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Transition from production to lifestyle farming: new management arrangements in Portuguese small farms

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ABSTRACT

In many rural landscapes of Europe, there is a transition taking place from the predominance of agriculture towards a much more diverse combination of different activities and consumption interests. In Mediterranean Europe, new combinations in management strategies are emerging, as the case study in Southern Portugal shows. Transition theory has been used to analyse how new smallholders' profiles lead to the emergence of a niche. This niche is characterised by the emergence of new management arrangements in small-scale farms that are in danger of being driven out of production. Due to these new processes of transition, the pattern and character of the Mediterranean small farms mosaic landscape is maintained. This paper shows that for the new smallholders, farming is an important part of their activities. The paper also shows that by failing to recognise new types of farmers and their potential for innovation, the agricultural regime is missing an opportunity to reactivate the linkage between agriculture and social representations of the rural in a way that would suit the rural development paradigms of today.

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1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, many rural areas across much of Europe have been undergoing a process of transition from the predominance of agriculture and forestry production, towards a much more varying combination of different activities and consumption interests (Ilbery 1998; Marsden et al. 1992; Marsden & Sonnino 2008; Woods 2007; 2011). The literature shows how the increasing demand for consumption of the countryside is frequently being followed by different interests and pathways influencing in land management (McDonagh 2012; Pinto-Correia & Kristensen 2013; Woods 2015; Hodge 2016) as well as a 'deactivation' of farming (Van der Ploeg 2008). That said, if farming activities decline, the farm-managed landscape, whose attraction lies in the diversity of goods and services it provides, may lose those characteristics that lie at the heart of its capacity to attract (Selman 2012; Primdahl & Kristensen 2016). One might term this the countryside commodification dilemma: the relationship between consumption patterns and rural settings is necessarily contingent, since the most highly valued attributes of rurality – such as the quality of the landscape, its relation to traditional agriculture and tranquility – are often the ones most vulnerable to the impact of commodification (Woods 2011).

On the other hand, it has recently been shown that land owners' motivations may be diverse and that new farmers' profiles are increasingly appearing in different rural areas of Europe (Sutherland 2010; Primdahl et al. 2013; Primdahl & Kristensen 2016). These new

smallholders may be interested in the countryside as a place to reside (Halfracree 2006) and may also embark on other land-based activities or adopt farming as an occupation (Primdahl et al. 2013; Wilbur 2013). They are typically associated with small-scale farms and may be thought of as lifestyle farmers, i.e. rural smallholders who farm and live on the farm, principally for lifestyle reasons rather than for financial motivations related to farming (Pinto-Correia et al. 2015b; Meijboom & Stafen 2016).

Innovative management arrangements, meaning new alignments in production and consumption chains, are emerging (Barbieri & Valdivia 2010; Marsden 2013; Ortiz-Miranda et al. 2013; Hinrichs 2014). For both agricultural policy and landscape planning alike, these new trends and possible new alignments mean considerable challenges, given that policy targets, their relative positioning and the stakeholders addressed are changing (Bruckmeier & Tovey 2009; Woods 2011; Ingram 2015; Kasimis et al. 2009). The effective combination of potentialities and targets calls for new policy paradigms and new institutional arrangements (Selman 2012; Westhoek et al. 2013; Woods 2015).

In Southern Europe, these processes take on specific characteristics. On the one hand, not all farming systems have followed the process of 'productivist modernisation' in post-war Northern Europe, and many complex farm systems have been maintained, sustaining diverse and specific landscapes (Marin & Russo 2016). Furthermore, in Southern Europe, farmers and their networks have long since presented a somewhat hybrid nature, as have

rural–urban stakeholder interactions (Hedberg & do Carmo 2012; Kasimis et al. 2009; Ortiz-Miranda et al. 2013). In recent years, issues of food security and the local governance of alternative food systems have been gaining relevance in practice, and subsequently, in momentum for research (Blay-Palmer et al. 2016; Dwiartama & Piatti 2016; Marin & Vincenzo 2016).

Focusing on the Southern European reality today, the aim of this paper is twofold: (a) to describe the motivations of individuals who have recently become smallholders and are lifestyle farmers, and their positioning in relation to farming activities, the farming community and the management of the farming landscapes; and (b) to assess how these smallholders are considered by the existing policy and institutional frameworks governing farming. The paper is based on an empirical study of a local rural area in Southern Portugal undergoing an accelerating process of rural commodification. The analysis is framed around the social sciences contribution of transition theory and MultiLevel Perspective (MLP).

