

# Commonlands and Local Development in Northern Iberian Peninsula

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## ABSTRACT

Commonlands occupy approximately 1 million ha in Northern Iberian Peninsula with high average areas (500 ha in northern Portugal and 200 ha in Galicia). The region is among the UE poorest, with meaningful low GDP in comparison with most developed European regions. During centuries, *Baldios* (Portugal) and *Montes Veciñais en Man Común* (MVMC) (Galicia) played an essential role in the rural economy of their owner communities. This role was lost during the twentieth century due to the massive forestation and the decline of agriculture prominence. The restoration of democratic regimes in both countries returned the *Baldios* and MVMC to their owner communities, now declining, aging and disorganized. Taking into account the commons overall extension and large average size, this paper aims to determine the potentialities and limitations, in the current conditions, of communal lands contribution to needed rural and local development, using «Participatory Rural Appraisal» and results normalization. Two case studies, one in North Portugal and one in Galicia, allow identifying the still practiced individual and collective uses and the accomplishments made with revenues associated to the commonlands. Both Galician and Portuguese realities exhibit sound similarities and complementary benefits requiring social innovation to make a better use of rural resilience. Commonlands and small scale entrepreneurial initiatives can underpin the local markets network of transformed local products supported by attractive biodiversity and aesthetic values.

**KEYWORDS:** *commonlands, Iberian Peninsula, local development, «Participatory Rural Appraisal».*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Commonlands in Northern Iberian Peninsula, *Baldios* for North Portugal and *Montes Veciñais en Man Común* (MVMC) for Galicia, have a significant representation, occupying more than a quarter of the total surface of the region, often in highlands. For centuries they have represented an irreplaceable complement of agricultural activities and a basis of communitarian relationships among villagers. Herds raised collectively on the *mountains* provided meat, grease and wool, while wood was gathered for fireplaces and village oven and bush provided livestock bedding material, working also as fertilizer for expanding agriculture.

The consolidation of capitalism in this part of the Iberian Peninsula, where a large group of peasant small-holders are still to be found, was performed with a not so high rate of privatization, due to a social consensus on the need for the conservation of at least a part of the commons (Iriarte-Goñi 2002), working for the sound traditional equilibrium between important land owners and poor peasants. The Iberian commonlands have also survived the 20th century totalitarian interventions of Franco and Salazar's regimes.

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In the last quarter of the 20th century, the rising of democratic regimes in Portugal and Spain enabled the restitution of the commons to the communities which once owned them. However, regarding the rural changes in recent decades and the decline of the rural space traditional functions, these are currently different communities and the common land now holds different functions.

The legislation in both countries acknowledges that the property of *MVMC* and *Baldios* belong to the populations surrounding the commonlands. Ever since the *Montes' State Law* of 1968, the *MVMC* are considered “indivisible, inalienable, imprescriptible and not subject to *embargos*”. In Portugal, the Law of 1976 (and the later parliament’s Constitutional corroborations, the last one in 1999) considers that “*Baldios*, as communitarian assets, belong to the local communities which hold their utilitarian possession and management”. The rule covers the inalienability of the commons and prohibits private ownership over them; furthermore, it assigns to the communities a wide juridical accountability over the commons (Bica 2010).

Iberian Peninsula commons are thus collective though private properties in the sense that their ownership, management and use are allocated to well defined communities with access to shared resources from which others are excluded<sup>2</sup>.

Altogether, the *MVMC* in Galicia and the *Baldios* in the north of Portugal cover a total area of one million hectares. In Galicia, the *MVMC* cover approximately 600,000 hectares owned by circa 2,800 communities, corresponding to one third of the total forest area and to one quarter of the Galician territory (Fernández et al. 2006). While the average size of privately owned forest holdings is less than two hectares, the average size of the *MVMC* exceeds 200 hectares. Moreover, privately owned holdings often consist of several land plots, whereas the *MVMC* usually consist of one single plot (Fernández et al., 2006). In the north of Portugal, the total area of the 671 commons on which information could be obtained is 378,574 hectares (Baptista 2010), (close to 1/5 of the region’s total area), showing an average area of 500 hectares per *Baldio*, while the privately owned properties correspond also to a very small scale property type (DGF 1998). The disadvantageous position of *minifundia* concerning technology, knowledge, access to credit, commercial relationships and human means, was identified in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century by Karl Kautsky (Kautsky 1972).

