

## ***Global overview of the Rural Development Programme: the mainland Portugal case-study***

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**Abstract:** This paper provides a global overview of the implementation of the Rural Development Programmes (RDP) in mainland Portugal, based on the collected and analysed information concerning to the rural programmes and some parameters of that place. These RDPs have been focused in the agriculture sector because the main Portuguese figures pointing that its rural territory is dominated by the agroforestry complex and about 1/3 of their population lives in rural areas. Their agriculture is very diverse, with prevalence of a small-scale structure where farms with big dimension accounts only 9% of the total, but represents 67% of the utilised agriculture area (UAA) and 77% of the total standard output value. The implemented RDPs show a positive impact in Portuguese economy due to the increasing of agricultural products, mechanization and buildings. Also, the decreasing of agricultural population has been balanced by the best living standard level of farmers (the increasing income). The recent RDP (2014-2020) pursue the previous programmes and is centred on five priorities with the main emphasis given to enhancing farm viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture in all regions and promoting innovative farm technologies and sustainable management of forests.

**Keywords:** Agroforestry; Portugal; Rural Development; Socio-economic and environmental indicators.

### **1. Introduction**

The environment, local culture and heritage are three key points in rural areas, being the local population the main generator and defender of those elements (Cardoso, 2011). Their absence or reduction imposed by the set of economic, social and demographic changes in recent decades has resulted in a growing devitalized economic and social decline, through a spiral process. The rural depopulation is very intense, the population that withstands is aging and the economic sources of income are scarce, with negative consequences for the territory cohesion and the overall country development.

Rural Portugal with an economic history and a structure resulting from the use of land by agriculture, forest and from industrial activities that used rural labour force and/or rural natural resources has been subject to major changes in terms of their economic functioning. Farming has lost importance, worsening the agrifood supply problems, however there are an increased interest by the pluri-activity and pluri-income, the industry, the development of residential and recreational activities, as well as the growth of social interest by rural and nature goods (Cardoso, 2011). Indeed, the countryside no longer has the exclusive function of agro-forestry-pastoral production, but acquired a symbolic and playful representation imposed by urban (Cardoso, 2011), giving new social and environmental functions (or alternatives) to the agriculture, besides the economic (Lima, 2008). This means that farms are not only production units but they become consumer spaces embedded in the rural landscape (Pinto-Correia, 2007).

This view of the countryside marked by the multifunctionality of rural areas, in general, and of agriculture, in particular (Melides et al., 2010), especially since the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), in 1992, aims not only to develop agriculture and forestry, but also the diversification of economies. The creation of new activities is focused on the natural resources and biodiversity protection, the landscape valuation, the space management and the preservation of cultural and heritage values (Carneiro, 2010).

However, this change of paradigm alerts, according to various authors (e.g. Cardoso, 2011; Marta-Costa, 2008), for a greater concerns on economic, social and environmental development of these areas. Fernandes (2003) refers it as a movement, a dynamic that is reflected in the passage from one stage to another, or a process that combine the construction, destruction, reconstruction and reintegration of ideas (Fernandes, 2003). The emergence of these new concerns regarding the rural areas has given rise to a new concept - rural development - about which the European Union has been reflected for the development promotion, establishing goals to achieve in this field, and all over the world, mainly in the last two decades. The rural development is also one of the strategies defined for Portugal. In a recent document of his Ministry of Agriculture and Sea (MAM, 2014a), the creation of conditions for the promotion of rural areas emerges as one of the three strategic objectives to achieve in the period 2014-2020.

This rural development concept is multidimensional because it integrates issues since the economic growth until the improvement of the living conditions of the residents. This is a social process based on the respect and articulation of the principles of: economic efficiency, social and territorial equity, heritage and environmental quality, sustainability, democratic participation and civic responsibility (Cardoso, 2011). The agriculture declining in rural areas imposes the search for alternatives in other economic activities, being also essential to potentiate the agriculture by the implementation of measures which promote a sustainable local development. It was in this context that were elaborated the rural, local and regional development policies, implemented through its RDPs, among others programs with similar goals.

