

FONCIMED. Réseau de recherche et d'échange sur le foncier méditerranéen.

11^e Séminaire Annuel "*L'allocation des ressources foncières dans les espaces méditerranéens : usages du droit et formes de régulation*", Meknès, Maroc, 8-10 Novembre 2018

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Shifting paradigms, shifting landscapes; a critical examination of the intensification and corporatization of olive groves in Alentejo (Portugal).

Muñoz-Rojas, José (1), Pinto-Correia, Teresa (2), Silveira, André (3)

(1) ICAAM-Universidade de Évora, jmrojas@uevora.pt

(2) ICAAM-Universidade de Évora, mtpc@uevora.pt

(3) ICS-Universidade de Lisboa, andre.silveira@ics.ulisboa.pt

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Contextualization of the problem and main objectives of the communication

Agricultural landscapes in the Alentejo (Portugal) are rapidly shifting as a result of a productivist agenda to modernize agriculture that is underpinned by a policy framework promoting intensification through supply-focused water policies (Silveira et al, 2018). This region has historically been characterized by a mosaic of traditional rural-land-uses that is well adapted to the irregular bio-physical conditions of the Mediterranean. Such mosaic includes multi-functional land-use types such as the Agro-Silvo-pastoral Montado system, which, despite recent quantitative and qualitative trends of decay (Godinho *et al*, 2015), still largely dominates the regional rural landscapes (Ferraz de Oliveira, Azeda & Pinto-Correia, 2016). Alas, it also includes many traditional, extensive and, frequently multi-functional (e.g. silvo-pastoral) olive groves that were historically aimed to comply with local demands for good-quality olive oil and table olives of (mostly) traditional Portuguese varieties. However, over the past decade a rapid shift towards intensification and corporatization has occurred in the olive sector following the radical changes in water availability. These were triggered by the construction of the Alqueva water reservoir, the largest artificial water mass in Europe, placed on the Eastern edge of the region. Specific regulations and planning controls are in place aiming to halt the loss of Silvo-Pastoral traditional systems (Ministério da Agricultura, do Desenvolvimento Rural e das Pescas, 2001) and also to set target numbers within restricted areas for implementing irrigated crops, including intensive olive groves (Ministério da Agricultura, do Desenvolvimento Rural e das Pescas, 2002). Despite of these, the increase in intensive olive groves and associated irrigation infrastructures, mainly intended for the production, transformation and commercialization of olive oil has been notable (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2015).

This is resulting in a paradigmatic shift in the functioning of the region's agricultural sector. Such shift is materialized in an equally dynamic shift of the rural landscape, and is expressed through social, political and corporate discourses underpinning the multiple views and aspirations held by different decision makers (owners, managers, users, traders, policy makers), but also by others affected by such decisions (e.g. other farmers, conservation agents and lobbyists and consumers in general). Under such a complex picture, entrepreneurs and businesses operating in the intensive and super-intensive sub-sectors seem to be clearly leading in influencing policy makers, legislators and even the public opinion, whilst a wider and fairer debate on the multiple trade-offs and implications of the current dynamics of change for regional and local sustainability is clearly lacking. In response to this, in this paper we will present the combined findings of various research tasks and projects looking at the sustainability of the olive sector in the region to critically discuss the following research questions: how are productivist and post-productivist discourses reflecting and influencing the rapid intensification and corporatization of olive groves in Alentejo?; what policy and planning responses and tools are in place to foster land-use change in olive-groves?; and how do they tackle the imbalances and power relations underlying such discourses?; and finally, how is all of this reflected in the shifting regional and local rural landscapes and their changes?. Responding to these questions will help to decipher the potential implications of this process for the sustainability of the rural land-use and economy at the regional and local levels and will enable us to offer some hints for improvement.

