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TERROIR ‘TALE OF TWO GLASSES’: LOCALNESS VS. DE-TERRITORIALIZATION IN NEMEA AND BASTO WINE REGIONS

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Contextualizing the research problem

Nemea (Greece) and Basto (Portugal) are two high quality wines regions under the protection of labels of origin that in legal terms have (commonly) the format of Geographical Indications (*GIs*). Despite both follow institutional overseeing certification systems and quality control, recent discussions have emerged on the re-construction of local/traditional knowledge and thus on the re-construction of both regions terroir's. Therefore, those discussions arose challenges to rural development of those regions between the preservation of *localness* (implicit on the protection by labels of origin) and the threats of *de-territorialization*. Between the knowledge and power negotiation dynamics of all involved actors (from winemakers to farmers, local authorities and other stakeholders like the local cooperative) there is a need to question if the current rural development strategies based on local food production qualification schemes (under *GI*'s) are being implemented towards the extended development of the region, its local community and therefore to the fully protection of wine terroir¹ on a broader sense than *only* origin and quality. This need to question comes along with recent renewed interest on the notion of terroir, where discussions emerged about the preservation/re-creation of terroir on the

¹ When vine growing and producing are translated into a concept like terroir that is embedded by geological and climacteric, territorial, social and cultural characteristics of a rural region, the wine bears a 'signature' present on the 'natural' and 'unique' taste regionally identified that is protected by certified labels of origin.

ongoing process of history (Barham, 2003) and also the discussion on the extent of GIs capacity to protect terroir as history, heritage or ‘patrimoine’ (Wilson, 1998)².

Michael Veseth (2011:7) ‘appropriating’ Charles Dickens book *A Tale of Two Cities*, writes that “The global wineglass it seems is both quite empty and full to the brim” and thus calling it *A Tale of Two Glasses*. In this expression Veseth address the dualities of the wine global markets, so not quite our purpose. However we can ‘recycle’ the *Tale of Two Glasses* to contextualize the research problem of rural development policies, strategies and actors facing *localness vs. de-territorialization* in both wine regions. Starting with, apparently, the ‘empty glass’; de-territorialization process is often seen as linked to the rise and dominance of the conventional agro-food chains, and thus, with the *globalisation of agro-food system*. The latter has been responsible for four interconnected issues (Papadopoulos, 2010): food production is reshaped by *global processes of capital accumulation*; the *dissolution of place specificity* on food production; *industrialisation of food production requires favourable local conditions and globalisation of food sector should consider that corporate actors may challenge the dominance of local authors*.³ However, de-territorialization does not certainly means that “it comes without any actual geography” (Morgan et al., 2006:53) but instead it comes with *geographies* of the strong interconnections between different localities and regions, rural and non-rural (Papadopoulos, 2010) that spatially embed global agro-food chains and “stretch the links, networks and chains between production and consumption spheres” (Morgan et al. 2006:53). The other ‘glass’, apparently, the full one, in terms of local food production and consumption and their related GI’s qualification schemes, is related with *re-territorialization* process in which regional geographies play a central role conducive to localness of food production along with, the so-called, alternative agro-food chains. However, simply *localization* of agro-food chains does not mean localness of food production once both conventional and alternative agro-food chains “are competing or interlocking since both processes may coincide in the same region and at the same time” – and food and agriculture firms may even globalise to “reduce uncertainty or to expand business” (Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002:350; Papadopoulos, 2010). Nemea and Basto wine regions presented (by the research results) challenges in which both ‘glasses’ can possibly come from empty to full in a near future and where the ‘tale’ can come to a threatening reality for wine’s terroir identity.

² Regarding terroir: “Beyond the measurable ecosystem, there is an additional dimension – the spiritual aspect that recognized the joys, the heartbreaks, the pride, the sweat and the frustrations of its history.” (Wilson 1998 cited by Barham, 2003).

³ Agro-food sector globalisation as a contested process in which the corporate actors condition actions of local actors and the latter may challenge the dominance of the former (Marsden et.al 1996, McMichael 2000, Murdoch et al. 2000, Papadopoulos, 2010).

Understanding this challenges requires a understand of both regions networks and actors – from the ones who work on the vines to the ones that produce the wine that fills both ‘glasses’ – once agro-food system is a configuration that can be analyzed by using actor-based notions (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002; Goodman, 2004).

