REGIONAL AND LOCAL RESPONSES IN PORTUGAL

IN THE CONTEXT OF MARGINALIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION

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Rural abandonment and landscape evolution in the Central Region of Portugal

The landscapes of countries such as European ones, whose territories have long been occupied and used by groups of humans in different stages of development and organisation, are essentially a product of History, just as Georges Bertrand (1978) said. Even when, under specific circumstances, human communities cease to occupy parts of a territory and abandon it to nature, the result of its evolution can never be identified as though it was virgin landscape. The changes of morphology, the transformation of the soil, the introduction of new species, some of which could be seen as invaders, or at least as being highly adaptable, the existing infrastructures, etc, are marks which will only disappear from those landscapes with difficulty.

The level of human intervention in Portuguese rural landscapes and, in this specific case, in the Central Region\(^1\) (Fig. 1), increased until the middle of the 20\(^{th}\) century and then it decreased significantly because of the profound demographic changes in the last few decades. The diversity of the socio-economic dynamics that operated in the different sub-regions had distinct effects on those landscapes and this work will try to show these effects. Several important indicators are used but the results will nonetheless be incomplete.

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\(^2\) In terms of agriculture and forest the Central Region is subdivided into the Região Agrária da Beira Litoral (Baixo Vouga, Baixo Mondego, Pinhal Litoral, Dão-Lafões and Pinhal Interior Norte) and the Região Agrária da Beira Interior (Pinhal Interior Sul, Serra da Estrela, Beira Interior Norte, Beira Interior Sul and Cova da Beira).