

## **Sustainable development and the economic crisis: a case study from Portugal.**

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In 1992, during the first and now legendary Earth Summit on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro, we conducted fieldwork in Southwestern Portugal, one of those European regions in urgent need of development. A recently implemented Nature Park was at the heart of the local debate and highly contested; while the goal of the Nature Park was to protect the unique natural beauty of the area and to simultaneously foster sustainable development, local inhabitants simply demanded development, be it sustainable or not. Sustainable development was indeed at the cutting edge; the worldwide establishment of protected areas peaked between 1985 and 1995 (West et al. 2006: 252). Protected areas such as nature parks, with their double measure of conservation of the environment and sustainable development, were considered a new way to overcome problematic legacies of the past like political corruption, economic mismanagement or administrative gridlock. In the context of the European Union, Portugal was considered a developing country that still had to struggle with the problems of an old and ineffective bureaucracy and administration. Thus, with due respect, we labeled the municipality of Odemira, our field site in the southern region of Alentejo, 'the global village' (Krauss 2001); what was talked about in Rio was put to the test in Odemira. The books we wrote about our fieldwork had telling titles: directed at the conflicts surrounding the Nature Park and the concept of sustainable development, one quoted a local graffito, 'Hang the Greens!' (Krauss 2001); the other one was about the continuity of 'The Rhetoric of Crisis' (Dracklé 2000), which prevailed in everyday and political discourse, despite the subsidies for disadvantaged regions coming in from Brussels and despite the promise of sustainable development.

As we write this article, the leaders of the world are meeting again in Rio for another earth summit, in honor of the legendary summit in 1992, now called 'Rio +20. United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development'. Simultaneously, the Portugal of 2012 is, more than ever, in a deepening crisis. The so-called 'troika', consisting of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, has put Portugal under their 'umbrella' by providing the country with an emergency packet for their struggling economy. The Portuguese government is strictly following the harsh austerity measures imposed by the 'troika', and as such is

being reduced to a technocratic regime where the so-called ‘laws of the market’ replace politics. While the government eagerly cuts salaries, public spending, cancels holidays and raises taxes, the population and especially its youth, suffering from high unemployment rates, feel increasingly desperate. Portugal’s southern region Alentejo and its southwest coast are no exception. Just like in 1992, the Nature Park ‘Southwest Alentejo and Vicentinian Coast’ is highly contested, while its administration falls victim to the budget cuts, and its functions are being reduced to the lowest standards. Meanwhile, mostly foreign investors run agro-industrial or tourist businesses in the Nature Park while the local population serves as cheap labor – if at all. While a new ‘*plano de ordenamento*’, a spatial plan for the Park, is under discussion, local administrators, politicians, farmers, fishermen and enraged citizens continue to claim their right to development, be it sustainable or not. Still, the rhetoric of crisis is prevalent, and it is being channeled through the discourse on sustainable development.

In this article, we discuss what happened to the ‘global village’ in the last two decades, between Rio 92 and Rio +20. We will do so through the lens of sustainable development, with the Nature Park ‘*Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina*’ as our backdrop. We ask if the concept of sustainable development was ever or still is an alternative to market-driven politics, to the overall economic crisis, to neo-liberal politics run amok? Or is it just another version of the many development strategies that came and went, without ever having a sustainable economic impact? We will argue that this area of the Southwestern coast is no exception to the overall crisis; sustainable development came as a solution but turned out to be just another symptom. Instead, studying this coast can shed light on the current crisis in Portugal. In the following, we first situate the concept of sustainable development in the context of an anthropology of (post-) environmental landscapes and protected areas (1); the region of Alentejo was considered marginal both in terms of Portugal and the European Union and subject to economic and political measures which shaped its environment. Thus, in the first part we outline a history of this landscape, the changing meanings attributed to it and the subsequent waves of development measures imposed on it.