In fact, as indicated by Baptista (1999), rural development is mainly a density problem: density of population, actors, (institutional and private) initiatives, organizational capacity; economic activities, skilled labour, job creation and infrastructure. In this sense, the various programs that have been implemented aim to contradict, as far as possible, the demographic and economic decline of rural areas, and to perspective new forms of sustainable development, only possible through the preservation of the territories, the unique cultural heritage and fixing populations (Cavaco, 2005).

The translation of the assumptions on which the rural development is based in indicators, and the analysis of its evolution through cross-reading with the global overview of the various RDPs for mainland Portugal is the main purpose of this work.

This analysis will be developed based on the data published in the official statistics. The agroforestry activities will have particular relevance, because they still occupy a key place given the economic weight of the sector, the performance in terms of natural resources and also they can boost the development providing better quality of life and promoting social cohesion. These are also the arguments used to give priority to activities covered by this sector on the RPDs, because a competitive agriculture dominant in rural areas will promote a sustainable countryside (MAM, 2014b).

In this sense, the work starts with a brief statement of the implemented RDPs and its priorities in the Portuguese mainland. Then, the evolution of the agroforestry sector, based on information published by the Statistical Office of Portugal (INE) is showed. After that, it is selected and analysed some agricultural ratios regarding structural, economic, labour and environmental issues to assess the impact of these programs in the rural economy and development of the mainland Portugal.

## 2. Rural Development Programmes of Portugal

Despite some previously initiatives of regional development and targeted for rural areas, only from European integration Portugal had the seriously commitment to the rural development (Carneiro, 2004).

The European Union (EU) is the institution that promotes the development, decreeing goals to achieve in this field (Cardoso, 2011). Their concerns with the rural world are relatively new and for many years focused on the problems of agriculture (DGDR, 1997). In Portugal it is still the same. Despite the discourse changing, the political guidelines continue to emphasize the role of agriculture and to focus on this sector the investment efforts for rural areas (Silva & Figueiredo, 2013). Maybe because the main Portuguese figures pointing that its rural territory is dominated by the agroforestry complex and about 1/3 of their population lives in rural areas (MAM, 2014b).

It was on the Future of the Rural World, published by the European Commission in 1988, in which rural development was assumed with concern (CCE, 1988). In this document, rural development should stimulate local agents and project promoters to acquire necessary skills to become agents involved in the development of their territory (Carneiro, 2010). The "bottom-up" or upward approach was encouraged contrary to what was done until then ("top-down" actions) (Cristóvão & Miranda, 2005; Dinis, 2010; Ferreira, 2012).

In fact, the specific policies and measures created by the Community for rural areas try to be part of an integrated and grounded perspective on local realities (Cardoso, 2011). Since the first Integrated Programmes of Rural Development that accompanied the reform of the Structural Funds in 1988, it was continued its preparation in close cooperation with national, regional and local authorities (CCE, 1988). Each Member State should draw up a development plan, on which would be established the development priorities for each country and for each region (Carneiro, 2004). From the document Major Options of the Plan for the period 1989-1992, it was elaborated in Portugal, the Regional Development Plan (PDR, 1989-1993), a document that would serve as a basis for the negotiation of the Structural Funds to grant to Portugal (I Community Support Framework, CSF).

The reform of the Structural Funds was, according to Carneiro (2004), the greatest impetus for solving the problems of the European rural areas. Linked to the CAP reforms, the first in 1992, through Agro-Environmental Program (Reg. 2087/1992), and the next in 1999, through the Rural Development Regulation (Reg. 1257/1999), and to the Commission reflections, the theme of rural development begins to gain importance in the EU (Galvão, 2010).

Also as part of a necessary reflection about the CAP future, the Cork Conference of 1996, mobilized independent experts and the Member States to reflect on this reality. It was noticed, then, that the integrated development of Europe's rural areas could not be based on a pricing and markets policy and on a something deficit structural policy (Carneiro, 2004; Galvão, 2010; Ferreira, 2012). It was necessary to reverse the rural exodus process and rehabilitate the economy of rural areas, particularly in the agricultural sector, by stimulating job creation and equal opportunities that will be reflected in the living conditions improving for rural populations (Cardoso, 2011). As indicated by Ferreira (2012), rural development in Portugal was highly dependent and conditioned by the evolution and fluctuations of this issue at Community level.