Galicia and North Portugal constitute the Euroregion Galicia-North of Portugal. The two NUTS II regions are among the UE poorest, with meaningful low GDP in comparison with most developed European regions (Vieira et al. 2006)

Considered as an European geographic peripheral region, it is also a social and economic periphery in the hinterland. In North Portugal, the lower purchase power

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<sup>2</sup> Its singularity must therefore be established when compared to other european «commonlands», for instance, to the situation in Navarra, where most of the common property belongs to the municipalities (Lana 2008), to England and Wales commonlands, which hold a “complex set of property rights” (Short 2008), or to the reindeer herders’ nomadic nature of their use of land (Minde 2001).

found in NUTS 'Alto Tras-os Montes', Douro' y 'Tâmega' matches the hinterland municipalities (INE 2004). In Galicia, the lower incomes are also found in the inner countryside, in 'Lugo sur', 'Ourense occidental' and 'Ourense oriental' (IGE 2006).

Taking into account the commons overall extension and large average size, this paper aims to discuss the role commonlands can play in the badly needed local-rural development.

## 2. «RURALITY» LEAVES THE RURAL

Rural areas have always experienced continuous transformation in their social and physic-spatial composition. After the Second World War, with the rise of technologies applied to agriculture, the social and professional composition in rural areas changed completely in the European Union (later on in southern Europe<sup>3</sup>). "Contemporary rural areas have ceased to evoke the pastures, flocks and shepherds of Arcadia" (Claval 2005). Agrarian policies fostered production intensification in order to obtain an efficient and competitive agriculture capable to support the growing markets of European Union. "Productivism' bolstered specialization and commercialization of European Union agriculture" (Rizov 2005). In the other side of the rural coin the ecological, social, and financial costs reveal themselves too high. Financial, due to the agrarian protectionism system of both Europe and North America. Ecological, agrarian activities intensification brought soil and water degradation and the immense sequential ecological damages. As for social, global income inequality is probably greater than it has ever been in human history (cf. Milanovic 1999; World Bank 2002; Wade 2004). With globalization has come an increase in disparity among individuals, groups, territories, and states. In rural areas these processes are particularly relevant, new disparities have emerged and largely neglected by policies. With the increase in agricultural productivity, farm density is declining; rural populations are falling, agriculture is restrained to small areas of the territory and loses social and economic significance (Baptista 2001; Blandford 2002). Whilst agriculture is an important feature of the rural economy, it cannot alone guarantee jobs and growth. Today, circa three quarters of Europe's farmers are part-time, requiring supplementary sources of income. Agriculture and forestry remain by far the largest land users, still shaping the rural environment and landscape. Rural areas cover 90 % of the EU's territory and are home to approximately 50 % of its population (EU Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development 2006). But at the same time "the higher the degree of rurality, the lower is the GDP pc in both EU-15 and EU-12" (EU Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development 2010).

In an era of climate, energy, food, economic and financial crisis as the one we are living in today, agriculture and rural areas have recovered a central place in the

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<sup>3</sup> In Portugal and Spain, specifically, the existence of abundant rural labor force, together with the slow industrial growth, postponed technological development, and the need to replace labor force by capital. "This situation was ruptured (at first) with the agrarian and rural exodus of the 60s", (...) "a second main transformation of Iberian agriculture occurred in 1986, with the adhesion to the European-Union, accelerating social transformations and simultaneously imposing a greater exposition and overture to the markets" (Baptista 2004).

policies debate. Market globalization has also struck local markets. On the other hand, weak territories try to change scale and play a role at another level. Trade-off is unfair, meaning that even the most distant sites are under the range of great business. However, resilience, identity and opportunities of the rural-local axis can produce new amenities, context goods as well as cultural bonds, most valuable for their particular small scale. In highlands, as is the case of commonlands, biodiversity, clean air, clear water and landscape values are remarkable. The promising territories are those able to gather goods and anchor investments that meet environment, economic activity, tourism, leisure, culture and science current demands (Covas 2007).

### 3. METODOLOGY

Rural hinterland is facing a challenge where, besides economic aspects, is prominent the interaction of ecological and societal complexity. Societal complexity calls for stakeholder participation. Decision structuring tools offer the possibility to make participatory decision processes more transparent and take into account ecological complexity's uncertainty and lack of information.