The Nature Park started in 1986 as a ‘protected landscape’ before it was upgraded to a Nature Park in 1995. In the second part, we discuss the impacts of the implementation of this protected area and what it means that ‘conservation is our government now’, as

West (2006) entitled her monograph about a National Park in New Guinea. We contrast the concept of sustainable development with a few ethnographic examples, which reveals the prevalence of the market ideology as an organizing principle in the European Union. Finally, we will focus on the rhetoric of crisis still surrounding the Nature Park, the region of the Alentejo, Portugal and the European Union.

### **History of a Landscape of Crisis and Resistance**

The municipality of Odemira, where we conducted our fieldwork, lies inland. But nowadays, everything is directed to the coast. In 1988, the coastline was demarcated as a 'protected landscape', in 1995 it reached the status of a *Parque Natural*, a Nature Park. Ever since, it has been labeled an ecological paradise, a landscape of '*património natural e cultural*', of natural and cultural heritage. Its coastal plane reaches up to 20 km inland and allows economic activities in accordance with the rules of the Park. The concept of sustainable development seeks to reconcile economy and ecology, nature conservation and development along this coastline, which was long considered 'the poorhouse of Europe'. But it is easily forgotten that for the region of Alentejo, this is not the first development strategy to be based on assumptions about its nature and its people. Quite the contrary; the political ecology of the Alentejo is a troubled history of subsequent development strategies, all of them deeply rooted in imageries of nature and culture and legitimized in the name of the nation, the land and the people (Vale de Almeida 1992; Dracklé 1991). In fact, the concept of sustainable development has to be put into the context of previous strategies to develop the Alentejo and the resulting geo-political consequences. In the first part of the century and until 1974, Portugal suffered under the dictatorship of the *Estado Novo*; in 1974, the Carnation Revolution put an end to colonial Portugal, and the Alentejo turned into a field of social and political experiments until its entry into the European Union in 1986. This troubled history left many traces in the landscape and its people. (2)

The heart of the sparsely populated Alentejo was always inland. People lived with their backs turned to the sea; many of them hardly ever made it to the coast. When doing fieldwork in the eighties in a post-revolutionary cooperative in the inland, a trip with people to the seaside was a big event for both anthropologists and rural inhabitants. Now it is the other way around, as Portugal follows a worldwide

tendency: The inland is increasingly deserted, while the coast becomes the object of desire. This geographical shift did not necessarily change the power relations, the structures of ownership and the right for access to the land – which are the underlying tensions characterizing Portugal’s history in general and the one of the Alentejo in particular.

Before the revolution of 1974, the Alentejo landscape was under the control of the *latifundistas*, of absent landowners, while landless day laborers had to work from the rising of the sun to its setting. In books like ‘*Levantado do chão*’ by the Noble Prize winner José Saramago (1980) or ‘*Ricos e pobres no Alentejo*’ by José Cutileiro (1977), the Alentejo was portrayed as a landscape of ‘*a miséria*’, of misery. The terms ‘*património cultural e natural*’ resonate differently than its friendly environmental meaning when contrasted with the Alentejo during the seemingly ever-lasting dictatorship of the ‘*Estado Novo*’ of Salazar and later on Caetano.

Salazar created a national identity along the paternalistic iconography of a rural family, with him as the caring father and the people as his children (Vale de Almeida 1991). In terms of economy, he tried to turn the poorhouse of the Alentejo into the breadbasket of an autonomous Portugal. His ‘*campanha do trigo*’ (wheat campaign) turned the Alentejo into endless fields of wheat, disregarding the ecological and climatic conditions which were averse to this form of monoculture. The wheat campaign turned out to be an economic failure and carried severe ecological consequences. The double meaning of the term ‘*desertificação*’, desertification, describes the situation after this failed strategy best; in terms of ecology, it left dry land with a damaged population of cork trees, and regarding the human population, the result was the emigration of many ‘*Alentejanos*’ who tried to escape political oppression and economic misery.