Regarding the 1994-1999 RDP, from which emerges the CSF II, Carneiro (2004) points out that their funds are directly related to rural development through the Operational Programme of Strengthening Regional Development Potentials. However, the found structural and administrative difficulties with the program produced an undervaluation of the funds. Like its predecessor, this PDR was dedicated to the approximation of the average living standards of Portugal to the Community and to the correction of internal regional imbalances.

Along with the LEADER and INTERREG, this plan announced a speech change and, from 1999, rural development was included in the strategic axes of the III CSF, as well as on the

government's strategy for Portugal. This is witnessed by the Axis 2 (AGRO program) and Axis 4 (AGRI Measure). These two instruments were accompanied, for 2000-2006 period, by the Rural Development Plan, known for RURIS, and the Community Initiative for Rural Development - LEADER + (Carneiro, 2004; Cristóvão & Miranda, 2005; Fonseca & Ramos, 2008; Carneiro, 2010; Galvão, 2010).

The rural development support was the interventions core of the Guidance section of the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF-O) in the 1989-2006 period, whose main fields of intervention are in Table 1. In the following years it was replaced by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) which provides the framework for the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF 2007-2013) and the current RDP 2020 for Portugal mainland Rural, since 2014.

Table 1. Intervention areas and potential funding of EAGGF-O, in 1989-2006 period

1989-1993	1994-1999	2000-2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structural adjustment of farms: balance between production and the market, viable agricultural communities, young farmers establishment, efficiency in farming, processing and marketing of agricultural and forestry products, associations of producers</li> <li>• Environmental protection and landscape</li> <li>• Rural infrastructure development</li> <li>• Land consolidation</li> <li>• Irrigation</li> <li>• Tourism and handicraft</li> <li>• Forest</li> <li>• Processing and marketing of products</li> <li>• Technical assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable development of the rural environment</li> <li>• Rural infrastructure development</li> <li>• Land consolidation</li> <li>• Irrigation</li> <li>• Tourism and handicraft</li> <li>• Technical assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competitiveness of agroforestry sector</li> <li>• Multifunctionality of farms</li> <li>• Quality and innovation of production</li> <li>• Specific potential of rural territories</li> <li>• Conditions of life and work of farmers and rural populations</li> <li>• Farmers organization, association and initiatives</li> <li>• Technical assistance</li> </ul>

Source: Mateus (2013).

For the 2007-2013 period they were created three RDPs to implement the National Strategic Plan for Rural Development (PEN), prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries of Portugal (MADRP) for (1) the mainland (PRODER); (2) Azores (PRORURAL) and (3) Madeira (PRODEAM) (MAMAOT, 2012).

More recently, the RDP 2020 (2014-2020) started for the Portuguese mainland and pursue the previous programmes. Taking into account the objectives of the CAP, it is centred on five priorities with the main emphasis given to enhancing farm viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture in all regions and promoting innovative farm technologies and the sustainable management of forests. In this program dominates the support concentration in the industry and in the tradable goods production (MAM, 2014b).

The main objectives and measures of the RDPs after 2006 are in Table 2.

Table 2. Objectives and measures of the RDPs of Portugal, for 2007/2013 and 2014/2020 periods

Period	2007-2013	2014-2020
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors</li> <li>• Promote the sustainability of rural areas and natural resources</li> <li>• Social and economic revitalization in rural areas</li> <li>• Promotion of competitiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value added growth of the agroforestry sector and economic viability of agriculture</li> <li>• Promotion of efficient management and resources protection</li> <li>• Ensure conditions for economic and social dynamism of the countryside</li> <li>• Innovation &amp;</li> <li>• Knowledge</li> </ul>
Actions/ Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable management of rural areas</li> <li>• Rural areas dinamisation</li> <li>• Knowledge promotion and skills development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add value for the agriculture production</li> <li>• Add value for the forest resources</li> <li>• Production organization</li> <li>• Risk management and restoration of productive potential</li> <li>• Agriculture and natural resources</li> <li>• Protection and rehabilitation of forest</li> <li>• Maintenance of agricultural activity in disadvantaged areas</li> <li>• LEADER</li> </ul>

Source: Carneiro (2004); MAMAOT (2012).