2. Multilevel perspective: a framework for assessing the scope of transitions

Transition studies are grounded in a diversity of theoretical backgrounds (Geels & Schot 2010) and aim to understand transitions in such a way that the structures, cultures and practices of a societal system are analysed in a comprehensive manner (De Haan & Rotmans 2011; Lawhon & Murphy 2011). MLP views transitions as non-linear processes that result from the interplay of developments at three analytical levels: niches, socio-technical regimes and an exogenous sociotechnical landscape (Geels 2011). Niches are created by actors at the local level, and the innovations they promote are often characterised by a mismatch with the existing regime, a lack of appropriate infrastructures, or regulations (Sutherland et al. 2015). Niches are fundamental for transitions as they are the beginning of systemic change. The regime is at the meso-level, the locus of established practices and associated rules that stabilise existing systems, including standardised ways of doing things, policy paradigms and social norms. Sectors such as agriculture, planning and conservation correspond to individualised regimes. The sociotechnical landscape encompasses long-term exogenous trends at the macro level.

Transition studies have recently been applied to the complex nature and multiple dimensions of societal transformations involved in sustainable development (Grin et al. 2010; Lawhon & Murphy 2011). MLP and niche–regime interactions are particularly powerful frameworks for grasping opportunities and barriers to change (Ingram 2015; Sutherland et al. 2015). The application of a MLP makes it possible to reveal the

contours of complex relations between different levels of governance. The basis of a MLP is the idea that systems (regimes) are ‘locked in’ to a steady trajectory. Niches emerge as innovative activities inside and outside these regimes, and they will succeed in introducing changes to those regimes if they are anchored to them. Anchoring happens when there is a connection to the regime, which actively establishes links to the niche.

Existing literature on endogenous rural development provides a far-reaching insight into the initiation and development of new processes that may be conceptualised as niches as well as the drivers of successful collective action that may lead to their subsequent transformation into innovations (Oostindie & van Broekhuizen 2008). There have been recent applications of MLP to the analysis of processes of change in agriculture at the local and regional levels (Ingram 2015; Sutherland et al. 2015). These show that in agriculture there are considerable particularities in relation to other sectors, due to the spatial nature of farming systems and the growing multiplicity in the uses of the land. With respect to agriculture, transitions are likely to be characterised by diversity and result from push-and-pull effects of niche and regime stakeholders, also in regard to other regimes (Darnhofer et al. 2015). Examples studied by Sutherland et al. (2015) show that in farming, niches often differ from the ideal type defined in an MLP, as they do not explicitly aspire to transform the regime. They may be co-created by niche entrepreneurs and regime stakeholders, and they may originate from atomistic decision makers without any formal coordination. The anchoring capacity of such niches and, hence, their transformative potential, is yet to be assessed.

MLP thereby provides a useful analytical tool to: (1) understand the role of the new smallholders and their networks as potential drivers of change in rural areas, i.e., as a niche; (2) understand the way these new smallholders relate to, or challenge, existing policy and institutional frameworks governing the use of the land and the management of the rural landscapes and (3) identify barriers to the changes promoted in the niche as well as to denote potential opportunities (Lawhon & Murphy 2011; Woods 2011; Selman 2012; Ingram 2015).

3. Methods

3.1. The case study area: Montemor-o-Novo

The case study area is a small-scale farm landscape, with a mosaic structure composed of mixed land cover patches corresponding to small plots in farm holdings of between 1 and 5 ha. Principal productions are olive oil, vegetables and fruits (citrus) as well as sheep for meat (Pinto-Correia et al. 2015a). This local landscape is located in the vicinity of the town of Montemor-o-Novo, 100km east of Lisbon



Figure 1. Location of the study area, in the municipality of Montemor-o-Novo, Southern Portugal.

in the region of Alentejo (Figure 1). As shown in the Figure, this is a small local area less than 10 sq.km in size. The dense small-scale mosaics in the nearby surroundings of towns are characteristic of Southern Portugal. They form a unique landscape, with agricultural units of high heterogeneity and high population density, in contrast to the more homogeneous and extensively used large-scale estates (*latifundia*) that are predominant in the region (100–2000 ha). In spatial terms, the areas of small-scale farms are clearly separated from the much larger areas of large-scale properties (Pinto-Correia et al. 2014).