But the Alentejo is also a landscape of resistance, which became obvious after the news of the revolution had finally reached this region, which was then still far away from the center in Lisbon. In the post-revolutionary era, the mostly landless people occupied the huge land estates of the absent landowners and created thousands of rural co-operatives. ‘*A terra a quem a trabalha*’, ran the battle cry, ‘the land to those who work it’. The land garnered a new meaning; *a terra* means the orbit, the planet, the soil, the place of belonging and identity (‘*a minha terra*’ – the land where I come from), and of ownership – meanings which are, as we will see later, excluded in the meaning of ‘nature’ as an object of conservation. The land reform became a contested

site of national and transnational politics; in the Cold War, the so-called ‘domino theory’ raised fear of a communist South in Europe; the Portuguese communist party tried to overcome the anarchist roots of the land reform movement, and finally it was the entry of Portugal into the European Union which put an end to this time of social and political experiments; a time which has something unreal in the light of today and simultaneously wakes associations to the current ‘occupy movement’ as a form of social protest against the overall success of neo-liberal market ideologies (Graeber 2012).

Thus, after the *campanha do trigo*, the land reform turned out to be another failed vision with the Alentejo now becoming a region within the framework of the integrated Europe. The landowners came back and took hold of their land again, in the name of the law and protected by the police. Once again, the land did not belong to those who worked on it, and in many cases they were not needed any more at all, with another wave of emigration as a result. Either many landowners decided not to work the land at all, or else they participated in a new strategy to turn the Alentejo or parts of it into an economically viable asset: the eucalyptus tree was considered the new green oil to fuel Portugal’s paper industry. Landowners turned their land into eucalyptus plantations or sold or leased their land to the nationally owned or foreign companies; huge parts of the Alentejo and Portugal turned into eucalyptus monocultures (Krauss 2001: 131- 192). Eucalyptus is known to be a fast growing tree, which can be industrially planted and managed. In the municipality of Odemira, large parts of the mountainous areas separating the inland Alentejo from the coastal area are densely planted with eucalyptus trees. They grow in endless files, each plantation cut simultaneously after a time span of ten to twelve years.

Eucalyptus monocultures are said to destroy the soil in the long run; they replace and reduce most of the indigenous flora and fauna, and the need for more plantations is pushing the human population from the inland towards the coast. Every summer, thousands of hectares of eucalyptus trees are burning, be it the result of rivalry among entrepreneurs, or a means of forcing resistant landowners to sell their land to the eucalyptus industry. Arson by the village idiot, who wants to see the fire engines come, is a much discussed topic and reflects the hurt self-image of a population run over by another development strategy. Those who previously worked the land for the landowner or on their own piece of land now have turned into free floating entrepreneurs, who cut or transport wood at their own risk. Their income is subject to

the fluctuations of the cellulose market and other market imponderabilities. Thus, the post-revolutionary era was just a short interlude from the way that led from feudalism straight into neo-liberal capitalism, with a system of contractors and subcontractors installed.

In 1986, Portugal became a member of the EU, which, of course, prefers free market to communist or even anarchist ideas of economic practice. Especially after 1989, the neo-liberal market ideology replaced politics. The Alentejo turned into a region which became a receiver of European funds to develop disadvantaged regions. Besides the risks of a neo-liberal market as illustrated with the example of the eucalyptus industry, the overall state of living has risen considerably, and with it the rhetoric of distrust and corruption (Dracklé 2005). Was the investment into planting sunflowers, or into a particular cattle herd only due to the subsidies to be had, or were the resulting products really produced for an existing market? And where did all the jeeps come from? While in the nineties, Portugal was considered a model pupil or ‘well-behaved child’ (Borneman and Fowler 1997) of the European Union, the discourses on crisis and corruption lingered on. There were many leaks in the flow of money from Brussels over Lisbon into the regions in need of development, and the administrative apparatus was easily uncovered as one of the main sources of unreliability and stagnation.

