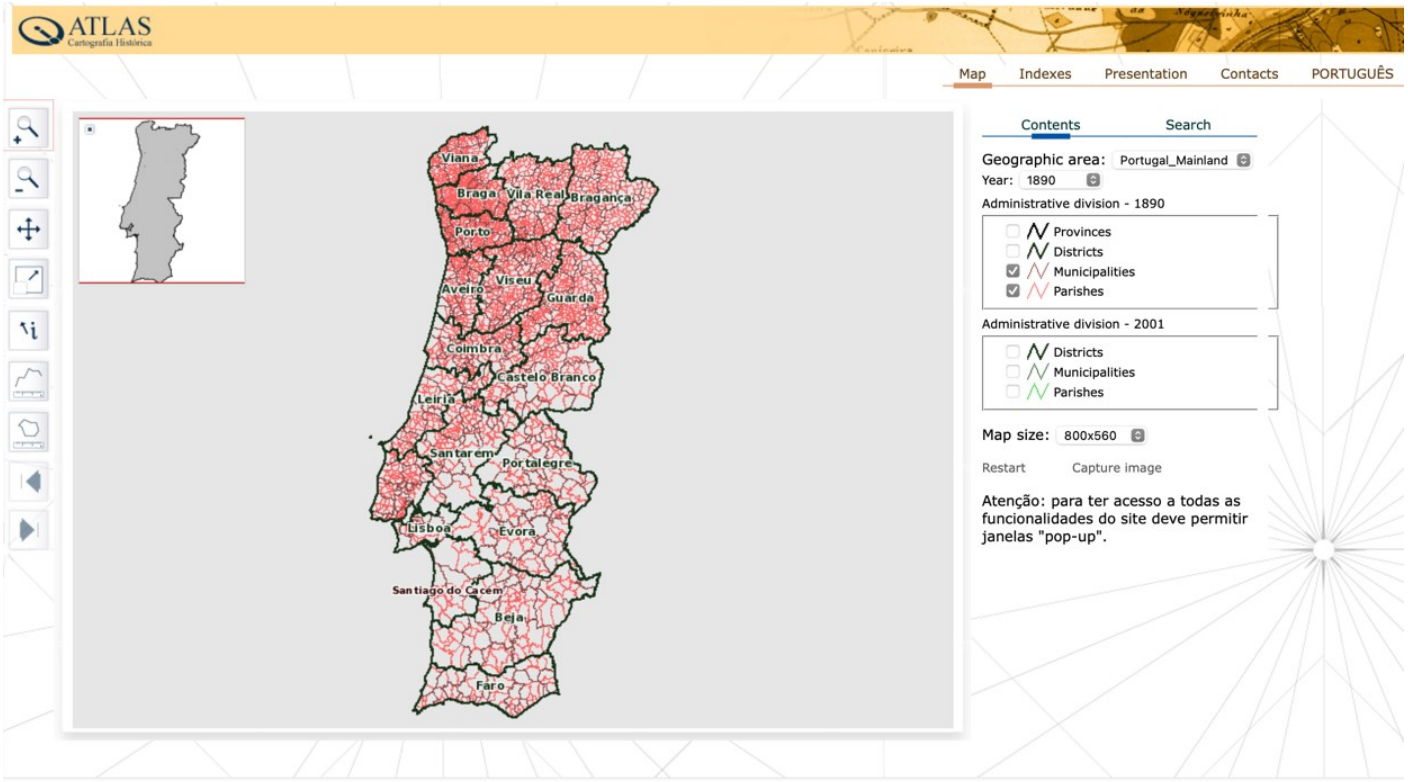


**Figure 2.** Atlas – Historical Cartography website. Source: Atlas – Historical Cartography, http://atlas.fcsh.unl.pt/cartoweb35/atlas/apresentacao-en.html (last accessed December 3rd, 2024). Screenshot taken by the author.

Considering the rise in number and high mortality rates of foundlings, in 1783, Pina Manique (1733-1805), head of the Intendancy-General of Police, ordered the setting up of Foundling Houses in all administrative capitals, equipped with wheels, thus implementing an already existing law. It was considered that practices such as abortion, infanticide, and abandonments in public places were depriving the country of individuals useful for its progress. Some years later, similar measures were applied in Spain (1796), France (1811) and in Italian cities (beginning of the 19th century) (AHACLX, Manuscritos da série vermelha, nº 21, 1783; Ariès, 1990-1991, 148; Lopes, 1993, 503).

In Lisbon, in 1783, there was already a Foundling House with a wheel in the SCML (Figure 3), plagued by economic problems, amplified by the costs of raising the children, the lack of payment by the local authorities and shortages of wet nurses due to continued delays in the payment of their salaries (Cubeiro, 2011, 10; SCML, Relatório …, 1836, 2).

In the first half of the 19th century, with the advance of the Liberal State, the government began taking responsibility for public welfare, one facet of the emerging Welfare State (Lopes, 2013, 260). Within this context, in 1836, Passos Manuel (1801-1862) uniformized the foundling service – only municipalities should be responsible for such children, ending the agreement with the *Misericórdias*. Due to its historical experience, Lisbon became an exception ("Decreto de 19 de Setembro de 1836", 8).

Both Portugal and the other European states that institutionalized the wheel experienced rises in abandonment and foundling mortality rates. A debate emerged in the first half of the 19th century, gaining in priority towards the mid-century, led by doctors (such as Francisco de Assis e Sousa Vaz (1797-1870), doctor of Oporto Foundling House, and Tomás de Carvalho (1819-1897), head nurse at the São José Hospital), politicians (like António Luís de Sousa Henriques Seco (1822-1892) and António Fructuoso Aires de Gouvia Osório (1828-1916)), and intellectuals (such as the assistant chairperson (and later chairperson) of the SCML, António Figueira e Sousa (1836-1891)). In 1862-1863, 15,385 children were abandoned in Portugal, 3,135 (20%) of them in Lisbon's Foundling House. There was a total of 52,552 foundlings in the Kingdom, 16,994 (32%) under the guardianship of the capital's institution. Indeed, between the 1849-1850 and 1869-1870 financial years (from July to June of the following year), an average of 2,609 children were abandoned annually at the SCML (Figure 4).

This debate became official in 1862 with government intervention, nominating a committee to study the problem and propose solutions. The latter were encapsulated into the November 21st, 1867 decree. This changed the welfare model – wheels and anonymity were abolished.[4]

[4] From 1835, France set up admission tribunals for its institutions and, against strong opposition from the population, the Paris foundling wheel was closed in 1862. In Spain, the debate took place later, in the early decades of the 20th century. Furthermore, the underlying reason for the closure of the Madrid foundling wheel, one of the most significant in the country, was the institution's headquarters moving (Fuchs, 1984, 42-46; Le Boulanger, 2011, 31; Pérez Moreda, 2005, 68-69; Rollet-Echalier, 1990, 65).

