

Interior regions in Portugal: demographics, problems and (im)possible solutions

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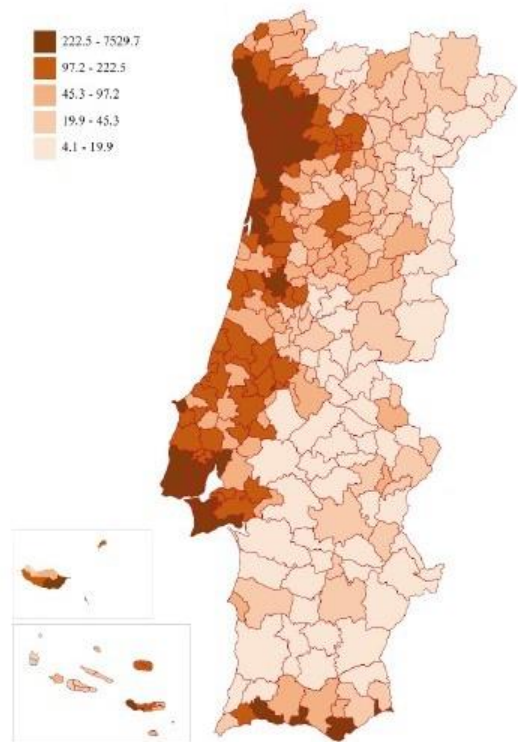
Researcher at CICP, Universidade do Minho.



THE PROBLEMS

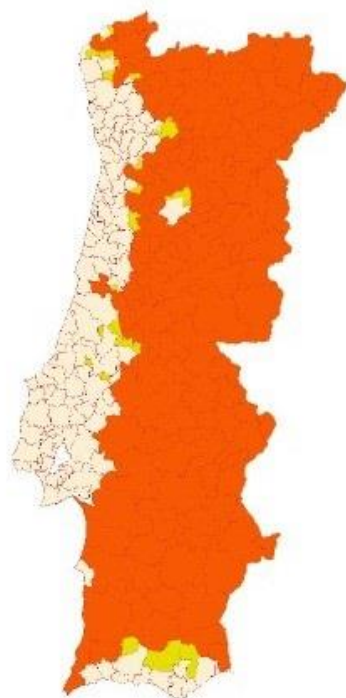
20% of the population in
80% of the territory
Aging population
Environmental issues

Areas classified as interior regions in 2017:



Source: Pordata (www.pordata.pt/Municipios/Densidade+populacional-452). Accessed 10 January 2019.

Figure 1: Map of population density in Portuguese municipalities: Average number of residents per square kilometre, 2017.



Source: Programa Nacional para a Coesão Territorial (National Programme for Territorial Cohesion) – Implementação, Acompanhamento e Monitorização, p. 98. (www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/jc21/governo/programa/programa-nacional-para-a-coesao-territorial-/ficheiros-coesao-territorial/programa-nacional-para-a-coesao-territorial-implementacao-acompanhamento-e-monitorizacao-pdf.aspx).

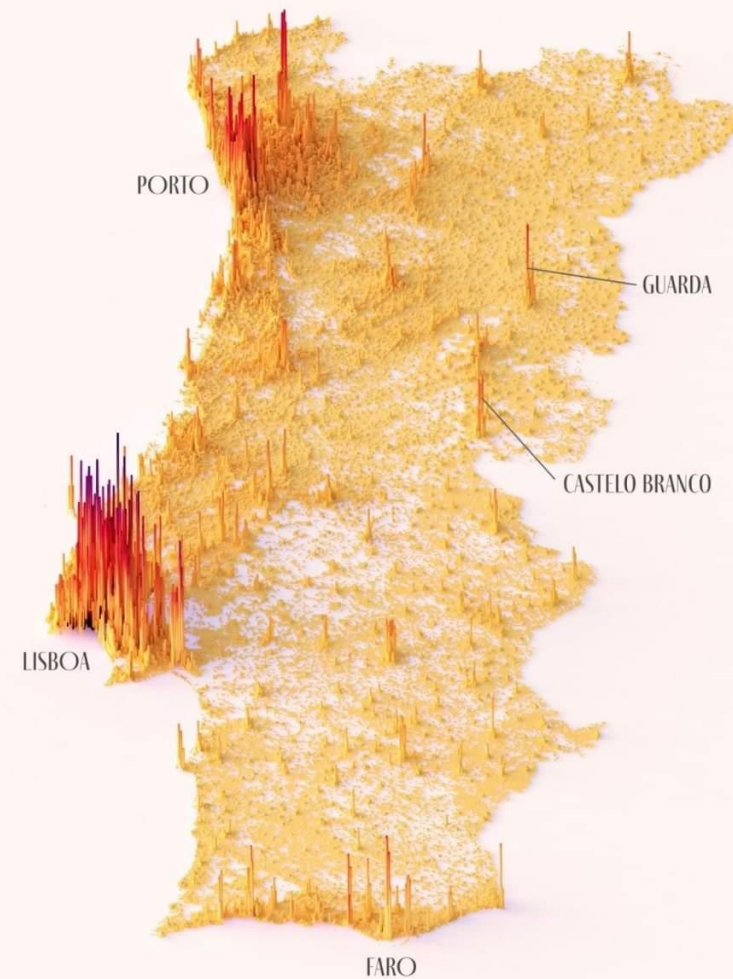
Figure 2: Map of the geographic limits of the Portuguese areas classified as interior

POPULATION DENSITY MAP

PORTUGAL

VISUALISED BY @TERENCE@FOSSTODON.ORG/@RESEARCHREMORA
IN #RSTATS WITH RAYSHADER (@TYLERMORGANWALL)

KONTUR POPULATION 2022



Since the middle ages, keeping people in rural areas and agricultural activities had been a subject of state policies:

- There were laws and public policies meant to keep the population on the countryside using all sorts of arguments,
- territory defense and military occupation,
- food self-supply,
- state autonomy and independence.



The Agrarian Question

However,

People kept abandoning the fields whenever they could and Portugal was never self-sufficient in food supplies, particularly cereals (Almeida, 2020).



Tradicional activities in rural Portugal:

- The Montado: cork trees provide cork and acorns to feed swine
- Olive trees for olive oil
- Livestock herds: swine, sheep, goats, cows for meat, milk and cheese
- Small farm animals: chickens, rabbits, and so on, including bees for honey
- Cereal crops
- Vegetable and fruit gardens in towns and farm headquarters
- Hunting
- Forests provide firewood and coal
- Agricultural based industries:
 - wool and linen textiles
 - leather shoes
 - tomato
 - milk
 - wood for furniture, construction, resin, and plywood
 - cork for bottles and isolation coatings.

The Montado: Complete and diverse ecosystem appropriate for the Mediterranean climate







Fires:

- Fire prevention is another example of an important regulating service provided by well-managed *montados*.
- Cork trees don't perish by fire.
- The Mediterranean basin is a hotspot for climatic changes and a region where the frequency of extreme events such as droughts and severe wildfires is expected to increase in the future.
- In Portugal we are presently in an extreme drought phase.