This is the point where sustainable development comes in. Environmental damages, increased pressure on a still largely untouched coastline, and last but not least the urgency of establishing a viable administration were at the root of turning the coastline first into a protected area and later on into a Nature Park.

### **History of a Protected Landscape**

The Nature Park did not simply fall from the sky. Instead, it is the result of local, regional and national initiatives, which could make use of transnational resources such as the European Union and its environmental programs, of international nature conversation programs and finally of all those governmental and non-governmental activities which resulted in the Rio 92 summit. Nature Parks are an attempt to single out stretches of nature or landscapes in order to implement sustainable development, which ideally reconciles economy and ecology, or, in more mundane terms, it is an attempt to tame and civilize the brute forces of market capitalism. (3) Sustainable

development comes as a moderate form of the market ideology, not as opposed to it. As the following outline of the history of this Nature Park demonstrates, its submission to the market ideology also is its dilemma. (4)

The origin of the current Nature Park was an initiative of local communist politicians, a few concerned citizens, biologists and the nature conservation organization '*Liga para a Protecção da Natureza*'. In a common effort, they managed to delineate an area and to outline a plan in order to put the southwestern coastline under nature protection, including the coastal plain with its agricultural activities. The Nature Park was the result of an unlikely coalition: The then communist president of Odemira was a charismatic leader, with a vision of the development of his municipality rooted in local tradition. Furthermore, there was a newly emerging environmental movement in Portugal, which rejuvenated the classical elitist nature organizations. Carlos Pimenta, who was Portuguese Secretary of State for a while and is today a member of the European Parliament, was the leader of this new movement, which was definitively focused on changing the system from within. This is an important point in the troubled history of social movements in Portugal: the environmental movement broke with the leftist revolutionary ideology, which still prevailed in the eighties. Instead, they decided to work from within the system by using administrative measures, transnational conservation treaties, and the institutional background that the EU offers. The common goal of this diverse and unlikely coalition between local politicians and environmentalists was to prevent the coastline from falling victim to an uncontrolled tourism industry, just like it happened in the Algarve and in Spain. The Southwest coast was still 'virgin', as a journalist put it, with tourism, eucalyptus and agricultural industry already waiting to take over.

The main weapon to keep them out and to create a protection zone was science, especially biology and ecosystem science. The landscape of the rich and the poor, of oppression and resistance was cleansed of its social history and was newly defined in terms of red lists, flora and fauna in need of protection, and it was divided in zones of differing ecological importance. Neither eucalyptus nor people became the symbol of the park; instead, it was the '*lontra lontra*', a species of otters prevalent along the coast with its habitat including both salt and sweet water (Krauss 2006). Outfitted with microchips, the otter became the object of scientific research and, once classified as an endangered species, an administrative tool to exclude more zones from economic activity. Most of the park functionaries have their roots in biology; for

them, the Park exists to identify, classify and protect flora and fauna from economic activity. The representation of the Park to the outside is based on these scientific studies, supplemented by panoramic photos of the coastal landscape. Human beings are only part of the brochures in the form of folklore, but never as active citizens of a modern nation, an image that Portugal seeks to embody.

In interviews, the Park functionaries expressed a complementary attitude towards the local inhabitants whom they considered as either being backward and not yet capable of understanding the need for environmental protection, or else as modernist and not caring about nature. The idealized, folkloric coastal inhabitant as portrayed in the brochures, in reality, hardly exists; in the end, listening to some of the functionaries we gained the impression that the goal of the Nature Park is to protect the landscape from its very inhabitants. It did not help much that most of them originated from Lisbon and the upper classes, which traditionally look down on the people of the Alentejo.