This area was selected for the case study because its small-scale farms, like others elsewhere (Halfracree 2006; Woods 2007, 2015), have been increasingly declining in importance as production units. In the meantime, they have become attractive as residential holdings: they are located in an attractive landscape and can be managed without a full-time commitment, being located close to a provincial town and only 100km from the metropolitan area of Lisbon. Since the late 1980s, urban residents have been purchasing small farms as permanent or weekend residences, along with new generations of local families who are returning to family-owned land. While the extent of this change in ownership is not known, the phenomenon has been acknowledged by the local municipal council and has been described in the literature (Pinto-Correia et al. 2015a; 2015b). While the productive function of these small farms has decreased, their market value has gone up. This is a result of an increase in demand in a context in which planning regulations and environmental restrictions make it difficult to change a property's structure or to

construct new buildings (Pinto-Correia & Primdahl 2009). Thus far, the high valued landscape features have been maintained as the changes in management options do not mean significant changes in the land cover pattern (Pinto-Correia et al. 2015a). However, the dilemma formulated by Woods (2011) is clear here: in the long term, will new smallholders, acting as lifestyle farmers, maintain production on their farms, alongside countryside consumption activities, and will this combination sustain the quality of the landscape and its local attractiveness? Will policy mechanisms be able to support the successful integration of these different goals?

3.2. The interviews

In accordance with the MLP, the niche in this case has been defined as land management driven primarily by landscape consumption interests. This new mode of land management is considered a niche because it involves a significant and radical change to the way agricultural land is used (Elzen et al. 2012; Darnhofer 2015). The lifestyle farmers in place, considered as niche actors, have no collective or shared intention to facilitate radical change at the regime level, as traditionally expected for a niche in an MLP (Darnhofer 2015). The way the niche is defined in the present analysis, according to the transition theory scheme first presented by Geels (2004), is shown in Figure 2. The scheme in the figure is a graphic representation of the transition process seen in the light of a MLP. In this paper, the focus is on niche actors who act as a niche even if they do not

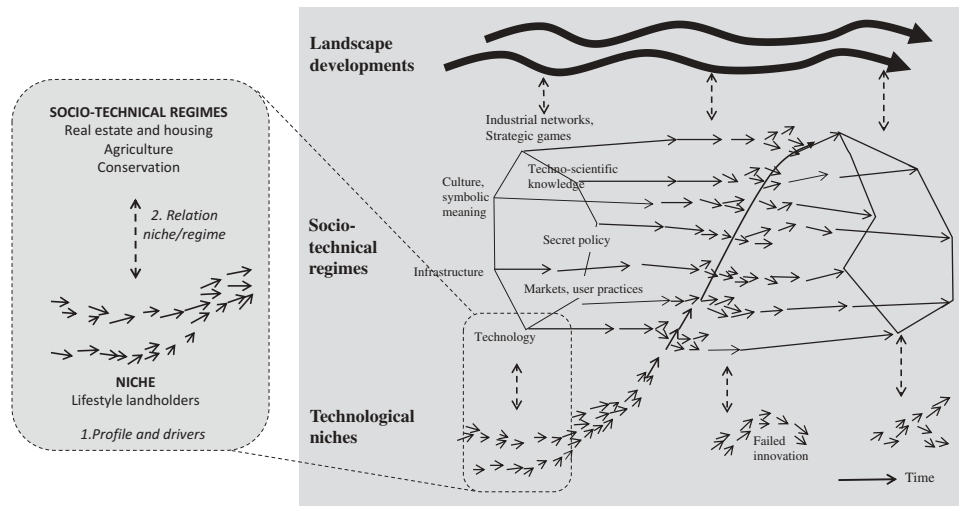


Figure 2. Overview of the research approach framed by the MultiLevel Perspective (MLP). Adapted from Geels 2004. In this paper the focus is on niche actors, which act as a niche even if they do not have the expressed intention to work together nor to press the regime – but still this pressure is registered, and these actors relate to and challenge the existing policy and institutional frameworks governing the use of the land and the management of the rural landscapes.

have the expressed intention to work together nor pressure the regime. However, the actions of these actors are bound up with new beliefs and values, new technologies and practices, new configurations of stakeholder groups and new networks. Through individual action, different forms of innovative management are implemented, and through geographical relations at the local level, niche actors do interact with each other. Furthermore, by questioning and challenging institutions and policies, they interact with the regime, which may or may not be open to these innovative management forms.

In order to describe the niche, the niche actors considered have been defined as: smallholders who have not always lived in the study area, but moved there from another setting more than a year before the study was undertaken (from another region or an urban existence in a large city or nearby town), and who own a small farm or spend at least half their time there on a permanent and continuous basis.