At local level or community-based<sup>4</sup> rural developments, participatory rural appraisal (PRA) centres its approach on the capacities and knowledge of ordinary people (not only specialists) involved in the planning process and can play an alternative planning and project appraisal paradigm to formal MCA methods (Edwards Jones et al. 2000). The methods and techniques of PRA focus on the capacities of local people encouraging them to assume a relevant role in the research and planning process, recognizing diversity, individual contexts and individuality and enabling a generalized culture of sharing of ideas and experiences between and amongst both local people and outsiders/extension workers (Chambers 1994; Pretty 1995; Edward-Jones et al. 2000). "These alternative methodologies imply a process of learning to action" (Pretty 1995, 1255)<sup>5</sup>.

Multiple typologies and types of communal lands had to be accounted for in order to select the communities with whom the study should be performed. Communities varied according to their geographic localization, organization type, management model, human and natural resources, and land uses. The distance to the littoral urban

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<sup>4</sup> Poteete (2004) discuss the conceptual problems that the term 'community' presents. She considers (1) 'community' as equivalent to residents in geopolitically defined settlements. But (2) if defined in terms of self-identification, communities don't need to be neither geographically concentrated nor exclusive. When (3) formation of a group is a conscious act there will be an "intentional community". In this work, 'community' is referred to (1) and (2) that shows causal relationships, (4) through interviews with people who draw them directly (Özesmi and Özesmi 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Pretty (1995) says that Participatory Rural Appraisal, one of the systems of 'learning and action', was practiced in at least 130 countries and despite the different contexts in which these approaches are used he can identify six common elements of that kind of systems: (1) a defined methodology and systematic learning process; (2) multiple perspectives; (3) group learning process; (4) context specific; (5) facilitating experts and stakeholders; (6) leading to sustained action.

centres results in a differential scale, from the near-urban communities to the most isolated ones of the interior. On the other hand, some communities reveal a high degree of organization and initiative while others are disarticulated, aged and mostly inertial. Some communities are self-managed, others have co-management with the Administration (in these cases usually the Administration is in fact the manager and hands over part of the income to the community), or no management at all. Another cause of variation is the income source; in most communal lands forestry is the main income source, but some have quarries, mobile phone antennas or Aeolian parks. Moreover, the degree of exploitation is also variable although under-exploitation is predominant.

Each of the two cases studied is a grouping of communities owning commonlands. In Portugal there is only one such group ("*Núcleo*"), established in 2002 by the joint of seven *Baldios* belonging to seven parishes of Amarante (Porto, Serra do Marão; Fig. 1.) and occupying in total 6817 ha. In Galicia there are 15 groupings ("*Mancomunidades*"), the most part located in Pontevedra province. The Galician study case (*Mancomunidade* of Ponte Caldelas) is located in Pontevedra (Fig. 1), was established in 1991 by the joint of seven commonlands but has now 23 commonlands occupying circa 4500 ha. In both cases, the geographic location keeps these communities away from the isolation conditions of the interior, although both cases maintain rural characteristics and agrarian activities – these more evident in the Portuguese case.

Ten semi-structured interviews (five in Galicia, five in Portugal) conducted with communities' ruler boards members supported the survey.

Once information was gathered, different criteria values were normalized.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 *Population characteristics, individual uses, collective uses, participation, accomplishments made with revenues associated to the commonlands.*

In terms of management, in the north of Portugal nearly all the area belonging to the *Núcleo* is co-managed with the Administration, while in Galicia more than 60% of the *Mancomunidade* area is self-managed. Regarding the number of commonlands, in Galicia, about half has both management modalities and the other half has direct management. Forestry is the main use both in North Portugal and Galicia<sup>6</sup>. The mean surface area of commonlands in the *Mancomunidades* is around 200 hectares, a value close to the average of all *MVMC* in Galicia. The mean surface area of the *baldios* belonging to the *Núcleo* – 945 hectares – is twice as much as the average size of the other commonlands in North Portugal.

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<sup>6</sup> Another similarity is the higher risk of wild fire hazards due to the monoculture forests of pine (*Pinus pinaster* Aiton) in Portugal and of eucalypt (*Eucalyptus globulus* Labill.) in Galicia.



Figure 1. Study areas in North Portugal (Amarante) and Galicia (Ponte Caldelas), in the Euroregion Galicia-NorthPortugal.

To further characterize the communities of the case studies, information regarding the populations of the target parishes (North Portugal) and *parroquias* (Galicia) was obtained from the Portuguese and the Galician institutes of population statistics (census of 2001); information regarding the uses and exploitation of commonlands was obtained from interviews with community members. Population characteristics are similar in the two study areas, with higher percentage of youngsters in the north of Portugal and higher percentage of elders in Galicia (Table 1). Regarding employment, more population in the Galician study *parroquias* is employed in services, while in Portugal more population in the study parishes is employed in industry (Table 1).