The population did not hesitate to fire back, at least verbally. ‘Hang the Greens’ graffiti at the houses of fishermen, accusations of animal cruelty in respect to the electronically observed otters, or the complaint that otters were treated better than people – there is a huge reservoir of slogans which seem to be commonly shared worldwide; this is also true for the complaint that the local people are ‘treated like Indians in a reservation’ – put on display, but restricted from the rights that every other citizen has. Thus, the rhetoric of crisis slowly adapted to the new circumstances, and the actual politics of the Nature Park did not help much to stop it.

### **Nature conservation, sustainable development and the market**

As we have seen so far, initially, Odemira and most of the other municipalities along the coast welcomed the Park. An administration was installed in Odemira, with a director and staff, consisting of technicians and a few scientists. Rules were slowly set up. The term ‘sustainability’ was integrated into development planning, and the area of protected landscape was turned into the more restrictive status of a Nature Park. This status upgrade came along with many public hearings where citizens and local politicians soon started to express their concerns: local inhabitants complained that the Park administration was eager to prevent local farmers from digging new water holes or building barns, and to put restrictions on the practice of artisanal fishery. But

it was not the complete absence of development that they complained about; instead, it was a very special kind of development that put local politicians into trouble and enraged many local residents. Foreign investors from England, the Netherlands or France were allowed to do what the local residents were not allowed to do: to practice intensive and chemically supported industrial horticulture or agriculture in the protected area.

And in fact, development came, but neither regulated nor sustainable. Instead, it came as a scandal. In the middle of the Nature Park, the French billionaire Thierry Roussel implemented a vegetable and fruit production project which was supposed to be 'ecological' and promised to create a workplace for several hundred people. Thierry Roussel was a well-known member of the international jet-set, divorced from Christina Onassis, and his daughter was known as the 'richest girl of the world'. He told us that he came to the Alentejo because he just wanted to do one useful thing in his life. The director of the Park strongly disagreed with the project; in his opinion, the enterprise violated many laws of the Park. But there were ministries with more influence than the new one for the environment, or the respective regional administrations. There were 'certain interests', as he called it. The director had to accept, while continuing to give negative assessments for small projects of local farmers who did not have protection from above.

After a few years, Thierry Roussel's large-scale horticulture in the middle of the Park failed spectacularly; he left Portugal by night, leaving tons of plastic from the greenhouses behind and a huge amount of chemical residues. He sent the workers back into unemployment, without having received their salary for their work in the months before. There were rumors that he got hold of the European subsidies and took them with him; or that he was involved in international drug dealing, or used his horticultural production for money laundering – rumors, gossip and conspiracy theories became abundant and ever more desperate. This story was almost too exemplary to serve as an example; but for the locals, no crime was big enough, no fraud brazen enough to fit their expectations. Other fruit and vegetable industries came in the shadow of this scandal, from the Netherlands and England, and they have managed their enterprises evidently more reasonably and prudently.

As all other development strategies before, the Nature Park provoked a sense of crisis. It became the object of complaint, resistance, and a symbol for the government, for those 'up there' in Lisbon, who were supposed to not care much about those down

here in the Alentejo. The Park administration suffered from less and less support from Lisbon. Good intentions, not enough staff, and the overruling of their decisions when so-called higher interests were at stake. In the background, there were rumors about gigantic tourist projects planned along the protected coastline; plans which still linger on and are never fully revealed. Some of them are said to be approved, others assessed, others just exist as rumors. A local saying goes that development, be it sustainable or not, is a lot talked about but hardly seen. In a Portugal of crisis, this seems to be more true than ever before.

From the beginning, sustainable development was conceptualized as a technocratic problem. The idea of the market was cleansed of all its social, political or postcolonial connotations, while the idea of nature was cleansed of any sense of belonging, of ownership and social meanings. While this was on the one hand intentionally in a landscape full of tensions and a troubled history, it is on the other hand the capitulation of politics. ‘Market’ and ‘Nature’, both written with capital letters, have replaced politics, and the project of development has become part of what Ferguson (1990) famously called the ‘anti-politics machine’. Non governmental organizations, science and public administration are the main players and install a new set of guidelines; red lists, endangered birds, or the forces of the market which quite naturally overrule those of nature are considered as a set of necessities which guide politics in a technological way. While outside the Nature Park, financial risks are outsourced to the individual entrepreneur, inside the Nature Park, things environmental or declared as natural regulate activities – except when the laws of the market once more overrule them.

