

CASE STUDY PT-3 OLIVE GROVES (PORTUGAL)

BRIEF PROFILE OF THE CASE STUDY

- The study takes place in the municipality of Montemor-O-Novo, in central Alentejo. An important characteristic of this area is its rurality with the proximity of Lisbon, and along the main axis of exchange between Lisbon and Madrid. The landscape is composed of a characteristic **small-scale mosaic of farm units** between 1 and 5 ha, sometimes up to 20ha.
- This mosaic landscape, composed of land use processes **hardly taken in account by authorities** in their different policies at the various scales, is nevertheless a provider of environmental and social benefits.
- The analysis focuses on two environmental and social benefits. Firstly, **sustainable food production** and secondly rural **vitality**. The present case study pays particular attention to the farmers and their collectives actions, their linkage with the other actors of the socio-economic system without forgetting the valuation of the key stakeholders on the field.



KEY FACTORS IMPACTING THE PROVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

The environmental and social benefit addressed in this case study is **rural vitality**. As other peripheral territories, Baixo Alentejo municipalities have deal for long time with **rural exodus and land abandonment**. The *Alqueva* irrigation project brought the **promise of more jobs, attracting investments and settling population in the region**.

The identified negatives externalities that derived from the intensification of olive grove systems seems to be in conflict with other policies and strategies and territorial policies, namely the EU-Water Framework Directive, control of diffuse pollution, Regional Strategy for Smart Specialisation, and even the Operational Program for the Alentejo Region, and also the European Biodiversity Strategy as well as it is putting at risks the protection status brought by the Birds' directive.

Farming system intensification, allows for **large increments in productivity and profitability** but constraints some **environmental and landscape** benefits and cause more environmental concerns.

EMERGING FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Landscape transformation can be quite shocking for the occasional visitor; still for the locals it can actually be seen as the **expression of the rural vitality**. **Steppe ecosystems** provide a wide variety of biotopes for birds, some of those endangered **species which relies solely upon these ecosystems**. The Natura 2000 network, through the Birds directive, should ensure the protection of these important habitats for these important species, there are reports of Special Protection Areas converted to irrigation crops, in the current case study area, which poses a real threat to conservation efforts. An important heritage is being jeopardized in name of profitability and rural vitality, once the endogenous varieties are being replaced by exogenous and more rentable ones as well as centenary olives.

