



The XXVI European Society for Rural Sociology Congress
Places of Possibility? Rural Societies in a Neoliberal World
18-21 August 2015, Aberdeen Scotland

Who is Consuming Countryside's Amenities?

An Overview of Portuguese Tourists' Consumptions of the Rural



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RURAL MATTERS
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Aims



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- Based on a cluster analysis of data (N=866) deriving from a survey applied to a larger sample of the Portuguese population (N=1853), this paper aims at
 - understanding the demands and consumptions of the Portuguese countryside,
 - highlighting the main characteristics, consumption motivations, and practices of rural visitors.

Theoretical background



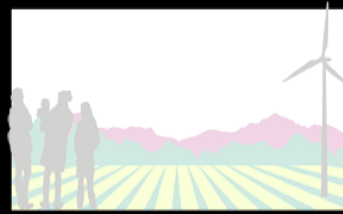
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- Rural territories may be increasingly defined as post-productive spaces, particularly in marginal regions
- These trends have been supported by political orientations and discourses, as well as by the development strategies of the last few decades, particularly within the European Union context, and specifically in Portugal, converting rural territories from places of production into spaces of consumption
- As Halfacree (2006) argues, many rural areas within Europe may nowadays be defined as 'consuming idylls', being reconfigured mainly into tourism and leisure places, into environmental conservation spaces and/or gastronomy and foodstuffs idylls.

Theoretical background



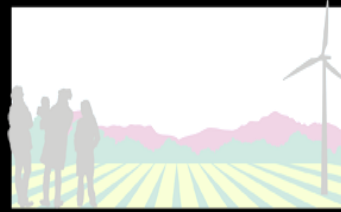
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- These studies reveal an increasing interest in the phenomenon worldwide, some common patterns of demand, while also finding some heterogeneity, both within the studied populations and the geographically and culturally diverse destination contexts.
- Several studies suggest that the rural tourism market tends to be composed mainly of tourists pertaining to the medium-high class, with relatively high levels of education, including all age groups, generally national tourists travelling by car (Lane, 2009; Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997), frequently travelling with family, particularly with children (Opperman, 1996).

Theoretical background



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- The European Commission (1999) reported a trend toward short holidays in the countryside, also linked to an increasing interest in health and well-being, active holidays and environmental concerns, while Lane (2009) stresses the growing role of the highly mobile, exploring, independent tourist, looking for new destinations and experiences.
- As a matter of fact, according to the European Commission (2010), about 28% of the European population are motivated to explore local cultures and way of life, a motivation that may be well-accommodated in rural territories.

Theoretical background



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- **There is a variety of motivations and purposes to visit rural areas:**
 - typical general tourist motivations and behaviours that may be undertaken anywhere (eating out, shopping, socializing, relaxing, family togetherness)
 - Purposes more linked to the rural destination environment mostly relate to nature and scenery as well as its enjoyment through the rather passive *tourist gaze*
 - The search for the 'rural idyll'
 - physically demanding outdoor activities
 - The so often referred to romantic search for rural culture and way of life seems to be a minority or secondary interest
 - An increasingly popular special interest pursuits, such as those associated to local wine and food consumption
 - Wellness pursuits
 - Visiting friends and relatives (VFR)
 - Revisiting rural places where visitors' family roots lie
 - The interest in socializing within traveller group and with local populations

Methodology



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- A questionnaire applied to a **sample of the Portuguese population over 14 years old** (applied between 11/2013 and 10/2014 and combining personal interviews and online answers)
- **A total of 1853 valid questionnaires were obtained** (59.8% - personal interviews/ 40.2% online)
- **A quota sampling** approach was adopted based on the following criteria:
 - The municipality of residence categorized in three levels:
 - level 1 municipalities – most urban;
 - level 2 municipalities – the intermediate
 - and level 3 municipalities – the most rural
 - The parish of residence (categorized in two groups – urban or rural, according to INE classification)
 - Gender
 - Age.

Methodology



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- In order to evaluate the demands and consumptions of rural areas by Portuguese population, respondents were asked if they had visited a national rural area at least once during the last three years.
- From the 1853 respondents only **866 (46.7%)** declared they had travelled to the Portuguese countryside with tourism and leisure purposes in the last three years.
- Therefore, given the aims of the present paper, only these respondents were considered in the analysis.
- Respondents were, therefore, asked to provide information regarding:
 - i) the planning of their trip and the information sources used;
 - ii) some dimensions of their travel behaviour when visiting rural areas – tourism activities carried out during the visits, types of accommodation and transportation more frequently used, composition of the travel group and the frequency of the visits to a Portuguese rural destination;
 - iii) personal and/or family connections with rural areas – experience as rural inhabitant or worker, rural origin, parents' rural origin, consumption of rural food products; and
 - (iv) the sociodemographic profile.