In the current economic crisis, the fragility of the concept of sustainable development becomes obvious: of course, the budget of the Nature Park has to be cut, staff has to be thinned out and the flow of subsidies depleted. The Nature Park never really managed to become an alternative to the overall neo-liberal market idea; instead, it turned out that it is as much apart of the crisis as it is a symptom of the crisis, but it was never its antipode. Its administration was always subject to the political forces ‘above’ and was overruled whenever ‘other’ interests had more importance. The environment is just another form of governance, be it in Papua New Guinea or in the Alentejo. On the productive side, the Nature Park shifted the focus on the Alentejo from the inland to the coast, and it helped to make this landscape fit the global tourist market. The Facebook site of the Nature Park displays an endless photo competition

of the natural beauties of this coastal landscape, while being mute about the permanent conflicts surrounding it.

### **Neither sustainability nor development: Crisis, once again**

When doing fieldwork in Odemira in the nineties, we became friends with the local historian António Martins Quaresma. He introduced us to the social, economic and environmental history of this landscape; with him, we discussed for hours and hours the rise of eucalyptus monocultures, the scandal about Thierry Roussel's enterprise, and the endless complexities and conflicts surrounding the administration of a Nature Park. For him and other intellectuals of the region, both nature conservation and the European Union were at least partially seen as a means to overcoming national and regional corruption and administrative gridlock. On the other hand, he testified to how those forces had done nothing but modernize the old rhetoric of crises and corruption. In an email conversation twenty years later, he gave us an update of the current situation in terms of our previous conversations; in fact, he only confirmed and described in more detail what he had said before.

According to him, today there is unanimity concerning the critique of the Nature Park. The confusing thing, he says, is that this critique comes from all sides and from people with very different intentions and convictions. Some things are easily identified: the functioning of the Park is worse than ever, without enough money, without clearly stated projects, without technical staff. The crisis hit this administration, too. It is limited to mere bureaucratic tasks, without a pedagogical concept whatsoever – just another public administration to bore people to death by not answering their petitions. And it is, he goes on, unable to fulfill its basic duties; for example, along the coast the clandestine settlements still flourish. And it is unable to give a clear statement on, let alone resolve all the pending plans for large-scale tourist projects in different places along the coast. Rumors has it that one construction project with 1600 beds has already been approved; though it has not yet been officially confirmed.

Compared to the nineties of the last century, the points of critique are more or less the same, except that now all local functionaries seem to share them unanimously. Even the defenders of the Park easily admit that it does not function well, that it is poorly administered and its actual practice and regulation is considered incompetent. And, of

course, gossip is running wild, as are conspiracy theories. Does the government intentionally reduce efficient staff, in order to facilitate the implementation of large-scale projects, as happened before with Thierry Roussel?

António Martins Quaresma compares the current opposition concerning the new '*plano de ordenamento*' for the Nature Park with a soup, a '*caldo*', with many different ingredients: local politicians address the question of power, of local politics versus the central government, ; they seem obliged to support the protest of those locals who vote for them; on the other hand, they depend on industrial development and urbanisation projects in the Park because of the urgently needed flow of money they bring to the municipality; and finally, they know from experience that nature conservation can easily go on at the expense of the local population and create injustice. Indeed, the Nature Park keeps cooking a soup with complex and contradictory ingredients. The only thing sustainable seems to be the rhetoric of crisis, of corruption and the emotional upset this brings to local residents. Sustainable development did not turn out as an alternative to the neo-liberal market and its crisis; instead, it turns out to be just another symptom of it.

