

## **Fruitful Liaisons? Relationships between regional food productions and tourism activities in Serra da Estrela, Portugal**

Catarina Vieira and Elisabete Figueiredo

*University of Aveiro – Portugal, vieira.cat@gmail.com; elisa@ua.pt*

**Abstract:** *The paper explores the effectiveness amplification of the strategies and instruments to promote a real connection between regional food productions and rural tourism, using an interdisciplinary perspective and analysing the opportunities presented by rural tourism as preferential market for regional food products. Based on an exploratory research conducted in the Tourism Region of Serra da Estrela – Portugal, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches and techniques, it is possible to point out the need to intervene at several scales (tourism demand, tourism establishments and agents, regional food producers) in order to explore and materialise the (currently faint) potential for fruitful liaisons between rural tourism and regional food productions.*

**Keywords:** *regional food productions, rural tourism, rural development*

### **Introduction**

Despite the frequent academic and political debates and the diverse initiatives directed to remote and mountain Portuguese rural territories, the fact is that they continue to lose population and socioeconomic dynamics, therefore losing their attractiveness capacity for local inhabitants (Oliveira Baptista, 2006). In parallel these areas are increasingly demanded by new actors, frequently of urban origin, motivated by consumption logics related to leisure and recreation as well as to the contact with nature (Figueiredo, 2009).

Since the end of the 80's these questions have acquired a new centrality, with the recognition of the multifunctional character of rural areas (e.g. CEC, 1988). In fact, during the last decades, rural policies and measures, particularly the ones concerning remote and mountain areas, reflected and reinforced the dominant shift in terms of development paradigms, as well as in the way rural areas are perceived socially and institutionally. From a paradigm centred in agricultural production, we passed (mainly within European Union (EU)) to a paradigm which, in what concerns remote rural areas, is increasingly centred in the preservation of nature, environment and cultural aspects, i.e. in the new functions rural areas can play to society as a whole (Figueiredo, 2003; Figueiredo, 2008; Murdoch, 2003; Gamache et al., 2004; Halfacree, 2007). In terms of political strategies and measures we also passed from the ones almost exclusively focused on the agricultural sector to measures which increasingly include the multifunctional character of remote rural areas. These last strategies also include a diversity of policy instruments in order to foster local development based on that multifunctionality and, consequently aiming to promote economic diversification in rural areas. In this context, the valorisation of the connection between regional food productions (RFP) and rural tourism (RT) activities emerges as an important opportunity for rural development.

Based on the research conducted in the Tourism Region of Serra da Estrela (TRSE) – interior central region of Portugal<sup>1</sup> - this paper aims to explore the connection between RFP and RT activities, taking into account the limitations and difficulties inherent both to RFP and RT in remote and mountain areas. Specifically, this paper aims to evaluate the modes and the intensity of the connection between RFP and RT activities; to identify and to understand the main constraints for an effective

---

<sup>1</sup> TRSE is considered as a strategic tourism destination within Portugal in the recent Strategic National Tourism Plan, both due to snow tourism (more mass tourism related) and to eco and rural tourism. Moreover, part of this region is included in a Natural Park – the Natural Park of Serra da Estrela, created in 1976.

liaison between regional food products and rural tourism activities; and to identify the main strategies rural stakeholders propose to reinforce that liaison. As discussed in the following sections, although theoretically one can point out the diverse and mutual benefits resulting from the connection between RFP and RT (Boyne et al., 2003; Malevolti, 2003; Tibério and Abreu, 2005) - namely the amplification of RFP markets through rural tourism activities and costumers and the contribution of RFP to enhance the attractiveness of rural tourism destinations (Boyne et al., 2003) - the empirical evidence gathered in our study area, along with the evidence provided by several authors, demonstrate that that connection is still faint and need to be reinforced. Notwithstanding the exploratory nature of the research, the data collected allows to conclude on the existence of an opportunity in RT to be a preferential market for regional products. However, the effective materialisation of the potential of that liaison is far from being immediate, therefore requiring a multilevel and coherent collective action to integrate tourism demand, tourism operators and agents, as well as RFP producers.

### Regional Food Productions: a New Perception on 'Old' Products

The regional food productions or, as often designated in the scientific literature, the '*traditional*', '*typical*', '*home made*', '*quality*' products (Tibério 2004 in Baptista and Tibério, 2008: 12), are diverse and multiple within the agro-food sector. However, in spite of their diversity and the abundance of definitions and designations, these productions share some common features. They are recognized by their deep connection to the territory, both due to the origin of the products or raw materials used in their production, which are frequently a consequence of the local climatic and geological characteristics, and because of the tradition in their consumption and their reputation, which are often locally constructed (e.g. Barberis, 1992 in Baptista and Tibério, 2008). Moreover, "*their place within a given community derives from historical precedent and collective practices*" (Bérard and Marchenay, 2008: 9), which means that regional food productions are extremely important to reinforce local identities and character. In this sense one can state that they are "*social constructs*" (Bérard and Marchenay, 1998: 7). As Brunori (2007: 11 - 12) mentions, the *Curry Report* in UK sets two important definitions in relation to RFP: on the one hand there are "*local food*" products, on the other hand there are "*locality food*" products. The first are produced, consumed and appreciated within a confined area, by a community that knows them. The second often supposed a separation between consumption and production, in terms of knowledge by the consumers, but their specific quality and their local origin are guaranteed by institutional certification or qualification systems. In this paper we consider both *local* and *locality food* productions as RFP.

Despite the fact that these *local* and *locality food* productions had acquired, in the last years, a new dimension and meaning, they are in fact "*old*" productions. As Tibério and Cristóvão state "*the productions designated nowadays as 'traditional' are not new, otherwise we did not name them 'traditional'*". The authors add that these products "*only remain traditional because they have been forgotten by the productivist 'agricultural modernisation' paradigm*" (Tibério and Cristóvão, 2005: 16). Within this mode of agricultural production, in fact, many of the RFP producers could not comply with the competition for costs reduction and scale enlargement, both necessary conditions within the "*agro-industrial paradigm*", (Marsden et al., 2001: 77). Paradoxically, it was this marginalisation that played a crucial role in the preservation of a large part of these traditional products: by not being included in the industrial production systems, they have maintained their uniqueness and character, acquiring nowadays a renewed interest, both at social and institutional levels.