In the two parishes where the study area is included, there are 154 small holdings (< 5 ha) (INE-RGA, 2009). As the study area comprises a smaller area within the two parishes, the number is even lower. It is not known how many of the smallholders are lifestyle farmers, as the statistical record does not show the profiles of the farmers. Using an illustrative sample approach, 18 lifestyle smallholders were interviewed in the Summer of 2014. The selection was done primarily through enquiries made at local social venues, using a snowball approach.

Interviews were semi-structured, focusing on the characterisation of the interviewees' farming system and their strategies and motivations, using the transition theory analytical framework. The structure of the interviews is shown in Table 1. Answers and relevant

Table 1. The structure of the interview applied to the lifestyle small-scale landholders in Montemor-o-Novo.

Lifestyle farming – Structure of the interview applied	
Objective	Questions
Characterising the small-scale landholder	Personal characteristics
Understanding the niche	Reasons to move into the area and reasons to stay Recognition of a group of lifestyle farmers they belong to Practices and options for farm management
Understanding the relation niche–regime	Institutions farmers relate to, and type of relation established Evolution of these relationships Impressions concerning the support from these institutions
Assessing if intentional or unintentional changes in the regime are promoted	Changes registered in the concerned institutions, intentions to provoke such changes

quotes were registered during the interviews. Data from the 18 interviews were interpreted using thematic coding (Guest et al. 2012) to identify what drives the niche, its perspectives and relationship to the regime, and its intentions regarding change.

4. Results

4.1. The motivations of smallholders

The lifestyle farmers that were interviewed moved to their properties over a period ranging between 1 and 31 years ago, most of them were accompanied by their families. As shown in Table 2, most of them come from a rural background, although many led predominantly urban lives before arriving in Montemor-o-Novo.

Table 3 shows the type of land use in the farms considered. Despite their different professional backgrounds, only two do not practice farming as an

Table 2. Origin and life path of the 18 interviewed. 10 are original from a rural area and have spent their life in a rural setting; 4 are original from a rural area but have spent their life mostly in urban setting; 4 are original from an urban setting and have spent most of their life in the urban setting.

Origin:	Rural	Rural	Urban
Life path:	Rural	Urban	Urban
From region	6	1	0
From outside	4	3	4
Total	10	4	4

Table 3. Farming activities were characterised as: (i) existent or non-existent on the farm, when existent, if alternative management practices are applied (organic, biodynamic, permaculture); (ii) developed entirely by third party (farming activity is entirely undertaken by an individual from outside the family, e.g. a neighbour or friend).

Land use in the farm	Number of farms	Type of practices
Farming activity	16	6 – Farming by land owner, conventional practices 7 – Farming by land owner, alternative practices 3 – Farming by another person, conventional practices
No farming activity	2	Land kept as fallow or garden

important activity on their property. Three of the interviewees subcontract local farmers to carry out agricultural work and do not get involved themselves. All of the other interviewees work on their farms, often subcontracting and collaborating with agricultural workers or volunteers to varying degrees (ranging from delegating task management entirely to workers to making all the decisions themselves, and sometimes discussing and deciding jointly). For four of these smallholders, farming is the main source of income.

The smallholders were also asked why they moved to the study area and why they remained there. The answers reveal interesting differences between the factors behind their decision to move into the area and their decision to stay. Professional and residential opportunities, as well as peace and quietness, were the attractiveness factors most often mentioned. Agricultural activities, the countryside experience, the local social network, ideological options and nature were also mentioned, but were not as significant. On the other hand, the factors that most frequently justified their decision to stay were the local social network, agricultural activities, peace and quietness and the experience of the countryside. This may indicate that these newcomers progressively connect with the community they live in and that, by doing so and by having the land to manage, they find increased relevance in agriculture activities over time. It also reveals that there are values implicit to this territory that may be responsible for not only attracting but also keeping newcomers there, and that these values, if understood well, could be reinforced.

The most frequently cited factor for remaining in the area (which was also an attractiveness factor), was the local social network, referring both to the interviewees' roots (links with family and friends) and to new connections established in the case of outsiders:

- ‘This holding belonged to my great-grandfather (...) since part of my family was here, I came back’;
- [Talking about factors for staying in the area] ‘... the land and the people. There is a particularly interesting aspect you don’t get in [specific urban areas in Portugal], which is a well-connected community of citizens, much more in contact with each other. We actually have civic activity, which I thought was something that had gotten lost over time. Suddenly, it exists here in Montemor. It’s not surreal, it really is true. It happens.’
- ‘I liked the people. And thought I wanted a house here.’
- ‘It is because of the people that we stay. Interconnection with the people.’

