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A local landscape in transition between production and consumption goals: new management arrangements and new challenges for governance.

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Abstract:

Around all towns in the Alentejo region, the landscape is dominated by an agricultural mosaic, where small scale farming dominates, composed of olive groves combined with pastures, fruit orchards, and vegetable gardens, in the most fertile and water abundant soils. This is a totally different pattern than the large scale landscape of the extensive silvo-pastoral systems in the latifundia that normally is associated with the region. It is not the most known, but it is the landscape where people live or see in their everyday life.

These small scale farm units have increasingly lost their importance as production units over the last decades, even if farming has been maintained by aging local population. In the last two decades, these parcels became extremely attractive for new comers, who settle in the rural context as lifestyle farmers, or simply as new residents (permanent or week-end houses). These new comers have higher economic possibilities, often rebuilding the houses and investing in the land. They search for a new life quality. Farming and the production of food have been losing their importance – but it is increasing again, due to the rising demand for local and quality food products and the difficult economic situation of many families. As farming is concerned, new arrangements emerge: the new owners may be able to keep farming, often with new or reshaped production objectives, markets and models; they may search for associated older farmers in the area who support them with their knowledge and with this maintain the traditional farm systems; or they may let others, new comers or locals, use their land. The mixture of the different trends calls for new management arrangements, where the traditional cooperation and neighbour relations are reshaped. These new arrangements are emerging but still need to be strengthened and acknowledged by authorities and policies, so they can unfold.

The paper presents a case-study in Montemor-o-Novo, a small town 100 km from Lisbon, and

thus highly subject to the pressure from urban users. Within a larger European project, FarmPath, the transition theory conceptual framework has been applied to study changes in owner consumption patterns, production goals and models, as well as in land use and the landscape. Based in interviews to new entrants, this study i) characterizes broadly this larger phenomenon composed of individual changes and identifies the new ways in which rural landscapes are consumed, ii) identifies new production models and the cooperation models in place; iii) explores the impacts in the land use and landscape iii) discusses the reshaped social relationships and new management arrangements and the policies responses required for their unfolding. These small scale farm units have increasingly lost their importance as production units over the last decades, even if farming has been maintained by aging local population. In the last two decades, these parcels became extremely attractive for new comers, who settle in the rural context as lifestyle farmers, or simply as new residents (permanent or week-end houses). These new comers have higher economic possibilities, often rebuilding the houses and investing in the land. They search for a new life quality. Farming and the production of food have been losing their importance – but it is increasing again, due to the raising demand for local and quality food products and the difficult economic situation of many families. As farming is concerned, new arrangements emerge: the new owners may be able to keep farming, often with new or reshaped production objectives, markets and models; they may search for associated older farmers in the area who support them with their knowledge and with this maintain the traditional farm systems; or they may let others, new comers or locals, use their land. The mixture of the different trends calls for new management arrangements, where the traditional cooperation and neighbour relations are reshaped. These new arrangements are emerging but still need to be strengthened and acknowledged by authorities and policies, so they can unfold.

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