

Hoping for a brighter future: social images on the development processes of Portuguese rural areas

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Aims

- Unveiling, although in an exploratory way, the images of rural development processes and agents, conveyed by a sample of Portuguese population (**N=1853**) surveyed in the ambit of the research project Rural Matters

Theoretical background

- Rural development in Portugal is difficult to analyse, especially because of the
 - **persistent political negligence of rural areas** (Figueiredo, 2004)
 - and of the **absence of plans and policies** during decades.
- This situation moderately changed from 1986 on, with the adherence of the country to the European Union and, in consequence, with the implementation of the Agricultural Common Policy.

Theoretical background

- The analysis of the various programs and strategies to promote rural development (Batista and Figueiredo, 2011; Melo e Azevedo *et al.*, 2013) shows a **continuous emphasis on agricultural issues** and the **persistent neglect of other dimensions of rural areas**.
- The continuous emphasis on the productive (agricultural) rural, which in reality possesses a small expression in Portugal (e.g. Oliveira Baptista, 2006; Melo e Azevedo *et al.*, 2013) in the programs and strategies for rural development **demonstrates the political (ir)relevance of rural territories and the lack of a consistent and integrated approach to rural areas' problems**.

Methodology

- The Rural Matters questionnaire application was carried out in 31 Portuguese municipalities between November 2013 and October 2014. 1853 valid questionnaire responses were obtained via an online form or in person.
- **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.

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Sample Profile

- The **40-question questionnaire** was split into three parts:
 - the first one was concerned about peoples' views on the rural and rurality;
 - the second was about their consumption processes of rural areas (through both visiting rural areas and consuming rural products);
 - **the third one dealt with the perceptions on the past, present and future development of Portuguese rural areas.**

Methodology

Main Characteristics of the Sample

<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Female	1038	56.1
Male	813	43.9
<i>Age</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
15-24	239	12.9
25-34	422	22.8
35-49	373	20.1
50-64	392	21.2
65+	427	23.0
<i>Qualifications</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Primary education (1° CEB) or lower	329	17.8
Middle school (2/3° CEB)	238	12.9
Secondary education	447	24.1
Higher education	837	45.2
<i>Municipality (by level)</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1	1280	69.1
Level 2	311	16.8
Level 3	262	14.1
<i>Rural/urban parish</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Rural	147	7.9
Urban	1706	92.1

Findings

- Respondents were asked to measure the current level of socioeconomic development of Portuguese rural areas (in general), ranging from 1 (undeveloped) to 5 (highly developed):
 - More than half of the respondents have classified the level of socioeconomic development of rural areas as low (6.6% of the respondents answered "1", while 44.1% answered "2").
 - 40.0% have settled for middle ground, answering "3" (not positive nor negative)
 - and just 9.3% of the respondents think rural areas are developed (8.0% or highly developed (1.3%).
 - The average for all respondents was 2.53 (out of 5); it is higher among older respondents (2.63 among people aged 65+), people with lesser qualifications (2.67 among those with complete or incomplete primary education), and rural dwellers (2.64, with urban residents averaging only 2.52).

Findings

Respondents' perception of governments' intervention in eight aspects related to rural areas

<i>Aspects of rural areas</i>	<i>Average rating</i>	<i>% negative ratings (1 or 2)</i>	<i>% neutral ratings (3)</i>	<i>% positive ratings (4 or 5)</i>
Forestry	1.97	76.6	17.3	6.1
Socioeconomic conditions of the local population	1.98	74.8	18.5	6.6
Diversification of economic activities	2.01	73.3	20.6	6.1
Agriculture	2.12	70.3	22.9	6.9
Preservation of local traditions	2.12	68.2	21.4	10.4
Environmental protection	2.30	62.0	25.9	12.2
Preservation of local built heritage	2.30	61.2	25.5	13.2
Tourism	2.89	35.3	37.4	27.3

Findings

Entities responsible for developing and financing rural areas, according to respondents

<i>Entity</i>	<i>Responsible for the development of rural areas</i>	<i>Should finance the development of rural areas</i>
European Union	30.7%	47.2%
National government	62.1%	76.3%
National tourism entities	8.5%	10.9%
Municipalities	48.8%	33.4%
Parish councils	27.0%	8.5%
Local development associations	11.4%	7.9%
Local and regional tourism entities	7.0%	5.1%
Local and regional entrepreneurs	15.7%	15.3%
NGOs	1.7%	1.0%
Local citizen associations	5.8%	2.6%
Local citizens (individually)	12.5%	3.4%
Tourists	2.3%	3.9%
All Portuguese citizens	11.0%	14.1%
Doesn't know	2.8%	3.9%

Findings

- For more than half of the respondents, **the future looks bleak** for most rural areas, taking into account the past and present situation of rural territories in Portugal:
 - 51% of the respondents (a percentage that rises to 63.1% among people aged 65+ and 65% among those who live in a Level 3 municipality) think rural areas will be abandoned in the future.
 - 12.9% think they will be exploited for/supported by rural tourism,
 - 11.2% think they will be diversified, integrating new people and activities,
 - and 9.5% defend they'll be dominated by small scale, traditional agriculture.
- On the other hand,
 - 51.6% of the respondents wish rural areas would be more diversified (in terms of inhabitants and economic activities),
 - 14.2% wish they were dominated by nature and its protection,
 - 7.2% defend that rural areas should be primarily dominated by small scale agriculture,
 - 6.8% by large scale agriculture
 - and 6.5% by productive, profitable forestry.

Findings

- Despite rating the **development of rural areas as poor and the governments' actions' even worse**, the vast majority of **respondents defend that rural territories are very important to the Portuguese economy, society and tourism**:
 - 52.4% of respondents think rural areas are “very important” to the Portuguese economy
 - 57.1% say they're “very important” for Portuguese tourism
 - and 46.4% said the same about the importance of rural areas for Portuguese society (average: 4.16).

Conclusions

- To sum up, the general idea about rural territories' development and their importance for the country in the 21st century **seems to be consensual among most of the questionnaire respondents:**
 - although they view rural areas as very important and defend their development should primarily be driven by centralized public entities and public funds, they rate very negatively both the socioeconomic development and the performance of past governments regarding rural areas, imagining the future of rural areas as bleak but hoping for those to be more **diversified and vibrant**, both in terms of population and economic activities.

Thank you! Obrigada!



RURAL MATTERS

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COMPETE

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