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Theme 3

‘WISH YOU WERE RURAL’¹: LOCAL FOOD CONSUMPTION IN TWO MAIN PORTUGUESE URBAN CENTRES THROUGH FAMILY RELATIONS²

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Contextualizing the research problem

Portuguese ‘rural world’ has been losing its (strictly) productive character, called, in existing literature, as a ‘identity crisis’ (Figueiredo, 2008) for which have not, yet, been found answers that lead to a ‘new agro-rural reality’ (Covas, 2011; Oliveira Baptista, 2011). Furthermore, Portugal agriculture is currently, for the most part, about household farming, still very traditional and small scaled. Besides, rural areas as space of consumption stand out (albeit timidly) as an alternative to large commercial spaces and processes of globalization. In despite of the difficulties that local foods face, these products are recognized for their deep connection to the territories and their climatic and soil characteristics (Vieira & Figueiredo, 2010), presented by terms like *bio*, *traditional* or *terroir*. They are also recognized by tradition (often localized) of its consumption and its reputation (which is often also built locally) (Vieira & Figueiredo, 2010). Therefore they can also be considered as patrimoine (Fonte, 2008) or a local community expression itself, when the local food acquisition and

¹ I am grateful to my friend Boris for the suggestion on the title using Pink Floyd’s known song ‘Wish you were here’.

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consumption is established in short-circuits channels (Brunori, 2007). This way, it implies that its consumption, even by visitors, occurs in the place of production or, also, consumption through family relations or other proximity relations. This research intends to add a little bit more effort to the (almost inexistent) discussion on the value of local food products and their consumption habits through family connections, specially important, when, as results will further demonstrate, there is strong evidences of this family connection of local food consumption by Portuguese urban inhabitants.

Methodology

On the research project *Rural Matters* a representative sample of the Portuguese population was surveyed with a questionnaire with broader goals than just the ones associated to the consumption patterns of local foods products from rural areas in Portugal, like social representations of the Portuguese rural “world(s)” and to touristic demands. However, in this work there are under analysis only the data related to the two main urban centres in Portugal: the broader region of Lisbon, called here GL (Portuguese for Grande Lisboa) and the broader region of Porto, called here GP (Portuguese for Grande Porto).³ The people surveyed from this two main Portuguese urban centres (N= 886 for GL and N=452 for GP) were analysed on their local food consumption, the relations between this consumption with their existing background related to rural areas like familiar connections and also the motivation for the consumption of this products. Therefore, variables like local food consumption were correlated with variables that represent the way they have access to this local food products, either by visiting rural areas either through family connections in this rural areas, including their participation on the production process. The data was analysed with SPSS for descriptive statistics like frequencies and variable correlations.

Results and Discussion

In terms of socio-demographic characterization for the respondents of GL the sample is constituted by 57% of women and 43% of men; 13% is at the age of 24 years or less, 62%

³Sub-region of Grande Lisboa covers 9 municipalities and a population of 2 242 326 inhabitants (according to the Portuguese general population survey ‘Censos 2011’).

Sub-region of Grande Porto covers 11 municipalities and a population of 1 287 276 inhabitants according to the Portuguese general population survey ‘Censos 2011’).

between 25 and 64 years old and 25% has 65 or more years; 22% has a High School degree and 50% University degree; 47% has a job and 46% has a household monthly income between 500 euros and 1500 euros. The large majority of 86% born in an urban area, while 40% lived in a rural area in the past and 27% admitted to work in a rural area in the past. Regarding parents' origins in 25% of the cases father's is from a rural area and 27% mother's too.

In the case of GP surveyed people, 54% of women and 46% of men; regarding age distribution GP follows the same distribution as GL; 23% has a High School degree and 37% University degree; 37% has a job and 40% has a household monthly income between 500 euros and 1500 euros. Once more the large majority of 94% born in an urban area, while 23% lived in a rural area in the past and 18% admitted to work in a rural area in the past. Regarding parents' origins in 9% of the cases father's is from a rural area and 9% mother's too.

Presenting some of the main results that prove the relation between local foods consumption and familiar connections:

- **In GL** 75% of the respondents have visited a rural area in the last three years. Between those 75%, 55% have visited family relatives during rural visits and 89% indicated this last reason and 'to do tourism', simultaneously. **In GP** 67% have visited rural areas in the last three years, 49% have visited family in rural areas and 91% visited rural areas with this last purpose and 'to do tourism' simultaneously.
- **In GL** 69% consume local products and 36% consume local products and visit family when visiting rural areas. This relation is reinforced by the fact that 64% of the ones who consume local products have access to that consumption by direct relation with the production place (either by own production/ family and friends either during the visits to rural areas.) Furthermore, 27% of total GL sample consume the local product more consumed by this direct relation. **In GP** 75% consume local food products and 28% consume this products and visit family in rural areas. Regarding direct relation between access to local food and production place we find 50% of those who consume local products, constituting 20% of total GP sample.
- **In GL** 11% of the ones who have access to the local food products by own production or family relatives production participates actively on the production process, meaning 7% of total GL sample. **In GP** this values are 9% and 7% (being the last surprisingly the same as for GL), respectively. This participation on the production process is particularly important if we

consider that more than half (in both GL and GP) of the ones that consume local food products assumed that the most consumed products are placed in the category of ‘products from soil cultivation’ (in contrast of animal origin products or transformed products).

- Finally, in **GL** 46% of the ones who consume local food products lived in a rural area in the past, meaning 32% of total GL sample. For **GP** case we find 27% and 20%, respectively.

It is quite visible the connection between respondents local food products consumption and a rural background, either by family connections either by a past experience living in one of those areas in Portugal, or even both of them, once the first could be reason of the latter (the total Portuguese sample indicates that the majority of those who lived in rural areas lived for periods between 17-25 years, being this precisely the time people leave rural areas to study in universities located in urban centres or to work). Despite the lack of research publications and studies on local food consumption through family relations, a same kind of research was done, on behalf of Rural Matters project, for Portuguese municipality of Aveiro, also a considerable urban centre in Portugal (Ribeiro, Figueiredo and Silva, 2014). The conclusions for Aveiro’s sample are very similar to ones seen for GL and GP urban centres with family playing an important role on local food consumption and acquisition. This connections have the potential, if studied and stimulated, to contribute to keep or moreover to enhance the communications networks between rural and urban areas – especially in the current problematic contexts that Portuguese rural areas have been facing for many years (e.g. population decrease, ageing, economic decline). Not only to preserve the patrimonial and cultural value of local foods, that are vehicles of rural memories and identities (see Bessièrre, 1998; Brunori, 2007; Figueiredo, 2013 and Fonte, 2008) but also because there is a considerable potential for this family relations between rural and urban areas to establish local food systems where social embeddedness has a important role to play (Hinrichs, 2000; Murdoch, Marsden and Banks, 2000). And, finally, at the same time, establishing patterns of consumption behaviour with different origin labelled products based on the acceptance and the feeling of ‘being protecting’ the ‘local’, ‘quality’ and ‘endogenous’ food systems (Van der Ploeg, 1997).

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