Instead, controlled and justified admissions, and policing around the institutions became mandatory. Furthermore, considering how poverty accounted for the main reason behind abandoning, the government was not to raise the children but rather help parents during the early years by providing breastfeeding allowances, a mechanism already existing, but which was only generalized in the second half of the 19th century (Lopes, 2016, 1-2). The goals involved promoting parental responsibility and protecting children through keeping them with their biological family (SCML, Relatório …, 1862, 4-5).

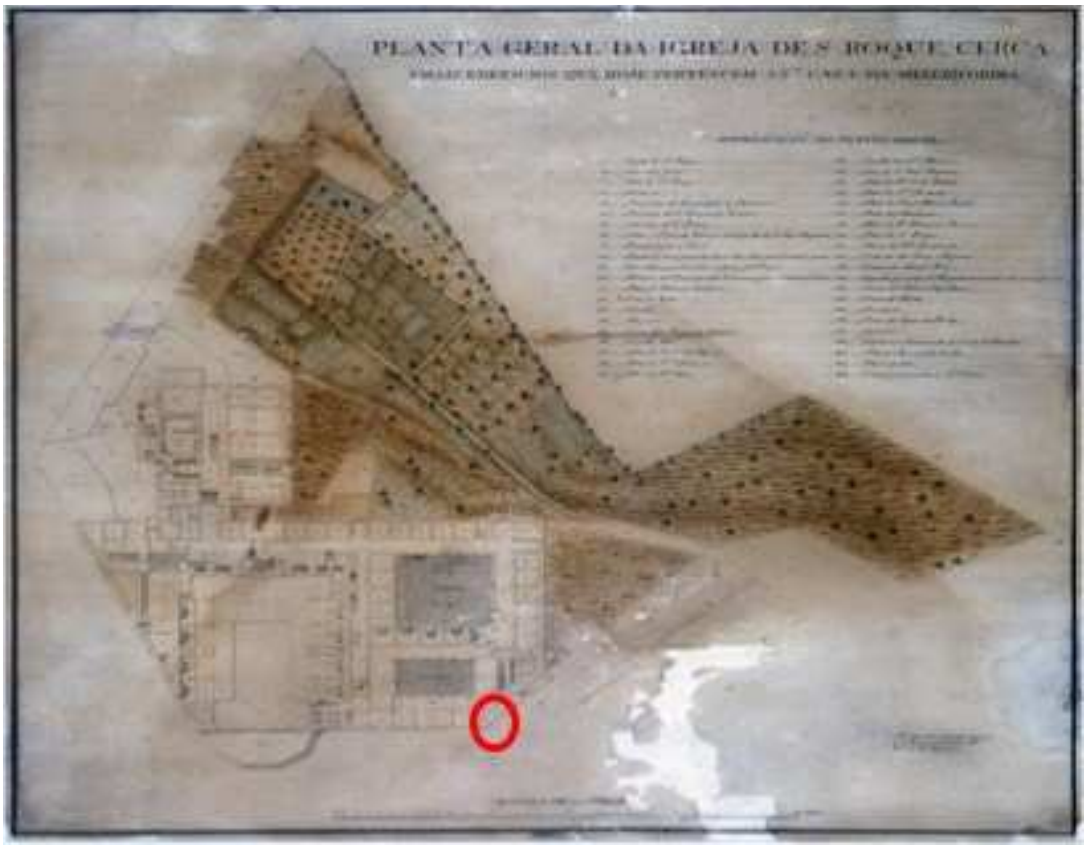


**Figure 3.** The SCML layout. The wheel was placed in the building façade (circled). Source: AHSCML, *Planta geral do edifício de São Roque*, c. 1808-1813.

Despite being revoked in early 1868, during the *Janeirinha* protest movement which toppled the government, the situation was unsustainable. Wheels were closing and the new reception model adopted throughout the Kingdom (even before 1867) ("Decreto de 14 de Janeiro de 1868", 92; Lopes, 2002, 17). Indeed, wheels in Lisbon's neighbouring municipalities were closed from 1867, with consequences for exposures rise at the SCML. In 1869-1870, 2,901 children were abandoned in the Lisbon wheel (Figure 4).

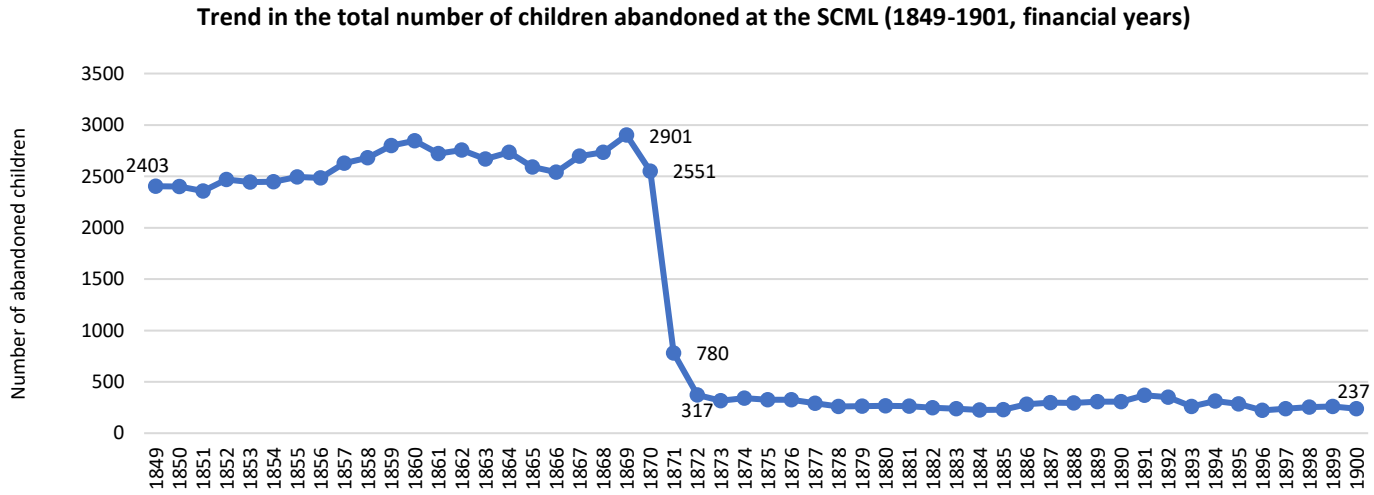


**Figure 4.** Trend in the total number of abandoned children at the SCML between 1849 and 1901. Source: SCML, Relatório …, 1850-1901.