Important aspects in this new valorisation of local productions were the several food related problems that occurred in the last decades (e.g. the bovine spongiform encephalopathy - BSE) and an increasing awareness of the environmental negative impacts of the conventional agriculture and food production systems. For this reason, the wide range of attributes nowadays associated to RFP - as Brunori (2007) states: "*functional*"; "*ecological*"; "*aesthetic*"; "*ethical*"; and "*political*" - represents a broader concept of quality and the emergence of new opportunities to RFP producers. These opportunities, however, are not automatically created calling our attention to the need of generating

qualification systems that can assure the quality and origin of *local products* in order to transform them into *locality food* productions (Brunori, 2007). Recognizing the relevance of RFP to local development as well as the need for their qualification and certification, in 1992 the EU defined the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO)<sup>2</sup> and the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)<sup>3</sup>. With these mechanisms the EU tried to encourage and support traditional agricultural productions and protect their producers and consumers. Nevertheless, in Portugal (as in other European countries), the economic and social results of the application of those mechanisms can be considered uncertain and far from being entirely known.

Despite RFP are increasingly recognized as important assets to rural development, particularly in remote areas, they continue to present several weaknesses which make difficult their placement in the market mainly when compared with mass-productions. In parallel *“the evolution observed in food legislation”* by centring the main concerns and demands on hygiene issues, disregarding aspects as their uniqueness and flavour, continues to place powerful obstacles to the initiatives of artisanal nature (Delfosse, 1991 in Tibério and Cristóvão, 2005: 22). Although the purpose of these norms was to correct some of the problems created by the *“agro-industrial mode”*, this new *“bureaucratic hygienic mode”* turn out to be highly unfair, by setting up regulating costs, that are still unbearable for small producers, precisely the ones that were not responsible for the side effects of agricultural mass production (Marsden et al., 2001: 77). These aspects clearly demonstrate that in spite of the relevance of protection mechanisms to the valorisation of RFP, it is also necessary to implement other complementary measures, namely for the *“consolidation of a defence lobby to this type of small productions”* (Carvalho, 1994, 1995 in Tibério and Cristóvão, 2005: 25). It seems also necessary to foster the perception of the quality attributes of RFP among the consumers, in order to motivate them to *“put pressure on legislative and health authorities to change their position”* (Brunori, 2007: 8). Being rural tourists driven by several symbolic attributes of RFP - strongly related to the features which attract them to rural areas globally considered - one can foresee a possible role of these consumers in setting and developing such a lobby.

## Rural Tourism and Regional Food Productions – Conflicts or Synergies?

Rural tourism is a concept without a consensual definition (Kastenholz and Figueiredo, 2007), mainly because the difficulties in providing a clear and homogeneous definition of rural areas and rurality (Figueiredo, 2009). Without intending to reproduce in this paper the debate on the definition of those concepts and areas, we consider as rural tourism the *“tourism which takes place in the countryside”* (OCDE, 1994: 8), both due to the simplicity of this formulation and to its wide-ranging.

Although rural tourism is not a new phenomenon (Kastenholz and Figueiredo, 2007), it has been acquiring during the last decade, a complete new dimension both in social and institutional terms. In the first case, this new dimension is related to the growing urban demands for rural areas (e.g. Cristóvão, 2002), in the second case this new dimension is often translated in the formulation that rural tourism can act as the panacea for rural areas development problems (e.g. Ribeiro, 2003b). The new social demand and valorisation of rural areas are based on broader social transformations in which the search for the *authentic*, the *genuine* seems to play an important role. This *idealization* (and its materialization) of the rural as more *pure*, *authentic* and *wholesome* space is more evident in the *remote* or *marginalized* areas (namely in the ones left behind by the agro-industrial mode of production) (Figueiredo, 2003).

Despite this new appeal of rural areas to urban populations, the fulfilment of all the opportunities presented to rural areas by RT activities is far from being consensual. This happens not only by the negative impacts RT can have on local communities, but also (particularly in the Portuguese case), by the scarce rural tourism flows<sup>4</sup>, as well as by the modest economic impacts RT activities have in rural

<sup>2</sup> EEC Regulation n. 2081/92, 14 July 1992.

<sup>3</sup> EEC Regulation n. 2081/92, 14 July 1992.

<sup>4</sup> For instance in 2007 the occupancy rate of RT establishments was 14,5% as pointed out by Kastenholz and Figueiredo (2007).

contexts (Ribeiro and Marques, 2002; Kastenholtz and Figueiredo, 2007). Taking these aspects into consideration, particularly in Portugal, it seems clear that *“an integration (...) and articulation of diverse and multi-level strategies”* (Ribeiro, 2003a: 203) are needed in order to promote an effective positive contribution of RT activities for rural development. Simultaneously, due to the scarcity of research in this domain, more empirical evidence on the articulation of RT activities and the broader social and economical reality of rural areas is needed. Considering this necessity, this paper, as mentioned before, explores one dimension (regional food productions) of the connection between RT and local realities.

In the analysis of the connection between RT and RFP it is important to consider that both can be identified as part of *Alternative Food Networks* (AFN) or as referred by Renting et al. (2003) of *Short Food Supply Chains* (SFSS). This type of networks can connect consumers and producers and contribute to *“re-socialise or re-spatialise food, thereby allowing the consumer to make new value judgments about the relative desirability of foods on the basis of their own knowledge, experience, or perceived imagery”* (Renting et al., 2003: 398). In effect, while visiting rural areas with regional food productions, tourists can be in direct contact with producers (namely while visiting farms and agro-tourism establishments) and can be involved in activities in which RFP are central elements (e.g. regional productions’ festivals, gastronomic routes, products’ tasting events and local restaurants) (Renting et al., 2003: 400). Very often, the result of these activities and contacts is the establishment of interactions and networks based on *relations of proximity*: RFP are sold within the region and the consumers (or the tourists) are informed about their local character (Renting et al., 2003: 400), which is an important aspect in promoting their consumption and consequently in fostering local positive economic impacts. This assumption is suggested mainly by the type of tourist that, in general, visits rural environments, frequently of urban origin and searching to *“returning to the land”*, in a logic that seems to reject globalization and *“shaped by the imaginary associated to rurality (...) and by a certain ‘food nationalism’* (Bernat, 1996 in Cristóvão, 2002: 4). However, a *“large part of the representations that formed the urban imaginary about rurality are clearly based on myths and symbols”* (Ribeiro, 2003b: 201), which could not correspond entirely to local realities. Moreover, this type of tourist seems not capable of distinguish between what is local, genuine and natural and what is imported and mass-produced. Information seems, as suggested before, to play an important role in this context, particularly when the connection between tourists/consumers and producers is mediated, as it is often the case, by intermediaries such as retailers and restaurants on which depends the guaranty of the products’ quality (Renting et al., 2003). Thus, it seems that one of the most relevant aspects in the development of an effective liaison between RT and RFP is the ability to control information and the symbols and meanings associated to regional food products. As Brunori (2007: 6) states *“consumers can be identified as agents of change through their choices, and the direction of change depends on what consumers know about food”*.

