A contribution towards a governance model that supports high natural value farming

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+solo+vida

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Summary

The starting point

Governance entails a collective process of reflection on improving progress toward a shared objective. While some governance proposals may advocate for a radical transition to a new organizational structure, this is not where we begin.

Our initial focus lies on the Natural Park of Vale do Guadiana and the interplay between nature conservation and farming. Firstly, we embark on mapping the existing governance model.

Secondly, we present a snapshot of successful practices from other contexts that can offer valuable insights for this case.

Lastly, we propose a governance model designed to enhance ongoing endeavours to support high nature value farming.

Simply maintaining the status quo will not adequately address the challenges associated with high nature farming. It is imperative that we cultivate the adoption of best practices within our institutional organizations and be willing to modify or improve as needed.

Contents

In the face of increasingly complex challenges that impact us all, it is essential to reflect on how we currently organize ourselves around specific issues. Identifying necessary changes enables us to devise solutions and implement them effectively. Governance entails a process of reorganizing people and institutions, questioning current organizational paradigms, operational methods, and decision-making processes. It strives to transcend established governmental institutions and structures by fostering new formats of collective work, streamlining action procedures, and enhancing the capacity for experimentation, innovation, and change. Governance involves structural collective work, making it imperative to approach governance as a collective process in both thought and action.

What is a governance model?

The challenges we currently face are becoming increasingly complex and multidimensional, underscoring the importance of finding platforms for understanding and dialogue. These platforms should encourage interaction among various stakeholders, facilitate the sharing of knowledge, and enable the evaluation of shared concerns and experiences.

In this context, the concept of governance can be defined as a process that involves *"interactions among structures (…) that determine how power and responsibilities are exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens or other stakeholders have their say."*(Graham et al. 2003).

While governing pertains to the actions of formal state entities, the concept of governance suggests a broader scope. Beyond public governmental structures, governance entails the reorganization of individuals and institutions. This includes coordinating relationships among individuals, civil society, and the state with the aim of collectively exploring new work formats, increasing procedural flexibility, and improving the ability to identify and address existing problems. Achieving this requires the sharing and transfer of knowledge, as well as fostering experimentation and innovation.

It's important to clarify that governance, often mistaken for management, is a distinct concept. According to Borrini-Feyerabend et al. (2013), governance is defined as the process of setting objectives and action priorities. The managing entity, typically part of formal governance structures, carries out these objectives. Various styles of governance (refer to Table 1) exist, differing in organizational structure, established priorities, and approaches varying between organizations. Despite the presence of different governance types, as highlighted by Gieseke (2016), organizations often incorporate characteristics from various styles, resulting in a blend.

Table 1 Governance Models (adapted from Gieseke, 2016)

Models	Structure	Priorities	Form
Hierarchical Governance	Top-down	Compliance and stability	–
Market Governance	Top-down (However, more flexible.)	Innovation and incentives	–
Network Governance	Flexible and multidirectional	Trust and commitment	• **Network Leadership:** centralized in a single individual who will act as the facilitator and administrator of activities. • **Network Administration:** Differs from the previous one by the presence of an external team that manages and facilitates the organization's activities. • **Network Participation:** Decentralized activity where each organization contributes to a common objective.

The Methodological Approach

To comprehend the current situation, we've gathered the following information:

First, we created an institutional map, which while possibly incomplete, offers a significant overview of the individuals and institutions that need involvement.

Second, we conducted a series of interviews to gather information on organizational and communication practices.

Third, we organized a sequence of workshops where the topic was thoroughly discussed.

Fourth, we validated the insights developed in meetings with key actors of the territory.

A total of 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with local stakeholders involved in the Natural Park of Vale do Guadiana (NPVG). Of these, 15 interviews were with farmers, 4 were with government entities, and 1 was with a non-governmental organization, addressing intersecting questions. Subsequently, we performed a content analysis to identify common perceptions regarding the current governance model and ideas for necessary changes to develop a governance model capable of meeting the identified needs. The results are summarized in the following sections.