Next, a brief statement about the application of funds for the Portuguese rural development it is exposed, through the study coordinated by Mateus (2013):

- Between 1989 and 2011, Portugal received about 21 billion of Euros for rural development (2011 constant prices), being just over half (52%) from the EU funding. The remaining financial contribution was from national public entities (17%) and of the consideration of private agents (31%).
- The annual average amount of total investment was higher (at 2011 constant prices) in the period of the I and III CSF (1989-1993 and 2000-2006);
- The Northern (24-32%), Alentejo (20-29%) and Central (18-19%) regions of Portugal have earned higher amounts to the other regions of the country, regarding the distribution of funds for rural development between the periods of 1989 to 2011. Lisbon and Vale do Tejo (16 to 8%) and the Algarve (7 to 2%) have received a decreasing proportion of funds over time;
- The funds distribution for rural development by policy area in each of the four programming periods highlights the importance of the support given to farms. They aimed the farm modernization, conversion and diversification and the adding value of agricultural production. This intervention has represented, on average, about 45% of the total funds received for rural development. The support infrastructures to agriculture had about one-fifth of the received amount of structural funding, including the construction and improvement of irrigation, rehabilitation of agricultural and rural tracks, soil drainage and conservation, and land consolidation. Also it is perceptible the growing importance to forestry sector support, for promoting sustainable development and forests competitiveness as well as the landscape management. Finally, the processing and marketing of agricultural products had been one of the privileged areas of intervention, absorbing about 12% of the total funds received through the various CSF.
- The physical achievements financed by the EAGGF-O and EAFRD were, in general, aimed for farms, initially through infrastructure improving and in last years a more targeted support for the modernization and establishment of young farmers. The programs had also privileged the forest sector, although the downward trend on the figures along the timeframe of the funding. Another type of interventions were also highlighted through the cross-services establishment for the sector, and, in the last period, the compensate payments for natural or economic disadvantages were also evident.

### **3. Briefly Portuguese agriculture dynamic: the impact of their RDP's**

Indicators that reveal the evolution of agriculture and the Portuguese countryside as a result, in part, of the Portuguese RDP's are evidenced in this topic. Obviously, other factors influence the observed numbers because the rural area benefits from other policy measures (from European, national or local ambits), besides the global economic conjuncture and the adverse environmental factors. However, it should be noted that also the evolution of the RDP's, implemented since 1989, was carried out (or should be) in response to the various constraints to the development of rural areas.

The indicators were measured through the available figures of population (from 1981, 2001 and 2011 years) and agricultural census (from 1989, 1999 and 2009 years) provided by the Portuguese official statistics (INE, 1984, 2001, 2002, 2011, 2012) for mainland Portugal. The autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira were not included because they benefit from more adapted RDPs to their context. The available database do not match with the RDP's periods but they are the most credible and quantitative information for the dates under analysis. However, in this work and according to what was said above, it will be tried to expose the readings of the gathered indicators based on the established goals of the RDPs. In fact, we intend to check for direct answers to the evidenced problems in rural areas of the Portuguese mainland. By the previous points, these are essentially located at two levels, on the population

dynamics, whose balance is critical to the rural areas maintenance; and on evolution of the agriculture structural and competitive features, the main target of several Portuguese RDPs, in order to reflect itself in the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the sector and surrounding territory.

### **Population dynamics**

The Portuguese mainland covers a population of 10,028 thousand inhabitants, an average of 113 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, for an area of 89,089 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 70% corresponds to agriculture and forestry (MAM, 2014b).

About of 81.4% of its territory is rural (MAM, 2014b), whereby the produced statistics for the Portuguese mainland reflect, in general, the rural areas dynamics (Table 3). An exception it is the data regarding the resident population evolution, where the coast and the large urban centres have a strong contributions and have originated slight increases between 1981 and 2011, with reflects on the increasing population densities. For rural areas and for 2000 to 2012 period, its population fell 1.7%, in contrast to the urban areas, which increased 5.3%. At present, the rural areas of the Portuguese mainland represent about 33% of its population, corresponding to a density of 46.1 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> (MAM, 2014b).

The aging index has a strong worsening on the dates under analysis, for the Portuguese mainland, with a value of 112.7 at 2011. This is more accentuated for their rural areas reaching 141.8 and 177.2, in 2001 and 2011, respectively (MAM, 2014b). The negative trend is accompanied by the potential sustainability index, with the reduction of one individual at working age per elderly, between each evaluated period.