Methodology

Considering the topic of the research, we decided to support it on qualitative methods. Therefore it has been planned and worked through five steps: *Data collection; Interview guide; Choice of the sample; In-depth interviews and data analysis*. Data collection has focused on research’s main concepts: Terroir; Geographical Indications; regional foods and rural development and also on both wine regions existing literature. Semi-structured interviews were carried out under a framework of two main sections: *the evolution of terroir between local knowledge and expert knowledge* and *the regional and local interprofessional network*. This key points were designed to lead into a better understanding on how in a wine region with recognized identity, cultural and traditional heritage the concept of terroir is known, discussed and re-created. The sample was selected accordingly both *convenience sampling* and *snowball sampling* and taking in consideration two criteria: *origin of the winery* and *market orientation* (local/domestic or international). In total, 12 interviews were made; for both regions, equally, five producers⁴ and the institutional certification entity.

Results and Discussion

In Nemea, the discussion among the wine producers concerns the establishment of sub-appellations. Therefore, if formally established, there will be included on the bottles (besides the general Nemea PDO label) certified labelling of the specific rural community (inside Nemea region). We observed that may result into different status of quality accordingly to different sub-zones of Nemea wine appellation. The opposers⁵ believe that this changes will have impacts on property values and also confusion between consumers regarding Nemea wine will be brought. Besides, the non-participation of Nemea Wine Cooperative on SON⁶ (the local interprofessional association of producers) and thus on the main table of the discussion about

⁴ In the Nemea case it includes an interview to the local wine cooperative.

⁵ Few private wineries, the Cooperative and thus the majority of the farmers (vinegrowers).

⁶ Caused among other things by the opposition to Nemea terroir sub-appellations.

the changes on the terroir of Nemea, constitutes a *problem* on the chain of Nemea network. It establishes, at first, a non-communication between the two most important stakeholders in Nemea – the private wineries and the cooperative. Second, it constitutes a real possibility for, not only the rural community (farmers and other inhabitants that have an indirect relation with the wine economy) be set apart from the discussion as an important stakeholder, but also (because not represented by the cooperative) an overall consensus over the discussed changes will be almost impossible. This can create a ‘climate’ of distrust and driven the discussion through *non-localized* ‘arenas’ and thus to *de-territorialized* decisions.

In Basto there are, increasingly, closer relations between wine producers and bigger companies located elsewhere than between themselves. This is related with a conflicting competition for stronger network and status, making discussions on common strategies for Basto wine region(al) rural development very difficult to take place (regarding this the word *impossible* was constantly used during interviews with wine producers). The predominant relation between producers is characterised by individualistic positions. However, we observed that those positions are augmented by the *distrust within the local interprofessional network*: struggling for the same potential clients; to buy (grapes) from vinegrowers with better price/quality ratio; conflicts for better social and political status on the relation with the Vinho Verde Commission⁷. Furthermore, the *lack of institutional active intermediation* (municipal authorities and Vinho Verde Commission), the inexistence of a Basto wine producers association or even the inexistence of a local cooperative has leading to the sub-promotion position of Basto on Vinho Verde promotion schemes in comparison with others sub-regions (Lavrador, 2011). It was also evident from the results that the changes on Basto’s wine sector have been stimulated from outside (in response to international markets needs) and barely from within – once more, *non-localized* ‘arenas’ and thus *de-territorialized* decisions.

In sum, for both cases, the main challenge appears to be how to preserve wine terroir and therefore its *localness*, when the interprofessional network is being driven in a way of, either non-consensus relations (Nemea) or isolated *modus operandi* without discussions at all (Basto).

There is indeed a needed ‘spark’ for all involved actors and local authorities to come together – *a necessity of localized governance networks* (Winter, 2003). Therefore, in both wine regions, the existence of localized governance is essential to prevent the negative effects on terroir’s identity and wine production localness through strategical planning involving all stakeholders

⁷ The commission responsible for Vinho Verde wine certification. Vinho Verde is the designation of the (broader) wine appellation being Basto one of its sub-regions.

and political authorities both at local and regional level. This integrated strategical planning will only play a vital role to preserve *localness* over *de-territorialisation* if able to mobilize *re-territorialization under a re-shaping of traditional knowledge* along with the winemaking modern techniques⁸.

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⁸ In a research publish in 2010 about Nemea, Papadopoulos (2010) wrote “The local capacity to re-construct local/traditional knowledge and negotiate knowledge forms remains a critical element for the territorial development of Nemea.”

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