



Land managers and soils: from care to agency

Soils for Europe

European Parliament, Brussels, 30 April 2025 - 14:00-16.00

Teresa Pinto-Correia

Vice-Chair Mission Board, Mission Soil of Horizon Europe

MED-Mediterranean Institute for Agriculture, Environment and Development &
CHANGE-Institute for Global Change and Sustainability,
University of Évora – PORTUGAL



EU MISSIONS
SOIL DEAL FOR EUROPE



MED
MEDITERRANEAN INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE,
ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

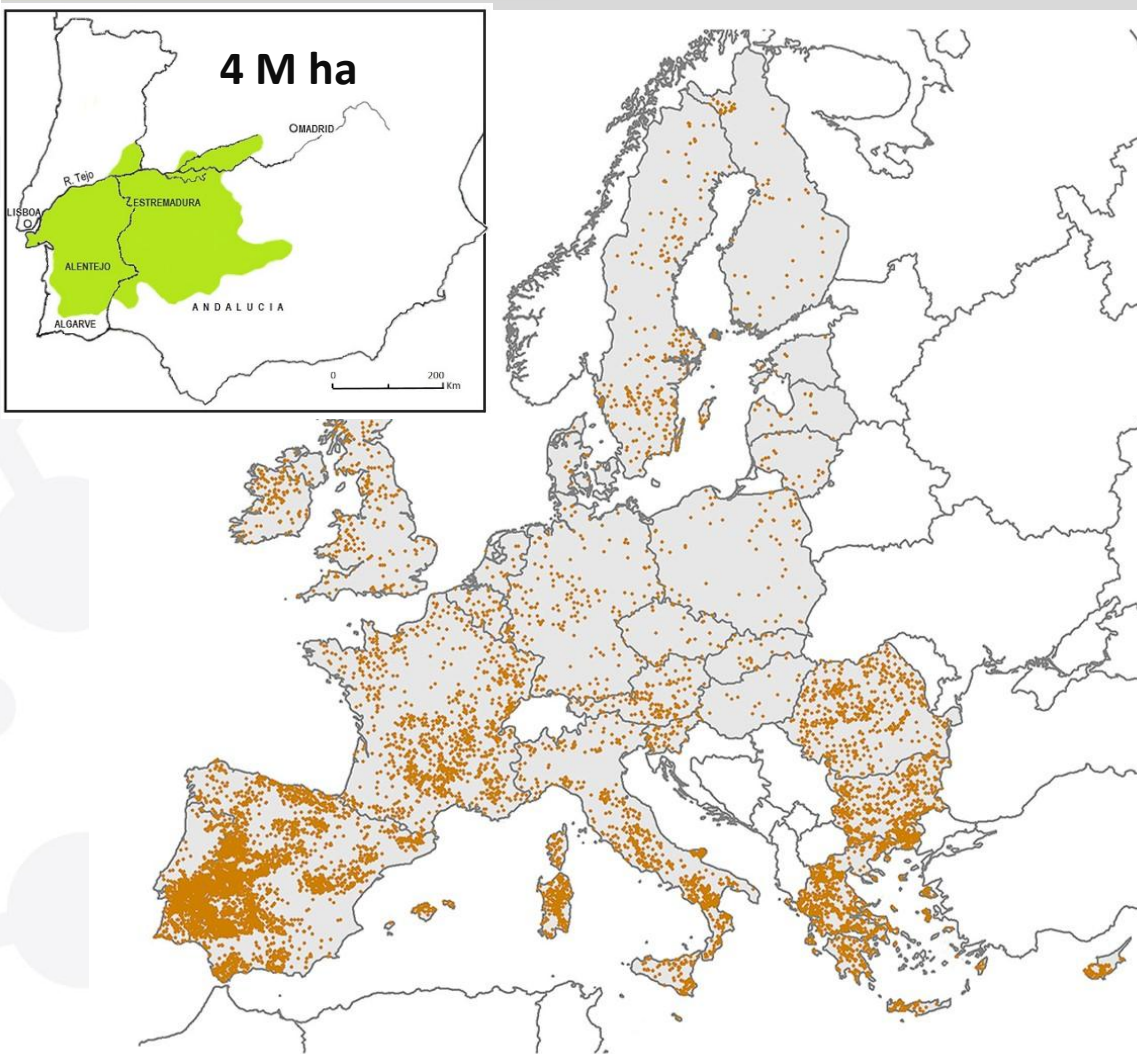
CHANGE
Global Change and Sustainability Institute