The SCML implemented the new reception model on December 1st, 1870, when the wheel was removed and newborns began being admitted during daytime inside the institution with an employee completing a form by asking the applicant questions about parentage, the reason for abandoning, and the geographical provenance of the child (SCML, 1998, 125). In its report, the SCML stated this transition took place "with almost no setbacks" (SCML, Relatório..., 1871, 3).

According to the quantitative data presented in Figure 4, the welfare policy changes produced an immediate decrease in child abandonment. Between 1871 and 1900, the numbers represent just 10% of the average for the previous period.[5] In addition to the change in admissions, the municipalities close to Lisbon set up hospices in 1871 (Belém and Olivais, for example. See Figure 6 for their location), also contributing to lowering the number of children entering the SCML. Furthermore, the increase in the number of breastfeeding subsidies granted, served to further reduce the increase in abandonment. Those subsidized (poor married or single mothers) received 1$600 réis per month for one year alongside access to medical and pharmaceutical care (AHSCML, Livro nº 7 de atas …, 1865-1870, 124; SCML, Relatório..., 1871, 8 and 11). In 1871, 694 allowances were granted, surging to 4,961 in 1900 (SCML Relatório ..., 1850-1901), and thus enabling mothers to raise their own children.

Nevertheless, despite this quantitative improvement, the SCML still considered to be responsible for an excessively high number of foundlings and so implemented specific further measures. Admissions were restricted to children from Lisbon or whose mothers had lived in Lisbon nine months prior to the birth. A protocol was signed between the Hospital, the Foundling House and local authorities determining that mothers were to be controlled after birth by presenting themselves and their child to council administrators. In cases where they came from other municipalities, these women were escorted by the authorities after childbirth, thus making it impossible for them to leave their newborns at the SCML. Contracts were also established with police forces to reinforce policing around the institution and monetary payments of 20$000 *réis* were made to whoever helped locate those abandoning children (SCML, Relatório...,1871, 8). Various policemen took part in investigating child abandonment, mostly members of Lisbon Civil Police, founded in 1867 (on the Lisbon police force, see Gonçalves (2007) and Rollo (2020)). For example, from 1881 to 1893, the policeman Jacob da Fonseca solved nine cases with the perpetrators prosecuted and sentenced (AHSCML, Livro nº 12 de atas …, Livro nº 13 de atas …, Livro nº 14 de atas …, Livro nº 15 de atas …, 1877-1898). The SCML was not only preventing child abandoning but also moralizing Lisbon society, thus participating in a broader movement of social integrity and moralization, instigated by the central authorities. Indeed, during the 19th century and faced by Lisbon's growth and increase in population, the authorities perceived the "dangers of a moral degradation of the nation" (Gonçalves, 2007, 115) and implemented strict intervention measures.[6]

## 5. The GIS study of child abandonment in 19th century Lisbon

### *5.1. Foundlings provenances*

As referenced, the data spans the abandoning, mostly by mothers, as well as the reasons. Foundlings were mostly abandoned because the mothers lived in other households (30%) or due to child's father absence (25%) (SCML, Relatório…, 1872-1906). The first cause may relate to the ones working as servants, a common job for women, particularly in urban areas. Furthermore, these women were mostly single, unable to keep their children even if receiving an allowance. Their occupation would provide them with a place to live but did not allow for keeping the minors.

Nevertheless, on this study, one must stand out the data regarding the geographical origins of the children from the end of 1870 onwards. The quantitative SCML reports' data is presented both at a municipal level (Figure 5) and, when considering the city of Lisbon, at a parish level (Figure 6). This enables not only the identification of the origins of foundlings within the Kingdom but also whether the particular SCML measures were applied.

Figure 5 displays the provenance of children admitted by municipality in percentage terms between 1871 and 1900. Despite this institution receiving the most abandoned children, following the ending of anonymous abandonment, we may argue there was a relatively low incidence of foundlings from most Portuguese municipalities. Despite municipalities with percentages ranging from 0.01% to 0.10%, including Barreiro, Moita, Oeiras and Cascais, and even from 0.11% to 0.19%, specifically, Vila Franca de Xira and Almada, the overwhelming number of children came from Lisbon (99.03%).

Were data on provenance available for prior to the new admission model, the historical cartography produced might eventually differ, highlighting other municipalities, particularly those close to Lisbon as stressed by the institutional sources throughout the most of the century. For example, in 1853, a wet nurse received payment by the Torres Vedras Municipality to leave children from several outlying municipalities in the SCML foundling wheel (ANTT, Ministério do Reino, bdl. 4507, August 9th, 1853). This was also a reality in other European locations, such as Paris where, due to the costs of raising a child, many local institutions began discouraging admissions, with any minors dispatched to the Foundling House in the French capital (Ransel, 1988, 6). This trend underwent a significant decrease following the wheel's closure and the Lisbon institution adopting the aforementioned particular measures (see section 4).

Given Lisbon's prominence, from which parishes did foundlings come from?

The black lines in Figure 6 represent Lisbon's growth in the second half of the 19th century, particularly between 1878 and 1890, incorporating peripheral municipalities such as Belém and Olivais. In fact, the city's population was expanding to and beyond its borders in 1878.

In terms of parish of origin, foundlings from Encarnação predominate (6.90%), where the SCML was located. Its highest value may relate to an initial period when women were paid to deliver children to the institution and provided false statements or because the minors were abandoned by persons of unknown provenance. Alongside Encarnação parish, Santa Isabel (6.89%) stands out, followed by Santa Catarina (5.76%), Anjos (5.59%), and Nossa Senhora do Socorro (5.53%).

[5] Before and after the change to the admission model, 98% of the children were abandoned still living, with no display of any gender preference. This act must have been contemplated during pregnancy with the children handed in just after their birth or within a few days (SCML, Relatório…, 1861-1901), in an attempt to save their offspring, enabling their survival, perhaps even to have a better life, and considering future retrieval.

[6] The local authorities and police forces also contributed to this moralizing campaign. Hence, prostitution constituted both a sanitary and a moral problem as reflected in the public debate. This stressed the moral degradation as well as the interrelated health problems. The state intervened in efforts to regulate this practice. For example, the Lisbon Civil Government required prostitutes to register, thus creating an official record, banning them from "good" streets and implementing periodic health visits. In collaboration, the police force licensed both prostitutes and their workplaces, with daily controls, and with follow-up by doctors who recorded and inspected these women. Such measures were clearly needed given that, from 1897 to 1901, Lisbon was home to the highest number of registered prostitutes (Barreira, 2016; Gonçalves, 2007; Urbano, 2020). About prostitution in Lisbon during the 19th century, see Cruz (1984) and Pais (2008).