Another important aspect in the analysis of the connection between RFP and RT is related to what Brunori and Rossi (2000) call the existence of coherence in the collective action. In fact, several agents (producers, tourists, intermediaries) and institutions (producers’ associations, tourism bodies, and local development organizations) are involved in that connection. Through their collective action they could generate several economic, social and cultural benefits to local communities and regions. Accordingly with the authors the establishment of a collective action among these agents and institutions is a crucial aspect to local development, since it allows *“small entrepreneurs to mobilize social relations to improve their economic performance and create new opportunities for growth”* (Brunori and Rossi, 2000: 409). An important aspect on this collective action and networking is coherence, meaning that all the elements should coexist in a harmonious and consistent manner, facilitating therefore the existence of synergies (Brunori and Rossi, 2000: 410). This means that in the connection between RFP and RT activities, the diverse stakeholders should act in a coherent way

regarding the use and the promotion of regional food products and recognizing their relevance to the region's attractiveness<sup>5</sup>.

Several research works in this domain stress the relevance of coherence in stakeholders' action by presenting empirical evidence about the inexistence of coherence in the connection between RT and RFP, due to the replacement of regional productions by industrialised and/or non local products. This is clear in the studies of Malevolti (2003) on Tuscany (Italy) and of Tibério and Abreu (2005) in the Natural Park of Douro International (Portugal). As obstacles to the use of local food products, Malevolti (2003) identify the following ones: the higher costs; the storage difficulties and the lack of knowledge on local products and local gastronomy by tourists and, more important, by tourism operators. In the same sense, Tibério and Abreu (2005) point out: the inability of suppliers to understand and to conform to the needs in terms of the distribution of productions; the faint interest of the smaller distributors on RFP; the existence of irregularities in the commercial processes and, more generally, the inability of RFP producers in fulfil the new tourism demands. All the previous aspects reveal a clear lack of integration and coherence between RT and RFP, in the regions analysed, and contradict the potential amplification of RFP markets induced by rural tourism. Even in mass tourism contexts, as it is in part (during the snow season) the case of TRSE, there is empirical evidence on the importance of a coherent connection among the various stakeholders in order to stimulate regional food productions through tourism activities and contribute to foster local economies (e.g. Torres, 2003; Telfer and Wall, 2000)<sup>6</sup>. However, the existence and intensity of this positive impacts, both in mass tourism and in rural tourism contexts are dependent upon the characteristics of the tourism demand; the characteristics of the food production systems as well as the mediation and marketing systems (e.g. Meyer et al., 2004; Torres, 2003).

Despite the difficulties and problems in the connection between RFP and RT activities, taking into account the attraction of urban populations by rural areas and rural tourism activities, it is to be expected a preference for typical and regional food productions that could be translated in the amplification of their markets. In this respect, the study conducted by Malevolti (2003) also allows to identify the strong interest and enthusiasm on RFP by tourists. In the study of Tibério and Abreu (2005) the preference for RFP seems to be significant enough to generate new consumption habits<sup>7</sup>. In parallel a study conducted in two rural mountainous areas of Greece demonstrates the mythical representation that rural tourists have on RFP, indicating that the tourism expenditure in RFP is higher when tourists perceive these productions *"as indicative of a particular lifestyle, or as being authentic and wholesome"* (Skuras et al., 2006: 776). This excerpt points out another relevant dimension of RFP, previously stressed: the fact that these productions are not perceived only as food, but also as part of the overall tourism experience in which cultural aspects (mainly associated to gastronomy) are of paramount importance (DuRand and Heath, 2006). DuRand e Heath (2006) refer that gastronomy is considered as the reflex of a country, of its people and of its culture, therefore being an important aspect to be offered as main touristic attraction. In this sense, RFP as essential raw materials in a genuine local gastronomy became central in the touristic experience, as well as in the attractiveness of a tourism destination. As Boyne, Hall and Williams (2003: 132) refer *"high-quality food and beverage products can enhance the overall tourism product and tourists' experiences, while tourism-related spending on these locally-produced goods provides economic stimuli to maintain or reinvigorate the viability of the local primary production and processing sectors"*.

<sup>5</sup> As a study conducted in the wine region of Tuscany (Italy) by Brunori and Rossi (2000) demonstrates the coherent connection between RFP and RT allowed an increase in the number of visitors and tourists and contributed to their higher awareness of the region distinctive characteristics.

<sup>6</sup> In mass tourism contexts, large part of the available empirical evidence stresses the increase of the import of food products, induced by the high number of tourists. The same studies call our attention to the fact that in some of those contexts a reduction in local agricultural production can occur due to that fact (Bowen et al., 1991; Telfer and Wall, 2000; Telfer and Wall, 1996; Meyer et al., 2004; McBain, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> However, the same study reveals that consumers often do not buy this type of products in their areas of residence because of their unavailability.

## Fruitful Liaisons – Relationships between Regional Food Productions and Tourism Activities in Serra da Estrela, Portugal

### Study Area and Methodological Notes

Aiming to explore the significance of the liaison between RT and RFP, in a rural development perspective, we conducted an exploratory empirical research<sup>8</sup> in a mountain area located in the interior central region of Portugal – the Tourism Region of Serra da Estrela (TRSE). The designation of this region reveals a homogeneous management in terms of planning and tourism valorisation for the 13 municipalities included in this area<sup>9</sup>. However, it is an extremely heterogeneous region in what concerns tourism patterns<sup>10</sup>, landscape features, cultural aspects and economic activities, despite the similarity of the fragile demographic, social and economic structures. Between 1991 and 2006 the TRSE lost 4,6% of its population, being this, along with the severe ageing processes, a continuous trend (INE, 2006; INE, 2002). In 2006, the TRSE presented an ageing index of circa 182,3, much higher than the national value (111,7) (INE, 2006: 69). The region holds an immense richness in terms of landscape and natural resources – being the major part of it included in the Natural Park of Serra da Estrela – which places it as a strategic destination in the tourism national context. In parallel the region possesses a large richness of local products. In fact, in the whole region 9 productions hold the PDO label<sup>11</sup> and 5 the PGI label<sup>12</sup>. In parallel one can find a large variety of other products with strong local tradition, although not legally certified.

As mentioned in the introduction, the research was guided by three main aims: evaluate the modes and intensity of the connection between RFP and RT; identify the main constraints to that connection and understand the perceptions of the several stakeholders in what concerns strategies to reinforce the liaison between regional food products and rural tourism activities.