Table 3. Population indicators from 1981, 2001 and 2011 in Portugal Mainland

INDICATORS		1981	2001	2011
Populacion Census	Population density (Nr. Inhabitants/km <sup>2</sup> )	104.8	110.9	112.7
	Aging index	45.4	104.5	130.6
	Potential sustainability index	5.5	4.1	3.4
	Longevity index	34.2	41.4	47.9

Source: INE (1984, 2002, 2012).

In the opposite, the longevity index shows a growing trend which reflects the improvement of living quality of the population. It should be also noted that this progression is accompanied by the educational level. At 2011, almost 55.9% of the population of rural areas had basic education and 9.7% higher education (MAM, 2014b).

### **Structural and competitive features of agriculture**

According to the last agricultural census from 2009 (INE, 2011), there are in Portugal mainland 278,114 farms exploring 3,542,305 hectares of Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA). The number of farms in the country has declined about 30% per decade since 1989, but its size has been growing, reaching 12.7 ha per holding of the mainland, at 2009 (INE, 2001; 2011) (Table 4). This evolution allows a productive fabric restructuration on the larger farms embodied the transference of arable crops to pasture, towards a more extensive agriculture (MAM, 2014b).

However, there is a high proportion (roughly 90%) of small and very small farms in this country, according to data for 2009. These farms are mostly family businesses with low hiring rate and small amounts of land. On the other hand, medium and large farms (9% of the total) employ more hired labour and represents 67% of the UAA (GPP, 2012; INE, 2011).

The use of the UAA has shown a positive trend only for permanent grassland since 1989 (INE, 2001; 2011). In the last decades, it was observed a significant transfer of the arable land use for pasture and meadow, with particular emphasis for the poor spontaneous (MAM, 2014b). Temporary cultures have regressed in general and in permanent crops growth stands out only for the nuts, between the considered dates (1989-2009) (INE, 2001; 2011).

In terms of livestock species in Portugal, statistics show regression in all of them, except for cattle where it denotes a stabilization or small growth of the effective in the last two decades (INE, 2001; 2011). The animal effective consists of approximately two million Normal Heads (NH) (MAM, 2014b), corresponding to an average of seven NH by farm.

Table 4. Agricultural indicators from 1989, 1999 and 2009 in Portugal Mainland:

	INDICATORS	1989	1999	2009
Farm structure	Number of farms	550,879	382,163	278,114
	Average size of farms (Ha)	7.0	9.8	12.7
	Livestock density/farm (NH)	4.10	6.10	7.14
Production and profitability	Output of the Agricultural Industry (Basic prices)/UAA (10 <sup>3</sup> €/Ha)	n.a.	1.59	1.62
	Output of the Agricultural Industry (Basic prices)/UAA (10 <sup>3</sup> €/Ha)	n.a.	1.59	1.62
	Output of the Agricultural Industry (Basic prices)/Intermediate Consumption	n.a.	1.97	1.66
	Gross Value Added/AWU (€)	n.a.	5,873.53	6,653.84
	Operating Surplus/Mixed Income/farm (10 <sup>6</sup> €)	n.a.	5,464.87	4,928.27
	Farms with profitable but not agricultural activities (%)	n.a.	8.6	5.4
Population and farm labour	Labour input/farm (AWU)	1.5	1.3	1.2
	Labour input/SAU (AWU/Ha)	20.9	13.3	9.6
	Importance of family farming in total labour (% AWU)	84.9	82.0	79.9
	Importance of family farming population in the resident population (%)	18.9	11.6	7.0
	Family farming population with more than 64 years (%)	17.0	24.8	34.60
	Family farming population with paid work from the outside of the farm (%)	28.9	29.3	29.1
Environmental indicators	Livestock density/UAA (NH/Ha)	0.58	0.62	0.56
	Irrigated surface (% UAA)	n.a.	16.1	13.0
	Tractors per 100 ha of UAA	3.4	4.4	5.1

Note: n.a. – not available.

Source: INE (2001, 2011); GPP (2000, 2012).