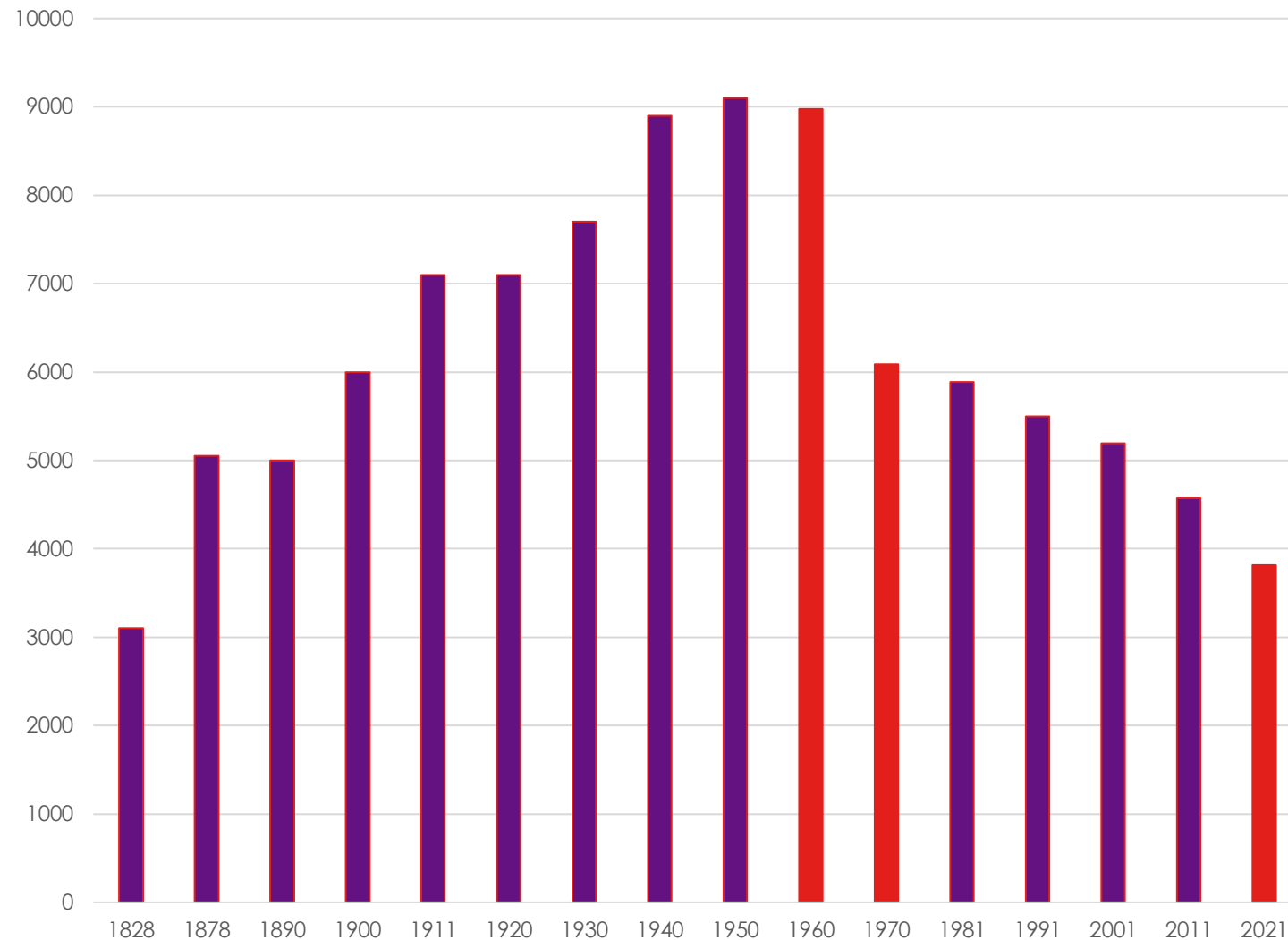




The Maranhão Dam: a case study in the municipality of Avis

In the municipality of Avis, the Maranhão Dam was inaugurated in 1959 and it was precisely on the next decade that it lost 1/3 of its population. And again 16.6 per cent from 2011 to 2021.

Avis Municipality: demographics



1960: rural exodus, farm machines and industry

- Industrialization and construction works in the outskirts of Lisbon and Oporto attracted rural labourers to better paid jobs
- Emigration to other European countries, particularly France, Luxemburg, Switzerland and Germany. Over a million Portuguese people helped rebuild France after World War II and stayed there.
- Search for better life and working conditions
- An escape from the Colonial War
- Higher wages in agriculture
- Renters
- A new class of entrepreneurs: machines and tomato croppers
- Fences for herds, less shepherds
- End of transhumance



Depopulation:

- Sharp reduction in the size of the population in interior municipalities
- Weakened the social structure and foundation of the rural population
- The loss of these regions' productive role and active population has decreased their social, economic and political significance.
- Depopulation brings out frailties. People are unprotected, alone, with restricted access to health services, education, communication, security. Poor internet and phone services, poor water quality.

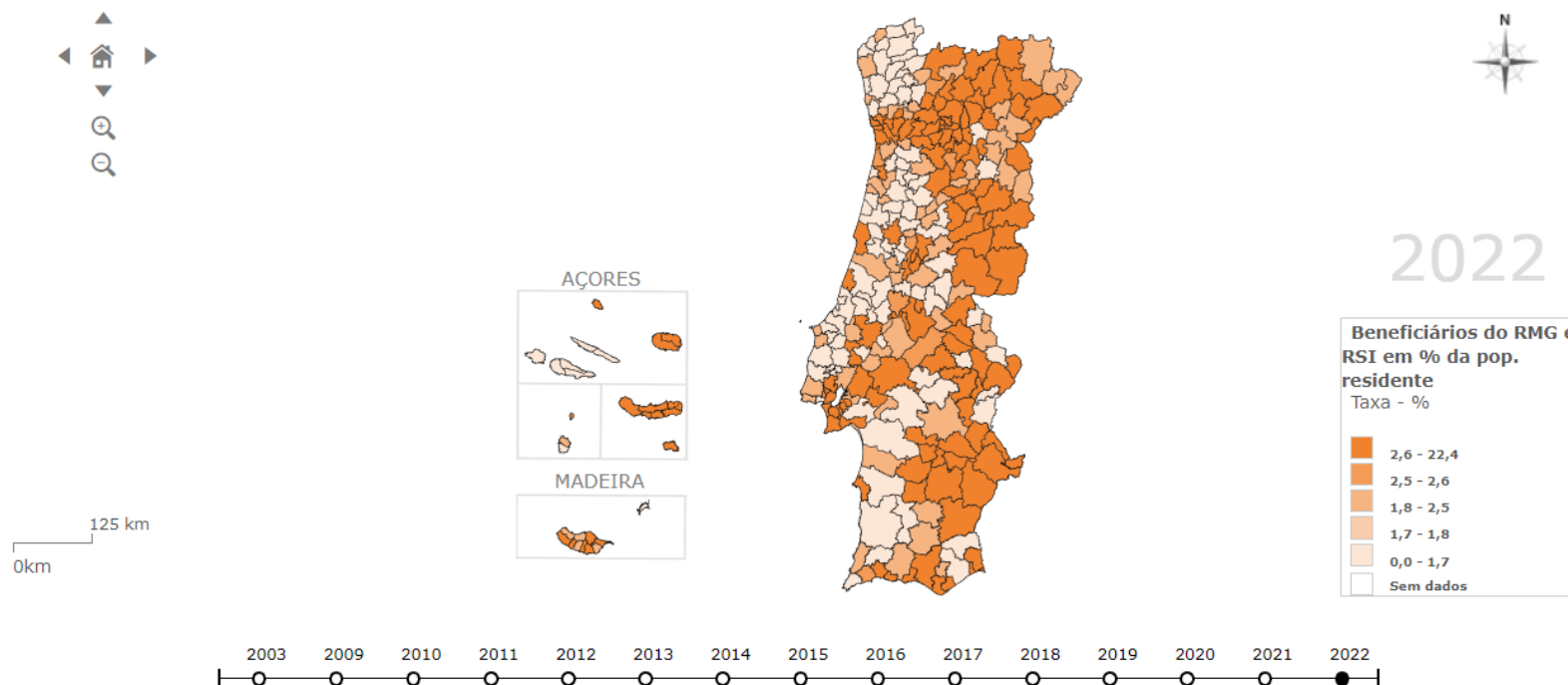
Beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum income have higher percentages in interior regions



