

Chapter 7

Rural Provenance Food as Cultural Heritage: A Way of Promoting Territorial Development?

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to reflect on rural provenance food as cultural heritage, discussing at the same time its contribution to promoting rural development and renewed rural-urban connections in Portugal. This chapter takes a selection of urban retailers (the so-called gourmet or specialized stores) located in Lisbon, Portugal, as the starting point of the discussion. In fact, in commercializing rural food products—generally perceived as higher quality and presenting unique characteristics—urban retailers are selling a piece of the countryside, a piece of specific terroirs, a piece of cultural identity, and a particular vision of the world and savoir-faire. Based on the content analysis of the stores' promotional materials, it is possible to conclude that a growing gourmetization and heritagization in the commercialization of rural provenance food products is taking place in urban contexts. The promotion of foodstuffs held by the stores also relies on the claim that provenance matters, whether that provenance is portrayed as local, regional, or national.

INTRODUCTION¹

This chapter is focused on the rural provenance food as cultural heritage, discussing at the same time its contribution to promoting rural attractiveness and development in Portugal. This discussion is rooted in the well documented and widely debated changes that many rural areas, mainly in peripheral regions of Europe (and Portugal), face since some decades ago. Due to these changes, largely induced by the

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transformations in agricultural activities, many rural areas currently face new challenges that seem to result in major reconfiguration processes both for rural territories and for the rural-urban connections.

Many of these territories have been transformed from places of production into multifunctional spaces, in which consumption-oriented activities currently assume a central role. Tourism and leisure related activities, including gastronomy, tasting, and acquisition of traditional and local foodstuffs represent major assets within this multifunctional rural, being increasingly valued by urban populations and contributing to re-valorising some agricultural related productions and to foster local communities' development (Figueiredo, 2011; 2013a; 2018; Oliveira Baptista, 2006; Soares da Silva, Figueiredo, Eusébio & Carneiro, 2016).

There is, in fact, a consensual recognition on the growing interest of (mainly urban) consumers in traditional and local foodstuffs and on the generally positive impacts these processes can induce in rural areas (Ilbery & Kneafsey, 2000; Marsden & Sonnino, 2008; Johnston & Bauman, 2010; Truninger, 2010; Nunes, 2011; Paulino, 2011; Eusébio, Carneiro, Kastenholz, Figueiredo & Soares da Silva, 2017). There is also an increasing European Union (EU) policy support to the production of this type of products and to their official certification that allow their preservation, differentiation and better understanding of their specific character (Pieniak, Verbeke, Vanhonacker, Guerrero & Hersleth, 2009; Rodrigo & Ferragolo da Veiga, 2010; Tibério & Diniz, 2012) as well as a growing – although scarcely analysed – number of urban retailers selling rural provenance foodstuffs (Figueiredo, 2019).

This chapter takes the urban retailers (the so-called *gourmet* or specialized stores) as the starting point of the discussion. In fact, in commercializing rural food products – generally perceived as higher quality and presenting unique characteristics – urban retailers are selling a *piece of the countryside*, a piece of specific *terroirs*, a piece of local (sometimes also regional or national) cultural identity and a particular vision of the world and *savoir-faire*. Food is considered as a relevant part of territories' cultural heritage and identity, reflecting both material and immaterial aspects, such as the biophysical conditions, main agricultural productions, activities, traditions and knowledge (Bèssiere, 1998; Fonte, 2008; Montanari & Staniscia, 2009; Sims, 2009; Fonte & Papadopoulos, 2010; Hong & Tsai, 2012). In this sense, food is more than just food as it places people (producers, distributors, and consumers) in a particular cultural order and social universe (Bèssiere, 1998; Figueiredo, 2013b). Therefore, food may be considered an important patrimony of a given community, region or country. Consumers of local traditional foodstuffs seem to value its authenticity and, consequently, its geographic origin, its simplicity, its connections with specific products and territories, its history and related traditions (Truninger, 2010; Nunes, 2011; Paulino, 2011; Eusébio et al., 2017). By selling rural provenance foods, urban retailers not only address consumers' needs and desires but also promote a certain image of agricultural activities and rural territories, contributing at the same time to rural attractiveness and local development (Figueiredo & Brochot, 2017; Figueiredo, 2019).

Although the chapter takes mainly a theoretical reflection on the above-mentioned topics, some empirical illustrations, based on a content analysis of the promotional materials used by urban retailers located in Lisbon, are included. The chapter develops from the present Introduction, into the discussion of rural provenance food as cultural heritage, not only at the local scale but also at the regional and national ones, playing an important role in the social and cultural identities construction and reinforcement. The links between specialty food production and consumption and rural development are discussed in the third section of the chapter. Here, a brief examination of some Lisbon specialty food stores is taken as an illustration of their role as contributors to the promotion of rural provenance food and, rural attractiveness and development.

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