the agro-forestry systems of Southern Europe

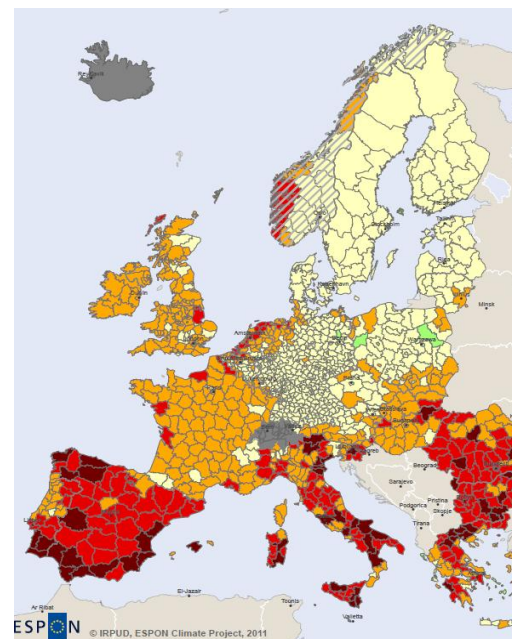


Agro-forestry in the European Union: a focus in the South

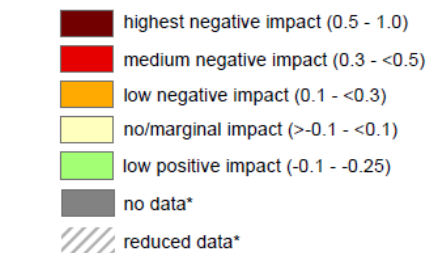
15 M hectares = 3,5% of EU area » **35%** of the actually grazed land



Iberia: a particular context



Vulnerability to climate change



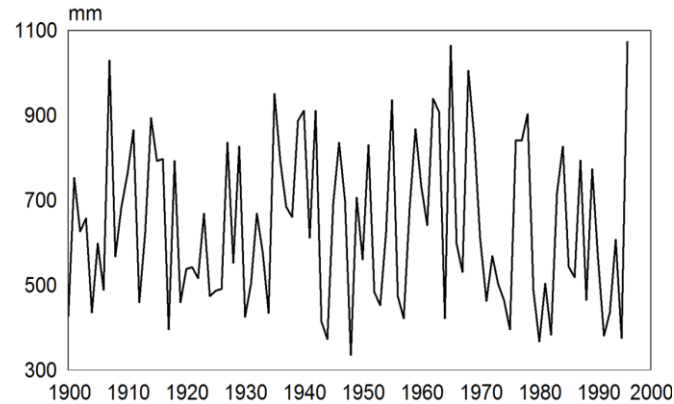
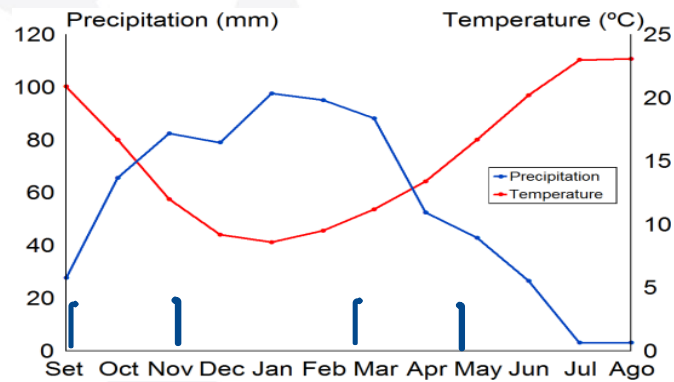
Farming intensity



A particular context for production systems: limiting climate and soil

Mediterranean climate

Warm season is extremely dry + Extreme interannual variability in precipitation



Complex Soil mosaic with low fertility

Acid soils > 80% »» manganese toxicity



Low nutrient content » poor mother rock and low % of organic matter



Management »» intensification and simplification

» degradation by soil erosion, destruction of soil structure and further loss of soil organic matter

and the agro-forestry system is in severe decay

reduction of tree renewal
loss of pasture productivity

intensification
specialisation

highly related with growing grazing intensity

since the 1990s » loss of 5000 ha/year

complex and fuzzy pattern
>> change often remains un-seen
and not addressed in policy making

D >50% Dense Montado



C 20 – 50% Open Montado



B 10 – 20% Clear Montado



A < 10% Open Pastures



How are farmers reacting ?



