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'POACHED PEARS IN WINE':
THE OESTE OF PORTUGAL AND THE EUROPEAN
QUALITY CONSTRUCTION OF PLACE-BASED FOODS

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‘Poached Pears in Wine’:
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Abstract: For nearly one century, the north of Lisbon Western Region was renowned for its wine production, and constructed its regional identity around the special qualities of its grapevines. The implementation of CAP measures since the 1980s has triggered a reorientation of the regional agricultural production with major investments in horticulture and orchards, namely pear trees. Since then, new economic dynamics and glocal discourses around a particular pear cultivar – the Rocha pear – have been observed. Both regional wines and Rocha pears, which were granted certified quality status (DOC and PDO labels) after the 1980s, are based upon monocultures and target global markets. This article looks at the processes of construction of a Geographical Indication around Rocha pear and its association with the Western region of Portugal, as it was granted PDO status in 2003. The article contributes to debates on the definition of *terroir* and other place-based product designations (such as the PDO enshrined by European regulations). The empirical material draws on observation methods, exploratory interviews with local farmers, regional and national associations, experts and local authorities, and on documental sources (e.g. newsletters, promotional marketing leaflets and secondary statistical data).

Key-words: *terroir*, Western Rocha Pear, Wine, Geographical Indications, place-based foods.

Resumo: Durante quase um século, a Região Oeste (a noroeste de Lisboa), foi reconhecida pela sua produção de vinho e construiu a sua identidade regional em torno das qualidades especiais das suas vinhas. Desde a década de 1980 que a implementação das medidas da PAC provocaram uma reorientação da produção agrícola regional, onde grandes investimentos foram feitos na horticultura e fruticultura, e concretamente na produção de pereiras. Desde então, tem sido observada uma nova dinâmica económica na Região do Oeste, marcada por discursos locais em torno de uma variedade particular de pera – a pera Rocha. Vinhos regionais e peras Rocha, tiveram o reconhecimento de qualidade através de esquemas de certificação (DOC para o vinho e DOP para a pera) depois dos anos 80, sendo estas produções baseadas na monocultura e orientadas o mercado internacional. Este paper analisa os processos de construção da indicação geográfica em torno da pera Rocha e a sua associação com a Região do Oeste, examinando como foi conquistada o estatuto de Denominação de Origem Protegida atribuído em 2003. Também explora de que forma esse estatuto teve implicações na paisagem e na identidade cultural da região, as quais foram marcadas durante décadas pela associação à vinha e ao vinho. O paper contribui assim para os atuais debates sobre a definição de *terroir*, que os regulamentos europeus consagram através das indicações geográficas. O material empírico baseia-se nos métodos de observação direta na região, em entrevistas exploratórias com agricultores locais de pera Rocha e vinha, associações regionais e nacionais, especialistas e autoridades locais. Também se faz uma recolha e análise das principais fontes documentais sobre este tópico (por exemplo, boletins, folhetos promocionais de marketing e estatísticas regionais e sectoriais).

Palavras-chave: produtos *terroir*, pera Rocha do Oeste, vinho, indicações geográficas, produtos locais

‘Poached Pears in Wine’:
**The *Oeste* of Portugal and the European quality construction of
place-based foods**

By Dulce Freire and Monica Truninger

Since the 1990s, the norms adopted by the European Union in the successive reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have been contributing to the valorisation and classification of new geographical indications or place-based foods. The policy guidelines that underlie these measures and the impacts they are having, either within the European Union or in the global agro-food context, have triggered intense discussions among scientists, economic actors, and government officials, as well as professional and voluntary associations.

Some of the most relevant contributions to these debates have been forged within the agro-food literature. These have focused on key economic, social and ecological roles played by place-based foods in consolidating strategies for rural and regional development in European countries. Since the accession of Portugal to the European Union¹, CAP reforms have been implemented in each Portuguese region. Departing from an analysis focused on the historical patterns of wine production and pear production in the *Oeste*² – one of the most dynamic agro-food regions in Portugal – this article aims at revealing aspects that have been weakly scrutinized in previous debates (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The Oeste region in Portugal (in bold)

Source: Image created by Rei-artur in January 2005, from the map: Mapa de Portugal.svg

Because wines and pears are place-based commodities, a crucial issue regarding EU classifications is the character of the product's link to the territory of origin. Long debated regarding the *terroir* of wines in France, the issue acquires relevance in the current conjuncture for two main reasons. First, classifications for different products grown in the same European territory are multiplying. Second, the emergence of a new paradigm based in quality – the so-called 'quality' turn (see Goodman, 2003; Murdoch et al, 2000) – is encouraging new food production-consumption linkages.