Participatory observation was also employed during +SOLO+VIDA, allowing the research team to engage in various activities, such as workshops, and informal conversations. These interactions contributed to shaping the picture described as follows.

To validate this description, in January 2024, we conducted a series of short meetings with key stakeholders to gather feedback on the characterization development. A total of 6 individuals participated in this validation step. As a result, the following chapter reflects this iterative process.
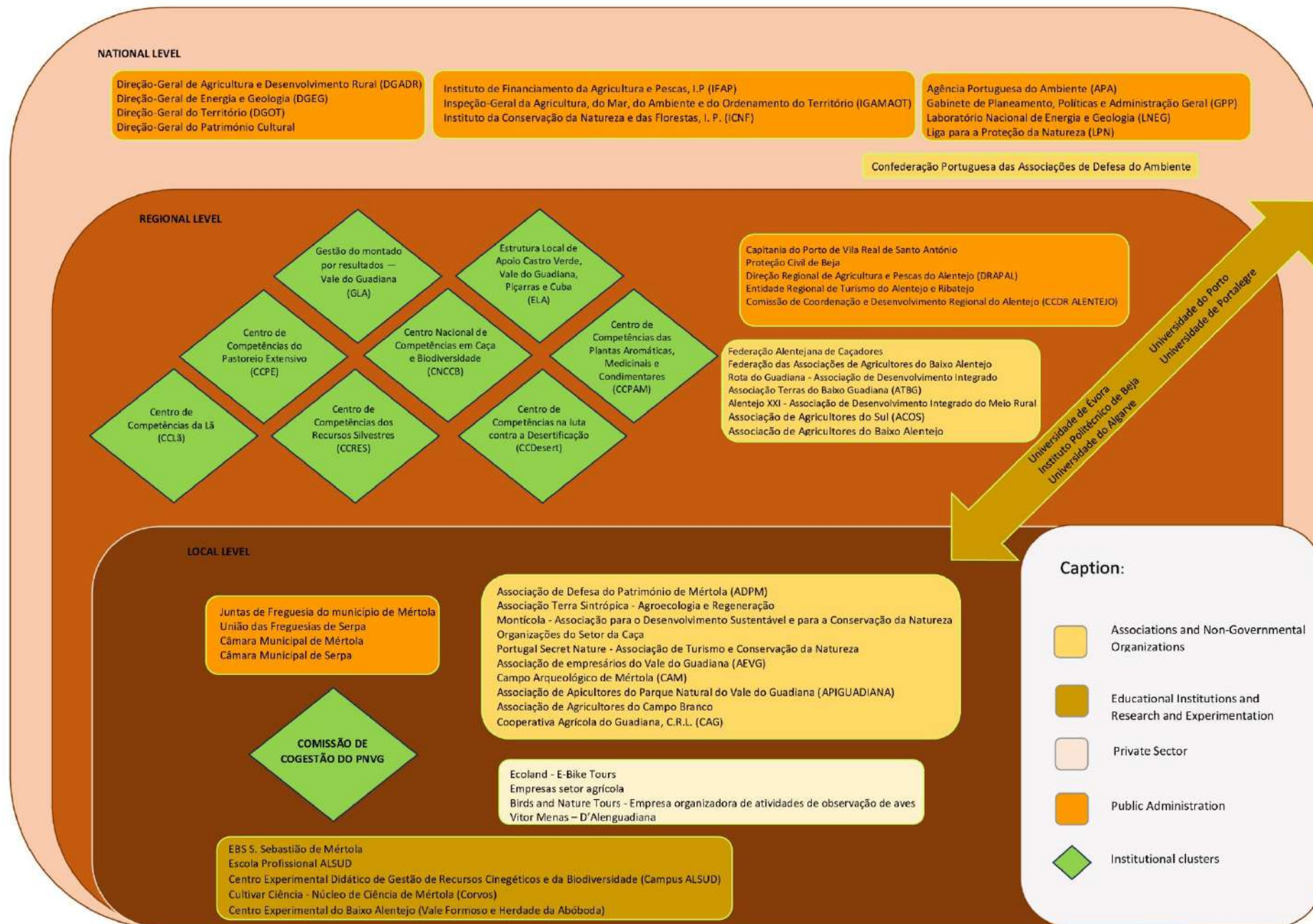
The Current Situation

