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The Landscape as an Asset in Southern European Fragile Agricultural Systems: Contrasts and Contradictions in Land Managers Attitudes and Practices

Teresa Pinto-Correia^a, Helena Menezes^a & Luis Filipe Barroso^a

^a ICAAM—Institute for Mediterranean Agrarian and Environmental
Sciences, University of Évora, Portugal

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The Landscape as an Asset in Southern European Fragile Agricultural Systems: Contrasts and Contradictions in Land Managers Attitudes and Practices

TERESA PINTO-CORREIA, HELENA MENEZES & LUIS FILIPE BARROSO

ICAAM—Institute for Mediterranean Agrarian and Environmental Sciences, University of Évora, Portugal

ABSTRACT *Transition theories suggest that there is a spatial, temporal and structural co-existence of several processes of transition from productivism to post-productivism going on in rural areas in multiple combinations resulting in a more complex, contested, variable mix of production, consumption and protection goals. This is particularly true for South European landscapes dominated by extensive agro-silvo-pastoral systems. The fragile agricultural sector is in some cases just entering the productivist phase, let alone moving towards post-productivism both in terms of discourse and management practices. At the same time, these are landscapes increasingly valued by society, and this demand should encourage new strategies for farm survival and new ways of managing the land. But such new strategies require a paradigm shift, not only in policy goals and formulation, but also in farmers' attitude towards their role and their management goals. In this paper, the question addressed is how the land managers within this system, facing multiple transition options, are choosing different management paradigms, in the complex range between productivism and post-productivism. Based on a farm survey in southern Portugal, a typology of land managers is produced, aiming to grasp the combination between their management practices in the farm and their expressed attitudes towards farm management and the role of their farm in the landscape. Results reveal some inconsistencies between land managers' intentions and their landscape outcomes, in an opposite sense to what has been earlier identified in Northwestern Europe. Even if they manage a multifunctional system, their self-concept is dominantly productivist and not affected by the public expectations of multifunctionality. This tension may reflect contradictions in the policy framework and, at the same time, raises challenges which the existing policy mechanisms do not consider.*

KEY WORDS: Montado landscape, land manager, typology, productivism and post-productivism, management paradigms

Introduction

The Montado is the agro-silvo-pastoral system dominant in southern Portugal, similar to the Dehesa in southern Spain, resulting in a savanna-like landscape of open oak

Correspondence Address: Teresa Pinto-Correia, University of Évora, ICAAM—Instituto de Ciências Agrárias e Ambientais Mediterrânicas, Núcleo da Mitra, Apt. 94, Évora 7002-554, Portugal. Email: mtpc@uevora.pt

woodland in a mosaic of patches with different tree and shrub densities. It is today a highly valued landscape in the European context not only due to its high conservation value (Bugalho *et al.*, 2011), but also for its support of multiple functions related to regional identity, recreation and aesthetic appreciation (Pinto-Correia *et al.*, 2011; Surova & Pinto-Correia, 2008). Nevertheless, it is primarily a production system, managed for the extensive production of livestock in combination with the exploitation of forestry products, such as wood for charcoal and cork, thus becoming a silvo-pastoral system. The Montado is a highly resilient system and has proved to be able so far to adapt to large external variations in market, regulations and the resulting practices. Despite being resilient, the Montado is threatened today both by intensification and extensification trends, both leading to increased landscape simplification (Pinto-Correia, 1993).

The maintenance of this landscape is a challenge today, both for policy-makers as well as for land managers. The increased acknowledgement of the Montado as a highly multifunctional land use system opens up multiple possibilities for new market driven activities as well as for increased support through public policies. But such new orientations would require a paradigm shift, not only in policy targeting, but mainly in the land managers goals and strategies (Marsden & Sonnino, 2008; Wilson, 2009).

While the multifunctionality debate continues in the European academic and policy fields related to the rural (Durand & van Huylenbroeck, 2003; OECD, 2001), it becomes evident that land managers are following different options. The main divide described in literature (Holmes, 2006; Wilson, 2007, 2008) is between those continuing with a productivist strategy and those opting for pathways closer to the non-productivist end. It has also been described how land managers who are becoming more post-productivist oriented are often struggling to translate this orientation in their practices. They adapt their management so that spatially there is a divide between productive areas and marginal non-used areas, and thus continue a dominant productivist practice (Marsden & Sonnino, 2008; Sutherland, 2010; Wilson, 2008, 2009).

In Southern Europe, many extensive farm systems in place are highly multifunctional, such as the Montado (Figure 1). But ongoing changes in land use show a trend for a specialisation in livestock production and a progressive intensification, or otherwise extreme reduction in land care and further abandonment, when the outcome from production is not sufficient. Both trends result from dominant productivist strategies and a lack of seeing other management options than production (Rodrigo & Veiga, 2009). If land managers would value more explicitly the landscape qualities of their Montado, they could easily enrol in a transition towards a more complex and variable mix of production, consumption and protection goals in their farm management (Pinto-Correia & Breman, 2009). These changes would require a deepening, a re-grounding or a broadening in farm activities (van der Ploeg & Marsden, 2008). But they also would require new policy orientations and targeting of the related tools. Analysing the dominant farm sector discourse, both in policy and in practice, shows a much more 'business as usual' concern. It has been raised by several authors that the fragile agricultural sector in Southern Europe is in some cases just entering the productivist phase, let alone moving towards post-productivism (Pinto-Correia, 2010; Robinson, 2008), both in terms of discourse and management practices (Tilzey & Potter, 2008).