Although place-based food economies may promote sustainable growth in particular regions, how best to name these products is a contending question. Concepts such as '*terroir*', 'regional', 'typical', 'local', and 'locality' have all generated plenty of debate amongst scholars. Some analysts insist on differentiating among *terroir*, typical, local and regional (Bérard e Marchenay, 2004; Tèchouyeres, 2005). Other scholars note different uses of 'local' in two contrasting schools of thought. The American-based school tends to view a concern with 'local food' to be an entailment of neo-liberal hegemony. Boiling it down, the view taken is that labelling a food 'local' is mainly a form of marketing, and as such is strongly prone to the vagaries of commodity fetishism (Guthman, 2007; Fonte and Papadopoulos,

2010). The Europe-based school, in contrast, distinguishes between ‘local’ foods and ‘locality’ foods (Maye et al, 2007). ‘Local’ is taken to convey ‘alternative’ in the sense that the food embodies and transmits environmental protection, social justice, taste, and health qualities. ‘Locality’ registers a connection with local economic development based in local food, however that food may be produced and wherever that food may be consumed. While ‘local’ and ‘locality’ are used interchangeably in popular discourse, in ‘academic’ discourse the first term implies “localised and unique patterns of interaction amongst nature, production operations, social networks and cultural heritage” oriented to a dedicated demand (Brunori and Rossi, 2007, p. 186), while the second term connotes a commitment to competitiveness in a differentiated market and to the technology, to the operational sizes and scales, and to marketing strategies understood to secure it.

In fact, and taking into account some of these differences, the European Union³ regulations contain various types of protection schemes for agri-food and traditional recipes that are considered place-based. The Protected Designation of Origin (PDO)⁴ is the strictest one regarding product origin and processing, thus more difficult to achieve. Briefly, a PDO product must comply with two important conditions: the quality features of the good should be primarily attributed to the geographical environment of the region of origin (including human or natural factors such as climate, soil quality, and local knowledge); and the chain of production and processing of raw materials up to the final product must take place in the defined geographical area (Josling, 2006). Currently, in both European and international markets it is possible to find such products as varied as Champagne (France), Florida Oranges (US), Prosciutto di Parma (Italy), New Zealand Lamb (New Zealand) and also the Western Rocha Pear (Portugal).

Several scholars have stressed the similarities between PDO definitions and the concept of *terroir*, developed around the appellation schemes for French or Italian wines and cheeses (Barham, 2003). For some, the similarities are such that *terroir* foods achieved legal status with the European law (Josling, 2006). Angela Tregear (2003) notes that regulations on GIs established by the European Union at the closing stages of the twentieth century have not been immune to the experience gained during decades of discussions and the preparation of legal instruments and implementation of institutions in France and Italy. In fact, the application of *terroir* meanings to wine is much older than to other foods (with the exception of Roquefort cheese). It dates from

the eighteenth century and has in the Portuguese Port-wine region (established in 1756) one of the first examples in world history⁵. Since then, many scholars have analyzed the issues raised by the institutionalization of linkages between food and territory. Many of the *terroir* definitions historically associated with some of the most famous European wines were under discussion since the end of the nineteenth century and were eventually recognized. The Bordeaux region in France or the Jerez region in Spain, established after the twenties, are good illustrations (Lachiver, 1988, pp. 490-496; de Lemps, 1993, pp. 151-153). Thus, when the Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957, these *terroir* wines already constituted structural elements of social and economic relations; they already configured cultural ties and identity features of different European regions.

Since the 1990s the national legal frameworks that defined the wine regions have been replaced by EU legislation that, among other objectives, tries to establish a uniform classification for wines produced within its borders. In several cases, as in the West of Portugal, these classifications allowed for the creation of new brands and for the realization of economic benefits from the unique local wine features that until then were anonymously mixed in bulk. Although the most famous are the Italian and French DOC, in the West of Portugal there are currently five DOC that appeal to consumers in different international markets.

As previously indicated, the discussion of GIs has not reached consensus. Additionally, the very concept of *terroir* is variously interpreted. But even if no agreement is achieved regarding the features indexed by the term, *terroir* is understood to occupy the semantic space in which various natural and cultural factors intersect (Bowen and Zapata, 2009, p. 109). Therefore, *terroir* products are strongly associated with the properties and bio-physical characteristics unique to particular places (e.g. microclimate, soil type, native plants, elevation). They also encompass the practices and know-how particular to territories, which are culturally embedded in history, heritage and tradition. Nowadays, *terroir* products tend to be regarded as the result of a dynamic process in which history, place and people are intrinsically configured and reconfigured across time and space (Bérard and Marchenay, 2004). In this sense, *terroir* move pendularly between tradition and innovation (Amilien, 2005).