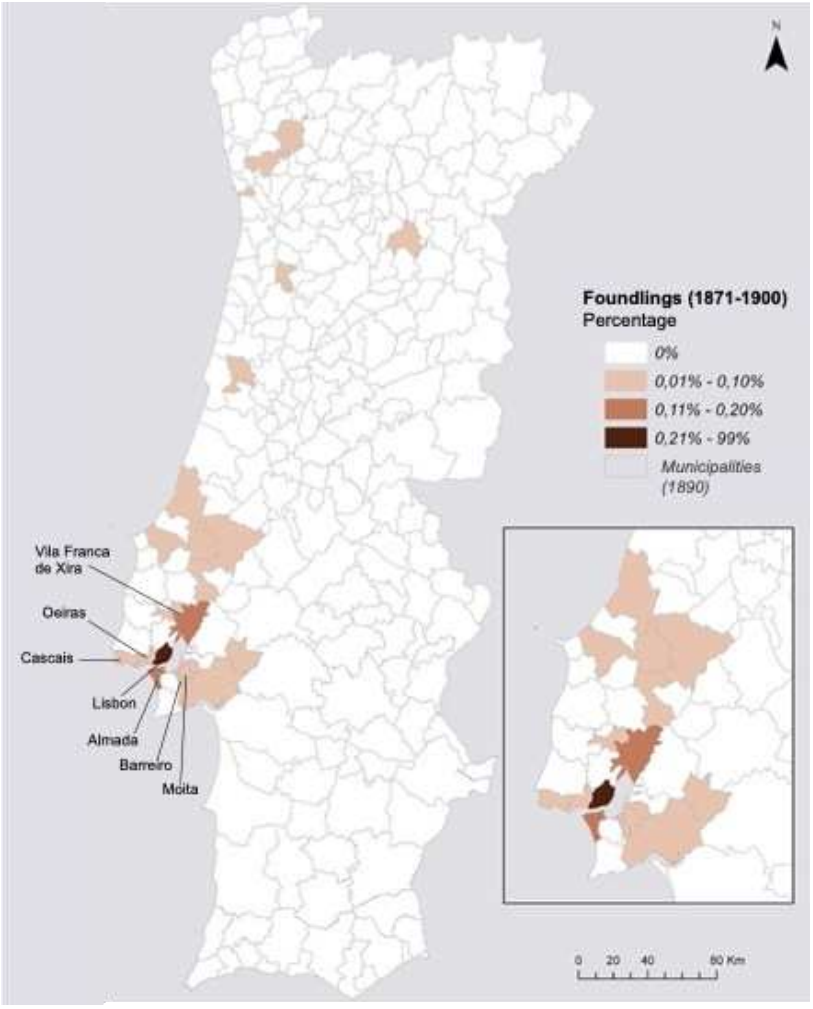


**Figure 5.** Children's provenance in percentage by municipality from 1871 to 1900. Source: SCML, Relatório…, 1871-1911.

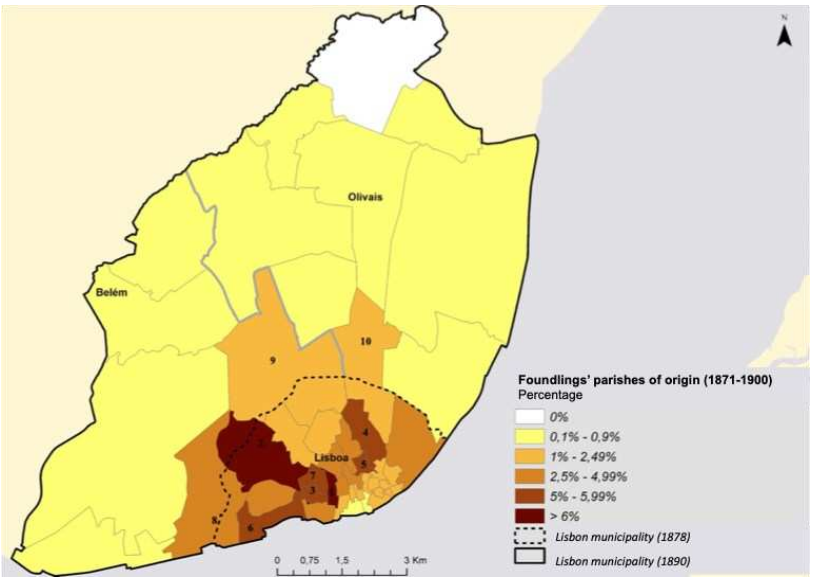


**Figure 6.** Origins of the children abandoned at the SCML by Lisbon municipal parish in percentage from 1871 to 1900. Source: SCML, Relatório…, 1871-1911. Note: 1 – Encarnação parish; 2 – Santa Isabel parish; 3 – Santa Catarina parish; 4 – Anjos parish; 5 – Nossa Senhora do Socorro parish; 6 – Santos-o-Velho parish; 7 – Mercês parish; 8 – São Pedro em Alcântara parish; 9 – São Sebastião da Pedreira parish; 10 –São Jorge de Arroios parish.

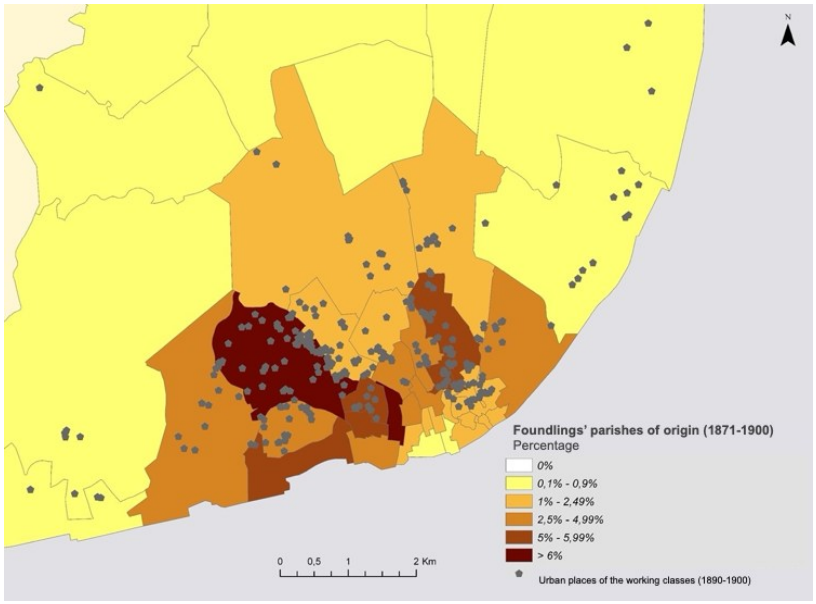


**Figure 7.** Origins of the children abandoned at the SCML by Lisbon municipal parish in percentage from 1871 to 1900 and the working class urban location from 1890 to 1900. Source: SCML, Relatório…, 1871-1901; Alcântara, 2019.