Agriculture was another factor of attractiveness: ‘When I thought about coming back this was my goal, to work on my own farm...then I bought this holding’. Interestingly enough, it is a stronger motive for staying in the area, one that is described in the interviews as influencing the experience of the place:

- ‘Agriculture is in our blood’
- ‘It reinforces our affection for the place’

Overall, experiencing the countryside, engaging in farming activities, the peace and quiet, and social networks combine to make up a lifestyle that defines the experience of this place, as this quote illustrates:

[about the factors for staying in the area] ‘It’s about being in the countryside. First my dad was born here. My grandparents were all born here. My dad also passed away here. But it isn’t only that. The situation here is that this [farming activity] is an escape, this is an escape from the work we do.’

Exploring the motivations behind lifestyle farmers’ migration to, and settlement in, the area enabled us to understand that their new modes of land occupancy go beyond consumption as the predominant motive over and above production. Instead, and as confirmed by recent literature (Woods 2011; Wilbur 2013; Thompson et al. 2015), these motives appear to be mixed, involving a complex diversity of combinations. Likewise, lifestyle farming goes beyond the trend of rural commodification. Rather, what lifestyle farmers in Montemor-o-Novo described was mainly a search for their own ways of living and experiencing the place, and in so doing, they managed the land by farming.

4.2. Lifestyle farmers, regimes and policy framing

Lifestyle farmers interact mainly with the agricultural regime. However, they also interact with two other

regimes: (a) real estate and housing (since many of them purchased their farms) and (b) conservation (since this is within a Natura 2000 area, a nature protection area according to European Directives 79/409/CEE and 92/43/CEE); due to the organisational make-up of the public administration, this regime, in Portugal, is closely related to environmental planning (Figure 3). The first regime is by far the most relevant in everyday management options, as these small farms are classified in the registry as production units with agricultural land, and the dominant land use continues to be agriculture. This regime includes all economic activities related to farming, from production to marketing and food processing, the provision of services and work related to farming activities, and policy framing and all legal requirements and regulations relative to the aforementioned activities. In the region of Alentejo, *latifundia* is the predominant farm structure: farms of more than 100 ha and up to 2000 ha, owned by the wealthy and socially dominant families in the region, who are often absentee land owners, and marked by an extensive agricultural use that has evolved in recent decades towards a more specialised and intensive use. Together with much more recent wine and intensive olive production units, these are farms considered by the regime as representing the agricultural productive sector in the region. Consequently, this regime considers small farming to be mostly a traditional, pre-modern activity that has survived until today, largely maintained by elderly local people with no relevant connections to

the market and limited capacity for scale enlargement or specialisation (Pinto-Correia et al. 2015b).

The real estate and housing regime refers to land and rural housing (farms as a home) and the real estate market. It also includes local building regulations managed at the municipal level. The influence of this regime is based on the attractiveness of the local landscape as a place to reside, both for newcomers and for locals. The market is thus an issue, as demand for these small-scale farms is high. Since small-scale farms are classified as agricultural land, new buildings or changes to existing structures, as well as new infrastructures, are severely restricted, increasing the pressure caused by growing demand and land prices.

The third regime is the conservation regime, which includes planning and environmental legislation and is aimed at maintaining the quality of the environment and landscape. It includes spatial planning frames and tools at the regional and national levels; existing legislation on conservation and environmental protection, which is often expressed in the aforementioned spatial plans; and associated public administrative bodies. National instruments exist for the protection of ecological interests (REN (Reserva Ecológica Nacional - National Ecological Classified Area)) and agricultural soil cover (RAN (Reserva Agrícola Nacional - National Agricultural Classified Area)). These impose restrictions on land use changes. More central to this regime, in this area,