We created a snapshot of the institutions influencing the dynamics of the territory through an institutional map (Figure 1). Figure 1 is organized in layers, beginning with a broader layer encompassing institutions at the national level, extending regionally to the local level, which includes the institutions directly involved in the daily operations within the territory.

At the national level, the most influential institutions are those involved in policy design and operationalization. Given the significance of agriculture, forestry, agroforestry, and cattle production in the territory, the GPP (Gabinete de Planeamento, Políticas e Administração Geral) and IFAP (Instituto de Financiamento da Agricultura e Pescas) are two institutions that exert substantial impact at the local level.

In addition to identifying individual institutions, we also recognize existing network structures that encompass many of the institutions operating within the territory at regional and local levels. Several "Centros de Competências," the "Estrutura de Ação Local" (ELAs), and the "Gabinete Local de Acompanhamento da Intervenção 2.2. Montado por resultados" (GLA) are highlighted. Furthermore, there is the co-management committee of the Natural Park (Comité de Co-Gestão do Parque Natural do Vale do Guadiana). This committee is chaired by the Municipal Council of Mértola and Serpa, in case the Mayor of Mértola is absent. The co-management structure aims to enhance the protected area of the Vale do Guadiana Natural Park through actions that promote environmental, economic, and social aspects. All these mentioned structures can serve as platforms that facilitate meetings and understanding among various stakeholders. However, the coordination between the deliberations developed within these structures and the decision-making powers of each individual institution is unclear, and the concrete implications are questionable. Therefore, while these network structures promote dialogue around common issues, their capacity to steer the development of the territory remains unclear.

At the local level, many institutions share development objectives but diverge on the pathways to achieve them. These local institutions are involved in projects and actions aimed at enhancing natural heritage and fostering more resilient agricultural development in the face of climate change and soil desertification. However, the coordination between these efforts is not readily apparent, and conflicts between approaches, the capacity to induce large-scale change, and the perceived attention and support provided to each initiative have been detected in some cases. While numerous collaborative efforts have been identified, partnerships are often duplicated, and in certain instances, fail to materialize between specific institutions. Consequently, despite the shared objectives among local institutions, collaboration among them is inconsistent. The lack of understanding and dialogue between specific institutions has been observed, potentially hindering collective action toward addressing issues identified by all parties.

Figure 1 – Institutional Map of the territory

NATIONAL LEVEL

Direção-Geral de Agricultura e Desenvolvimento Rural (DGADR)
Direção-Geral de Energia e Geologia (DGEG)
Direção-Geral do Território (DGOT)
Direção-Geral do Património Cultural

Instituto de Financiamento da Agricultura e Pescas, I.P (IFAP)
Inspeção-Geral da Agricultura, do Mar, do Ambiente e do Ordenamento do Território (IGAMAOT)
Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas, I. P. (ICNF)

Agência Portuguesa do Ambiente (APA)
Gabinete de Planeamento, Políticas e Administração Geral (GPP)
Laboratório Nacional de Energia e Geologia (LNEG)
Liga para a Proteção da Natureza (LPN)

Confederação Portuguesa das Associações de Defesa do Ambiente

REGIONAL LEVEL

Gestão do montado por resultados — Vale do Guadiana (GLA)

Estrutura Local de Apoio Castro Verde, Vale do Guadiana, Piçarras e Cuba (ELA)

Capitania do Porto de Vila Real de Santo António
Proteção Civil de Beja
Direção Regional de Agricultura e Pescas do Alentejo (DRAPAL)
Entidade Regional de Turismo do Alentejo e Ribatejo
Comissão de Coordenação e Desenvolvimento Regional do Alentejo (CCDR ALENTEJO)

