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**Native Forest Restoration in Portugal through the Eyes of
Local and National Environmental NGOs**

Master's thesis in the
Faculty of Agricultural Sciences

by

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Matriculation Number: 935922

Submitted
in August 2025

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Abstract

Portuguese native forests, vital for ecological resilience, cover now a tiny fraction of their original extent, having been displaced by other land uses and introduced exotic tree species like *Eucalyptus globulus* and *Pinus pinaster*. Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (ENGOs) have emerged as key actors in their restoration, but their contribution remains under-investigated. This study aims to address this research gap. A qualitative research design was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with eight Portuguese ENGOs engaged in native forest restoration, followed by thematic analysis of the transcribed data. It showed that ENGOs are moderately effective in restoring native forests at local level. Their success is rooted in adaptive, scientifically informed restoration strategies, proactive engagement with ecological challenges, robust collaboration with academic institutions and local communities, scale and location near to big population centres. Their impact, however, is limited by several factors, such as short and unstable funding, bureaucratic hurdles, socio-economic perceptions that do not recognize their restoration work as a public good, challenges posed by highly fragmented private landownership, and the relatively tiny proportion of forest area they manage at national scale. Despite their expertise, experience and commitment, their nationwide impact is constrained by external factors, underscoring an urgent need for supportive policy reforms and diversified, sustainable funding paradigms.