Table 1. Population characteristics and employment in the study parishes of North Portugal and *parroquias* of Galicia. Data source: the Portuguese and the Galician institutes of population statistics (census of 2001)

	North Portugal	Galicia
Total population	4185	5921
Age distribution (%)		
<14 years	19.4	10.9
15-64 years	62.4	63.9
≥65 years	18.3	25.2
Employment (%)		

Agriculture and fisheries	13.3	5.3
Industry and construction	49.4	34.6
Services	37.3	60.1

The number of commoners involved in the Galician case study depends on legal criteria of the *MVMC*, which distinguishes between residents and commoners. Laws 260/1992 and 13/1989 of the *MVMC* establishes that in each resident family (or economic unity) only one member can be a commoner. According to the Portuguese law all residents are commoners. In Ponte Caldelas *Mancomunidade*, there are 1150 commoners; using the same criteria for the Portuguese case, there are 1400 commoners in the *Núcleo*. None of the commonlands in the Portuguese *Núcleo* have land-use planning and in the Galician case, only one third of the 23 communities have such plans. Tables 2 to 5 summarize data relative to the individual and collective uses of the commonlands, participation of the commoners in their commonland, and to the accomplishments made with the revenues associated with the use of the commonlands.

Table 2. Significance level of the individual uses of the commonlands in North Portugal and Galicia. 0=inexistent; 1=little significant; 2=little significant but widespread; 3=median significant; 4=moderately significant; 5=very significant; \*=with market value

	North Portugal ( <i>Núcleo</i> )	Galicia ( <i>Mancomunida de</i> )
Collection of firewood	2	2
Collection of bushes	2	2
Husbandry	1	1
Production of honey	1*	1
Collection of mushrooms	1	1*
Collection of wild berries	1	1

Table 3. Level of participation in the organization and management of the commonlands in North Portugal and Galicia. 0=inexistent; 1=very low; 2=low; 3=moderate; 4=high; 5=very high; 2-3-4\*=impossible to correctly attribute a value - participation may be high in crisis situations, e.g. during the occurrence of wildfires

	North Portugal ( <i>Núcleo</i> )	Galicia ( <i>Mancomunida de</i> )
Participation in meetings	1	3
Participation in daily organization and management	1	2
Participation in crisis situations (wildfires)	2-3-4*	2-3-4*



Table 4. Uses of the commonlands in North Portugal and Galicia. 0=not used; 1=residual use; 2=little important; 3=median important; 4=important; 5=very important; 0\*=only in project

	North Portugal ( <i>Núcleo</i> )	Galicia ( <i>Mancomunidade</i> )
Forestry	4	4
Herding	0	1
Water abstraction	3	0
Mobile phone antennas	2	2
Aeolian parks	3	0*
Quarries	0	1

Table 5. Accomplishments made with revenues associated to the commonlands in North Portugal and Galicia. 0=none; 1=very little important; 2=little important; 3=medium important; 4=important; 5=very important; 3\*=one aeromodelling lane, one trout aquaculture, two gaming parks, physical maintenance circuit; 2\*=windmills, one archaeological park, water fountains

	North Portugal ( <i>Núcleo</i> )	Galicia ( <i>Mancomunidade</i> )
Afforestation	4	4
Tending and thinning	4	4
Wild fire prevention	4	4
Social buildings	3	2
Water distribution	4	3
Roadways	4	4
Picnic/festivity areas	4	4
Fluvial beaches	3	0
Other equipments	3*	2*

#### 4. 2. Normalized results displayed in graphic form

On the basis of field work and interviews, using a scale of 1–10 with 1 being the less important criteria value and 10 the most important, two normalized matrix were constructed drawing a comparison between Galicia and Portugal. The second one was obtained assigning relative weights to the criteria considered by stakeholders as synergies promoters (Malczewski 1999; Janikowski et al. 2000; Kurttila et al. 2000; Mendoza and Prabhu 2003; Mendoza and Martins 2006). Results are shown in graphic form in Figures 1 and 2.

The gathered and normalized information concerns – (i) collective productive activities, (ii) individual productive activities, (iii) local markets, (iv) biodiversity and (v) participation. The “collective and individual productive activities” values result from the average activities practiced. The criteria “local market” was built from individual activities with market value. “Biodiversity” values are based on individual and collective uses. “Participation” should reflect social dynamics.