Aprofunde a sua análise, aqui

Beneficiários do Rendimento Mínimo Garantido e Rendimento Social de Inserção da Segurança Social no total da população residente com 15 e mais anos (%)

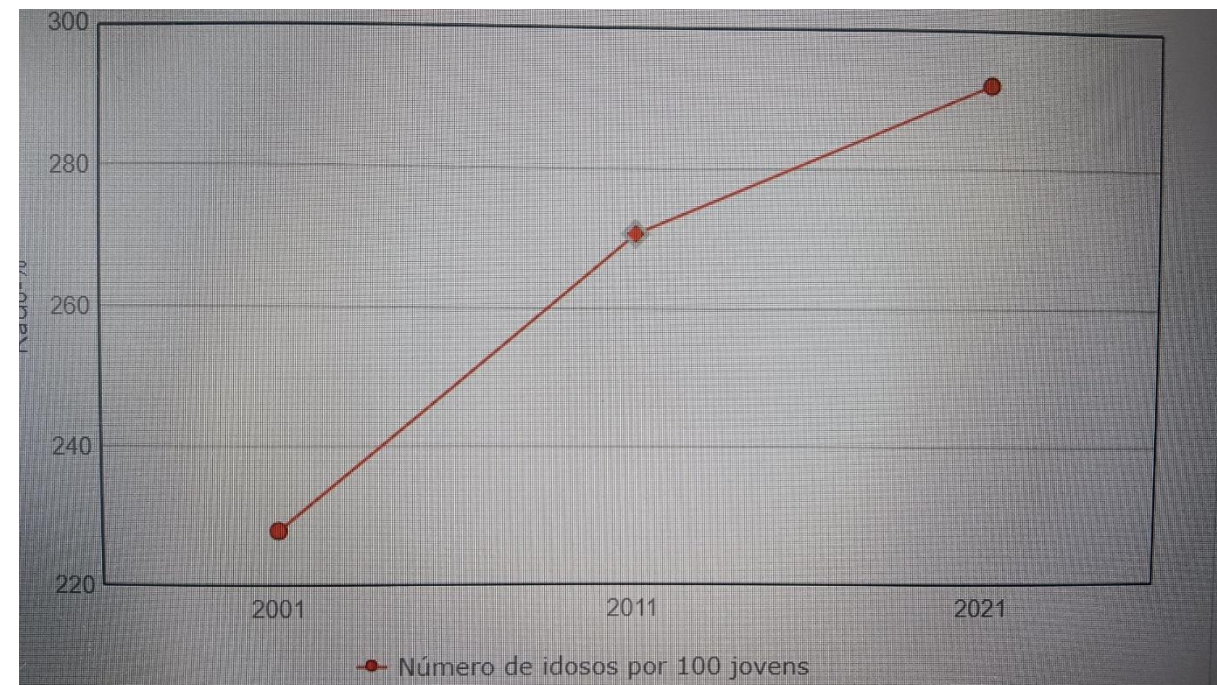
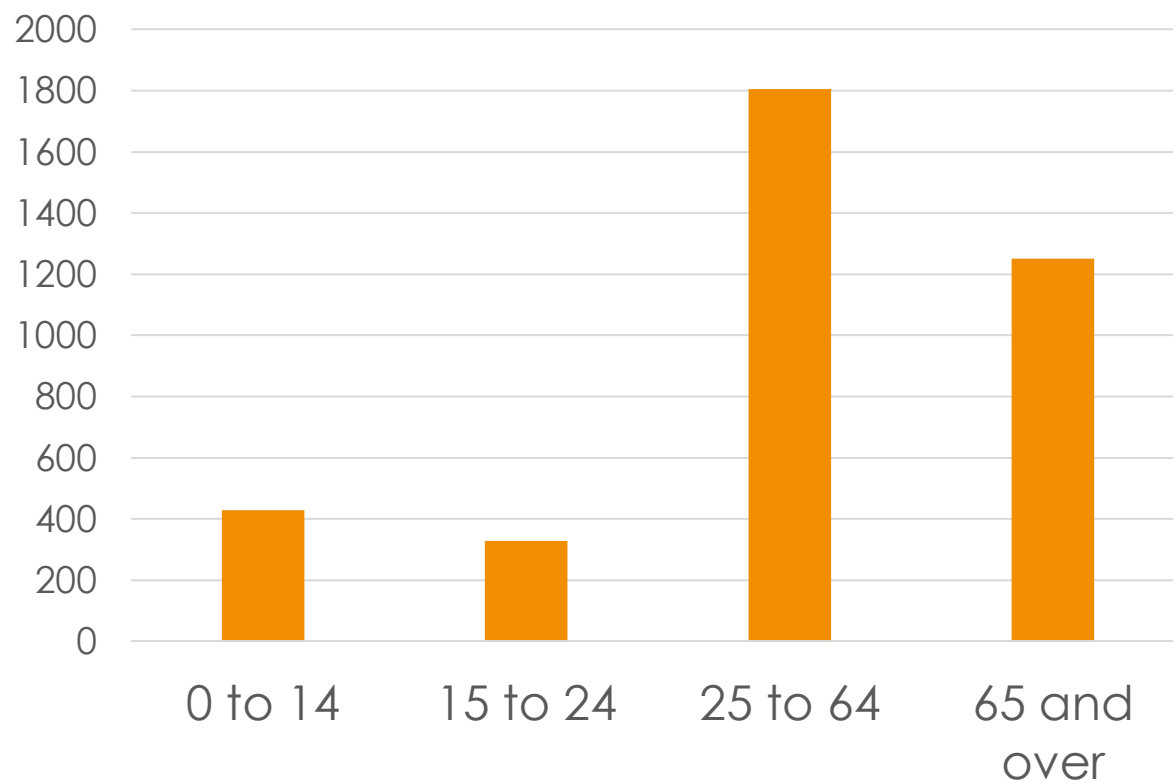
Beneficiários do RMG e RSI em % da pop. residente



[https://www.pordata.pt/municipios/beneficiarios+do+rendimento+minimo+garantido+e+rendimento+social+de+insercao+da+seguranca+social+no+total+da+populacao+residente+com+15+e+mais+anos+\(percentagem\)-715](https://www.pordata.pt/municipios/beneficiarios+do+rendimento+minimo+garantido+e+rendimento+social+de+insercao+da+seguranca+social+no+total+da+populacao+residente+com+15+e+mais+anos+(percentagem)-715)

Demographics in Avis

Avis: age groups in 2021



Ratio of elderly people for every hundred youths:
292 in Avis, 2021.

