La Cañada

No. 31 Winter 2019
ISSN 1027-2070

Photos: HNV-Link

HNV-Link: co-innovating for High Nature Value farming

HNV-Link is a multi-actor project and network of 13 partners and 10 High Nature Value (HNV) farming territories (`Learning Areas') in Europe that implement innovations and best practices to support HNV farmers.

Here, we present HNV-Link activities and share stories from several Learning Areas as well as our main recommendations. They have formulated with local actors sustainable development scenarios, and have identified the challenges and barriers to those. But more importantly, they are exchanging and applying innovative solutions to achieve their goals, improving social and institutional settings, policy and regulatory frameworks, farming techniques and management, as well as production and marketing. Sharing these innovations across diverse social, ecological and geographical contexts informs us how widely applicable they are and how they can be best combined.

Bearing in mind the range of public goods and services supplied by HNV farming (e.g. quality food, biodiversity, beautiful landscapes, etc.), policymakers must realise that biodiversity conservation objectives can't be fulfilled without supporting adequately HNV farmers. For this, EU countries should drive HNV-friendly adjustments in their agricultural and rural development policies, and governments should work closely with all actors along the agricultural value chain towards more sustainable agri-food systems for a prosperous and inclusive Europe.

The project is holding its Final Conference on 31 January 2019 in Montpellier, France. Its activities and key recommendations will be discussed then. Please, get in touch if you have a say on the issue! All other information is on our website!

Fabrice Gouriveau
HNV-Link Coordinator
fabrice.gouriveau@iamm.fr

Contents

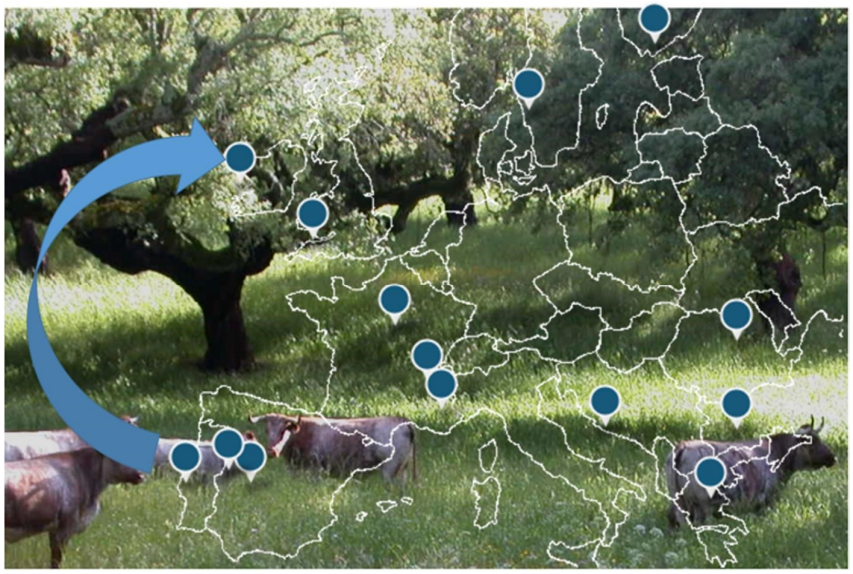
The Montado case study

Co-construction of locally-led innovative solutions

The interactive relationship between society and science is one of the critical challenges of the modern construction of science. Two premises can be found in research aiming to be socially meaningful. The first premise is the involvement of enlarged peer communities for the co-construction of knowledge in order to enrich scientific research. The second premise is the acknowledgment of the central role of forms of human knowledge other than the scientific form, including that such inclusion may empower otherwise marginalized social groups. The discussion about these relationships is not new in the agricultural sector, especially with regard to knowledge transfer, which has historically been framed as `extension'. In recent years, the concept of learning and innovation networks for sustainable agriculture has emerged, and research and extension services have been experimenting with new methods and practices related to facilitation and brokerage within networks. The story we are about to tell is based on these premises and develops around the growing involvement of a multi-stakeholder network, as well as the adoption of participatory approaches where researchers embrace the roles of learning-innovation-change facilitators and knowledge brokers.

The agro-silvo-pastoral system Montado

The Montado is the dominant land use system in the Alentejo region, Southern Portugal, and is quite similar to the Dehesa in the Southwest of Spain. It is an agro-silvopastoral extensive production system with a variety of products and high levels of associated biodiversity. It is considered a High Nature Value (HNV) farming system. The open tree cover, mostly composed of *Quercus rotundifolia* and *Q. suber* in changing densities, provides forest products such as cork, acorns, and wood for charcoal. The trees provide shelter for the livestock grazing in the undercover both in summer and winter. The pasture undercover is composed of species-rich native or cultivated grasslands, combined with shrubs in varied densities. It is a highly



multifunctional system providing multiple benefits to society. However, the decline of the Montado due to loss of tree density and a more or less extensive absence of tree regeneration, is now an unavoidable reality recognized by all actors actively involved with it – producers, researchers, public administration, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and users.

Agri-climate-environment schemes (AES) are one of the key practical tools to mitigate and reverse the growing loss of biodiversity and structural diversity of European farming systems. AES can bolster the conservation of complex systems such as the Montado and can directly support adaptive management for these systems. The AES currently available for the Montado are management-based in that they support management practices prescribed to the producers and which are expected to result in positive impact on the environmental status of the Montados. Alternatively or additionally to such AES, the European Commission advocates using of results-based approach. There is a paradigm shift in it: payments are given if a defined environmental result is achieved regardless of the undertaken management. Therefore, the producer has the freedom to decide on the management that he/she considers most appropriate to achieve the defined result. Further, this new results-based model is based on a close interaction with extension services for defining the management strategies for achieving specified environmental results. Nonetheless, the producer is the final decision maker.