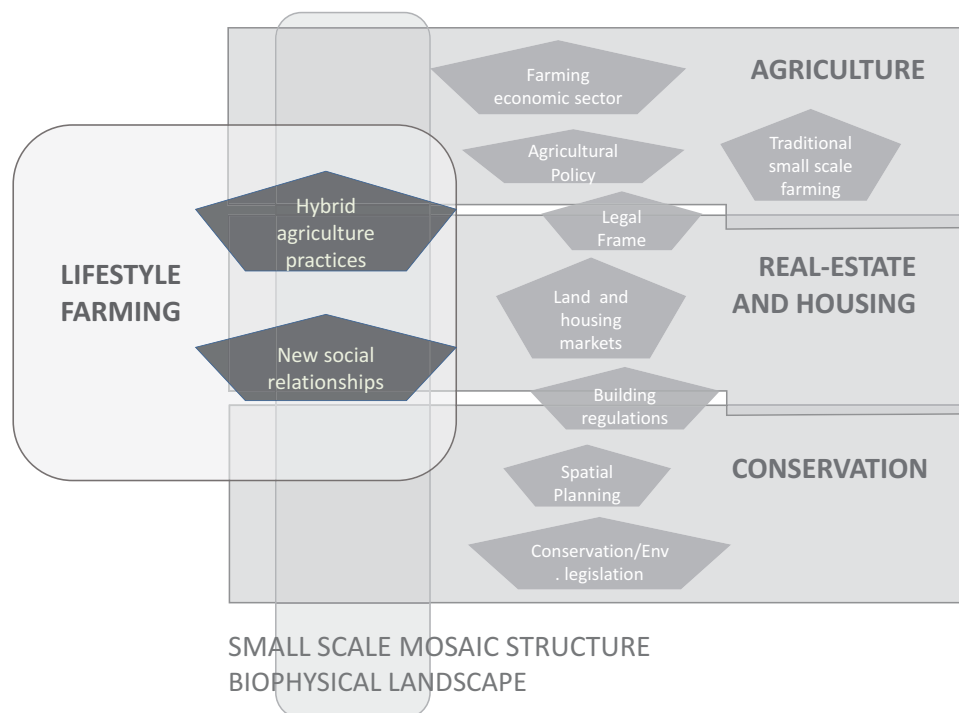


Figure 3. Lifestyle farming as a niche and the way it interacts with the three regimes which mostly have an influence on the niche development. The small-scale mosaic structure as well as the biophysical landscape creates the conditions for this niche to appear. New connections with the regime, or anchoring pathways, established mainly with the agricultural regime, are made on the basis of hybrid agriculture and land management practices and new social relationships.

are the rules that apply to the Natura 2000 site of Monfurado, which includes the case study area. Thus far, spatial planning tools have contributed to preserving the integrity of the landscape, but they also place constraints on the new management options of lifestyle farmers, curtailing their ability to make land use changes.

The way in which lifestyle farmers have expressed their relationship to existing policies and institutional regulations reflects the relationship between niches and regimes, and the degree of anchoring with the agricultural regime, in particular. The agricultural regime is the regime most clearly identified by interviewees and it has also proven to be dominant in similar contexts (Hinrichs 2014; Ingram 2015; Sutherland et al. 2015). However, by not engaging professionally with farming activities, these lifestyle farmers are indifferent to existing policies and regulations and as such, have become cut off from the regime framework:

- *'I don't ask them for anything and they don't ask anything from me.'*
- *'I ignore it completely.'*

For those who are becoming more engaged with farming, they harbour an increasing concern and frustration with existing policies and regulations in their daily activities:

- *'Everything has to be clandestine.'*
- *'Bureaucracy kills everything [describing a situation where the interviewee attempted to sell all of his/her agricultural products collectively with other producers – although they managed to sell everything, they gave up when it came to legalising the activity] It's easier to just leave things ticking along as they are.'*
- *'Too many papers, new technology (...) invoices. (...) we are limited and we shouldn't be. (...) a small farm of ten sheep needs a secretary.'*

In addition to this regulatory asphyxia, the notion of a lack of support for small-scale farming was also expressed, e.g. *'There is no support for small-scale farming'*. One important limitation for small-scale farming is the burden of transaction costs, which are not proportional to the farm and its productive scale. High transaction costs can be a considerable obstacle to the use of a large number of policy schemes by small-scale farmers even if they may otherwise be advantageous to them. Another concern that was expressed involves the absence of a functional rural outreach service. There is no clear and effective information to individual farmers, and as a consequence, technical services are not up to date with the realities and implementation problems of small-scale agricultural holdings. The following comments exemplify this absence:

- *'It is very hard to stay informed in Portugal (...) Information is hardly ever made known. [the public institutions do not keep people informed] There is no access to information.'*
- *'No one can work in small-scale farming and pay social security. There is even a way of not paying social security, but here they will never tell you how.'*
- [Referring to the lack of communication with institutions and what the interviewee considers a critical problem in Portugal] *'People are afraid of the authorities. (...) when you don't get on with the mayor it then becomes impossible to do anything, which is a problem. (...) so they're scared.'*
- *'I don't want to claim there are no support measures, but they are so hidden that it isn't possible to benefit from them.'*

There appears to be a considerable distance between policy design and regulatory institutions and the daily realities of small-scale farming. It points to the consequences of gaps in rural outreach services or to the lack of systematised and available information that would provide all types of farmers with access to existing resources.