Figure 7 relates the previous data (from Figure 6) with the working class locations, studied by Alcântara (2019) in her doctoral degree, to confirm whether these children came from working class families. However, no clear relationship emerges between these two variables. On the one hand, there are parishes where no working classes lived but are the source of high numbers of foundlings. Such is the example of Encarnação and Santos-o-Velho. On the other hand, there are also parishes with a high number of working class households and low numbers of abandoned children. Furthermore, some parishes stand out for both phenomena. For example, there was a high percentage of foundlings from Santa Isabel, Anjos, and Nossa Senhora do Socorro alongside concentrations of working classes households. These geographies experienced demographic growth from 1864 to 1900 in keeping with the city's spatial expansion (see Table A1 in the Appendix). With an effective average population growth rate of 48% in Lisbon, Santa Isabel parish (128.4%) and Anjos parish (124.6%) more than doubled this. Despite a lower variation in Nossa Senhora do Socorro (54.5%), it still ranked above the capital's average.

We know that the working classes lived in these parishes, thus coherent with the information on the social characterization of the mothers abandoning their children as single, living in the households where they worked as servants. Additionally, children came from parishes where the population was increasing, making us wonder whether, as this growth migration related, the abandonments were by women from outside the capital, new residents in the city and probably lacking social integration. We always remain among the popular and working classes not only whenever referring to the social provenance of foundlings but also the wet nurses raising them who also belonged to the same class.

### *5.2. The distribution of foundlings to wet nurses and crafts teachers*

Sending children to be raised by external wet nurses was a common practice in European societies both at the private level, primarily by rich families, and also by institutions for the purposes of raising foundlings. In 18th century France, this practice generalized to all of urban society, including children from the working classes. In Paris, in 1780, out of 21,000 births only 1,000 children were breastfed by their mothers. Advancing industrialization reinforced the need to access professionalized help outside the family (Hunecke, 1985, 15-17). Foundling wet nurses ranked among the poorest of this working class, with several reasons for applying for the job – offsetting the lack of a biological son or daughter or their death; receiving a salary; or considering the future labour potential the foundling represented.

Raising foundlings was divided into stages by their age, accounting for a decrease in wet nurse salaries (received every three months) as the children got older. Until the foundling was one year old, during the breastfeeding stage, the infant was sent to a breastfeeding wet nurse, whose milk quality was examined by a SCML doctor. This worker was prohibited from either breastfeeding another child or stopping breastfeeding the foundling before the contract ended. She needed to be either married or widowed and, if already a mother, the son or daughter had to be one year old and extending breastfeeding capacities from her biological child. These were the best paid wet nurses.

The dry stage extended from the age of one to 10. Wet nurses needed to have sufficient means of subsistence and their good behaviour testified by the local authorities. Breastfeeding wet nurses could keep the foundling they were raising and move onto the next stages. At the age of seven, the minor should be in education. Should he/she learn to read, write, and count, the wet nurse would receive a gratification. This was easily controlled by the SCML when children were raised by wet nurses in the capital. However, when they were located in rural areas, the SCML recognized the difficulties of controlling whether the children attended school (SCML, Relatório..., 1862, 7).

The clothing term spanned the stage from 10 to 16 years old, when wet nurses were chosen with care, displaying exemplar behaviours, and following Christian principles. Foundlings might learn crafts or develop professional activities according to their gender. In fact, it was common for foundling boys to be sent to crafts teachers to develop their skills (particularly tasks and occupations that might turn into a future job). As for females, when in Lisbon, they started working as servants at an early age as there was sustained demand for this service.

The wet nurses duties were well defined. For example, in Lisbon context, these women had to present the foundlings in the SCML whenever requested. They needed to take care of them as their own biological son or daughter, vaccinating and taking them to the doctor in case of illness. Whenever not wanting to keep the foundling, the latter had to be reinstitutionalized and sent to another external wet nurse (ANTT, Ministério do

Reino, bdl. 4507, Deveres das amas residentes fora de Lisboa…). From the moment of abandoning, the life course of these children was marked by spatial mobility.

According to a medical speech, following their abandoning at the institution, the goal was to dispatch the minors as soon as possible to be raised by external wet nurses, particularly to those living in the countryside in the belief they had better housing conditions, and the children would grow up healthier, becoming more robust and active among the fresh air, despite then receiving weaker levels of schooling. Additionally, they would be integrated into the families of wet nurses. For example, the Madrid Foundling House sent children to Spanish provinces from 1890 to 1935, particularly to those closer to the capital, aiming to concentrate foundlings in those locations. In Toledo, the goal of children being raised by rural wet nurses and the economic needs of these families received explicit recognition (Martín Espinosa, 2012, 461-462; Pérez Moreda, 1996, 145 and 156-157; Revuelta Eugercios, 2011, 341-342). In Portugal, a similar tendency was studied by Lopes for the Coimbra Foundling House (2000) and by Cortes for Loulé (1991).

Following this believe, the SCML perceived Lisbon wet nurses as living in houses with poor hygiene and with a high number of foundlings they raised later reinstitutionalized, resulting in a lack of family integration (SCML, Relatório…, 1861, n. p.). Reinforcing this thesis, the SCML chairman at the time of adopting the new admissions model, António Figueira e Sousa, Count of Rio Maior, stated that "foundlings in the countryside develop better than anywhere else, rarely being retrieved by the House; don't gain much fortune or attentive education; but do earn the relationships and the family the wheel took away from them, and participate in the luck of their breastfeeding brothers, the majority of the population; furthermore living in the countryside counters, as is well known, the physical problems existing, and tending to concentrate in the major cities" (Conde de Rio Maior, 1866, 80-81).

The advantages and benefits of raising children outside the city of Lisbon is clearly conveyed in Figures 8 and 9, with greater concentration outside the capital. To better monitor the children in its care, the SCML set up inspection districts with payment offices in the 1840's. This system spanned the three districts home to the most foundlings and where the institution sought to concentrate them – Sobral, Caldas da Rainha, and Leiria (see Figures 8 and 9 black lines). Here, there were inspectors, who paid wet nurses' salaries on specified days while visiting and inspecting children on the others, assuring their good development and treatment. In Lisbon, there was also a payment office in the SCML building and a visit system (SCML, Relatório…, 1861; SCML, Relatório…, 1862, 9).

