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***Theme 3***

***LOCAL FOOD CONSUMPTION: DISTINCT PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION AND ASSOCIATED MEANINGS AMONGST PORTUGUESE RURAL TOURISTS***

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Leisure and holiday pursuits are increasingly sought in rural territories for a variety of purposes associated to the presence of an equally varied resource base, sometimes referred to as “countryside capital” (Garrod, et al, 2006), permitting different, appealing and distinctive experience settings highly valued by the post-modern tourist, if adequately planned and managed (Kastenholtz, Carneiro & Marques, 2012; Lane, 2009).

Within this rural tourism experience context, local food assumes a sometimes outstanding role (Sidali, Kastenholtz & Bianchi, 2013), being also frequently, eventually excessively, used as an attractive icon of the rural in the respective promotional material (Figueiredo, 2013). Local food is frequently linked to the ideal of safer and healthier food consumption, while also associated to authenticity, local culture and identity, since ingredients are generally perceived as being locally produced and/or transformed in the rural territories where tourists spend their holidays, as being produced by small farmers and not the large-scale agro-industry and by

using traditional processes. Apart from this local food ideal, the acquisition and consumption of these products, after the tourist experience at the destination, is recognized as a means of enjoying a prolonged tourist experience at home (Aho, 2001; Kastenholz et al 2014).

Local food is a broad category, though, including distinct product types, such as agriculture produce, manufactured and refined products; with most distinct ingredients and flavors and very distinct associated cultural meanings or traditions. Its consumption may additionally occur in quite distinct contexts, both at the destination and at home, both integrated in tourism services or provided in more general commercial outlets. Additionally, not all rural tourists are alike, with differences observed in motivations, travel behaviors, demographics and impacts produced (Frochot, 2005; Kastenholz, 2004; Molera & Albaladejo, 2007), suggesting distinct market and marketing approaches yielding most sustainable outcomes (Kastenholz, 2004). Similarly, the market of local food is heterogeneous as most markets today. A sound understanding of this market heterogeneity regarding food consumption and its associated meanings may help improve marketing, particularly product development and market communication, directed to visitors of rural areas when aiming at presenting more appealing and competitive rural tourist experiences, while simultaneously contributing to enhanced market success of local food products competing in the global food market.

In the present study the authors attempt to clarify local food consumption patterns amongst Portuguese visitors of rural areas, distinguishing groups of consumers surveyed in 2014 in the context of a 3-years research project<sup>1</sup>, based on motivations for this type of food consumption.

For the present study, only those living in urban areas, who had visited rural areas for tourism purposes before and who simultaneously indicated consumption of locally produced food items, with known origin from rural areas (N=610), were considered. As our main interest was in understanding the consumption patterns of local food products, the main reasons for this food consumption were first assessed (being healthier, biologic, cheaper, more reliable, having better appearance, having better flavor, being national, being produced by themselves or by relatives, supporting local producers) and then responses introduced in a hierarchical cluster analysis. The most important reasons identified for consuming local food products

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were the respondents' perception of these products being healthier (43.8%), having better flavor (42.6%) and being more reliable (29.2%).

Three clusters emerged from the cluster analysis. The Cluster 1, which represents 25% of the sample, is the most likely to buy the products because they are more reliable. Cluster 2 (42% of the sample) encompasses the respondents who are most likely to buy the products because they taste better and are national. Cluster 3 (33% of the sample) is the most likely to buy these products because they are healthier, biological, cheaper, they have better appearance and due to being produced by themselves or family members. Chi-square tests were performed to analyze the differences between the identified clusters in terms of travel behavior, link to rural areas, type of local products consumed and socio-demographic profile. Some differences among clusters in terms of travel behavior were identified. The Cluster 2 tends to visit more historic villages and protected areas, while the Cluster 1 tends to taste more local gastronomy. Regarding the type of local products consumed, Cluster 1 is the one which tends to consume more products of animal origin (e.g. sausages), Cluster 2 consumes more processed products (e.g. wine and cheese), while Cluster 3 consumes more agricultural products (e.g. potatoes). As far as the place of consumption is concerned, Cluster 2 includes visitors from rural areas who are most likely to consume the products in their area of residence and also during visits. No statistically significant differences among clusters were obtained regarding the link to rural areas. Finally, few differences were found in terms of socio-demographic profile among the clusters. For example, Cluster 1 is the group that includes more visitors with lower qualifications while the Cluster 2 is that which tends to include more visitors with higher educational levels. Given that the development of rural areas is largely related to the promotion and consumption of endogenous products, this study provides important insights regarding the need of different strategies to target different market segments and thus increase the consumption of food products of rural areas.

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