The ambiguous position of the regime towards small-scale farming also ultimately leads to similarly ambiguous views about small-scale agriculture on the part of those who practice it:

- *'Apart from some subsistence agriculture, agriculture here will come to an end. I don't see anybody. . . the man from [the neighbouring farm] is no longer able and his sons aren't committed in the long term to any of it. People are not interested. (...) [about the role of small-scale farmers in food production] It is very important. (...) It is not yet what would be needed. And small-scale production is absolutely boycotted. [Interviewer: And what is the lack of interest in farming related to?] I think it was encouraged. They were paid to stop farming. That is what was done. ... and now we are being told to do it. So they discouraged people, pushed them away. People no longer have any way in. [Interviewer: So farming isn't a very appealing activity?] I don't see anyone being very interested. Not here in Montemor, at least.'*
- [Interviewer: is it easy to sell products?] *'It doesn't seem very easy to me, from what I see and hear, but maybe we can get there. (...) I think what was done some ten years ago was all wrong. Mainly regarding the policies of the time, of, for example, ordering a halt to the production of olive groves, dry fruit, horticulture... Almonds and hazelnuts now come from the United States... it's ridiculous. And we are a very poor country, we could do the things we can and do well ourselves. (...) I think change is coming. (...) there are more committed people who understand that without agriculture we are nothing. [Interviewer: do you think there is an interest in agriculture among younger generations; do you think there will be a revival?] I think there is now. This is something recent. I don't know how deep it goes, but a change is taking place.'*

The interviewees argued for a clear and ongoing recognition of the value of small-scale agriculture. This recognition, the motivation to keep the activity alive, and the observation that certain changes may be taking place, as described in the above quote, was, however, accompanied by strong impressions that small-scale farming is in decline, and by expressions of disappointment and frustration. The agricultural regime was the regime most referred to by far. This regime was seen as being responsible for the decline and for the struggles faced by those who want to keep small-scale agriculture alive.

For the most part, the other two regimes were not mentioned by the interviewees and clearly play a much more minor role in their day-to-day decision-making. The conservation regime could serve as a supporting regime, given that these farmers maintain a highly valued landscape by preserving traditional landscape elements and patterns, despite the fact that their functions are now different. By maintaining the landscape, the properties that have been recognised as worthy of inclusion in a Natura 2000 site are also preserved. Nevertheless, planning and environmental regulations are only mentioned as being constraints on land owners' choices and are only known to a very small extent. As for the real estate regime, it has somehow interfered with all of these farmers' choices, as it is closely linked to the price of land for these small farmers. Furthermore, this regime is profiting from the actual role of lifestyle farmers, who ensure that the landscape's capacity to attract is maintained, yet are denied protection within this particular regime.

5. Discussion

Our case study confirms the scenario described in the existing literature: there is an increasingly varied array of land owners and land managers and an intense interplay of internal and external relationships in rural areas, where new balances between production and countryside consumption are taking shape.

Most revealingly, however, this case study also shows evidence that runs contrary to, or at least builds on, the picture that the literature has formed so far, in which countryside commodification progressively leads to a decline in farming activity and a loss of the landscape and rural qualities that activated the countryside consumption trends (Woods 2011; Selman 2012). This is not what has been observed in Montemor-o-Novo. The specific pattern of change observed in our case is most likely related to the hybrid particularities of Southern European agricultural and rural communities, which are maintained in spite of recent commodification trends. The slow path of change which is characteristic of the Mediterranean context, both in agriculture, social

relations and community networks, seems to play a central role in securing a smooth transition into new management arrangements. The hybrid characteristics of farming and its stakeholders are upheld, and a polarisation of land management goals is not needed. We may be witnessing a transition pathway which is particular to the Mediterranean South European context.

From a landscape perspective, given that the farm structure and local production systems have been maintained, land cover also remains the same; as such, the landscape mosaic has been left largely unchanged, as described in more detail by Pinto-Correia et al. (2015a). Despite the existence of new and larger housing projects, the density and distribution of housing has been maintained due to planning regulations, while the impact of countryside commoditisation has not changed the landscape character as much as might have been expected. The new uses of small farms are even helping reshape the character of the local landscape, which has maintained the highly valued characteristics of the traditional landscape.