Wet nurses from rural areas or small localities commonly raised more than one abandoned child, reflecting how important this activity was to their household income. Hence, this brought about an exchange between the city and the countryside. The benefits were mutual – while the urban space sent surplus population, the countryside saw its population increase alongside the additional income from raising the abandoned children (Kertzer, 1991, 20; Sá, 1992, 119-121). Despite this preference, the SCML identified some drawbacks related to the geographical distance, specifically, the difficulties in controlling and caring for the foundlings. Nevertheless, it aimed to overcome these by recruiting new employees and clustering the foundlings in certain areas (SCML, Relatório…, 1861, n. p.). We must also add other inconveniences, such as the mortality of children placed in rural areas as well as the inconstancy of the women applying as wet nurses, a job which strictly related to supply and demand, in conjunction with the increase in their salaries.

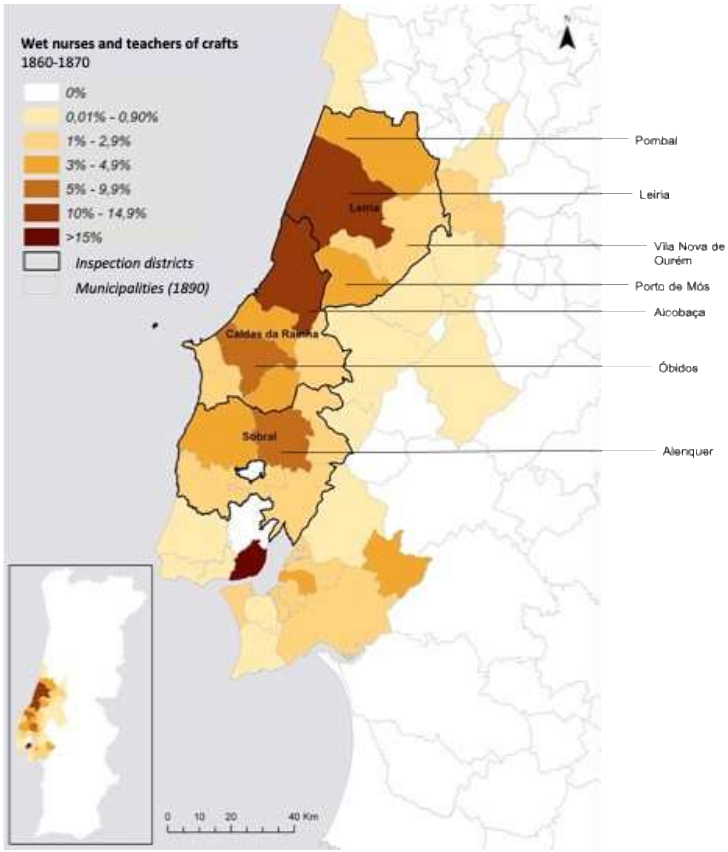


**Figure 8.** Children abandoned at the SCML raised by external wet nurses and crafts teachers by municipality in percentage from 1860 to 1870. Source: SCML, Relatório…, 1861-1871. Note: 1 – Leiria municipality; 2 – Pombal municipality; 3 – Vila Nova de Ourém municipality; 4 – Alcobaça municipality; 5 – Porto de Mós municipality; 6 – Óbidos municipality; 7 – Alenquer municipality; 8 – Lisbon municipality.

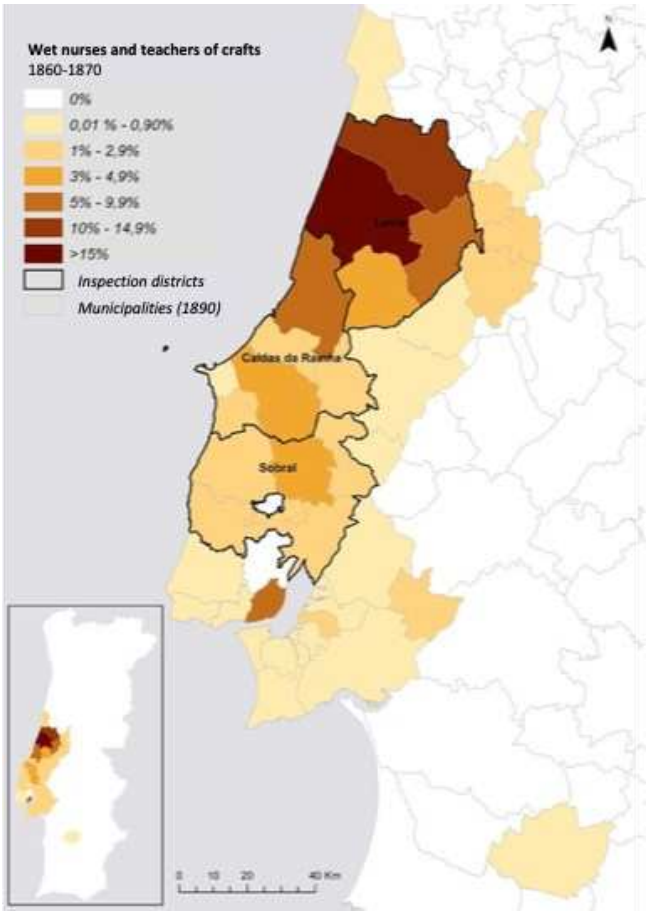


**Figure 9.** Children abandoned at the SCML raised by external wet nurses and crafts teachers by municipality in percentage from 1871 to 1900. Source: SCML, Relatório…, 1861-1901.

Figures 8 and 9 highlight the spatial pattern underlying children's distribution. Foundlings were concentrated in those wet nurses and crafts teachers living in coastal areas between Figueira da Foz and Setúbal Peninsula. This furthermore demonstrates the ability to aggregate children outside the capital city. In fact, Lisbon's position never exceeded 16% and decreased over time.

Foundlings were concentrated in the inspection districts established by the SCML, with the district of Leiria standing out and, within its scope, the Leiria, Pombal, Porto de Mós, and Vila Nova de Ourém municipalities. There was also a significant number of children raised in the Alcobaça and Óbidos municipalities (Caldas da Rainha inspection district) and in Alenquer (Sobral inspection district). There may eventually have been a higher supply of wet nurses and crafts teachers in these municipalities, motivated by the SCML measures, such as the aforementioned setting up of payment offices in these locations. Additionally, from the 1860's onwards, the SCML started paying a gratification to wet nurses collecting children directly from the institution, which was paid out in proportion to the distance between where they lived and Lisbon, thus attracting women from further afield (SCML, Relatório…, 1861, n. p.). Despite a lower percentage, children were also raised by wet nurses and crafts teachers living south of the Tagus River in keeping with the proximity to the capital.