Methodology and sources used

To elicit responses to the questions posed, we examined the results attained through the combination of various tasks collected through three research projects, which are respectively ongoing and already completed, namely: SUFISA-Sustainable Finance for Sustainable Agriculture and Fisheries (2015-2019)* and the individual post doc project GuardianAdaptativo, funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology-FCT (2016-2019)**. The sources consulted (table 1) combined the analysis of media sources, individual semi-structured interviews, focus groups with farmers and producers and workshops with multiple stakeholders. Activities targeted actors and stakeholders involved in the extensive and traditional, and also in the intensive and super-intensive olive production models, along with others with responsibilities in policy making, lobbying, transformation and trade. It is important to indicate that the research questions covered in this paper were not explicitly the object of any of the diverse research tasks performed, nor were they directly aligned with the original aims of the projects on which they were embedded. Instead, they are a direct result of further reflections among a team of researchers in the three projects arising from the implementations and lessons learnt from the various activities covered. The original research questions addressed in the various sources consulted (table 1) relate to issues of financial sustainability and institutional arrangements (SUFISA) and sustainable water planning in response to climate and socio-political changes (GuardianAdaptativo). To elicit response to these questions, a series of discussion sessions were maintained among four researchers participating in these projects (two researchers from SUFISA*, and a further one from GuardianAdaptativo**). A critical approach was undertaken to examine the research questions using a lens on which previous in-depth knowledge on the sector, and experience of jointly working together by all three authors proved essential. The criticality of the approach undertaken materialized in the questioning of the (largely ideological) assumptions that underpin the productivist approach currently dominating in the sector.

*<http://www.sufisa.eu> (H2020-Project Number: 635577)

*** <http://www.ics.ul.pt/instituto/?ln=e&pid=255&mm=5&ctmid=2&mnid=1&doc=31809901190>

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Table 1. An overview of the research methods employed.

Method/ Technique	Number of participants	Time of data gathering	Data analysis	Data source
Media Analysis	SUFISA researchers	Data collected between September 2015 and May 2017, covering the period between 2002 and 2017	Content analysis using NVivo software, using the keywords (in Portuguese): Intensive, Super-Intensive, Olive Oil, Sustainability, Resilience, Intensification, Production, Export, Investment, Irrigation, Environmental Impact.	9 internet portals, 5 specialized journals, 4 daily newspapers and 3 professional newsletters
Semi- structured interviews	18 participants from government organisations; farmer Associations; Agri- business managers; Academic institutions; and Non-Governmental Organizations	Interviews conducted between 2015 and 2017	Transcriptions of recordings; notes of the rapporteur and thematic coding of common issues	SUFISA interviews with experts (N=10) in 2016 GuadianAdaptativo (N=8) in 2016 and 2017
Focus Groups	3 focus group discussion with 3 to 5 participants following Intensive, traditional or mixed production methods	September 2016, March and June 2017		Focus groups with farmers (traditional/extensive and intensive/super- intensive) conducted under the SUFISA project
Workshops	Workshop - 15 participants from Farming Businesses, Government; Farmer Lobbies; and Non- Governmental Organizations	Workshop - September 2017		Workshop with multiple stakeholders conducted under the SUFISA project

Conclusion

We have explored the possibilities to add novel insights to the important social and policy interpretations and discourses underpinning current changes and trends towards intensification and corporatization in the olive sector in Alentejo. Results obtained so far stem from an expert-based discussion of the implications of the results obtained through three different research projects, whose original intentions and goals only indirectly and unintentionally addressed these issues that required a more critical perspective. These results point out to how the current co-existence (although at different rates of change) of two different models of exploitation of olive groves, intensive and traditional/extensive, can respectively be linked to a productivist and non/post-productivist discourse. Whilst the former is clearly prevalent throughout media, policy and the wider society, the latter is slowly gaining some attention thanks to the increasing permeation of sustainability across Portuguese and European society. However, questions related to the private appropriation of public and common resources and of self-sufficiency and food security are also entering the discussion, and further insights are required that will permit translating these (yet) theoretical arguments onto more efficient policies and decisions towards sustainability.

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