Figure 1. Comparison between Galicia and North Portugal commonlands characteristics

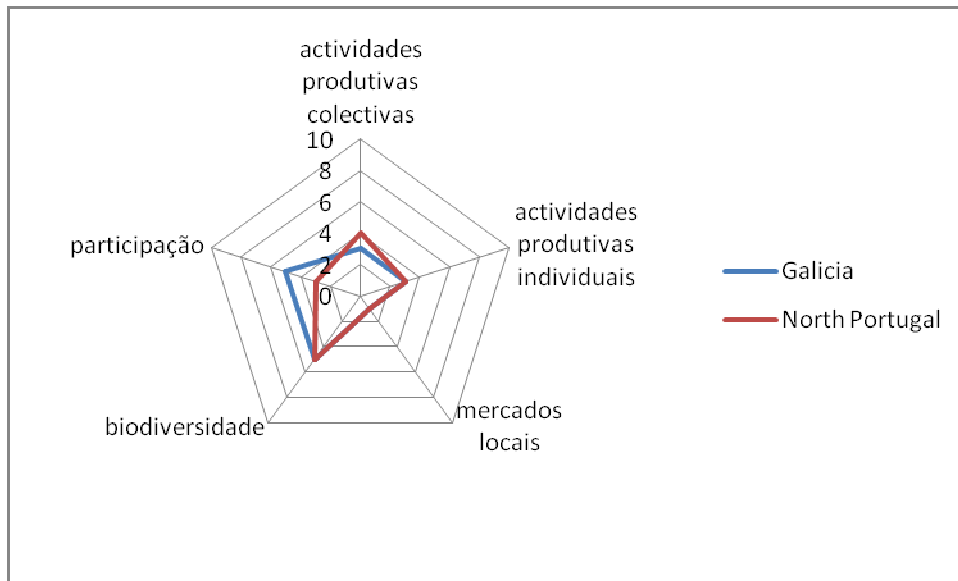
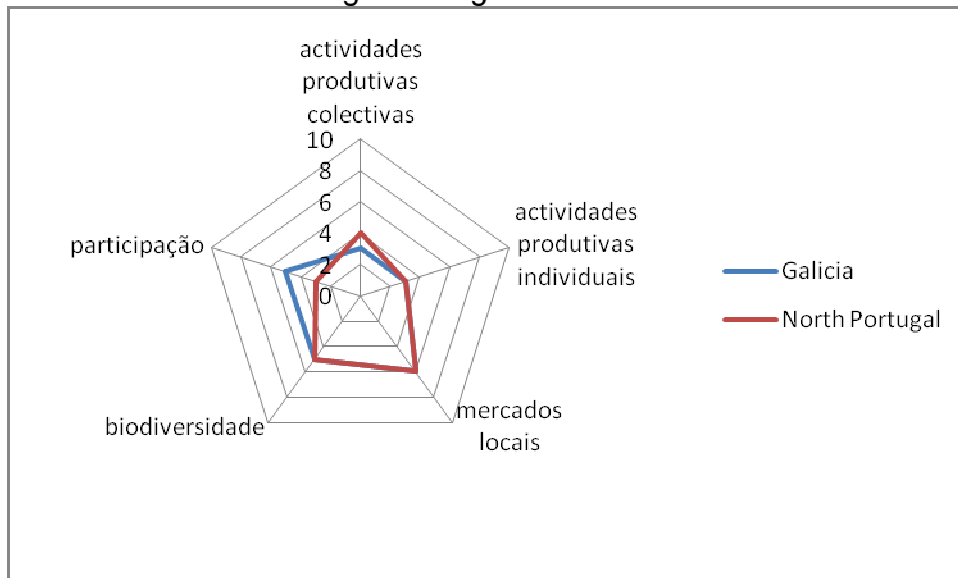


Figure 2. Comparison between Galicia and North Portugal commonlands characteristics with assigned weights



Both graphics display the low values that in general characterize commonlands activities. They also show the two realities likeness and manifest their complementarity. “Local markets” are considered of very high importance, thus reflected in Figure 2.