The data presented in this section derive from the information collected through a questionnaire applied to several agents of tourism industry – RT operators, restaurants owners and local retailers<sup>13</sup> (intermediary agents between rural tourism activities and producers of regional food productions). The questionnaire was first sent to 121 agents: 25 hotels and 44 rural tourism units registered on the TRSE website; 39 restaurants and 13 retailers. The response rate was of 68,7% (i.e., 79 valid responses were obtained out of 115 valid agents).

In parallel, we conducted semi-structured interviews to regional entities directly related with RT and RFP: management of TRSE (one), all the associations representative of the products with PDO and PGI, totally or partially integrated in the region (six) and all the local development associations whose intervention area is totally or partially included in the TRSE (seven).

### Main Results and Discussion

#### *Modes and intensity of the connection between RT and RFP*

In terms of rural tourism flows, the TRSE is characterized by a strong seasonality which is responsible for the low occupancy rates in rural tourism accommodations<sup>14</sup>. In fact, the most significant tourism

<sup>8</sup> We define our research as exploratory mainly due to the fact that, although obviously necessary to sustain some of our findings, we did not collect data directly from tourists, as well as from farmers. Particularly, on the last case, we did not consider the farmers directly associated with rural tourism activities.

<sup>9</sup> Corresponding to 4.785,8 km<sup>2</sup> of total surface.

<sup>10</sup> As mentioned before, in this region, both mass tourism (connected to snow) and rural and eco tourism coexist.

<sup>11</sup> These products are: lamb meat, old and new cheeses, olive oil (from both Beira Alta and Beira Baixa regions), yellow cheese and spicy cheese from Beira Baixa region, apple *bravo de esmolfe* type and chestnut from *Soutos da Lapa* area.

<sup>12</sup> These products are: lamb meat from Beira Baixa region, goat meat and apples from Beira Alta region, cherries and apples from *Cova da Beira* area.

<sup>13</sup> We considered as RT operators the managers and owners of rural tourism establishments within the following categories: *Turismo de Habitação* (residential tourism), *Turismo Rural* (rural tourism) and *Agro-Turismo* (agro-tourism) as they are defined by the Law-Decree 54/2002. The restaurants considered in the study were the ones with a regional menu. The retailers selected were the ones selling regional food products.

<sup>14</sup> This data is consistent with the national data in terms of occupancy rates in rural tourism establishments.

demand in this region is concentrated in the snow season and, consequently, in the municipalities located near the higher peak of Serra da Estrela (Torre), nevertheless being the duration of the tourists' stay very limited. Concerning the snow tourism, the entities interviewed refer its scarce economic interest for the region. However they also refer the emergence of a new tourism demand (more linked to rural tourism activities) which, mainly in summer, is motivated by a closer contact with nature and by the cultural aspects of the rural communities within the TRSE. Despite their reduced number, these tourists tend to stay longer in the region, possess higher income levels, are of urban origin and, more frequently, from other European countries.

Taking the previous aspects into consideration and to evaluate the modes and the intensity of the connection between RT and RFP in the Serra da Estrela region, we tried to understand the contribution of RFP for the region attractiveness as a tourism destination and to understand the use of regional products by local tourism agents and operators. In general, the interviewed entities recognized the importance of RFP to the region attractiveness, also recognizing diverse benefits to landscape maintenance, to regional gastronomy, to the cultural interest of the region and to the significance of the regional productions to the *label Serra da Estrela* as a tourism destination. In fact, as one of the interviewed entities stated:

**E6:** *"...People always connect some productions to Serra da Estrela. For instance sausages, wine, honey, olive oil, bread... and these products are in fact... they are identified as important features in the 'label Serra da Estrela'".*

Confirming this evidence, the data gathered from the restaurant owners and managers indicate the popularity, among tourists, of some regional foods: lamb and goat meat, sausages and Serra da Estrela cheese. In fact, 43,9% and 38,6% of the restaurant owners inquired pointed out respectively the great or relative enthusiasm of the tourists for these local productions. These findings suggest that regional food productions could play an important role in the touristic attractiveness of the region if they are integrated in the gastronomic offer, thus also contributing to the overall experience of the tourist, as referred by DuRand and Heath (2006) and Boyne, Hall and Williams (2003). Despite the interest reported by the respondents, gastronomy was also pointed out by the entities interviewed as a secondary aspect in the attractiveness of the region, complementing the two more relevant motivations for visiting it: the snow (in winter time) and the natural aspects (both in winter and summer time). In parallel, regional food productions' festivals were not referred as main attraction factors for tourists.

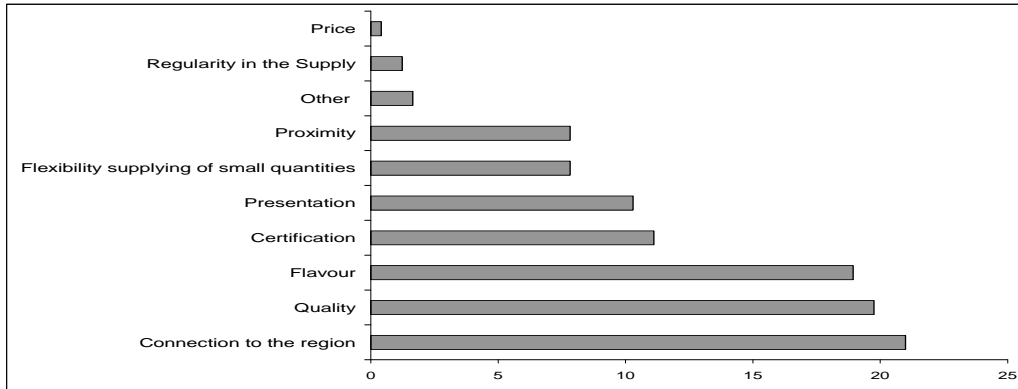
The economic impacts on local communities resulting from tourism activities seems to be significantly dependent upon the effective use of RFP by restaurants and other tourism units. Despite the increasing use of local products by regional restaurants, pointed out by the entities interviewed, their utilization is still faint. In fact, the majority of the entities interviewed considered that regional restaurants do not present regional and local gastronomy products and, even when they advertise them, very often they do not use local traditional productions in food preparation. This evidence is consistent with the findings of Malevolti (2003) discussed before. Moreover, being these intermediary agents responsible for the quality assurance of RFP (as stated by Renting et al., 2003), these data reveal the need to foster information mechanisms, as also referred by Brunori (2007).