Comparing Figures 8 and 9 portrays how Lisbon's percentage decreased from 16% to 7% in the relative distribution of the percentage of children raised by wet nurses and crafts teachers, reflecting an increase in certain municipalities, such as Leiria, Pombal, and Vila Nova de Ourém, and a decrease in others, such as Óbidos and Alenquer. Hence, there were reductions in the percentages of children in the Caldas da Rainha (from 29% to 23%) and Sobral (from 18% to 10%) inspection districts. In contrast, there was growth in the Leiria inspection district (from 22% to 46%). Despite these decreases, the preference still remained for sending children away to be raised in the inspection districts, which accounted for 68% in 1860-1870 and 79% in 1871-1900.

Figure 10 reports on the relationship between the children returned to the SCML and those taken in by wet nurses and crafts teachers in Lisbon, the inspection districts and beyond the latter. This confirms how foundlings raised outside the city were less frequently reinstitutionalized. Between 1861 and 1900, 41% of children in the Caldas da Rainha inspection district were handed back to the SCML, rising to 45% in Sobral and dropping to 28% in Leiria, which also relates to the transition between the breastfeeding and dry stages, given that breastfeeding wet nurses could take advantage of their milk and receive better pay. Leiria hosted the preferential municipalities and, as detailed in Figures 8 and 9, where the relative percentage of children increased both before and after the end of anonymous child abandonment. Values similar to Caldas da Rainha and Sobral are returned by areas outside the inspection districts (44%).

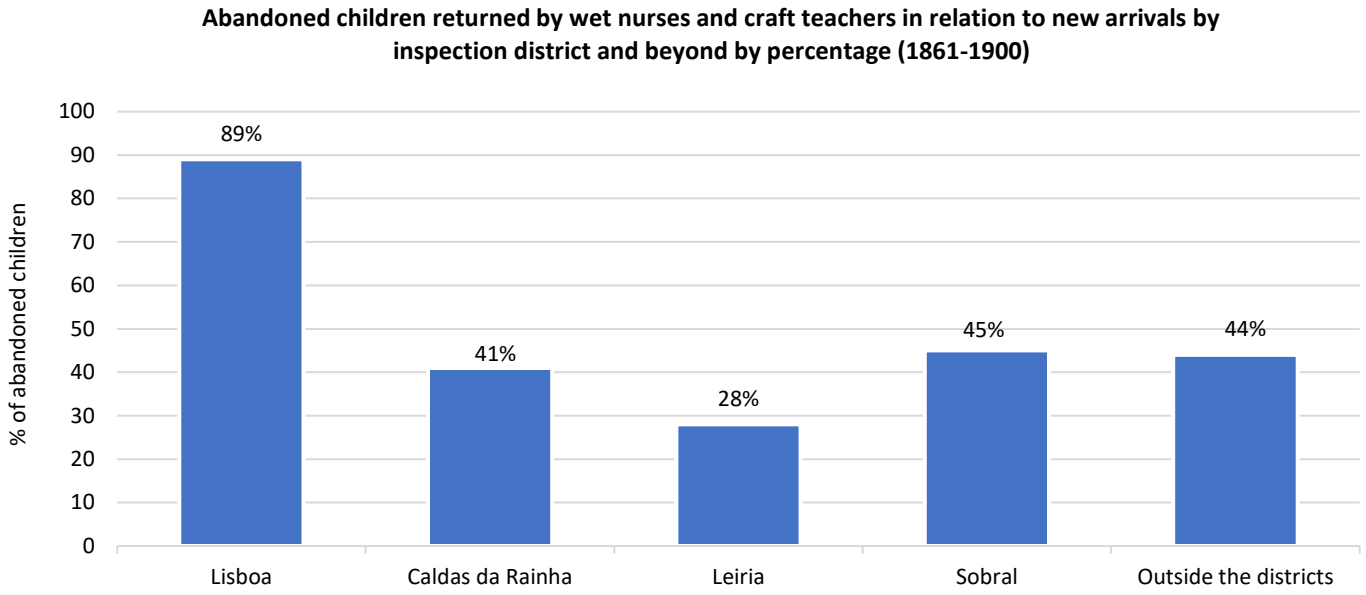


**Figure 10.** SCML abandoned children returned by wet nurses and crafts teachers as a percentage of the deliveries to the same inspection districts and beyond from 1861 to 1900. Source: SCML, Relatório…., 1862-1901.

Nevertheless, the relative number presented by Lisbon stands out, double the cases above (89%). Indeed, as the SCML argued, wet nurses and crafts teachers from the capital registered a higher rate of return to the institution, with consequences for the lack of family integration of foundlings. Even though the SCML lost track of many children in the clothing stage, after the age of 10, figure 10 suggests a higher level of family integration, when raised in smaller communities, in keeping with the SCML's rural preference (and by doctors, intellectuals, and politicians, both in Portugal and abroad).

## 6. Discussion

This case study underscores the potential for applying GIS to study past social phenomena and patterns, to reinforce historical arguments, as well as testifying to the achievement of institutional, political, and scientific goals. For this analysis, we applied the concept of "scientific visualisation" defined by Gregory (2007) as "representing data graphically so that they can be explored and understood. Mapping is an obvious form of scientific visualisation that can be used effectively to explore Geographical Information" (Gregory, 2007, 6).

According to Alves (2011), in the Portuguese context, knowledge on past administrative divisions is essential to understanding Contemporary History, mostly due to changes in the territorial structure and, particularly, in Lisbon (Alves, 2011, 1). Therefore, the application of a GIS, and particularly the geographical data produced within the scope of *SIGMA*, correspondingly allows for the precise representation of past phenomena. As the administrative division, at the municipal and parish levels, applied both by *SIGMA* and the SCML reports were the same, this facilitated merging the data between *SIGMA* shapefiles and the quantitative institutional sources as well as their modelling and manipulation in QGIS software.

As an outcome, this demonstrated the spatial characterization of particular populations, foundlings, wet nurses and crafts teachers, enabling a particularly granular level of aggregation (by municipality and parish), which may be difficult to pursue in past representations. We were able to identify the provenance of these children, at the municipal and parish levels, and the municipalities hosting most of the workers caring for them. This allows us to socially characterize these people, particularly by integrating them within the popular classes, considering the predominance of children from the peripheral Lisbon parishes, as well as their raising by people/families living in the countryside, with lower incomes and poorer living conditions for whom the payment received for raising foundlings was important to the household and local economies.

This paper also unveils new research agendas, perceivable through the lens of a GIS tool. For example, it would be of interest to analyse the judicial prosecutions of those who abandoned their children after 1870. This information would bring a new layer of knowledge into this field. On the one hand, this would address how the judicial power dealt with such occurrences, the respective judicial procedures, and the sentences handed down. On the other hand, this would also portray the social characteristics of the abandoners. Would we encounter the same characteristics as recognized among those abandoning their children at the institution? What would be their geographical provenances? Would this reinforce the arguments deriving from analysis of figures 6 and 7? However, the archival sources are not yet organized in order to facilitate this research and interweave the findings with the SCML provided information.