#### 4.3. *The local potencialities commonlands-based*

1. Forestry production (eucalypt, pine, autochthonous and exotic broad leaf trees)
2. Non-wood forestry production (grazing, honey production, mushroom, wild berries, medicinal and aromatic plants collection, hunting and fishing, biomass production)
3. Renewable energy centrals

4. Recreational activities in growing demand such as (eco)tourism, hunting and fishing
  5. Environmental functions including carbon sequestration and biodiversity promotion
  6. Social functions (job generation and thus enhancement of population settlement)
  7. Cultural functions (promotion of landscape values, cultural patrimony, ...)
  8. Dimension
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The commons are nowadays decreasingly used as a supporting area for agricultural lands but they are increasingly becoming object of direct economic exploitation intended for obtaining revenues destined for collective interest purposes by the commons' ruler boards. The woodlands are predominant and so are the revenues of wood selling. Nevertheless, revenues coming from aeolic turbines for electricity production, the allowance of mini-hydric exploitation rights, as well as from stone and sand exploitation, are increasingly gaining significance. Moreover, the awareness of the commonlands' environmental and landscape values is also growing in importance. The «potential» is there: commonlands can contribute for wealth creation, for environmental values promotion, for employment and other social functions fulfillment. How to overcome the distance between potential and reality?

The micro entrepreneurial initiatives show the way. Since the only solution against rural depression is population fixation and employment creation, the dynamics will come both from economic activities made possible by commonlands and from local markets made attractive for foreigners by the aesthetic commonlands values. Commonlands networks should compensate weak points and provide successful results.

#### 4.4 *Commonlands constraints*

Four strong barriers determine the commons performance: (i) the decline in the highlands traditional functions arising from rural change; (ii) the ideological background surrounding the commonlands; (iii) the limitations to the plenum exercise of property rights derived from «shared» management; (iv) their social non-visibility.

After having been, in the course of centuries, an indispensable complement to the agricultural/livestock farming complex, the commons are nowadays decreasingly used as a supporting area for agricultural lands. Along with agriculture's loss of economic and social importance, with peasants emigration to abroad and to industry came the decline in the highlands traditional functions. Also, the communities to whom the commons were handed back are quite different from those of the past: they lost cohesion, they are aged communities, a large number of their members are now emigrants, and they do not depend as they did on the revenues from land.

A second kind of constraints regarding the commons performance is related to the ideological background surrounding the common lands – affecting all the stakeholders direct or indirectly connected with the common lands, including the communities' members. Although times of wide state intervention in forestation are over, the models of top-down development still prevail in current official policy, and these models tend to reject a locally based development construction. Local

knowledge and experience in managing natural resources are disregarded and the commons (and the commoners) are considered «incapable» – a wide conceptualization which stems from both the «hero worship of property rights» (that is, private property) and the disregard for the legitimacy of communal property, considered not adequate to market demands. This situation actually contributes to both the resources' dilapidation and the environmental degradation since the costs related to the regulation of collective action are often considered too high<sup>7</sup>.

In 2001, twenty five years after the promulgation of the legislation which restituted the commons to the local communities, the Portuguese state's conduct regarding the application of the law was strongly disapproved by the communities (Carvalho 2001). The main criticisms regarded the lack of state's investments in the commons and the neglecting of its own projects, as well as delayed responses concerning, for instance, the permission to sell goods (wood or burned wood) produced in the *Baldios*. In addition, complaints were also made regarding the lack of use of potential European Union's financial supports. In Galicia, the commons were also the object of dubious conducted by the state structures. Sineiro (1998) denounces "the notorious lack of government support to the real autonomy of the *comunidades veciñais*" and "the non-fulfilment of its legal duties, such as the preparation of the *Rexistro de Montes Veciñais* (commons registration) containing an update on their situation, their use and their boundaries". García (1998) also points out "the government's neglect towards the monte communal", evidenced in particular by "the lack of technical and economic support, a non-existing fire prevention policy and the scarce interest in considering the commons as a distinct reality that must be preserved under the same conditions as any other aspect of the national heritage".

The *MVMC* and the *Baldios* are generally unknown to the bulk of society, which constitutes another obstacle. The commonlands' owners are not only beneficiaries in the present but also historical depositaries, given that they ought to preserve and guarantee the future of these lands (so its inalienability). The lack of social acknowledgement weakens the assumption of social responsibility by the communities. As for the Administration, who holds both technical and financial means and numerous commons' management, its deficient fulfillment of public service remains out of scrutiny and allows the maintaining of its role as «master» of the commons (Lopes and Cristóvão 2010).

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<sup>7</sup> The mainstay thinking has been exposed since the mid-1980s. Several authors summarized a body of evidence relevant to common-property resource management, describing not the tragedy but the potentiality of the commons, and not simply in sparse and remote regions. The work provided by several authors, supported by extensive field surveys and experimental research, highlighted the need to evaluate the costs of cooperation, and helped the clarification of concepts, the identification of variables and the design of principles essential to the functioning of communal property (Arnold and Campbell 1986; Feeny et al. 1990; Ostrom 1990; Bromley 1992; Feeny 1992; Oakerson 1992; Ostrom 1992; Edwards and Steins 1997; Short and Winter 1999; Steins and Edwards 1999; Ostrom 2001; Agarwal 2001; Agrawal 2001; Dietz et al. 2002; McCay 2002; Mackenzie 2004; Poteete 2004; Brown 2006; van Laerhoven and Ostrom 2007).