In what concerns tourism expenditure in local food productions, the entities interviewed recognized its importance, although in a restricted area. In a large part of the commercial establishments that promote themselves as selling traditional food products, RFP tend to be replaced by mass-productions and products from other regions of the country. This situation, reported by the entities we inquired, is rather consistent with the findings of Simões (2001: 13): *"the Barcelos traditional cocks, the Alentejo pottery and the products made in China or in India, are the products found in the commercial area of Torre and in several typical shops"*<sup>15</sup> of Serra da Estrela. The origin of the products used in food preparation was precisely one of the central aspects of our questionnaire in order to assess the strength of the connection between RFP and regional tourism industry. Despite the fact that all the respondents (retailers, restaurants and tourism units) reported the use of some

<sup>15</sup> Although the author is mentioning non food productions, the same can be applied to RFP.

local productions, it was quite evident that some productions – as fruits and olive oil – are not being used and some others are often replaced by more industrialized products - vegetables and lamb and goat meat. These data are in accordance with the findings of Malevolti (2003), Tibério and Abreu (2005), Telfer and Wall (2000) and Torres (2003).

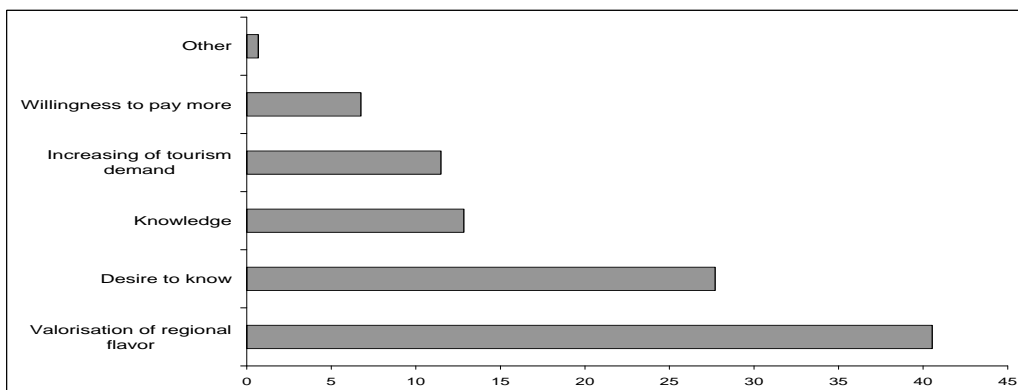
The active use of local productions by these intermediary agents is determined by the *quality* and *flavour* (38,7%) of the products, as well as by their *connection to the region* (20,9%). The *certification* label (11,1%) and the *presentation* (10,2%) are also relatively important reasons for using RFP in the establishments inquired (figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Reasons presented by restaurants, retailers and rural tourism units to select and use RFP.

Also the entities interviewed pointed out as major strengths of RFP their general higher quality, their distinctive flavour and aroma, aspects strongly related to the environmental characteristics of the region, as well as to specific local forms of production.

In theoretical terms, the decision in using (or not) RFP can also be conditioned by the importance attributed to them by the customers. As we can see in figure 2, the *valorisation of regional flavours* by the costumers (40,5%) is the main motivation for local tourism agents and units to use regional products. For 27,7% also the costumers' desire to know more about local communities and territories is an important motivational factor. Knowledge about RFP and the opportunity for increasing tourism flows are also relevant motivations.



**Figure 2.** Motivational factors for the use of RFP by restaurants, retailers and rural tourism units, related with costumers

From the evidence presented above it is possible to state the importance of regional food productions to the region, mainly in terms of their contribution to the *label* and image of Serra da Estrela and, consequently, to the external recognition of this area. However, the effective use of RFP by the rural tourism establishments inquired seems to be faint, indicating a fragile connection between those products and RT in the area, as well as a weak contribution for local economies.



### *Main constraints to an effective liaison between RT and RFP*

Despite the abovementioned richness of the region in terms of RFP, a large part of the legally certified products continue to be confined to local commercialization channels and processes, not having significant economic impacts at the regional and local levels. Paradoxically, as stated by the association of the Serra da Estrela Cheese Producers<sup>16</sup>, the producers of several PDO and PGI productions do not seem to profit much from these certification labels. In fact, as pointed out by the interviewed entities and for the majority of the certified products, several problems can be identified which reduce or eliminate the theoretical advantages of the labels: difficulties in communicating the certification economic benefits to the market; discrepancies between the regulations and the needs of the market; absence of dynamism of some productions' management entities; lack of sufficient demand; and absence of vitality and enthusiasm of the producers towards the whole certification requirements and processes.

The abovementioned problems reflect the characteristics of the regional entrepreneurs and producers of RFP. Apart a few productions with larger levels of industrialization, small family enterprises are predominant in the TRSE, facing several difficulties of production (some of them related to the EU regulations related to the *beaurocratic 'higienic' mode* and commercialization. Of course that these difficulties are strongly related to the features of the majority of the producers in this region: old persons, with low levels of literacy and, accordingly with the entities interviewed, much more concerned with the *art of production* than with the market specificities and needs. In the majority of the cases, these old and almost illiterate local producers do not have a successor to their activities and they will be forced to close in a very near future. As mentioned before, also the heavy legal regulations associated with the new modes of producing *old products*, play a central role in the uncertain and not very bright future of RFP activities in the region. Given the characteristics of the majority of the producers of RFP it is not very surprising that they do not consider association and a coherent collective action (to use the expression of Brunori and Rossi, 2000) as solutions to overcome production and commercialization problems. Despite the formal existence of some food producers' associations and cooperatives in the Serra da Estrela region, farmers and producers seem to prefer to carry their activities at an individual level. In fact, as well demonstrated by this excerpt from one of the interviews:

