

Disentangling marginalisation processes in rural Portugal

Teresa Pinto Correia and Bas Breman*

Introduction

This study has come forth out of the European EUROLAN-project which focuses on the processes and the consequences of marginalisation of agriculture and rural areas in various European countries. One of the countries where such an analysis of the situation concerning marginalisation took place was Portugal.

Although marginalisation is not a new phenomenon it is believed that nowadays, partly also as a consequence from changes in the Common Agricultural Policy, the extent and the speed of the process in Europe, as well as its socio-economic and ecological consequences, are being strengthened. At the same time though, the concept of marginalisation can also be confusing due to the fact that it is used to describe a wide range of processes with often very different origins or outcomes.

During the '80s and the '90s there have been several attempts to disentangle the concept of marginalisation by describing the process on different scales, in different regions of Europe and with different outcomes. We believe that such a disentangling of the concept is crucial in the sense that it leads to more detailed understanding of the various 'faces' of marginalisation and can thus help to influence the process and its consequences.

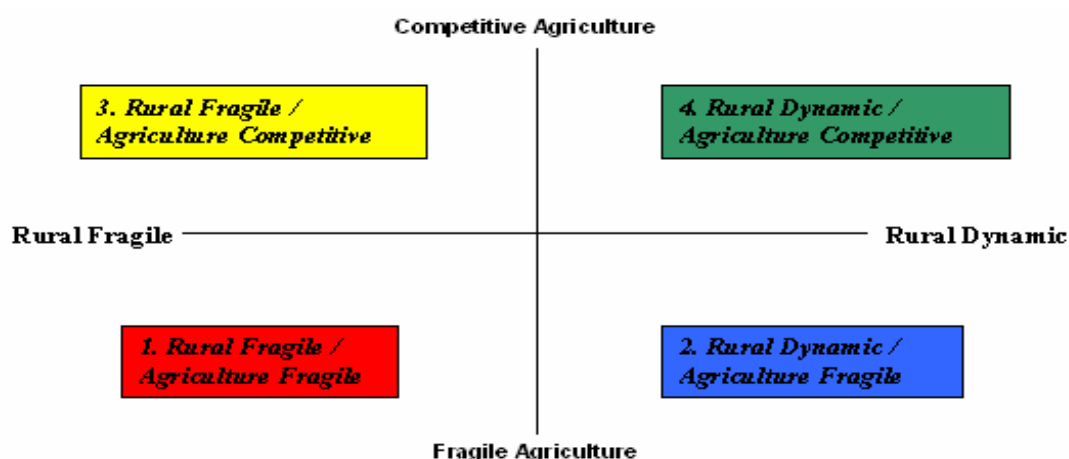
Based on the outcomes from the Portuguese analysis for the EUROLAN- project we would like to add a new element to the discussion on the concept of marginalisation.

Methods

To get to grips with the concept of marginalisation in Portugal, the first step in this study has been a thorough analysis of the existing information and discussion on the topic of marginalisation, first of all in the Portuguese discourse but also in a wider European context. During the next step, several indicators (both bio-physical and socio-economical) have been selected to help to clarify the status of the marginalisation in Portugal. The difficulties in the interpretation of those indicators, together with the outcomes from the foregoing analysis, asked for a more detailed description of the concept of marginalisation. Based on existing information, four different processes have been disentangled, three of which can somehow be related to the concept of marginalisation (see figure). Each of the processes reflect very different realities.

The interpretation and adaptation of a recent study by the Portuguese Ministry of Agriculture, entitled 'Portugal Rural: territórios e dinâmicas' (2003), has made it possible to quantify and visualize the occurrence of each of those four processes in Portugal.

* Departamento Planeamento Biofísico e Paisagístico, Universidade de Évora, Portugal. Teresa Pinto Correia – mtpc@uevora.pt, Bas Breman – basbreman@uevora.pt.



Results

The main outcome of this inventory has been the analysis and description of different realities of marginalisation in the Portuguese context. As Baptista (1995: 316) already described:

Agriculture no longer unites rural society with the whole of non-urban space. There now arises an issue of space which is no longer part of agriculture and which also no longer guarantees the vitality of rural society. The paths of agriculture, space and rural society are now dissociated.

As a consequence of such a dissociation, the marginalisation of agriculture and the marginalisation of rural areas are not necessarily interlinked either. This idea is strengthened by our own analysis of a range of indicators and by the data from the Portuguese Ministry of Agriculture. These data have been translated into maps and tables, visualizing distinct realities of marginalisation throughout Portugal. The most relevant of these figures will be shown and discussed in the poster.

The areas where both agriculture and rural areas are considered to be marginal can be found mostly in the interior mountain regions of the centre and the north. Together these areas occupy around 25% of the national territory and there is a strong correspondence with the outcomes of an earlier study on the probability of land abandonment.

The combination of a productive agricultural sector in marginal rural areas is very characteristic for the extensive areas of the Alentejo and to a somewhat lesser extent also for Trás-os-Montes. All in all this type of marginalisation affects about 44% of the country's surface. The more dynamic rural areas, either with or without a productive area, can be found mostly in the coastal areas and around the larger urban centres. About 10% of the country is seen to be dynamic whilst agriculture is only marginal. The remaining 21% of the territory is characterized by a productive agriculture in a dynamic environment and can thus not be considered marginal from these perspectives.

Discussion

The outcomes of this study illustrate the existence of various processes of marginalisation of agriculture and rural areas in Portugal. Together, these different processes affect large parts of the Portuguese territory but the consequences are far from uniform.

Marginalisation of agriculture, for example, does not necessarily imply the loss of rural dynamics or abandonment of land and at the same time a productive agriculture can not always prevent rural areas from getting marginalized. Similarly, the loss of rural dynamics might be problematic from a social or cultural point of view but does not necessarily have to be so from an economic or ecological perspective.

In the light of new CAP reforms such as 'decoupling', there will undoubtedly be significant changes in land use strategies. The outcome of those changing strategies also depends on the character of the marginalization processes. Therefore, diverse instruments will be needed to be able to deal with those outcomes.

Clearly, the results from this study cannot be seen as final outcomes as it is still necessary to continue research and discussion on the definitions and indicators that have been used.

What does become clear though, is that marginalisation of agriculture and rural areas in Portugal cannot be considered as one single process where the dynamics of land use and of social and economic indicators all follow the same trend.

It is believed that this diversity of marginalisation processes does not only account for the Portuguese situation but also for other rural areas in Europe. At the same time, there might also exist other types marginalisation in these areas which have not yet been detected in Portugal. A look at different processes, with sometimes divergent trends concerning agriculture, social factors and rural areas might be the required approach to better understand marginalisation and to cope with policy impacts and management challenges for the future. Almost implicitly, this also

Although one can find an increasing consciousness about the seriousness and the consequences of marginalisation, there is still little sign of a large scale, coherent scheme to deal with it in Portugal. Multifunctional forms of land use are sometimes presented as a useful instrument to stop marginalisation processes but we believe that the preconditions for these activities are often lacking.

The start of new activities requires agency, entrepreneurship and local resources. Especially in situations of rural marginalisation it is precisely those socio-economic dynamics that are missing.

There is an increasing demand from modern society for new functions such as recreation, identity and cultural and life quality functions that can possibly be offered by rural areas. From this perspective it might be crucial to focus first of all on processes of rural marginalisation and the ways in which these can be influenced.

Baptista, F. Oliveira, 1995 Agriculture, rural society and the land question in Portugal. *Sociologia Ruralis*, Volume 35, nr. ¾. Blackwell Publishing, England.