The resulting problem of the above exposed is the non-ruled use made up of the lands whose owners don't exert their rights. Illegal appropriation of resources such as wood, pastures or mushrooms is frequently documented.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The results show that in both the Portuguese and the Galician cases, the individual use of commonlands endures. Their importance is reduced in terms of number and economy and they do not assure the income of families, although uses such as the gathering of wood and bushes are still widely practiced by community members. Despite this scenario, the accomplishments made with revenues from the commonlands are significant. These revenues often allowed the commonlands to replace the role of central or local Administration in the building of several infra-structures in their villages.

Regarding the collective use of the commonlands, forestry dominates over other uses. In both study cases, uncontrolled wildfires recently destroyed large forest areas, the risk and magnitude of the fires being enhanced by the existence of monocultures of pine in north Portugal and eucalypt in Galicia. Herding, as a collective activity disappeared in the Portuguese *Núcleo*; in the *Mancomunidade* of Ponte Caldelas there is still an important activity in one community. One of the most important income sources is currently the installation of Aeolian parks. However, even in this apparently successful use, there is a noticeable lack of knowledge and negotiation power by part of the communities owning the commonlands. There are no tourism enterprise initiatives, although the commonlands are used for several leisure and recreational activities.

The low participation level in the life of the commonlands is partly due to the co-management model; disinterest being a giving-up reaction to the often non-agreeable decisions or to the long waiting for answers. The Administration theoretically decides on basis of the general society interests, but often those interests are not discussed with local stakeholders. Inside the communities leaders sometimes react against the "giving-up", and if there is any support to the commonlands it is due to this leadership. Still regarding participation, it is notorious the lower participation in the Portuguese case, which may be related to the legal administrative body in both countries. In Portugal the parishes are administrative organs at the community level, sometimes replacing – either by imposing themselves or because the communities are inactive – the commoners in the management of their commonlands. In Galicia the *parroquias* have no administrative functions, creating an administrative void occupied by the communities.

Employment data of the study areas shows that agriculture is no longer the main income source of these populations. The resulting altered relation between people inhabiting the rural areas and the land is followed by a change in people's habits and the adoption of more urban values and practices. Commonlands are now places for diverse entrepreneurial initiatives, in the area of telecommunications, energy or tourism projects.

The «old» communities were based on a subsistence economy; their productions were destined to their own consumption, not to the market. Their «law» was one of

traditional uses and customs. Due to the bonds among people and between people and land, these communities were more homogeneous than current communities. Personal relations dominated over impersonal, mundane relations, and family and neighbourhood bonds cemented their cohesion. On the other hand, they used «to do» without instruction, experimentation or speculation. Cooperation, materialized in communitarian actions (e.g. herding, use of common equipment such as the communitarian oven) was dictated by necessity.

Cohesion is one of the most important factors controlling the strength of a community, and strong communities are more capable to assume rights and responsibility towards their lands. A needed debate should discuss if there are any current activities in the commonlands contributing to the cohesion of the communities. The existence of cohesion in the communities depends on the individual uses, collective exploitation, the existence of revenues, and on the interest of the community members to exert their property rights, i.e. the individual, but also collective use of their commonland. In both the *Baldios* and *Montes Veciñais en Man Común*, open access does not exist. Resources belong to the communities and their multiple uses may be forbidden to outsiders. If they exert their right to the land, communities commit with their duties and assume themselves as social entities, cementing cohesion. Otherwise, they weaken their organization, as shown, for instance, by the low level of participation in meetings. Organization is reinforced if they participate – individually or encouraged by external agents – with their experience and knowledge in the management and decision taking of development projects adapted to local conditions. Commonlands persist as a wealth source, maintaining the culture of diverse and multi-functional uses. Their development model is specific, valorising resources with no market value. The opportunities for re-working of rural space expansion based upon low impact development is well shown by Halfacree (2007). The communities and this particular form of property – incongruous in times of economic liberalism, and tempting for the city councils and for new forms of entrepreneurialism – will survive better if they become an active part of local development projects, and they can do that if they enhance the strong points associated to their functioning.