## **Conclusion**

As Facebook friends with the '*Parque Natural Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina*', we get updates on a regular basis about the ongoing Portugal wide competition 'the most beautiful beaches of Portugal'; the Park administration displays picturesque photos of the beaches along the coast and has a good chance of winning. They also give notifications about new hiking trails and public events involving the Nature Park. Meanwhile, the discussion about the new spatial plan for the Nature Park goes on in the public and in the media. In an interview, the present President of the municipality, a socialist, complains that the plan only employs negative terms when mentioning Odemira: 'To talk about Odemira is synonymous with "to prohibit", "to condition" and "to restrict". This does not indicate a good future for the municipality. Expectations have to be reduced; family income will decrease.'<sup>(5)</sup> The overall Euro crisis, which hit Portugal harder than most of the other European countries, is channeled here through the permanent dispute about sustainable development between the central government and local authorities. The President of the municipality speaks of "the iron hand of the state" which stretches out to the region in

order to keep local initiatives out and governmental ‘interests’ in. In these statements, the discourses on nature and on economy merge into one; both are in crisis and consist of a vocabulary of restriction and prohibition. This leaves local authorities in a permanent double bind; they have to cooperate with those ‘above’ while at the same time they have to fight for the local interests. Seen from this local perspective, the Nature Park serves as an entry point for the government, for the center, into the region. Regional planning allows both for setting the rules for regional development while simultaneously leaving enough space for interest-driven interventions from above.

Thus, the situation in our ‘global village’ did not change much between the two earth summits of Rio and since the declaration of the coastal area as a protected one. The structure and even the topics of conflict are still the same. What has changed is the overall shift in terms of geography towards the coast and in terms of semantics towards nature conservation. There is no doubt that the general quality of life has enormously improved ever since Portugal joined the European Union; and there is no doubt that the Portuguese economy has been hit hard by the Euro crisis, which is felt most in the remote rural areas of the country. Sustainability did not really serve as a cure from the market ideology or as a means to bypass its follies; quite the contrary, it turned out that sustainability in fact serves as a means of control for government or economic interests. While the case of Thierry Roussel is easily considered too spectacular to serve as an example, the opposite might be said, too; this scandal perfectly reflects the current market crisis. In any case, local populations did not gain much from this kind of development.

Sustainable development tends to replace local politics in the double sense of implementing the law of the market (provided by the strongest players in the game) and the law of nature (identified by scientists and administered by the government) over the interests of local politics. Needless to say that in actual practice, the administration of the Nature Park falls victim to the law of economy and the austerity measures imposed on Portugal by the ‘troika’; it is suffering from the overall budget cuts, running out of both money and staff. Sustainable development enacted in this way just helps to paint the crisis green.

In Rio 20+, sustainable development will be at stake once more. There is still no other concept which has replaced it, and its meaning and practice is indeed under permanent negotiation. Things have changed a lot ever since climate change has appeared as a

new environmental issue; developing countries have become more demanding and insist on their right to development, while simultaneously becoming more and more aware of the climate challenge. Environmental discourse is increasingly shifting away from restriction and prohibition, and the economic part of sustainable development is being taken more seriously (Krauss 2012). What might be true for the world at large, should be true for the “global village” at the margins of Europe, too: creating an environment for the people inhabiting it.

(1) For an overview of the anthropology of landscapes, see Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995 and Krauss 2001. Recent developments reflected in the European Commission see Olwig 2007 and Krauss 2008.

(2) For an overview of the history of the Alentejo, see Krauss 2001, Dracklé 1991 and Dracklé 2000. All the following information of this subchapter is based on these books except where indicated.

(3) For an overview of the anthropology of protected areas, see West et al 2006 and Krauss 2012.

(4) This part is based on Krauss 2001, Krauss 2006, Krauss 2012, Dracklé 2000 and Dracklé 2005, except where indicated.

(5) ) Interview with J. A. Guerreiro in *Costa a Costa*, 28 March 2011, translated from the Portuguese by the authors.

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