Three interior Portuguese municipalities have a
ratio of over 700 elderly for every 100 youths,
<https://www.pordata.pt/municipios>

The Portuguese rural territories after agriculture (Baptista, 2006):

- Rural populations separated from agricultural activities in their territories.
- Other activities in rural areas:
 - Tourism
 - Hunting
 - Food.
- 3 types of agriculture:
 1. Highly competitive, specialized in fruits, wine and olive oil, fundamental for Portuguese exports, with low impact on local communities, low use of permanent labour, high use of seasonal labour.
 2. Based on livestock, corn and wheat, highly mechanized, low use of labour, completely dependent on European subsidies.
 3. Social agriculture, urban gardens, small size, a supplement to low pensions and unemployment. Some impact on community life and social relations.

Main topics:

- Heritage
- Quality of life
- Promotion of local resources
- Public services
- Decentralization
- Authonomy
- Social cohesion

New definitions of Heritage

- Natural
- Constructed
- Material
- Immaterial
- People
- Landscape
- Food, gastronomy
- Sea, waves
- Air
- Brands



Why not also this? Human made landscape



Very low rates of tourism in rural areas



Portuguese mountain landscape and heritage:

Why preserve empty villages just for tourists?

Scenic villages or villages as scenery.

Staged authenticity.

The cases of Piódão and Aldeias de Xisto: there are no inhabitants left.

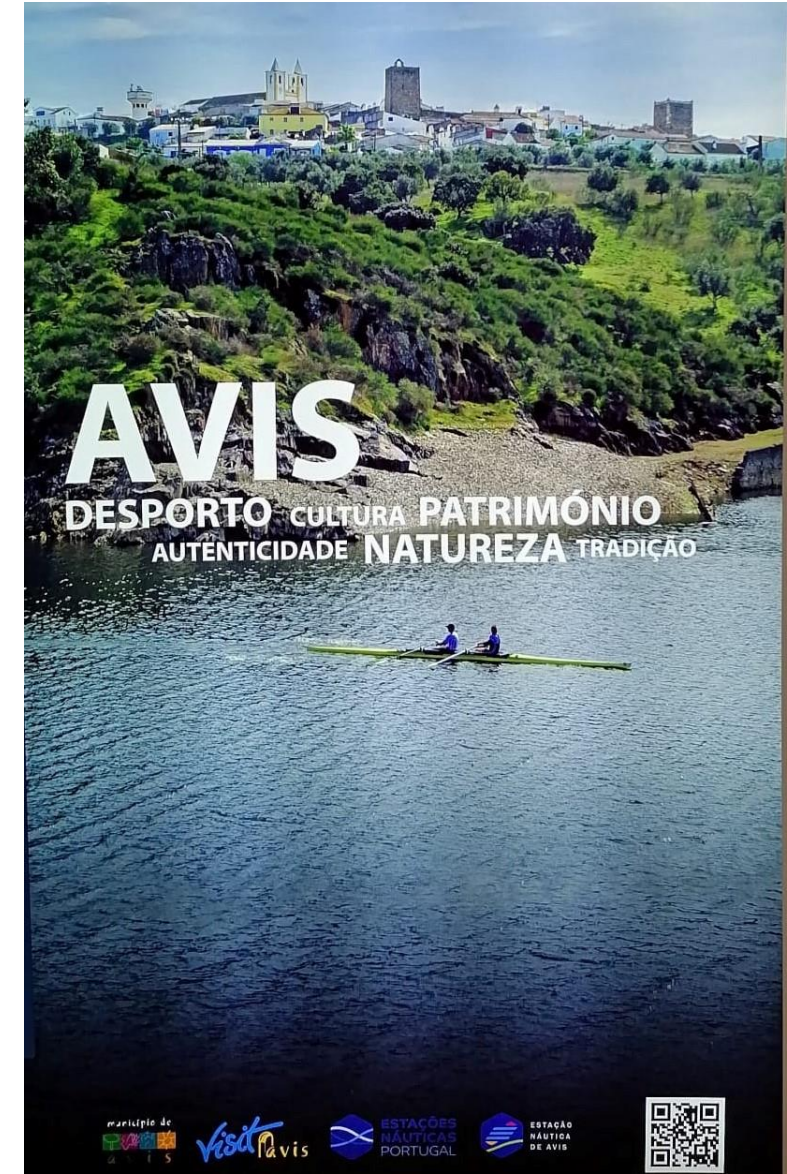
Rural as a theme park? McRural (Figueiredo, 2013)



Local Government attraction strategies

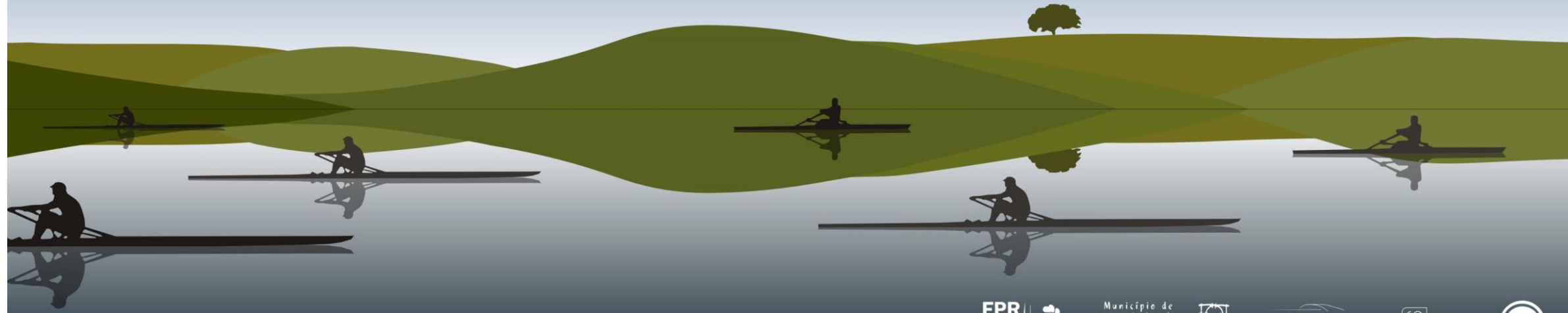
- Trying to attract people and companies
- Family oriented policies: maternity benefits, money for new families with children, fiscal incentives
- Emigrants as investment sources
- Summer festivals
- Local products
- Education, technical courses
- Local resources
- Heritage: certification, arts and crafts, quality, tradition
- Landscape, environment
- Professional schools: important factors for local development and youth settlement, as well as universities and polytechnic institutes, which have already proven to be useful tools for demographic stimulation and local job creation, because of their direct and indirect contributions to regional development.
- Tourism and heritage are important issues:
 - ✓ branding,
 - ✓ professional certificates in the area,
 - ✓ wifi in historical city centres
 - ✓ the creation of a digital platform to enhance historic, heritage and cultural visibility

