

Scenario development as methodological approach for defining vision for rural landscapes: case study southeast Portugal

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European rural landscapes today face the challenge of finding a new rationality within the constellation of diverse, and sometimes conflicting, political and societal goals.

Landscapes understood both as natural and social features, are dynamic in the sense that they are shaped by societies along time according to the set social values and believe in force.

Among the policies with impact on rural landscape, Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) plays a fundamental role. More recent reforms by introducing non-productive goals brought confusion into the mind set of the agriculture sector used to think in terms of production and productivity.

This conflict became already evident with the introduction of the accompanying measures in 1992, when the sector got financial support, but missed to find a clear set of goals for new development models. Meaning, new agricultural or rural models ensuring economic growth, ecological integrity and social vitality and thereby setting an active contribution to the construction of new landscapes with sound socio-ecological relations.

The 2003 CAP reform goes one step further in this direction by proposing decoupling of payments and production. The impact of this policy, both in social and environmental terms, is not clear yet. There might be regional difference, but it will definitely threaten the maintenance of high nature value farming and shape European Rural Landscapes in the near future.

The reform also aims at reinforcing the second pillar of CAP through increased support to Rural Development (RD), nevertheless there seems not to be much consensus about the meaning and extent of the RD concept when it comes to make operational use of it.

Taking into account that there are countries that were not able to spend the already allocated RD funds and that it emerge doubts on its efficiency, at this stage, it becomes demanding to define how to guide the use of this instrument to the benefit of the rural landscapes.

In this context, this study argues that there is lack of coherence among policies, mainly due to a missing vision on rural landscapes' future and therefore it aims at proposing the development of prospective scenarios as a basis for the definition of the 'rural landscape *Leitbild*'. The latter concept is proposed within the German literature (e.g. Gaede and Potschin 2001). It is composed of two words – *leiten* (to guide) and *Bild* (image) - meaning (if literally translated) the 'guiding image', or the image (in terms of the final goal) that guides action towards its achievement.

In the specific framework of this study it is aimed to set a guiding line for the development and articulation of policies and policy measures towards the 'desirable' landscape as stated by the local population.

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The methodology used to define the *Leitbild* is based on the approach developed by Nassauer et al. (2000) for the study of the cultural acceptability as defined by Nassauer (1995) of innovative agricultural practices based on farmers' perception.

Thus the scenario design follows a 3 step approach: (a) definition of possible futures based on alternative objectives, (b) validation of the scenarios by an expert-panel (decision-makers and scientific community) and (c) visual simulation of scenarios on digital landscape photos. The resulting images are then used to perform questionnaires on local stakeholders asking for what shows, in their opinion, the best future for their community 25 years from now.

For the sampling of landscape images that serve as basis for scenario visualisation, the LUCAS grid is used, which covers Europe with a 18km² sampling plan collecting biennial data on land use and land cover, environmental variables and landscape photos (Bettio *et al.* 2002).

So far the methodology is being applied to the landscape of Mértola (Southeast Portugal) using 6 points of the LUCAS sample. This region is suffering of severe desertification processes, understood in the wider sense of landscape degradation, meaning the loss of sound socio-ecological relations.

The results so far show the definition of 5 scenarios that aim at making the implication of alternative policy option apparent. The scenarios, named after its main function, are as follows: agriculture, forest, game, recreation and infrastructures. These scenarios are currently under validation by the expert panel. During the poster session, where the scenarios are going to be extensively presented, the participants of the conference are asked to contribute to the expert validation procedure by answering a questionnaire.

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