

# ***'No country for old people'* – representations of the rural in the Portuguese tourism promotional campaigns<sup>1</sup>**

Cândido Pinto<sup>a</sup>, Elisabete Figueiredo<sup>b</sup>, Catarina Capela<sup>a</sup> and Diogo Soares da Silva<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Master Students in Management and Planning in Tourism, Research Trainees. Department of Economics, Management and Industrial Engineering, University of Aveiro, Portugal, [candidomanuel@ua.pt](mailto:candidomanuel@ua.pt) / [catarinacapela@ua.pt](mailto:catarinacapela@ua.pt)

<sup>b</sup> Sociologist. Assistant Professor. Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences. GOVCOPP – Research Unit in Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policies, University of Aveiro, Portugal, [elisa@ua.pt](mailto:elisa@ua.pt)

<sup>c</sup> Master Student in Regional and Urban Planning, Research Assistant. Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences, University of Aveiro, Portugal, [diogo.silva@ua.pt](mailto:diogo.silva@ua.pt)

Like in many other European countries, rural areas in Portugal have undergone significant transformations over the course of recent decades as a consequence of increasingly global socio-economic dynamics of change. Even if the consequences of these processes of change that have taken place in rural areas may vary according to countries and regions one of its most visible signs has been the loss of the monopoly enjoyed by agricultural activities. This loss gave place to a rural no longer seen as a productive space but increasingly portrayed as consumption and consumable space in which leisure and tourism activities assume a paramount role.

Tourism and related activities are, to a great extent, the main driving forces of the rural reconfiguration processes, both in material and in symbolic terms. A central aspect in the way rural areas have been consumed is the touristic promotion of rurality and of the countryside, which is often based in 'global' images and symbols, rather in local features, apparently inducing an idealization of the rural. The rurality promoted mainly refers to a post-productive rural space in which the environment, the landscapes, the activities, the ways of life, the inhabitants turn into objects of appreciation and are, therefore, constituted as amenities and commodities. Rural contexts are often represented as 'idyllic', 'authentic' and 'genuine' places, offering many opportunities for performing multiple activities and to live different experiences.

Based on the content analysis of the Portuguese official tourism promotional campaigns (conducted at the national level) (25 posters and 18 videos since 1986 until 2012) portraying rural contexts, we intend to reveal the main features used to present and promote these territories, as well as to discuss the main transformations in the images conveyed. The empirical evidence shows a significant change in the way the rural has been presented and promoted during the last 3 decades, changing from a representation of these areas as 'old', 'static', 'unchanged' and 'untouched' (until the middle of the 90s) to its representation as 'young', 'active', 'experiential', 'enthusiastic' and 'emotional', much more oriented to external consumptions than to local features and populations. This difference is in accordance with the main political and policy (both European and national) guidelines and represents, to a certain extent, the turn from 'the old rural' to the 'new rural', therefore also representing the direction of many of the current rural reconfiguration processes.

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was elaborated within the 3 years research project (started June 2012): *Rural Matters – meanings of the rural in Portugal: between social representations, consumptions and development strategies* (PTDC/CS-GEO/117967/2010), funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) and co-funded by COMPETE, QREN and FEDER.