Attraction strategies



AVIS HEAD OF THE CORK

COME AND CHASE THE OLYMPIC CHAMPIONS



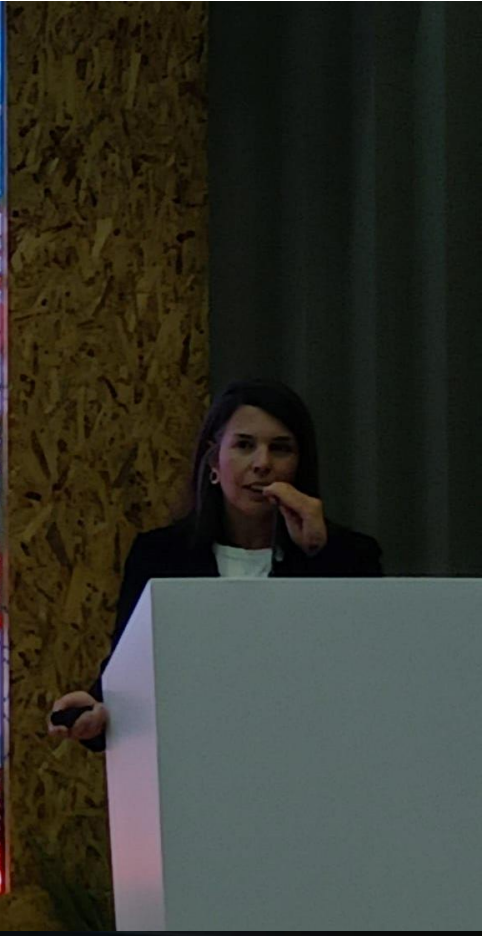
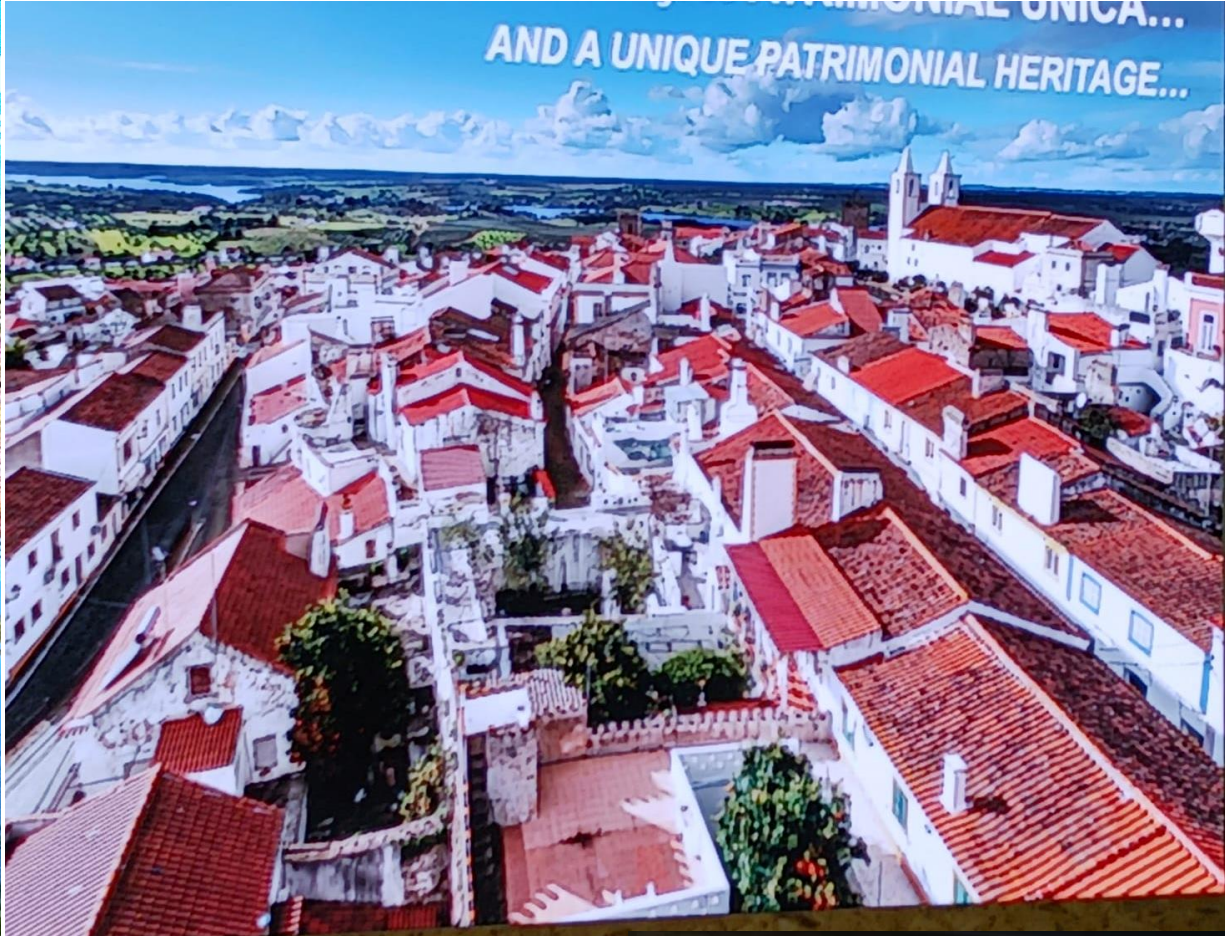
MARCH 25 MARÇO 2017



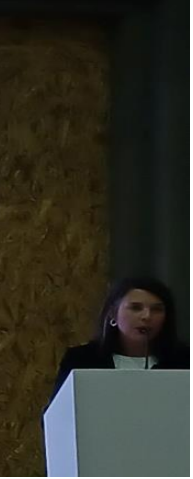
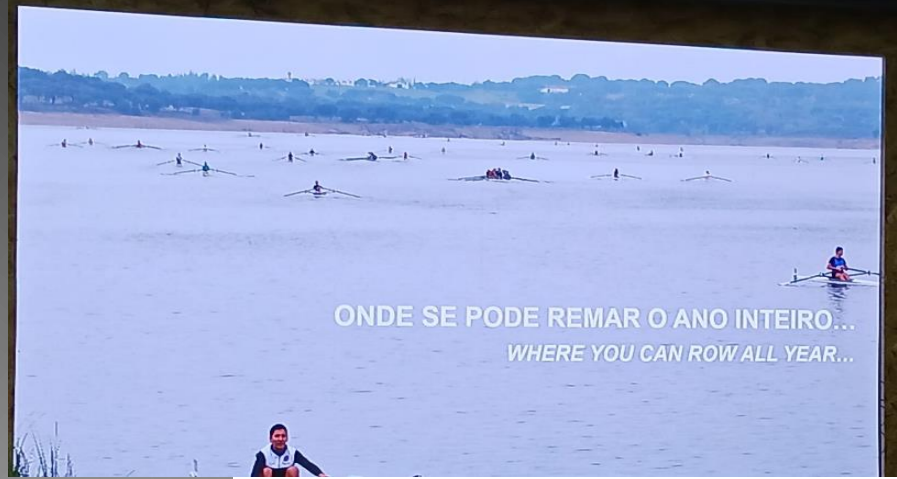
<https://viagens.sapo.pt/viajar/viajar-portugal/artigos/os-encantos-da-barragem-de-maranhao>



CONSTRUÇÃO DE UM FUTURO MAIS SUSTENTÁVEL
BUILDING A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



Municipal councillor presents
Avis Nautical Centre



However,

- Superintensive agriculture
- Drought
- Fire
- Resource depletion
- Mining projects: lithium extraction
- Luxury resorts and golf courses

(Almeida, 2020; Almeida, Faísca, Freire, 2023)



Based on myths created in the nineteenth century

- Unlimited growth
- Blind faith in Science
- Loss of connection with Nature
- The faster we use resources, the greater the progress
- Balance based on mastering technology

However: “The faster we consume natural resources and available energy, the shorter our survival time”.