**E14:** "... people continue to prefer to lose money alone than earn money together".

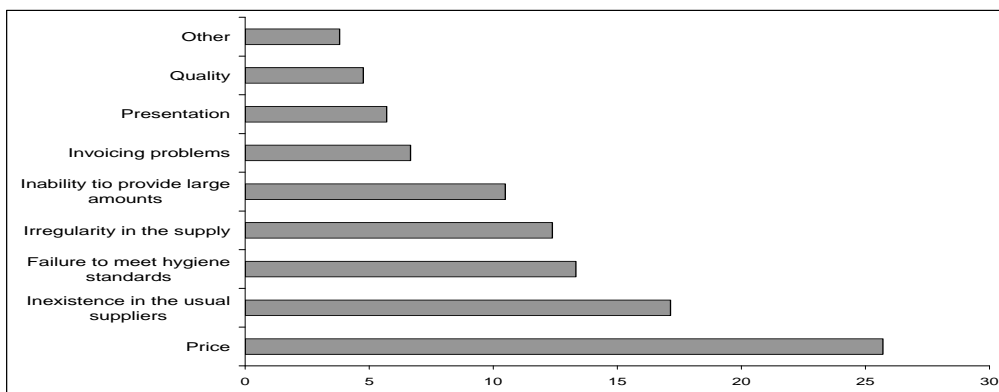
In this scenario, the importance of RFP in terms of employment and generation of income seems to derive more from the lack of alternatives outside agriculture than from the opportunities effectively created. As the majority of the entities inquired pointed out, it is in general a low income activity, often providing temporary jobs, which proves to be insufficient to maintain the population in the region. The economic value of the Serra da Estrela RFP - even of the legally certified productions - is not explored and recognized by the traditional and typical food productions' market. The various economic, organizational and social fragilities of the region seem to prevent the RFP producers to address the market in a more effective way. As stated in the previous section, RT entrepreneurs (which we considered in this study as intermediaries between regional food producers and the tourists) often replace RFP by more industrialized productions. This is both due to the insufficiency of the local supply (characterized, as mentioned, by small family enterprises) and, accordingly with the respondents, to the higher costs of local products. This clearly seems to be the case of sheep milk to produce mature cheeses, of lamb meat to supply regional restaurants and of rye to produce typical regional bread. Of course that the replacement of this kind of raw materials possesses as consequences not only the depersonalization of the products sold and used, but also an important loss in terms of economic benefits to local producers and communities. Particularly, the insufficient local supply can be illustrated by the following interview excerpt:

**E5:** "...does it seem to you (...) that there are enough sheep for the amount of cheese that is produced? (...) that there are so many goats to certify as the amount that is consumed?"

<sup>16</sup> Serra da Estrela cheese is the most famous and worldwide known production of the area.

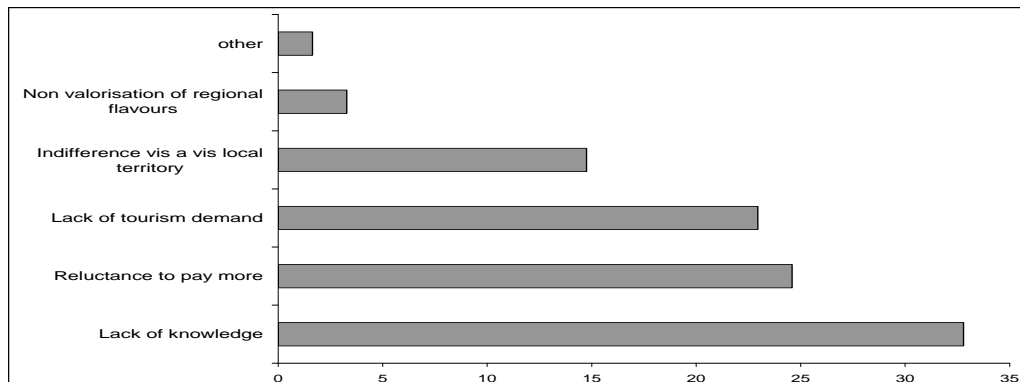
Considering precisely the infrequent use and the frequent replacement of some products by the respondents, we tried to understand the main constraints to the use of RFP by the intermediary agents. There was a large consensus among the entities interviewed in what concerns the major weaknesses of RFP on two interrelated aspects: the absence of association capacity of the producers and the lack of commercial organization and marketing strategies. Both these weaknesses reveal lack of coherence among the various stakeholders and consequently the inexistence of synergies (Brunori and Rossi, 2000). In addition, although with a minor significance, the entities identified as weaknesses of RFP also the lack of scale or dimension in the traditional productions, related to the small size and familiar character of the production; the higher prices of the typical local products; the distance of Serra da Estrela region *vis a vis* the country's larger urban areas (Lisbon and Oporto); the lack of innovative processes of production; and the socioeconomic characteristics of the producers in a certain extent responsible for the *death* of many traditional local *arts* and activities. All the abovementioned problematic aspects are strongly interrelated.

The empirical evidence gathered from the questionnaires concerning the weaknesses of RFP (namely the reasons pointed out by the intermediaries for not using these productions and the inhibitor factors deriving from the demand requests) reinforces the previous findings. First of all, as shown in figure 3, one should stress the problems associated with the supply. In fact, taking together the *inexistence of RFP in the usual suppliers*, the *inability to provide large quantities* and the *irregularity in the supply* factors, 39,9% of the establishments inquired stressed these aspects. 25,7% of the respondents pointed the general higher prices of the regional products as the main reason for not using them. Another relevant aspect pointed by the respondents is the inability of the producers to meet the hygiene standards and regulations (13,3%), again related to the small dimension of the enterprises and to the social and economic features of the farmers, as we stated before, which seem to prevent them to adapt their production modes to the EU norms.



**Figure 3.** Reasons presented by restaurants, retailers and rural tourism units to reject RFP.

Taking into account the factors related to rural tourism demand which inhibit the RT establishments in using RFP (figure 4), the costumers' *lack of knowledge about regional products* seems to be the most significant reason for not using these products (32,7%). This aspect is directly related to the commercial problems mentioned above, particularly with the lack of adequate marketing and promotional strategies. If costumers do not know the specificities of the RFP they cannot demand them as part of the overall tourism experience in the region, as Brunori (2007) also pointed out. The costumers' *reluctance to pay more* for experiencing RFP (24,5%) is also an important reason presented by RT establishments for not using local and regional products. The *insufficient tourism demand* (22,9%) and the costumers' *indifference vis a vis the specificities of local territories* (14,7%) are also important inhibitor factors for the use of RFP by the respondents.



**Figure 4.** Inhibitor factors for the use of RFP, by restaurants, retailers and rural tourism units related to customers.

From the abovementioned analysis it is possible to conclude that, in Serra da Estrela region, there are major constraints to a more fruitful liaison between RFP and RT activities, due to their own specificities and problems. On the RFP side, the small scale and dimension of the producers, their social and economic characteristics and their lack of association ability and coherent collective action seem to be the major constraints. On the RT side, the still faint rural tourism demand and the lack of information on RFP seem to be the more important obstacles.

#### *Strategies to reinforce the liaison between RT and RFP – the stakeholders' point of view*

Taking into account the faint connection between RFP and RT activities in the TRSE, we tried to understand the perceptions of the various stakeholders inquired concerning the more adequate strategies to overcome some of the problems and to reinforce that connection. The entities interviewed present a high level of consensus regarding the need to increase the rural tourism demand of the region as a way of raising the potential market for RFP. In the same sense, they also proposed the targeting of different types of tourists, more interested in the local culture and traditional social and economic activities. They also proposed as strategies to reinforce the liaison between RFP and RT better marketing strategies and the diffusion of knowledge on regional food productions among the tourists and among tourism entrepreneurs. This is clearly related to the need of reinforcing information on RFP, since *“the successful translation of information allows products to be differentiated from more anonymous commodities and command a premium price”* (Renting et al., 2003) which could also contribute to increase the income of the producers.