Moreover, these communities have a great potential regarding human and natural resources. More than half of the commoners are women. While in a number of other environments the role of women is strictly limited to the private and domestic spheres, and hence their frequent invisibility, the inland rural communities usually cannot do without the women's productive input. Besides, migration towards the urban centers, national or foreign, involves men in particular, while women stay home looking after the "rearguard". Despite the sometimes dominant role of women in the farm (as when it comes to household chores), and notwithstanding the impact that social and economic changes have on women and men and on gender-specific organizational aspects (Philipp 1995), the role of women as producers is not always duly acknowledged. Meillassoux (1993) refers to the 'woman's submission to her matrimonial relations' and 'woman's inability to secure her own production related status'. In addition to age-old atavisms that are hard to put aside, there are other types of constraints to role of women as producers. For example, in Galicia, under the current *Lei de Montes* (Commons Law), representation in the Assembly, the main-decision making body, is made on a household rather than on an individual basis. This "imposes serious constraints on the formal participation of the entire community and,

in practical terms, implies a lack of participation of women and serious problems regarding generational significance in these organizations” (Saco Lemos 1998). The visibility of women is only revealed in the selling outside the domestic circuits, of the goods they produce. Nevertheless, behavioural changes and changes in relational patterns between men and women are noticeable, partly driven by the diluting boundaries between the rural and the urban worlds, and by the impact of the media and the changing mentalities (Silva 2003). In other words, whenever circumstances allow, the active role of women stands out. The involvement of women in community life (the way they see it, the way they cope with difficulties, and the way they respond to conflicts ...) has special features. Among their various duties, women are normally experts in building solidarity networks, and their presence must be taken into account.

Regarding the old-aged peasants, numerically significant in certain communities, there are many active citizens who maintain the networks and connections they built and extended – across the lands they are determined to keep treading. In an ethical perspective of development, policy objectives can not be limited to the logic of competitiveness. If so, only opportunities with market advantages are valorised and social cleavage and marginalisation are enhanced. The commoners must react against the mainstream, integrating the contributions and know-how of the elderly. Youngsters can also be a potential resource in these areas. Although they seem to emphasise the narrower range of opportunities in rural areas (Rye 2006) and most of them seek the cities, for those who want to stay, and to attract others, it is necessary to have access to housing. In the interviews, most of the respondents noted the administrative difficulties to build outside the urban centres.

In summary, the future of commonlands in north Portugal and Galicia depends on the valorisation of their natural resources and on the qualification of their human resources. Regarding natural resources, they represent a convergence of interests a growing social concern towards environment – forestry sustainable management promotes social and ecologic values, as well as wood production. Moreover, both the *Montes Veciñais* and the *Baldios*, by their nature and their size, may play a structuring role in the rural context they belong to. ‘The *Montes Veciñais en Man Común* are virtually the only rural areas in Galicia with big enough dimensions to allow for sustainable management’ (Arenas and Aboal 1999). In the same way, Pereira Martín (2000) expresses the view that ‘by their origin, their size and their type of proprietorship, communal lands could suitably be the mainstay of forestry and other rural development policies, as well as the pillars of regional development’. Looking for alternatives to the development that merely claims for general economic growth and push peripheral regions to exclusion (Wade 2004), more recent development theoretical perspectives focus on local people and territory, and enlighten the projects centred in enhancing the social capital of territories and in the valorisation of resources and competitiveness advantages (Cristóvão and Miranda 2006).

The debate on the future of the commons must necessarily be set in the context of the reality facing the territorial areas where they belong. The rural world is undergoing a continuous depletion of its structures and its heritage. Reduced as it is in terms of size and significance, it risks ‘to end up as a mere reference for social and cultural ethnological and anthropological studies’ (Lopes 2003). The significant

accomplishments made with revenues associated to the commonlands designs the communities' resistance, but they must embrace more ambitious steps.

To face current challenges, communities owning commonlands ought to integrate employment creating local activities. Protecting commonlands from undue uses, fences included, brings respect and enhance economic activity. Both Galician and Portuguese realities exhibit sound similarities and complementary benefits requiring social innovation to make a better use of rural resilience. Networking should allow synergies to flourish in order to ensure social capital formation.

The performance of the virtuous circle should work like this: local markets of transformed local products are to be supported by attractive biodiversity and aesthetic values; these activities should promote identity reinforcement thus reinforcing participation; enabling people to develop long-lasting local economic and cultural dynamic processes lead people into defending and socially justifying the existence of commonlands.

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