(Martins-Loução, 2021)



Now this is the new reality:



Fernando Máximo



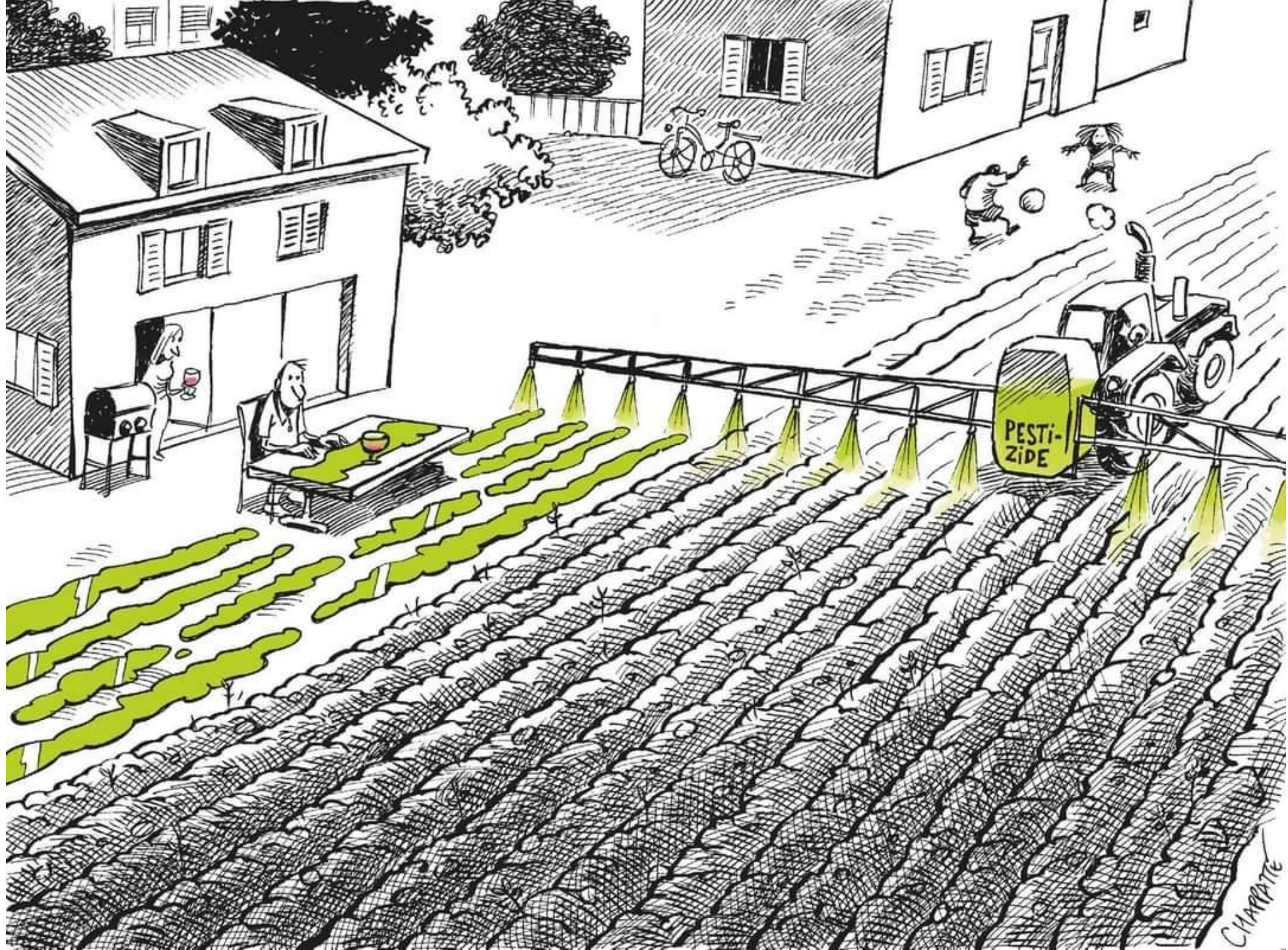
Superintensive monoculture

Olive oil for biofuel

Pulverizing chemicals on olive trees

Also almonds and other nuts





**Superintensive
olive groves all the
way to the water
line and dams
below normal
levels**



The 2017-2022 cronic drought



June 2023: 40% of the country in extreme drought



Microcystins: toxins produced by cyanobacteria, they produce damage in the liver, both in humans and livestock



SOCIEDADE

Água pode ser letal para o gado: Barragem do Maranhão contaminada pela agricultura intensiva



Odemira and greenhouses for red fruits:

4,000 hectares (9,880 acres) of plastics in the Natural Park of the Southwest of Alentejo and Costa Vicentina





- 6,000 to 8,000 farm workers in the municipality of Odemira, most of the illegal immigrants
- Mostly Nepalese and Pakistanis
- Not enough houses for seasonal workers
- Living in containers in shocking conditions (according to the mayors), near slavery, victims of organizations who bring them from their countries and keep their passports and salaries
- No multiculturalism can justify bad living conditions
- Cultural clashes with local population
- Pollution of water, soil and air with chemicals
- Not enough inspection regarding the environment and working conditions
- Odemira: a new Almeria?

Workers living in containers near Beja, by reporter Nuno Guedes, *TSF*, 30/01/2018 and 08/02/2018

- California model.
- Monoculture.
- Highly mechanized.
- Intensive use of water, chemicals and technology.
- Portugal in a similar situation to raw material dependent economies with high levels of exports to China, such as Brazil and Paraguay.
- Farms are now owned and explored mostly by foreigners in an international trend for land grabbing and resource appropriation.

- Agricultural products have turned into commodities and agricultural sector was incorporated into neoliberal policies and globalization.
- No new permanent jobs. Only temporary jobs, with low wages and illegal immigrant workers living in the worst human conditions
- There are new olive oil factories, but they only function for 3 months a year
- Not interesting for the local economy, nor for social development
- Causes environmental danger, genetic erosion and the end of biodiversity.

Regarding agriculture,

Expansion and intensification of agriculture are considered the main causes for emission of greenhouse gases, loss of biodiversity, soil and freshwater degradation, and environmental pollution. It's up to the State to produce policies and laws to prevent resource degradation (Martins-Loução, 2021).

Chemical-mechanical model:

- Huge input consumption: water, fertilizers, fuel for mechanization, electricity...
- Inefficient use of chemical inputs
- Unacceptable costs of the expansion of cultivated areas at the expense of natural remaining ecosystems
- Public policies for the rural world are insufficient and hard to enforce. They are contradicted by the deregulation of economic practices enforced by large companies.