At the agriculture production level the exposed values are generally decreasing on considered dates. Variations of production are predominantly negative in the diverse components of vegetal production, being to highlight the sharp drop in cereal production, while livestock production has lower amplitudes (GPP, 2012). However, the observed decreases are offset by the decrease of UAA and used hand labour, resulting in increased productivities per unit of used area and by Annual Work Unit (AWU). This is mainly due to technological improvements and changes in cultural occupation and also to the sharp decrease in the number and relative weight of the smaller farms (GPP, 2012). Nonetheless, the sector still shows very low productivity levels (GPP, 2012).

When vegetable and animal productions are compared, the first showed a greatest contribution, with 57.6% against 37.1% of the second, according to 2009 data (GPP, 2012). Still, deepening the perception of each subsector, it is noted that the livestock production has more dependency of intermediate consumption (Sousa, 2015). According to Eurostat (2012), in Portugal and for 2011, the share of the total value of the product affects to the inputs cost is of 88.6% in animal production and only 13.8% in vegetal production (GPP, 2012). It should be noted that in the period under analysis, there was a sharp increase in inputs prices and the prices stabilization of agricultural products (GPP, 2012). In this sense, the evolutionary analysis in the last decade reveals a smaller efficiency of the sector, expressed by the ratio of output/input through the intermediate consumption. This is also confirmed by the decrease of gathered operating surplus/mixed income by farm (Table 4).

The decreasing Gross Value Added (GVA) and subsequent evolution of agricultural production in value have affected the importance of agriculture in total Gross National Product (GDP). Agriculture had a weight in the national economy of 2.5% in 2000, 1.7% in 2007 and 1.4% (estimate) in 2011 (GPP, 2012). This weight decreasing of the agricultural GVA in the country

GVA follows the general trend in the EU27. However, some of the improvements realized in 2012 and especially in 2013 are a result of further improvement in the agricultural products prices and an increase less marked in the intermediate consumption prices accompanied by a decrease in the use of them (Sousa, 2015).

Also, it is worth noting the decrease of farms with profitable but not agricultural activities, 8.6 to 5.4% (Table 4), which may be due to the decline of the available labour work for such activities.

Regarding population and farm labour (Table 4), with the exception of the last two indicators, decreases are observed on the used labour per farm and per unit area, in the periods under review. Also the importance of family farming population in total labour and in resident population shows a declining trend. For 2011, the labour input was 341,502 AWU, of which 272,273 was family AWU.

Table 4 shows further the worsening of the age of family farming population, revealing the need for its rejuvenation. Already the family farming population with paid work from the outside of the farm has remained on constant levels, not reaching one third of this population.

The parameters regarding environmental effects of the agricultural sector in the Portuguese mainland, possible to measure, are at the end of Table 4. Its observation allows evidencing a small fluctuation in the livestock density by unit of UAA, with about 0.6 NH/ha, and therefore not exceeding the header limits allowed by the soil ability. Already the irrigated land has decreased between 1999 and 2009, with a water consumption of 2,139 m<sup>3</sup>/ha of watered UAA, in the last year. The indicator related to the number of tractors, tried to be an approach to used mechanical traction, with negative effects on physical soil degradation. This parameter has a growing trend and may be due to several factors. Besides the UAA decrease, there are continuous supports for machinery and equipment acquisition. Also, the tractors are a compensation factor for the hand labour reduction in the sector and, also, a display factor of the activity.

## **5. Final Considerations**

The characteristics of the Portuguese countryside are a result of numerous factors, and the various RDPs have an increased responsibility for the dynamics of these territories. In the EU, especially in Portugal, those plans have been highly targeted to the agricultural sector, since it dominates the occupation of the country. This is a subject of extreme criticism in the scientific literature, because rural areas are not only agriculture. New development models should be followed based on an integral and holistic approach of the territory, in which several dimensions converge to its development.

Given the different dimensions in this space, it is difficult to directly assess the real effects of the several programs. Regarding population, there is a general worsening of the indicators that characterize it. The quality of life, demonstrated by the longevity index, is the parameter with the better progress. The analysis at the agricultural sector level allows us to acknowledge the land restructuring of farms, with an increasing of its average size and a productivity and profitability growth. Concerns with the environment are beginning to take shape and the quality of life requires still other requisites. However, rural depopulation continues to occur accentuating imbalances between the coast and inland, and between the rural and urban of the Portuguese mainland.

Nevertheless, the main effect of the several measures supported by the RDPs may be their contribution to avoid the worsening of the indicators showed in this work.

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