CHAPTER 23
THE MULTIFUNCTIONAL LANDSCAPE OF MARVÃO, CENTRAL PORTUGAL

CAN HIGH VALUED NON COMMODITY FUNCTIONS SUPPORT THE MAINTENANCE OF SMALL SCALE FARM LANDSCAPES IN THE PERIPHERY OF EUROPE?

The landscape of Marvão is unique, in that it still combines two components of traditional Mediterranean agricultural landscapes: 1) large estates with silvo-pastoral areas of montado in the north, on slopes with poor soils, extensively managed, mainly for cattle grazing, and 2) a small scale mosaic landscape in the south, in the large fertile valleys, on small properties owned and cultivated mostly by elderly farmers, with a variety of crops and uses, and surrounded by forests, with scrub on the slopes.

The result is a distinctive, contrasting landscape, whose striking character relates to its diversity, the intensity of use in the valleys, and the remarkable small town of Marvão, which is currently a candidate for UNESCO World Heritage status. Nowadays, this landscape is valued mostly for aesthetic, cultural and recreational purposes, but it is nevertheless undergoing change. Its uses are becoming less complex, some particular land use combinations are being lost, and there is a resultant simplification of landscape patterns. It is doubtful whether the non-commodity functions that it supports today can make an effective contribution to the future maintenance of the current landscape qualities.