Centro de Competências do Pastoreio Extensivo (CCPE)

Centro Nacional de Competências em Caça e Biodiversidade (CNCCB)

Centro de Competências das Plantas Aromáticas, Medicinais e Condimentares (CCPAM)

Centro de Competências da Lã (CCLã)

Centro de Competências dos Recursos Silvestres (CCRES)

Centro de Competências na luta contra a Desertificação (CCDesert)

Federação Alentejana de Caçadores
Federação das Associações de Agricultores do Baixo Alentejo
Rota do Guadiana - Associação de Desenvolvimento Integrado
Associação Terras do Baixo Guadiana (ATBG)
Alentejo XXI - Associação de Desenvolvimento Integrado do Meio Rural
Associação de Agricultores do Sul (ACOS)
Associação de Agricultores do Baixo Alentejo

Universidade de Évora
Instituto Politécnico de Beja
Universidade do Algarve
Universidade do Porto
Universidade de Portalegre

LOCAL LEVEL

Juntas de Freguesia do município de Mértola
União das Freguesias de Serpa
Câmara Municipal de Mértola
Câmara Municipal de Serpa

Associação de Defesa do Património de Mértola (ADPM)
Associação Terra Sintrópica - Agroecologia e Regeneração
Montícola - Associação para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável e para a Conservação da Natureza
Organizações do Setor da Caça
Portugal Secret Nature - Associação de Turismo e Conservação da Natureza
Associação de empresários do Vale do Guadiana (AEVG)
Campo Arqueológico de Mértola (CAM)
Associação de Apicultores do Parque Natural do Vale do Guadiana (APIGUADIANA)
Associação de Agricultores do Campo Branco
Cooperativa Agrícola do Guadiana, C.R.L. (CAG)

COMISSÃO DE COGESTÃO DO PNVG

Ecoland - E-Bike Tours
Empresas setor agrícola
Birds and Nature Tours - Empresa organizadora de atividades de observação de aves
Vitor Menas – D'Alenguadiana

EBS S. Sebastião de Mértola
Escola Profissional ALSUD
Centro Experimental Didático de Gestão de Recursos Cinegéticos e da Biodiversidade (Campus ALSUD)
Cultivar Ciência - Núcleo de Ciência de Mértola (Corvos)
Centro Experimental do Baixo Alentejo (Vale Formoso e Herdade da Abóboda)

Caption:

Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations

Educational Institutions and Research and Experimentation

Private Sector

Public Administration

Institutional clusters

Perspectives Identified

A consensus was observed regarding the importance of conserving soils, biodiversity, and ecosystems in this territory (refer to Table 2). There exists an inseparable connection between the preservation of areas with high conservation value and agro-forestry activities, such as cork oak woodlands and steppe areas, for example. However, changes in agricultural systems have been described as disruptive to ecosystems, thus justifying the existence of the Park. These changes often involve more intensive agriculture, which compromises soil and biodiversity conservation efforts. Strengthening the balance between agriculture and natural values is deemed necessary.

The existing rural extension services in the territory primarily function as a support structure for the submission of applications related to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The bureaucratic requirements associated with these applications have led to a significant specialization of technicians in this task and a lack of resources to assist farmers in adopting changes in their management practices to address the challenges of climate change and declining productivity. Moreover, many of the commitments made by farmers upon entering the CAP subsidy system restrict the range of changes in management practices they can undertake, as they are required to adhere to the commitments of the subsidy system. A notable example in this case study is the obligation for farmers to grow pastures every year, a commitment that many farmers adhere to. To fulfil this obligation, soil mobilization is the most common practice, which ultimately leads to a decrease in soil health in a system where soil is a scarce and valuable resource. Other techniques, such as direct seeding, are infrequent due to the lack of available machinery and the steep terrain in the area.

