

Fires in Portugal: an opportunity to trigger inland development

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The recent big fires that devastated the Portuguese territory during 2017 have raised a crucial issue for territory planning and land management: the growing inland desertification, and the urgent need to revitalize the interior.

This article points out the reasons underlying forest fires, and proposes a set of measures to potentiate its effective resolution, through launching economic development and social cohesion in the rural inland country.

Most of these fires didn't turn up from natural causes. Several political, economic, administrative and management reasons explain the seriousness of its consequences. Within the scope of the Portuguese territorial planning, these reasons include shortcomings in land registry; inefficiencies and disorganisation in decision centres; inland abandonment; biased inspection of state organisms; lack of risk prevention; conflicts of interest in fire "businesses"; and lack of public spirit.

Herein is proposed the resolution (or, at least, the mitigation), of the consequences of fires through the registry of the whole land, integrating those without owner into a bank land; decentralization of powers; higher inland investments; incentives to family farming and agricultural cooperatives; higher impartiality in state inspection; better ordinance of forest and fire prevention; control of interests in fire- related businesses; use of technologies and military means to prevent and fight fire; launch of a recovery fund; dissemination of information concerning risks; and aggravation of penalties for arson.

It is urgent to take advantage of this unique opportunity to rethink the long-lasting problem of fires in a more global and integrated perspective able to trigger the country on the path of the future.