Inspiring cross-visit to the Burren

In June 2018, a 20-strong group of farmers, researchers and public administrators, assembled through previously existing initiatives from ICAAM/ University of Évora[1], visited the Burren area in Ireland. The objective was to gain knowledge on the experiences of local co-construction of results-based AES through a multi-actor approach, and to discuss possible problems and applied solutions transferable to the Montado. The expectations were to learn about the actors and institutions involved and to see *in-loco* the implementation experience of a results-based approach supporting sustainable agriculture.

In the Burren, rural entrepreneurship builds on the unique characteristics of the local landscape, which is internationally recognized for the richness and diversity of its heritage and flora. In this context, the producer plays the role of guardian of the existing natural and cultural values while maintaining an economically viable business model. The visit to the Burren was carried out under the Horizon2020 HNV-Link project in collaboration with a regional project – ProAgriFor, funded by Alentejo

2020. HNV-Link is dedicated to the development and sharing of innovative strategies and practices to support HNV farmland systems, while ProAgriFor aimed to promote stakeholder involvement in the agroforestry sector. During the visit to the Burren, the Portuguese group had the opportunity to witness the joint production and conservation practices carried out in effective partnerships among farmers, scientists and public administration. The Burren has shown that the threats posed by ecosystem degradation caused by land abandonment or by intensification of agriculture can be overcome using agri-environmental approaches based on farmer-centred processes. The Montado has similar challenges and, therefore, the potential transferability of the Burren experience is enormous.

The take home message outlined by the Portuguese visiting group was two-fold:

- **The environmental services expected from agriculture can be produced when the farmer has room for adaptive management backed by flexible policy tools.**
- **A continuous partnership among the different actors involved in designing, implementing and evaluating results-based AES is critical for the success of the programme.**

At the end of the three-day visit, the group reviewed the experience and drew up an outline of the action plan for the construction of a AES with mixed results- and management-based elements for the Montado, aiming at the implementation of a pilot experience in the Montado.

Riparian gallery.

Multi-actor approach

After the visit to the Burren, we pursued a multi-actor approach, already a routine in the research we develop, with the objective of defining the measurable environmental results for the Montado programme and the possible indicators to be used to assess those results. According to our definition, identified environmental results would only be eligible if (i) they respond to agricultural management practices, (ii) they are a conservation priority at regional or national level, and (iii) there is sufficient previous scientific knowledge to support the selection of indicators for their assessment.

In order to facilitate the organization of the work, we established different groups dedicated to specific components of the Montado ecosystem (soil, pasture, trees, biodiversity and water). Each group identified the intended environmental results, management practices affecting those results, and possible indicators to assess the environmental results. This progress was achieved in 4 months through the group meetings and, when deemed necessary, with experts in the different subject areas involved in the programme.

The main environmental results we identified through this process are: (i) maintenance or improvement of a healthy and functional soil; (ii) conservation of biodiverse Mediterranean pastures; (iii) promotion of the long-term viability of the Montado through oak tree regeneration; (iv) conservation of temporary Mediterranean ponds; (v) conservation of water courses with riparian galleries (that is, buffer zones with trees).

In the meantime, we launched contact with the Ministry of Agriculture, in particularly with the Department responsible for policy design and monitoring. Researchers and farmers together presented the draft programme for the Montado and discussed its technical details with the technical team in the Ministry. Because results-based mechanisms to compensate farmers who deliver environmental benefits are likely to become commoner in Member States post 2020, the proposed programme addresses public policy needs. After finalising the indicator list, we hope that the proposed programme will be tested as a pilot in a local Natura 2000 site Montado area, and that ultimately the approach will become part of the Portuguese Rural Development Programme (RDP).

Our next steps in this collaborative process will be devoted to the harmonization of the objectives for the different environmental results, refinement and quantification of indicators in order to build a scoring system and, later on, establishment of the payment levels. We will continue to work through a multi-actor approach with a close collaboration among producers, researchers and public administration with the aim of achieving an implementation phase on the ground in the form of a pilot programme capable of delivering the desired environmental results.

Role of HNV-Link

Interactive innovation has good conditions to emerge when different and complementary knowledge, perspectives and skills are combined in a process where all involved feel empowered. The multi-actor process we have presented here reflects one of such situations – researchers took the lead as initiators of the process, and continue coordinating, but the results-based programme for the Montado has, step-by-step, been appropriated also by farmers and the staff from the central and regional administration. The platform facilitated by the Horizon2020 projects established the frame for this to happen. In this case, there was a fortunate combination of HNV-Link with the ongoing initiative of a bi-monthly regular discussion meeting of Montado stakeholders, facilitated by a researcher in ICAAM, and an already long history of science-practice interface within the Montado in Alentejo. Competitive research funding is a supporting mechanism, but long term investment outside of these projects is a pre-condition for the co-construction to take place, especially concerning the management of such a complex system as the Montado.

Isabel Ferraz de Oliveira
mifo@uevora.pt

Helena Guimarães
mhguimaraes@uevora.pt

Teresa Pinto Correia
mtpc@uevora.pt
Instituto de Ciências Agrárias e Ambientais Mediterrânicas
Universidade de Évora, Portugal

[1]European funded projects such as Farmpath (FP7) and HNV-Link (H2020), Regional