Additionally, further research might focus on the impacts of the raising foundlings labour market in local contexts, reflecting on its consequences for living conditions following their rise in income, thereby geographically characterizing these population. In fact, as jobs open to women were limited in number and kind, wet-nursing was a feminine activity that became what Fields (1988) identifies as a "social institution". See, for example, the studies of Spanish Foundling Houses by Sarasuá (2021, 2023) or, for particular Spanish regions, by Dubert (2022), Hernández García (2022) and Martín García (2019) (despite dealing only with the sex ratio of births but adopting the same rational, see, for example, Echavarri,

2024). In this context, the data on wet nurses and crafts teacher salaries might be cross-referenced with religious sources, such as Róis de Confessados, to produce still deeper knowledge on the socio-economic and spatial characterization of this facet of the popular classes.[7]

## 7. Conclusion

The 19th century saw changes to the foundling welfare policy in Portugal. The ending of anonymous abandonment led to a generalization of this practice in a trend that also occurred in other European Catholic states. This reality impacted particularly in Lisbon, the Portuguese capital and its largest city, where the SCML held responsibility for the guardianship of abandoned children. Between mid-century and until 1870, almost 3,000 minors were annually abandoned through its wheel, and the institution receiving by far the highest number of foundlings in the Kingdom. Debate and the 1867 Decree led to the adoption of a new welfare system. Despite its subsequently revocation, the measures contained were applied – anonymous reception was replaced by a controlled procedure requiring identification and justification, accompanied by greater policing around the institutions, and the generalization of lactation subsidies while promoting parental responsibility. In December 1870, the SCML adopted this trend while also applying particular measures tailored to the specific characteristics of abandonment in the capital, which led to an immediate decrease in the numbers of exposures.

Through deploying a GIS and the historical 19th century Portuguese administrative cartography division, produced within the scope of SIGMA, our aim was to address the origins of the foundlings in SCML care as well as their later geographical distribution when raised by external wet nurses and crafts teachers. With this methodology, we may infer whether the institution was able to fulfil its goals as well as confirming and reinforcing historical (and contemporary) arguments.

Looking at foundling origins between 1871 and 1900, we conclude that most of the SCML abandoned children came from Lisbon. Nevertheless, we cannot infer this retrospectively as the sources continually emphasise the admission of children from other municipalities and contemplating a requirement for mothers to live in the city for the nine months prior to giving birth following the end of anonymous abandonment. Within the capital, most children were from Encarnação parish, probably stemming from false statements and/or a lack of information from those transporting the minors. However, other parishes also stood out. For example, Santa Isabel, Anjos, and Nossa Senhora do Socorro reflect locations to the working classes that also experienced significant population growth in the second half of the 19th century. In fact, parents generally belonged to the lower classes, reflecting how poverty and illegitimacy represented the main causes for abandonment, with the latter related to safeguarding female and family honour, which was common across Catholic Europe. Additionally, foundling parents may also have been new to the city and not yet totally integrated.

Regarding the destinations of children raised by external wet nurses and crafts teachers, we testify here to the SCML aim of concentrating them in the inspection districts set up in the 1840's. When comparing the periods before and after ending legal anonymous abandonment, we may point to the relative redistribution of the children, mostly aggregated in the Leiria inspection district, where we know they encountered better chances of family integration, with a lower percentage of children subsequently reinstitutionalized. The findings also confirm the lack of sense of belonging when raised by urban wet nurses and crafts teachers. Following the decrease in abandonment, the SCML was able to place the children in its preferred areas, where there was already a system and institution employees working to control them.

By inputting historical data from the institutional sources, primarily quantitative, with the problem-solving solution SIGMA, we are able to unveil patterns otherwise invisible when studying the "raw" data which, by simple analysis of the sources, we would be unable to identify. This also enables the confirmation of historical arguments, such as the preference for children to be raised by wet nurses living in the countryside, and the success of the institution's measures and goals, such as the restrictions on abandonment and the geographical distribution of the foundling population.

**Funding:** This research was funded by the FCT — Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., — and the FSE within the scope of the III Community Support Framework, PhD Grant SFRH/BD/112019/2015. The Institute of Contemporary History is funded by National funds through FCT, under the projects UIDB/04209/2020, UIDP/04209/2020, and LA/P/0132/2020

**Acknowledgment:** This research article was submitted to and reviewed by the *European Journal of Geography* (EJG) and is based on previous work presented (as a talk or poster) at the Spatial Humanities 2024 Conference, held at Otto-Friedrich University of Bamberg, Germany, in September 2024. The conference explored the contributions of geospatial technologies, such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), to humanities research, showcasing how these technologies, approaches, and methods expand knowledge within and beyond the digital humanities. We are grateful to the conference organizers and participants for their valuable discussions, and to the journal's anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback during the assessment of the full article.

**Data Availability Statement:** Due to privacy restrictions, no data are currently publicly available.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Appendix

**Table A1.** Variations in the effective Lisbon parish populations from 1864 to 1900, in percentage. Source: Rodrigues, 1995.

| Parishes | Variation in the effective population (%) |
|---|---|
| Arroios | 380.4 |
| Coração de Jesus | 139.3 |

[7] *Róis de Confessados* are lists of the people living in each household on every street in each parish, produced by priests over Easter. The information contained is not always homogenous but does usually specify the names, ages, professional occupations, marital status, and other characteristics (such as race or parentage ).

| | |
|---|---|
| Santa Isabel | 128.4 |
| Anjos | 124.6 |
| Alcântara | 123.5 |
| São Sebastião | 96.4 |
| Santa Engrácia | 93.7 |
| São Vicente | 83 |
| São Cristóvão | 75.3 |
| Lapa | 69.1 |
| Pena | 64.3 |
| Nossa Senhora do Socorro | 54.5 |
| São Mamede | 50.8 |
| Castelo | 48.1 |
| Santo Estêvão | 45.8 |
| Santos | 41.9 |
| São Miguel | 40.8 |
| Mercês | 37.2 |
| Santiago | 36 |
| Santo André | 33.1 |
| São José | 24.5 |
| Sé | 24.1 |
| Santa Catarina | 21.2 |
| Encarnação | 15 |
| São Paulo | 14.8 |
| Sacramento | 14.6 |
| Santa Justa | 8.3 |
| Mártires | -8.8 |
| São Nicolau | -9.4 |
| Conceição | -10.2 |
| Madalena | -14.3 |
| São Julião | -37.9 |

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