Sample Profile



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- **Residence**
 - 93.4% live in urban areas
 - 35.7% has already lived in a rural
 - 23.6% has already worked in a rural area.
- **Gender**
 - 56.2% of respondents are female
 - 43.8% are male
- **Age**
 - 73.5% - 25 to 64 years old
- **Links with rural areas**
 - father (19.9%),
 - mother (22.4%)
 - or spouse (13.6%) – were born in these areas
- **Income**
 - 79.9% have income between 501€ and 2500€
- **Many of the visits to the countryside were motivated by visits to friends and relatives, implying stays in these persons' homes (31.5%) or even in an own second home (10.8%), and involve quite a regular pattern of visit (43.4% indicating "more than 4 times in the past 3 years", the highest ordinal level below "every month", referred to by another 10%).**
- **The majority (43.8%) had visited these areas with family and mainly used the car to travel (85.1%).**

Sample Profile



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- **The activities mainly performed in rural areas:**
 - To rest (73.9%),
 - Appreciating the landscape (64.4%),
 - Contact with nature (60.7%),
 - Cultural enrichment – e.g. visiting historical villages (59.0%),
 - Tasting local gastronomy (56.5%)
 - Visiting monuments (45.2%)
 - and, as would be expected from the previously noted relevance of friends/family links, socializing – visiting relatives (44.5%) and interacting with local people (41.2%).
- **Participating in local traditional economic activities (9.6%), going on thematic tours (e.g. wine, chestnut, blueberry tours) (7.6%) and fishing (3.3%) are the activities least referred to when visiting the countryside**
- **It is worth noting that 76.2% of the sample declare to consume local food products both during the visit and back home,**

Cluster 1

The Active Visitors



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- **(N=183, 21.1%)**
 - explore several dimensions of the Portuguese countryside, practising a wide range of activities .
 - They are more likely to undertake almost all the activities mentioned than other groups.
 - Tend to engage more often in nature-related activities (e.g. observing local fauna and flora, appreciating the beauty of the landscape), in resting, and in cultural activities (e.g. visiting museums, monuments and historic villages, tasting local cuisine), and also interacting more than the others with local residents.
 - These rural visitors are, apart from the generally often used homes of friends and relatives, more likely to use rural camping than the others, perhaps because they want a greater immersion in nature than respondents in the other groups, while also referring to rural tourism more than the others, particularly manor house establishments
 - They tend to plan their trips to rural areas more than the other clusters and to use a wider range of information sources to plan these trips.
 - This cluster may play a more important role in fostering the economic development of rural areas as respondents tend to purchase local craft and food products.

Cluster 2

The Passive Nature Observers



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- **(N=1854, 21.2%)**
 - explore the Portuguese countryside in a relatively superficial manner.
 - They undertake a limited number of activities, mainly landscape observation, contact with nature and resting .
 - The data suggests that they have brief stays in rural areas – something that is reinforced by the fact that this is the cluster that integrates a larger number of excursionists – tend to use the car more often and to visit rural areas less frequently .
 - They are generally between 25 to 34 years old, are in the initial stages of their professional careers, are mainly single and possess high education levels .
 - This sociodemographic profile may partially explain the more frequent use of the internet by the respondents within this cluster to plan their visits.

Cluster 3

The Inactive



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- (N= 232, 26.8%)
 - reveals the most passive behaviour regarding the visits to the countryside.
 - They engage in quite a few activities, mainly resting and visiting relatives
 - This *inactivity* may be related to the higher proportion of senior, retired and widowed respondents within this cluster .
 - Additionally, this cluster encompasses a high percentage of visitors with low levels of literacy and with high familiarity levels with rural areas .
 - They are the less likely to plan the trip and use the bus more often than other clusters.
 - This cluster also presents, comparing to some others, a higher percentage of respondents that use hotels .

Cluster 4

The The Summer Family Vacationers



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- **(N=267, 30.8%)**
 - reveal a higher tendency to interact with locals, particularly in a VFR context, to go to the beach and are also interested in cultural enrichment through the contact with typical local products and economic activities (e.g. tasting local cuisine, tasting local wines, buying local agricultural products, buying local crafts, visiting historical/traditional villages) more than others (except for cluster 1) .
 - The majority of these visitors has higher education levels and is economically active.
 - They are more likely than the other respondents to rely on their own experience to plan the trips to rural areas and to use certain types of accommodation – second residence, country house/village tourism and rented house/room .

Conclusions



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- The four clusters identified here demonstrate **heterogeneity of sociodemographic characteristics**, as well as a **variety of motivations and purposes to visit rural areas as well as travel behaviours**
- Although there is **no precise correspondence between the sociodemographic variables and the motivations and behaviours of each cluster**, it is possible to identify a connection between older respondents and *The Inactive* cluster, as well as between *The Passive Nature Observers* and younger respondents.
- Both for *The Active Visitors* and for *The Passive Nature Observers* **environmental characteristics of rural areas seem to be a major motivation for the visit**, as well as the **tranquillity** often associated with rural contexts

Conclusions



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- *The Active Visitors* cluster **also engages in cultural and gastronomic activities**, sharing this characteristic with the respondents within *The Summer Family Vacationers* cluster.
- Both clusters seem **to be interested in the contact with typical local products and related activities, such as tasting local cuisine and local wines and buying local foodstuffs.**
- The main activities performed by *The Inactive* are **visiting relatives and resting.**
- Besides the already mentioned older age of the respondents within this cluster, which may explain the lower number of performed activities, **this cluster includes the highest percentage of visitors with family liaisons to rural areas** which may help to explain the main purpose of their visit to the Portuguese countryside

Conclusions



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- In all the clusters identified – except perhaps for *The Inactive* – the idyllic dimension of rural areas seems to play an important part regarding the visit to Portuguese countryside purposes.
- Globally, one must recognize the **diversity of representations, consumptions and demands, as far as visitor profiles, behaviours and motivations are concerned**, leading in similarly diverse rural territories and communities to a large variety of experience opportunities, with distinct possible impacts on the territories visited.
- **This variety, as well as the impact diverse types of consumption may have on the visited places, needs to be further investigated and better understood, so as to possibly manage demand in a way that effectively contributes to more sustainable development of the rural territories and their communities.**



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Tapadh leibh!
Thank you!
Obrigada!

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