Support for farmers to experiment with different management practices as alternatives to the most common ones, and to promote natural resource conservation, exists but in an inconsistent manner. Such support heavily relies on funded projects with defined timeframes and duration. There is a lack of long-term and dedicated resources for knowledge transfer to enhance agricultural practices and achieve a balance between the conservation of natural capital and agricultural activity. Additionally, there is a deficiency in on-site technical-scientific support to convey knowledge in a practical manner. Furthermore, as agricultural areas fall within a Natural Park, implementing specific practices and investments entails bureaucratic procedures, which are often burdensome due to inconsistencies and lack of clarity. For instance, one crucial management practice aimed at adding heterogeneity to the farming system involves developing islands of specific vegetation to serve as habitat and support tree regeneration. However, the origin of these plants must meet specific conditions, and there is no supplier capable of meeting these requirements, making actions toward habitat recovery legally impossible if plants are sourced from different origins and not in accordance with the law.

According to the interviewees, many conflicts between agricultural activity and conservation values stem from measures of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Despite innovative initiatives such as the Results-based Payments under Pillar 2 of the PEPAC (Plano Estratégico da Política Agrícola Comum), many of the remaining policy measures fail to benefit the conservation of soils, habitats, and biodiversity. There is a perceived disconnect between the needs and specificities of the territory and the

measures outlined in the new PEPAC 2023-2027. Interviewees express frustration with this disconnect, as they believe that a set of recommendations made during the consultation period for the current PEPAC were not adequately reflected in the its final version.

The interviewees consider the current planning and management tools, particularly concerning the Natural Park, as restrictive, outdated, and in need of reformulation. They emphasize the necessity to assess the state of the art of natural capital and design plans based on this assessment, effectively integrating agriculture into future nature conservation strategies.

The current planning and management tools, mainly in regard to the Natural Park, are considered by the interviewees restrictive, outdated and needing reformulation. They emphasize the need to assess the state of the art of natural capital and design plans based on this assessment, effectively integrating agriculture into future nature conservation strategies.

In conclusion, it has been observed that despite the presence of numerous entities operating within the NPVG and the partnerships established for specific tasks and projects, there is a lack of coordination and ongoing, structured communication among them. Additionally, interviewees highlighted that communication is lacking across governance levels, as national policies with local implications are deemed inadequate, misaligned with the territory, and creating conflicting trends of development.

Table 2: Perceptions on the actual Governance model and of the changes that need to occur.

Tema	Detalhes	Citação exemplificativa
Preserving traditional agriculture in the Natural Park is an action for nature conservation.	According to the interviewees, the Natural Park of Vale do Guadiana and agriculture are inseparable. Examples of this relationship include the "Montado" (cork oak forest) and the traditional cultivation of rainfed cereals and pastures.	*"Agriculture is responsible for maintaining biodiversity, pastures, and the cork oak forest."* *"…The NPVG as we know it, exists due to the agro-silvopastoral system …"*
Changes in agricultural systems are disrupting the ecosystems that justify the existence of the NPVG.	Changes in agricultural practices, resulting from intensification factors, are compromising soil and biodiversity conservation.	*"…Agriculture can be our best friend and our worst enemy."*
Rural extension supports applications for the Common Agricultural Policy.	The interviewees believe that there is no rural extension service focused on transmitting knowledge useful for the improvement and evolution of agricultural practices. Currently, associations supporting farmers specialize in managing applications for the subsidy system and assisting in fulfilling agreed commitments.	*"We should have, we needed to have, we would like to have, but to provide a direct rural extension service…. We don't currently do this; we once had a colleague through a project who ended up doing this work, and it was very interesting. Through this pilot project, an attempt was made to do this."* *"(…) In practical terms, we handle the single requests and applications ourselves."*
The circulation of knowledge about management practices occurs informally and erratically.	Institutions provide informal support to farmers regarding good agricultural practices and alternative management approaches to current challenges. Occasionally, and based on specific projects, there are informative sessions and training courses.	
The Common Agricultural Policy does not contribute to the conservation objectives of the NPVG.	The interviewees believe that, despite their contributions during the Public Consultation of the PEPAC, the measures remain misaligned with the specificities and characteristics of the territory, and there are no conditions for the implementation of certain measures. According to the interviewees, the incentives provided by the PEPAC for the implementation of measures often conflict with the inherent needs for promoting the conservation of biodiversity, soils, and species. This is perceived as an obstacle to the implementation of good agricultural practices.	*"The financing policies are not aligned with the needs of small business owners in the region".*
Excessive bureaucracy.	The process of integrating farmers into the support programs of the Common Agricultural Policy is perceived as slow, complex, and bureaucratic. Most farmers rely on associations or companies to submit applications, and a significant portion of the time of association technicians is spent managing these applications	*"More and more, farmers need us. Because agriculture nowadays is very bureaucratic (...). Currently, everything goes through information technology, computers, emails…, for everything."*