In parallel, the creation and reinforcement of certification systems and mechanisms among the restaurant owners and managers were pointed as important strategies to assure the local and regional origin of the food products used in the menus offered. This is particularly relevant since, as discussed above, these intermediaries are essential agents in the guarantee of RFP quality.

Regarding the supply of RFP, the entities inquired considered as important strategies to foster the capacity of association and the information on its economic advantages among the producers as well as larger EU and national government support to traditional productions and farmers through the design and implementation of more adequate policies and related strategies and measures. This demonstrates a clear need of promoting a coherent collective action in order to generate synergies RT and RFP, as also confirmed by Brunori and Rossi (2000) for the wine routes of Tuscany.

The factors perceived by the RT establishments (restaurants, retailers and rural tourism units) as determinant to encourage their use of RFP are directly connected to strategies to solve the main constraints identified above: enhancing the quality of the productions (33,3%), establishing more competitive prices (21,4%), enhancing the presentation of the products (16,7%), having a certification label (16,7%) and maintaining a regular supply (14,4%). In what concerns their perception on the factors that could motivate customers to increase their consumption of RFP, RT establishments pointed out the need for more effective marketing strategies (48,4%) as the major

course of action, followed by the need of increasing the tourism demand in the Serra da Estrela area (9,7%).

These strategies are in accordance with what Meyer et al. (2004) and Torres (2003) referred as important conditions to reinforce the liaison between tourism and RFP. In fact, also in the TRSE tree aspects seem determinant in that liaison: the characteristics of the tourism demand; the features of RFP and the marketing strategies and intermediary agents. Thus, in TRSE a multi-level strategy, concerning the supply, the demand and the tourism industry proves to be necessary in order to transform the liaison between RFP and RT in a fruitful one.

## Concluding Remarks

This paper discussed the liaison between the RFP and RT in the Serra da Estrela region, in Portugal, based on the empirical evidence collected from several entities, agents and social actors. The paper started with a theoretical debate on the potential benefits deriving from the connection between regional food productions and rural tourism activities. As mentioned in the first sections several advantages and mutual benefits can be identified in the relationship between regional and local traditional productions and rural tourism initiatives and activities, including a stronger contribution to local development. However, based on the empirical evidence discussed, we concluded that there is a faint relationship between RFP and RT in TRSE. In fact there are several constraints to a more fruitful liaison:

- inherent to the RFP supply systems and processes – the small scale of production; the higher prices of products; the social and economic characteristics of producers; the lack of association ability and the insufficient commercial organization capacity which are reflected both in the scarcity of information on RFP and in its unavailability in the markets commonly used by tourism industry;
- inherent to the customers – tourists and visitors reveal a lack of knowledge about RFP and some reluctance to pay more for traditional local products. At the same time, the scarcity and the seasonality of rural tourism in TRSE are important variables in explaining the small demand and the absence of interest for RFP in this region;
- inherent to the tourism industry – this industry tends to present a modest interest in all the diversity of regional food products of Serra da Estrela. In fact, establishments frequently replace local traditional products by non local productions, even if they are presented, sold and consumed as *local*, *typical* and *genuine*.

These constraints call our attention to the need of a global, but simultaneously integrated, intervention at various levels. Concerning the intervention at the tourism demand level, we pointed out the need to encourage, in the TRSE, a different type of tourists preferring to visit the region outside the winter season and with a higher socioeconomic profile and more willing to demand and consume RFP (Skuras et al., 2006) as an important part of the overall rural tourism experience. However due to the scarcity of information on RFP as well to the fact that tourism industry often presents and sell mass and non local products as local and genuine, it is important to enhance the mechanisms to foster knowledge on RFP, both among tourists and tourism entrepreneurs. Moreover, a better information on RFP on the tourists side can contribute to put some pressure on the regulatory institutions in order to protect the producers and their systems of production *vis a vis* the more industrialized production systems (Brunori, 2007). On the tourism industry side, along with better information mechanisms, it was evident the need for creating certification systems, among restaurants, in order to assure the local origin and the quality of RFP presented in the menus. Finally, at the supply systems level it seems crucial to enhance the association capacity among RFP producers, possibly integrating also external entities whose experience can contribute to the definition of adequate commercial and marketing strategies and, at the same time, to overcome the structural constraints associated with small scale food production systems. Hence this multilevel intervention presupposes conciliation among the various stakeholders as well as a coherent

collective action, in order to foster fruitful liaisons between regional food productions and rural tourism activities.