**Family farms between 100 and 1000 hectares + farmers with formal education higher than average in Portugal
High social and financial capital BUT fragmented & difficult access to quality advisory**

**farmers are aware of new societal demand & emerging markets » new business models
which would make it possible to invest in soil regeneration and tree renewal
and they know there are technical solutions already validated**

BUT

**are pressed by conflicts between different sector policies
pressure for mainstream production and security of income (CAP Pillar 1 payments) + farmers self-concept
»» innovation in management goals is hard to follow
»» continued specialization and simplification > the dominant paradigm**

Even with the power of exemple they do not moove
» how to engage farmers in innovative management solutions ?



Herdade da Abegoaria, Abril 2019
Under conservation agriculture since 2000



Logically, management decisions about soil:

- » monetary benefits derived from soil productivity (cost/benefit)
- » values towards soil health
- » knowledge integration in business model

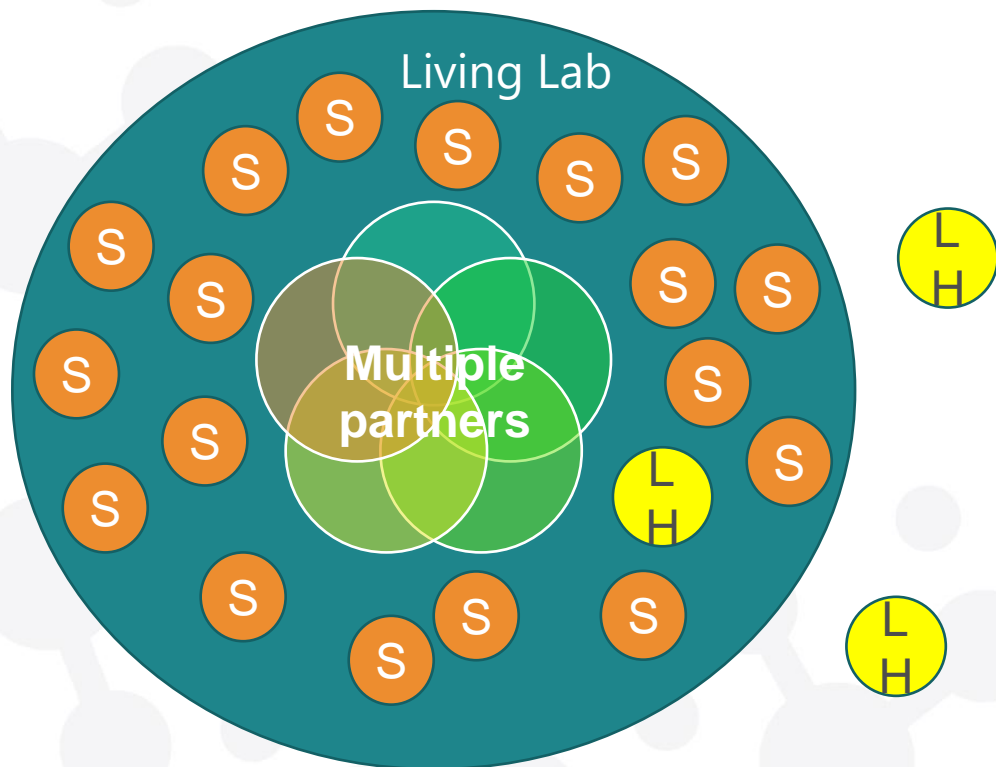
2025, we set up an inquiry about soil health to the LL 20 farmers

**The Montado Living Lab –
regeneration through soil health**
created start 2024 » 40 partners / 20 are farmers



To identify possible transformative pathways:

We approached a value-based understanding of soil health
3 dimensions: **knowledge, care and agency**,
can inform and complement instrumental decision making



European
Network of
Living Labs



There are path-dependencies which require concerted & targetted action to be changed

Contrary to what is described in literature, these farmers

care about their soils

have **knowledge** about soil limitations and regenerating practices
and know where to get more specific applied knowledge

BUT

they lack consistent and quality **soil data / monitoring**

& they do **not have agency**

explanatory reasons are

lack of supporting policy tools

dependency on current Pillar 1 schemes

lack of capital » risk aversion



- **Quality and accessible AKIS** is fundamental but not the sole factor for change
- Acknowledge the relevance of **policy tools targeted management**
- Invest in shift from **compliance and rules** towards **results and performance**