The planning and management instruments are outdated and in need of revision	The interviewees believe that the planning and management instruments need revision, considering that the Management Plan of the NPVG was published in 2008, and the Zoning Plan in 2001. They agree on the necessity for an update, emphasizing that this revision should prominently incorporate agriculture into future conservation strategies.	*"The management plan, I think we are still working in the same direction as before (...), it is very restrictive."*
Lack of coordination and communication among various sectors and entities	Despite the presence of various entities with responsibilities in the NPVG and the partnerships developed for project implementation, it has been observed that references to coordination and collaboration among these entities are often tied to the past. In the present, there are indications of a lack of coordination and structured ongoing collective efforts.	*"There was a significant mobilization of entities after the management plan to understand the path forward.*
The communication channels between different operational scales are not functioning.	Entities at the local level collaborate and are motivated to integrate collective actions. However, the interviewees believe that there is no coordination with entities at the national level, which, in turn, develop public policies with significant implications at the local level.	*"We identify what is wrong and report it, but when we check, it's even worse. And it goes on again. In other words, we are not heard at all."*

Cross fertilization: what can we learn from other contexts?

In this chapter, we will showcase governance practices that, through their actions, serve as mechanisms for dialogue, bringing together stakeholders with shared objectives. Consequently, they serve as a foundation that enhances understanding for joint and aligned action.

The examples reviewed

One of the examples examined is the Spanish Platform for Extensive Livestock Farming and Pastoralism (Guimarães and Herrera, 2022). Established in 2013 by the Entretantos Foundation, this platform operates in a network format involving multiple actors, with the foundation serving as the technical secretariat and facilitator for activities. The platform aims to provide an open space for meetings, dialogues, and mutual understanding among individuals and entities across the national territory. Its primary objective is to serve as an advocate for extensive livestock production systems. The platform organizes regular in-person activities and maintains a virtual platform to facilitate the exchange of management practices and initiatives focused on social and ecological concerns, including the public recognition of the significance of pastoralism and extensive farming.

In Portugal, we examined the Tertúlias do Montado initiative (Guimarães and Herrera, 2022), which brings together individuals and entities informally sharing a common interest in Montado. These gatherings serve as platforms where participants discuss the daily challenges, visions, opinions, and experiences related to Montado sustainability. Open to all interested parties, these dialogue platforms aim to establish a comprehensive and ongoing communication framework among diverse stakeholders. Launched in 2016 by the Mediterranean Institute for Agriculture, Environment, and Development (MED), Tertulias do Montado addresses complex issues affecting the Montado region. The initiative includes a skilled facilitator who designs interaction moments between researchers, landowners, farm managers, public administration, private companies, and civil society, encouraging transdisciplinary collaboration.

Another example is the Nature Friendly Farming Network in the United Kingdom that, according to the website, is an organization that, together with other non-governmental and public entities, focuses on the development of sustainable food production through agricultural practices that consider the well-being of the environment. The organization, led by farmers, focuses on sharing knowledge and best agricultural practices among producers who are at the forefront of the agri-food transition. They share their experiences with those starting the journey, providing support at every stage of the process.