## References

- Baptista, A. and L. Tibério (2008) *Estudo de Identificação dos Produtos Tradicionais com Tipicidade e Potencialidades Económicas*. Associação de Municípios do Baixo Tâmega, (<http://www.baixotamega.pt/ES/files/2/documentos/20080807120059859489.pdf> [Accessed in September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008]).
- Bérard, L. and P. Marchenay (1998) *Executive Summary EN: Les produits des terroirs en Europe du Sud: Caractérisation ethnologique, sensorielle et socio-économique de leur typicité; stratégies de valorisation*. ([http://www.ethno-terroirs.cnrs.fr/spip.php?rubrique6&tri=par\\_motcle#14](http://www.ethno-terroirs.cnrs.fr/spip.php?rubrique6&tri=par_motcle#14) [Accessed in November 21<sup>th</sup>, 2008]).
- Bérard, L. and P. Marchenay (2008) From localized products to geographical indications - awareness and action. *Bourg-en-Bresse, CNRS Ressources des terroirs*.
- Bowen, R. L.;Cox, L.J. and M. Fox (1991) The interface between Tourism and Agriculture. *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, 2, 43-54.
- Boyne, S.;Hall, D. and F. Williams (2003) Policy, support and promotion for food-related tourism initiatives: A marketing approach to regional development. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 14, (3/4), 131-154.
- Brunori, G. (2007) Local food and alternative food networks: a communication perspective. *Anthropology of food*, (<http://aof.revues.org/index430.html>) Accessed in March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010]).
- Brunori, G. and A. Rossi (2000) Synergy and coherence through collective action: some insights from Wine Routes in Tuscany. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40, (4), 409-423.
- CEC (1988) *The Future of Rural Society*. Bulletin of the European Communities, 4/88 (Brussels).
- Cristóvão, A. (2002) Mundo Rural: entre as representações (dos urbanos) e os benefícios reais (para os rurais). *Turismo Rural: Tendências e Sustentabilidade*, 81-116.
- DuRand, G.E. and E. Heath (2006) Towards a framework for food tourism as an element of destination marketing, *Current Issues in Tourism*, 9, (3), 206-234.
- Figueiredo, E. (2003) Entre o vivido e o desejado - O papel do ambiente na nova dicotomia rural/ urbano. In: Portela, J. and Caldas, J. C. (org.), *Portugal Chão*, Celta Editora, Oeiras. 149 -166
- Figueiredo, E. (2008) Imagine there's no rural – the transformation of rural spaces into places of nature conservation in Portugal. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 15, (2), 159-171.
- Figueiredo, E. (2009) One rural, two visions - environmental issues and images on rural areas in Portugal. *Journal of Central European Countryside*, 1,(1),9-21
- Gamache, N.;Domon, G. and Y. Jean (2004) Pour une compréhension des espaces ruraux : représentations dy paysage de territoires français et québécois. *Cahiers d'Économie et Sociologie Rurales*, 73, 72-102
- Halfacree, K. (2007) Trial by space for a 'radical rural': introducing alternative localities, representations and lives. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 23, 125-141
- INE (2002) *Censos 2001 - Resultados definitivos Centro*. ([http://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine\\_publicacoes&PUBLICACOESpub\\_boui=377711&PUBLICACOESmodo=2](http://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_publicacoes&PUBLICACOESpub_boui=377711&PUBLICACOESmodo=2) [Accessed in November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008]).
- INE (2006) *Anuário Estatístico da Região Centro*. Instituto Nacional de Estatística, ([http://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine\\_publicacoes&PUBLICACOESpub\\_boui=11292019&PUBLICACOESmodo=2](http://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_publicacoes&PUBLICACOESpub_boui=11292019&PUBLICACOESmodo=2) [Accessed in October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008]).
- Kastenholz, E. and E. Figueiredo (2007) Existing and potential connection between rural tourism and rural development - empirical approach. Oral invited presentation to the *3rd European Congress on Rural Tourism - Challenges and Strategies for Rural Tourism*, Eger, Hungary, 26/28 September.

- Malevolti, I. (2003) *Prodotti tipici locali tradizionali e turismo rurale*. IRPET - Istituto Regionale Programmazione Economica Toscana. ([http://www.irpet.it/storage/pubblicazioneallegato/39\\_Malevolti.pdf](http://www.irpet.it/storage/pubblicazioneallegato/39_Malevolti.pdf) [Accessed in November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007]).
- Marsden, T.;Banks, J.;Renting, H. and J.D.V.D. Ploeg (2001) The road towards sustainable rural development: issues of theory, policy and research practice. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 3,(2), 75-83.
- McBain, H. (2007) Caribbean tourism and agriculture: linking to enhance development and competitiveness. *ECLAC - Studies and Perspectives series - The Caribbean*. Nº 2.
- Meyer, D., Ashley, C. and C. Poultney (2004) Tourism-agricultural linkages: Boosting inputs from local farmers. *PPT in practice - Business implementation of Pro Poor Tourism: Case study briefs*. Nº 3.
- Murdoch, J. (2003) Co-constructing the countryside: hybrid networks and the extensive self. In: Cloke, P. (Ed.) *Country Visions*, London, Pearson Edwards, 263-280
- OCDE (1994) *Tourism Strategies and Rural Development*. Paris. (<http://bibemp2.us.es/turismo/turismonet1/economia%20del%20turismo/turismo%20rural/tourism%20strategies%20and%20rural%20development%20in%20OECD%20countries.pdf> [Accessed in September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008]).
- Oliveira Baptista, F. (2006) O rural depois da agricultura. In: Fonseca M. L. (coord.). *Desenvolvimento e Território – Espaços Rurais Pós-agrícolas e os Novos Lugares de Turismo e Lazer*. Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Geográficos, 85-100.
- Renting, H.;Marsden, T. K. and J. Banks (2003) Understanding alternative food networks: exploring the role of short food supply chains in rural development *Environment and Planning*, 35, (3),393 411.
- Ribeiro, M. (2003a) Espaços rurais como espaços turísticos - Reflexões em torno da construção da oferta de turismo em espaço rural, em Portugal. In Portela, José, e Caldas, João Castro (org.), *Portugal Chão*, Celta Editora, Oeiras. 199-215.
- Ribeiro, M. (2003b) Pelo Turismo é que vamos/ podemos ir(?). Sobre as representações e as visões dos responsáveis das administrações públicas de âmbito local, acerca do turismo para o desenvolvimento rural. In: Simões, O. and Cristóvão, A. (org.), *Turismo em espaços rurais e naturais*, IPC. 41- 56.
- Ribeiro, M. and C. Marques (2002) Rural tourism and the development of less favoured areas - between rhetoric and practice. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 4, (3) 211-220.
- Simões, M. J., Castela, A.P. and P. Jacinto (2001) Desafios e oportunidades da empresarialidade em meio rural: O caso da Serra da Estrela. *1º Congresso de estudos rurais - Território, Agricultura e Desenvolvimento*, (<http://www.sper.pt/ICER/DOWNLOAD/3009.PDF> [Accessed in October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008]).
- Skuras, D.;Dimara, E. and A. Petrou (2006) Rural tourism and visitors' expenditures for local food products. *Regional Studies*, 40, (7), 769-779.
- Telfer, D.J. and G. Wall (1996) Linkages between Tourism and Food Production. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 23,(3), 635-653.
- Telfer, D.J. and G. Wall (2000) Strengthening backward economic linkages: local food purchasing by three Indonesian hotels. *Tourism Geographies*, 2, (4), 421- 447.
- Tibério, M.L. and S. Abreu (2005) Distribuição, Restauração, Turismo e Valorização das Microproduções Agrícolas. In: Cristóvão, A.; Tibério, M. and Diéguez, V. (coord.), *Microproduções Agrícolas e Desenvolvimento Local no Douro - Duero*, Projecto INTERREG III, UTAD and Universidade de Salamanca, 155-177.
- Tibério, M.L. and A. Cristóvão (2005) Microproduções e Desenvolvimento Local. In: Cristóvão, A.; Tibério, M. and Diéguez, V. (coord.), *Microproduções Agrícolas e Desenvolvimento Local no Douro - Duero*, Projecto INTERREG III, UTAD and Universidade de Salamanca 15 - 27.
- Torres, R. (2003) Linkages between tourism and agriculture in Mexico. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30, (3), 546-566.