There is the need for:

- State intervention and public policies to deal with environmental sustainability
- Increasing the efficiency of public policies
- Promotion of the well-being of rural territories and their inhabitants
- Agricultural diversification
- Inspection resource use
- Rules for:
 - Product differentiation regarding ecological footprint in order to guide consumer behaviour
 - Direct economic incentives to production of bio products (Santos, 2013)

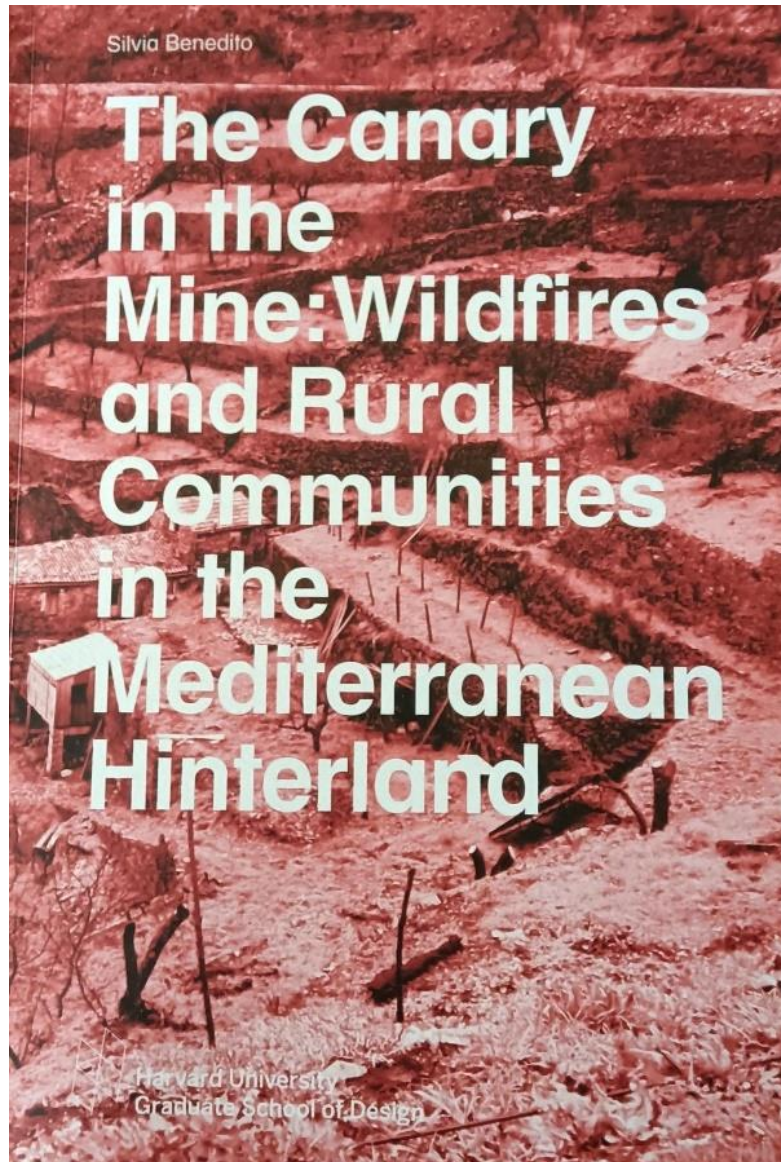


The 2017 and 2022 fires

Historic reasons for fuel accumulation and wildfires in the Mediterranean area:

1. rural exodus, depopulation
2. raising labor costs
3. declining value of the byproducts of fuel management (firewood, grazing, manure), which were used in the past as inputs to farming systems and rural livelihoods
4. declining economic viability of agriculture in hilly areas, which led to the obliteration of the forest–farmland mosaic (Simões, 2018; Benedito, 2020, Almeida, 2020)
5. identical and contiguous ecosystems (Martins-Loução, 2021)

Fires: a growing claim for a paradigm shift from fire suppression to damage prevention



Serra da Estrela after the fires



Lithium mining in the north of Portugal

Government contract with an American company

Disapproval of local government and local associations

According to the mayor of Boticas:

“We’ve been investing in equipment, heritage, forest, we’ve been giving incentives for people to settle here, helping our farmers with financial support, protecting our livestock, our bees. We’ve attracted companies, tourists. And this project is harmful for our environment.”



Barroso, no concelho de Boticas, receberá exploração de lítio da Savannah Resources. D.R.



Luxury resorts and real estate



<https://www.jornaldenegocios.pt/weekend/detalhe/areal-entre-troia-e-melides-um-paraiso-em-risco>

Luxury resorts and real estate

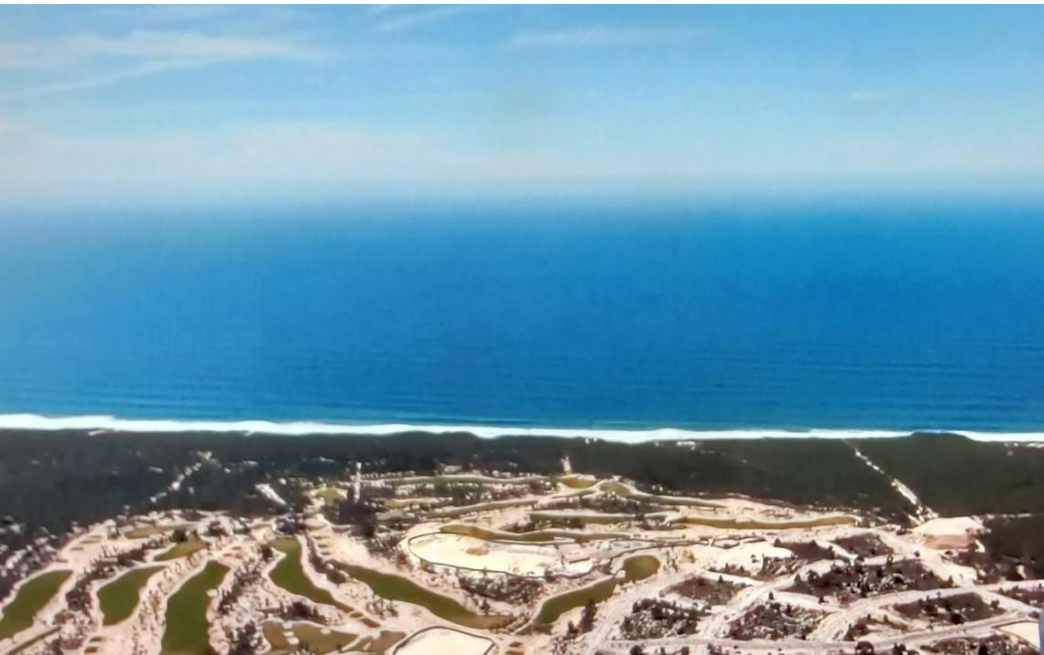
Alentejo's seashore: the European Hamptons?
Preserving ecosystems is the greatest luxury.



<https://www.rtp.pt/play/p11190/e689914/biosfera>

<https://www.escape.com.au/destinations/europe/portugal/this-wild-stretch-of-portuguese-coastline-is-fast-becoming-europes-hamptons/news-story/1b7ce3fc750ae3df0d1b2268b7907f0f?fbclid=IwAR0MbjUNUuaQV2-uQTJU fsxCQ2IH Lfy0jnMv6tYZf-OjCnifvXaLrU W8>

Luxury resorts and real estate



Troia, Melides, the empire of seashore golfcourses, when Portugal is going through extreme drought?

<https://pt.mondediplo.com/2023/03/troia-comporta-melides-o-imperio-do-golfe-a-beira-mar.html>



Extractivism

Irreversible damage and ecological destruction within the green revolution paradigm

“multiply stressed regions ‘depressed and contested territories’: areas that not only suffer from pervasive socio-economic and ecological distress but are also currently the object of competing developmental and market models” (Horstink, Schwemmlin, Encarnação, 2023).

