



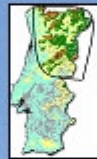
# Agricultural marginalisation in Portugal: Resistance or Resignation?

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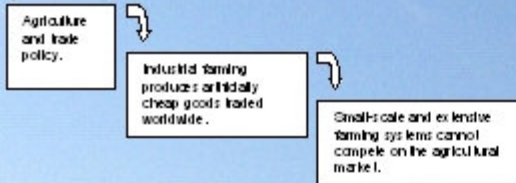
## Introduction:

The reduced profitability of Portuguese agriculture is most striking in the mountain areas of central and northern Portugal, where it leads to accelerated rates of land abandonment (Pinto-Correia et al, 2006).



The political, economic, social and ecological causes and consequences of rural and agricultural marginalisation in Portuguese mountain areas were analyzed with regard to the implications for small-scale farming systems. In July 2007, a semi-structured interview and participant observation were employed in 6 villages to explore the question: how do family farmers react to agricultural marginalization?

## Agricultural marginalisation processes:



### Implications for agriculture in Portuguese mountain areas:

- Dumping of agricultural products;
- Food supply exceeds demand;
- Low producer prices;
- Farming aimed at self-sufficiency rather than market oriented;
- Bitterly agricultural population;
- Lack of innovation, investments and organizational capacity in the agricultural sector;
- Land abandonment;
- Increasing fire risk, spread of invasive species;
- Loss of agro-biodiversity and ecological knowledge;
- Abandonment of low-consumption lifestyles.

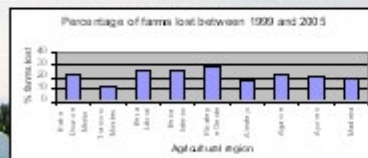


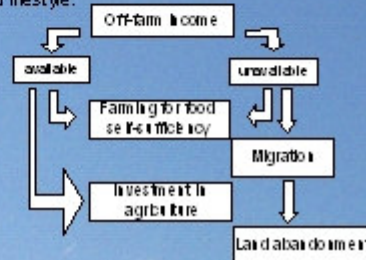
Figure 1 – Land abandonment in terms of percentage of farms lost between 1999 and 2005, per agricultural region in Portugal (Pinto-Correia et al, 2006)

**Further research:** What strategies may be used to establish sustainable farms in marginal mountain areas? What attracts newcomers to sustainable agriculture?

## Findings:

❖ Agricultural marginalisation processes mean that commercial production is financially unviable. However, subsistence production is largely independent of the market economy and can be maintained.

❖ Whether subsistence production is maintained or land is abandoned depends mainly on the availability of off-farm income sources (see figure below). Working outside the farm is frequently a means to maintain the land-based, self-sufficiency oriented lifestyle.



❖ The peasants' value system contributes to the maintenance of economically non-viable farming systems:



Land abandonment represents a decline of value; social pressures ensure that the land is ploughed where an off-farm job allows for investment in agriculture.



Where no off-farm income exists, monetary transactions are avoided – cows are preferred to tractors.

## Conclusion:

Emotional attachment to the land prevails, rather than a rational commitment to farming. This perspective can explain the patterns of continued subsistence farming, land abandonment and lack of entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector.

Emotional and cultural connection to the land ⇔ off-farm jobs support the maintenance of the landholding ⇔ RESISTANCE to outside pressures favouring land abandonment.

Low producer prices make agriculture an unfavourable income source ⇔ defeatist attitude towards agricultural marginalisation ⇔ farmers move out of agriculture RESIGNATION.