Nevertheless, it seems crucial to address the lack of information and communication, the lack of support and, in particular, the need to make policies flexible and adaptable to the specificities of small-scale agriculture. This has to do mainly with addressing agriculture policies. There are issues of scale and heavy transaction costs, which would justify specific conditions being made available to small-scale farming, such as higher subsidies per hectare, greater flexibility in terms of legal requirements for short supply chains and direct selling, market organisations, broader definitions of what farmer profiles may be accepted, and more targeted information material and services, to mention just a few. Failure to address these specific aspects will probably lead to the further erosion of the local environment and the particular characteristics of the landscape that make it so attractive (Pinto-Correia et al. 2015a).

The framework introduced by transition theory has made it possible to put the ongoing process into perspective, defining sources and objects of change and the manner in which they fuse and shape each other. Niche actors are not acknowledged by the dominant regime. However, their intentions and motivations revolve around living life and experiencing place in particular ways, with farming, the rural environment and proximity to nature playing a central role, as well as marked levels of social networking. Their interactions with other local actors seem to have taken shape, including those with actors that can be identified as regime actors, such as agro-food commercial agents and technical staff. Here as well, the above-mentioned traditional hybrid characteristics of Southern European rural communities play a role, given that the mixture of different actors in local networks is well known (Arnalte-Alegre & Ortiz-

Miranda 2013). As such, while the institutional and policy framework and its associated actors do not create a place in which this niche can be anchored, a kind of anchoring nonetheless takes place at the community level. This social anchoring is strongly rooted in location-based relationships and networks, and is therefore most likely contributing to higher resilience in the local community (McManus et al. 2012; Dwiartama & Piatti 2016).

This issue of space and place raises new questions to be addressed through the MLP, where the local context and the role of ties to land and place are more explicitly acknowledged, as has been remarked by other authors (Lawhon & Murphy 2011; McManus et al. 2012; Hinrichs 2014; Sutherland et al. 2015). Local physical landscape features, the social environment and the location in relation to large urban areas are all crucial to the emergence of lifestyle farming. Locational characteristics therefore determine how and if this niche will take shape, while the role of the land in transition studies requires further conceptual refinement.

6. Conclusion

The application of a MLP to analyse the transition process taking place in this small-scale farm landscape has made it possible to reveal what other more frequently used conceptual approaches have not shown thus far: (a) smallholders today, even without any formal collective action, constitute a renewed community of farmers who, through their different motivations and farming strategies, act as a niche in relation to their innovation potential; (b) the dominant regime, which is agricultural and focused on one type of agriculture that is more mainstream, fails to recognise these actors as farmers and their activity as farming; it is not open to supporting smallholders, and is missing an opportunity, already grounded in the territory, to develop innovation in production practices and market linkages, and to revitalise the link between agricultural activity and the countryside. The dynamics of agricultural production on small-scale farms, based on lifestyle farming, short-supply chains, food quality, local breeds and seeds, and high landscape quality managed by innovative smallholders, would be the perfect link to a renewed social image for the agricultural sector and for its role as a rural stepping stone. By maintaining small-scale farming as an unrecognised activity and lifestyle farmers as unrecognised farmers, the agricultural regime is not only missing out this opportunity but also failing to recognise the broader range of innovations possible in the countryside today (van der Dowe 2008; Arnalte-Alegre & Ortiz-Miranda 2013; Pinto-Correia et al. 2013; Ingram 2015; Blay-Palmer et al. 2016). These new approaches and arrangements could be framed within the context of existing

European strategic goals, with most of them simply requiring changes to be embedded in the national and regional context, where the non-recognition of the small-scale farming niche has been identified by niche actors.

More empirical evidence is required concerning the functioning of the regimes and the conditions for policy changes and adaptation. Particularly with respect to the functioning of the agricultural regime and how it deals with the niches described in this paper, it would be a step forward in understanding the present processes of rural transition. Furthermore, knowledge of the conservation regime and the real estate regime remains weak – given that these regimes were only to a limited extent mentioned by the interviewees, their anchoring capacity remained largely unexplored. Another challenging approach would be to reveal existing and possible linkages between regimes, particularly through planning authorities, and how much these linkages could create a new arena in which lifestyle farming might unfold. It has been proven that the sectoral approach has failed to acknowledge the novel processes taking place in this rural area. It is most likely that environmental and spatial planning bodies are those most linked to the changes taking place through changes in building types and structure given the predominance of the residential function.

The main conclusions reached in this paper are expected to contribute to rethinking policy formulation and targeting, as well as policy integration, with respect to small farms in Europe today (McDonagh 2012; Hinrichs 2014; Spruijt et al. 2014; Ingram 2015).

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