Modern-day land grabbing – produces “irreversible social harms”

“tendency of the increasing commodification of natural resources within a neoliberal framework”

“a continued persistence of the neoliberal economic paradigm in world economic affairs has contributed to a widespread belief in the benefits of a development model for poor countries premised on western private-sector-driven investments for the purpose of building exports to western markets” (Pols, Romijn, 2017) – but Portugal is a part of the EU!

“the depletion of raw materials, natural resources, land and soil degradation, climate change, species extinctions, biodiversity loss, and deforestation, are wedded to capital accumulation and the drive for continued exponential growth of the world economy. Increasing global inequalities, across multiple spatial contexts, is another measurable feature of these processes”

“Extractivism involves appropriation of natural and human resource wealth, producing a drain that damages or depletes its source in a potentially irreversible way”

“global agribusiness is compelled by commodity-driven and ecologically destructive extractivist logics of accumulation, especially in the forms of land-grabbing, class struggle, labor exploitation, and the intensification of mechanization and use of chemical inputs” (Chagnon et al, 2022)



All this goes against the *United Nations' Declaration on Peasants' Rights*, which defends:

- food security
- sustainable agri-food systems
- responsible governance of natural resources
- human rights (Alabrese, Bessa, Brunori, Giuggioli, 2022)

GDN – Global Deal for Nature proposes Ecological Restoration to save the diversity of life on Earth: by 2030, 30 percent of the planet (terrestrial and marine) should be fully protected, and 20 percent should be designated a stabilization area (Martins-Loução, 2021).

Extractivism

The United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15), in Montreal, Canada on 19 December 2022

Global action through 2030 to halt and reverse nature loss.

Nature is critical to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees. Adoption of a bold global biodiversity framework that addresses the key drivers of nature loss is needed to secure our own health and well-being alongside that of the planet.

What took place at COP 15:

- Adoption of an equitable and comprehensive framework matched by the resources needed for implementation
- **Clear targets to address overexploitation, pollution, fragmentation and unsustainable agricultural practices**
- A plan that safeguards the rights of indigenous peoples and recognizes their contributions as stewards of nature
- Finance for biodiversity and alignment of financial flows with nature to drive finances toward sustainable investments and away from environmentally harmful ones

<https://www.unep.org/un-biodiversity-conference-cop-15>



Some ONGs are encouraging discussion

→ Dunas Livres:

Fighting the development of real estate mega projects by the Comporta seashore

They put the responsibility on the municipality, who, according to this NGO, has sold, without rules, the most valuable assets of the region: land, water, beaches, people, dunes, forests, pristine landscape as there is no more all over the country or even in Europe. As well as the future of its youth and the culture of its elders.

A radical socio-cultural, geographic, environmental transformation is falling on the region. Motivated by the unsustainable development of real estate mega-projects and luxury tourism in areas and with much higher density than all the towns and villages of Melides and Comporta: Costa Terra, Herdade do Pinheiro, Muda Reserve, Torre and Dune nas Terras da Comporta, plus 3 urbanisations in the Tróia Peninsula - among other new and huge projects.

Four golf courts with bright green lawns while in the hills the precious montado is withering. Just like all over the country, there are serious drops in agricultural production due to record-breaking levels of extreme drought. Records that the municipality breaks, year after year.

Even so, more and more projects of intensive agriculture in the middle of the moorlands, with the reactivation or expansion of mines that will spend too much water. With an unnecessary train line that will come to weaken the montado and separate the people.

Access to beaches is privatised or highly conditioned to the point of being impossible to reach them. The end of the camping park and other infrastructures that were still accessible to the common citizen.

A municipality council that is friends with private interests of big economic powers, but that doesn't listen to its own population - this is not the interest of the people of Grândola and of the country!

A municipality council complicit with the goals of real estate promoters, but that hinders the efforts of civilian organisations that are trying to understand infringements to the law at the core of these projects.

Dear international friends,

The last wild section of coastline in Portugal, a unique treasure of dune habitats and pristine beaches that have survived until today, is about to disappear – if we do nothing.

The Dunas Livres Association is a movement dedicated to the preservation of the wild coast habitats and endangered flora between Tróia and Melides, the so-called Blue Coast. This is a necessary fight against the exponential rise of megaprojects of luxury tourism that are being approved and built left and right, on top of ancient dunes, ignoring what should be areas protected by national and European law.

Not only is the natural environment at stake, but the social and economic impacts are felt. The local population is dwindling, and the real estate investment and inflation do nothing but worsen an abandoned and rural Portugal, jeopardised by drought.

Dunas Livres is fighting this by spreading the information and fighting legally. We just got wonderful news that, within one day of starting the process, the court has requested the construction of the project "Na Praia", owned by @_inditex 's Sandra Ortega (@zara and friends), to STOP until the legal process is concluded. Hopefully, the result will be in favor of scraping the project completely, and preserve this stretch of dunes.

Creative spaces and regeneration: The case of Cunhal Sendim in Alentejo

Alfredo Cunhal Sendim | Facebook x Sharing the Landscape - EN - Mo x +

en.freixodomeio.pt/sharing-the-landscape/

YouTube Maps

Montado Freixo do Meio Partilha da Paisagem

VISITING CANTEEN INTERPRETATION CENTRE LODGING YOUR EVENTS PT

Homepage » Sharing the Landscape

Rediscovering our Natural System

The inspiration of the Montado is accessible for everyone. As is the reconnection with nature.

Visit and dive into the Natural System, learn about flora and fauna and the unique characteristics of Alentejo, and celebrate a heritage meant to be everyone's.

Get to know the Cooperative of Freixo do Meio, one hour drive away from Lisbon, in a quest for sustainability based on the principles of Agroecology.

584 HECTARES OF PROTECTED AREA

+1000 DIFFERENT SPECIES

6 DYNAMIC AGROFORESTS

7000 YEARS OF HUMAN PRESENCE

Innovation

Tradition THE MONTADO

Monte do Freixo do Meio

- Interpretation Centre
- Micro-factories for food production
- Vegetable Gardens and Agro-forestry
- Restaurant
- Store & Café
- Lodging

Millennial Zambujeiro

10Km Trail
Tours on foot, by bicycle or horseback riding

Conservation

24°C Nublado

20:36 20/09/2022

Montado do Freixo do Meio: <https://freixodomeio.pt/en/homepage-english/>, <https://www.facebook.com/freixodomeio>, <https://freixodomeio.pt/>, part of the National Network of Protected Areas.

Debate:

- Depopulation of rural areas is irreversible – another important loss from 2011 to 2021 (census)
- Local government has played an important role in the development of attraction strategies for people, families and private companies. Not necessarily the right ones.
- Public policies by the central government have been put in place. Not successfully.
- Huge contradiction between what is advertised about the rural world, heritage and environment, and the real conditions of frailty, insecurity, environment dangers, fires and unprotected populations.
- Can changing territorial policies contribute to reverse depopulation and protect the remaining rural population?
- There are no inspections to verify how policies are being applied.
- Most urgent:
 - Permanent jobs creation in the rural world
 - More climate appropriate agriculture – considering water shortages.
 - A change in mentalities and culture must occur in order to make people understand that putting money into rural areas is an investment, not a waste.
 - To safeguard the quality of life for the remaining few who still resist urban attraction.

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Thank you!