In the United Kingdom, the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust stands out as an institution dedicated to enhancing rural landscapes and biodiversity through the management of hunting and wildlife. Their actions are grounded in scientific foundations and supported by a network of public and private partners. Following a collaborative and network-based institutional model, they have pioneered Farmer Clusters, a platform aimed at identifying groups of farmers across the UK interested in agriculture aligned with landscape and nature conservation. Newcomers to the

clusters are guided by lead producers and conservation consultants who serve as advisors and facilitators throughout the transition process. Moreover, this process often involves leveraging existing agri-environmental schemes that provide financial support for agricultural objectives aligned with landscape and species conservation.

Transversal across various European Union countries, another example at the level of good governance practices is the Digital Innovation Hub (DIH), particularly in the agrifood sector (Quesada, 2022). Their main objective is to support primarily small and medium-sized enterprises in the digital transition process with the aim of enhancing their business and production processes. Reflecting as a regional platform with a pan-European network, DIH's support local businesses and activities. DIH's are a project *"designed to build an ecosystem of digital innovation by uniting different environments and sectors, exchanging knowledge, experiences, and technologies"* (Quesada, 2022:24)

An additional case study is the Burren Program in Ireland. As outlined on its website, the program strives to boost the local community's efforts in conserving both heritage and the environment. Its primary goals revolve around fostering sustainable management of agricultural lands characterized by significant natural and cultural value. The program is spearheaded by farmers, intertwining conservation with agriculture. These farmers receive payment to secure environmental results while developing their farming activity. The Burren Program team is actively engaged in streamlining procedures, aiming to minimize bureaucratic burdens, allowing producers to focus on their agricultural activities. It is characterized as a results-based project, wherein farmers have the freedom to achieve conservation outcomes that best suit their farms, considering their specific circumstances and constraints. Notably, it stands out as a flexible program that is compatible with diverse contexts.

Lessons learned from the examples

- To develop viable actions that do not impose excessive burdens on primary producers, **they are considered the central stakeholders, playing a central role in decision-making**, and always being considered in the planning and development of actions.

- **Supporting entities** without interfering in the organization's dynamics, **encourage them to organize themselves** and express their opinions and understandings.

- **Supporting entities** seek to **provide balance and dialogue through the exchange among the various groups** such as farmers, landowners, researchers, government entities, consultants, and civil society, including conservationists, non-governmental organizations, rural development groups, among others.

- **Various typologies of communication channels are advisable:** in person activities with a defined and agreed frequency, and mailing lists, where information circulates among various actors, sharing different opinions and fostering tolerance for diverse ways of thinking and acting.

- **Create specific working groups** to organize and plan campaigns, meetings, and activities considered needed.

- To have a **clear vision of what are the aims share by different institutions**, the final goal that all want to achieve; hence what do they gain by working in articulation. The existence of a clear vision regarding common goals among different institutions is crucial, as it clarifies how articulation can contribute to the activities and objectives of each institution. In other words, it elucidates what they can gain by working in collaboration.

- The promotion of agency and **peer to peer support promote responsibility** and at the same time allow knowledge transfer in an efficient manner.

- Act in a multi-layer approach meaning that the actions developed are not only focused on what happens at the farm level but **relates this source information with the policy dynamics in a two-ways communication channels** that allows practice to steer policies at the same time policies are used to allow improve practices at the farm level.

- The implementation of **open and effectively participatory decision-making** encourages the interest and involvement of individuals in dialogue structures.

- **Understanding existing limitations and constraints**, leveraging solutions that are viable and adapted to reality, creating opportunities from problems.

- **Adapting the language used** considering different stakeholders promotes a better understanding of the discussed topic and, consequently, the proactive involvement of individuals and institutions around a common goal.

What can improve the governance model?

The goals of an improved governance model

An enhanced governance model **supports farmers in balancing natural and production interests**, particularly as **natural assets are declining and necessitate effective actions to halt this trend**. While several actions are in place to achieve these dual goals, the lack of coordination between them may lead to duplication of efforts and reduced efficiency. Therefore, **an improved governance model should focus on articulating existing efforts to enhance their overall effectiveness**.

Capitalizing and empowering current network structures

We suggest that **articulation should be facilitated through existing network structures**, which represent a cost-effective strategy. Various network structures operate within the territory, functioning in a decentralized manner and contributing to the common objectives outlined above. However, data indicates that many of these networks are inefficient, lacking stabilized processes of deliberation, and displaying uncoordinated and inconsequential follow-up activities. **Enhancing the current capacity of these networks would be advantageous, involving the integration of experts in integration processes and providing training in integration expertise to those currently managing these networks** (Hoffman et al., 2022). Integration expertise is crucial for the development of integration efforts, as it encompasses a range of competencies and tools that facilitate leadership, administration, management, monitoring, and assessment of collaborative work among individuals and institutions.

Évora University, currently responsible for the function of the Guadiana GLA can provide this sort of training and support. The Guadiana GLA is focused on the operationalization of the Result-based model (RBM) currently being implemented under the CAP. Although the objectives of the GLA are well defined, these recent structure that is based on the implementation of a RBM includes the same objectives of the improved governance model discussed here. Although GLA is providing support to solely the farmers included in the agri-environmental scheme Montado by Results, perhaps a reinforcement of the existing resource could allow the larger actuation scale.

The structure of a RBM allows articulation efforts in the direction that is needed. Frist, the RBM implies a network work between all levels described in the institutional map (from national to local). Secondly, it implies the existence of technical support for farmers to serve the purpose we highlighted before: "to balance natural and production interests". Thirdly, it also implies the articulation between farmers and the overall society to improve awareness of the natural assets in place, as well as the effort developed with public budget to secure and improve their provision.

Therefore, we suggest that Guadiana GLA could serve as **leading network for an improved governance model that implies a centralization of the facilitation role in one specific actor or group of actors.** The definition of a responsible for this facilitation role can be important since the current model includes aspects of decentralize activities that do not appear to serve the purpose highlight above.

Create a farmer's cluster i.e. peer to peer support

Picking up some of the ideas of the case studies described before, conditions exist to create a farmer's cluster. The RBM implies that in the next 5 years, a group of 38 farmers are included in this intervention and a framers' network could be developed and peer to peer support formally structured and linked to the already stablished technical support within the Guadiana GLA. This cluster could be open to other farmers not currently included in the agri-environmental schemes but that can benefit from the sharing and supporting activities.

Create a dialogue platform as a physical space for articulation

To delve deeper into operationalization, we recommend establishing a dialogue platform like the one known as "Tertúlias do Montado." This would involve appointing a facilitator responsible for designing and implementing meetings every 2-3 months. During these gatherings, all institutions identified in the institutional map would collaborate to achieve the necessary articulation between individual activities.

A key actor of this platform are farmers but not only. The platform should also be attractive to researchers, public administrators, policy makers and non-governmental organizations. Since many activities are occurring, the main objectives of the platform would be articulation and promotion of collaborative work. Some sessions could also imply discussion of specific management topics and knowledge needs, but the start should be the development of a short to long term collective strategy where each institution contributes with its own activities.

Decrease red tape, increase tailored responses and timely responses

The decline of natural values needs the implementation of concrete ecosystem recovery management actions. What we realized in the implementation of +SOLO+VIDA is that red tape and the current procedure are ineffective and lead to the a lack of capacity to implement actions to recovery ecosystem. To overcome this challenge, we suggest that the Co-Management Comity of the Natural Park could serve as structure of dialogue and deliberation to a tailored response to demands by farmers or institutions that aim to implement actions towards the recovery of natural habitats. The Comity could increase the number of meeting existing per year and have a focus moment of discussion and deliberation on this sort of demands so that the response provided by the responsible authorities could include a more tailored and contextual perspective.

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