The regulations following from the CAP reforms introduced in the late 1980s provide for the existence in the European Union of ‘old’ (e.g. wine, cheese) and ‘new’ (e.g. fruit, meat, vegetables) *terroir* products. Given that the classification of ‘old’ and

'new' *terroir* is based on criteria that have a common root, it is necessary to assess the extent to which the theoretical and normative interconnections pinpointed by scholars are integrated and materialized in the regions. Despite a proliferation of studies dedicated to *terroir* products and to their places of origin, an in-depth analysis of the regional impacts caused by various European regulations on food quality for different products (e.g. wine and fruit) is still lacking. Hence, one of the main questions advanced in this paper is: to what extent are the 'new' *terroir* foods (e.g., the Rocha pear) affecting the landscape and foodscape of the 'old' *terroir* products (wine) in the same region.

The joint analysis of production and marketing processes for DOC wines and PDO Rocha pear, both occurring in the *Oeste* region of Portugal, suggests that adopting binary analytical categories (e.g. local-global or conventional-alternative) serves little to describe and analyse food systems that appear interwoven into different foodscapes. Against binary simplification we follow poststructuralist geographers (Murdoch, 2006) in arguing that food production and marketing systems are configured and reconfigured in contested spaces of food quality, where trajectories of de-territorialization and re-territorialization are concomitantly mobilized to shape the boundaries of these spaces (Morgan et al, 2006). Since EU strategies to promote the integrated rural development of various regions include the valuation of new place-based foods, here we analyze primarily the use of natural resources, the cultural representations of food, and the agri-economic activities of the *Oeste* region.

Many studies devoted to place-based foods tend to favour a presentist approach, often covering only recent decades. However, a full grasp of the inherent dynamics of various agro-food systems requires stretching the analytical time dimensions. By describing the major features that characterize the processes of quality construction of the Western Rocha pear and of regional *terroir* wines since the last decades of the nineteenth century, this article aims at understanding the social and historical impacts of de-territorialization and re-territorialization dynamics in the *Oeste*.

During this research⁶, several questions have emerged, namely: are there disparate cartographic configurations of the *Oeste* region that depend on the product at stake? How do the two food production systems co-exist in both symbolic and spatial landscapes?

As explained, the allocation of DOC quality labels to wines or PDO status to fruit produced in the *Oeste* requires evidence of the geographic and cultural linkages of

these products to the region. In the official documents that enumerate the set of norms, rules and technical requirements for the production and marketing of these foods, the territories of origin appear as areas with clearly defined boundaries and with homogenous agro-ecological characteristics. However, closer inspection indicates that these are geographical areas with diverse ecosystems and that, historically, manifest porous and transient borders. In the case of the *Oeste* region, both the territory and its designation have triggered regional controversies and protests. Occasionally these have had national repercussions.

The use of the toponym *Oeste* to name a specific part of the national territory became frequent beginning in the late nineteenth century. For the Portuguese geographer J. Gaspar (1993), the repeated use of this name would stem less from its geographical position in Western Portugal than from the name given to the new railway line completed in 1888. The *Oeste* Line runs for 198 km, connecting the municipality of Sintra (District of Lisbon) to the municipality of Figueira da Foz (District of Coimbra). The launch of the *Oeste* Line was designed to confer new access to a densely populated, economically buzzing, area which has supplied Lisbon and some foreign markets since the Middle Ages. However, the area that has most often been identified as *Oeste* does not stretch the entire length of the railway line. Thus, the relation between the transport infrastructure and the social construction of the designation is not linear. The area covered by this transport line belonged to the region of Estremadura, established since the founding of the nation in the twelfth century. Although the boundaries were not consensual, in the sprawling region of Estremadura a few subregions emerged during the nineteen and first decades of the twentieth century. The *Oeste* was one such subregions. Although the railway became a structuring factor in the organization of regional relations and cultural identity, the social construction of the *Oeste* entailed additional components.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century regionalist ideas diffused across Europe. These linked the natural characteristics of territories with cultural identities (Gellner, 1993; Donald et al, 2010) Portuguese intellectuals sought evidence that would enable them to evoke the *soul of the people* and the foundations of their homeland (Leal, 2004). In this pursuit, which prompted intense discussion and controversy, the existing regional divisions of the country were subject to detailed scrutiny. The quest for a representation of a bounded national identity, which included a search for folk traditions, monuments, and the features of the people and landscapes,

also prompted the search for agricultural products and production practices associated with each region. In the presentation of local features it became common to stress the economic, symbolic and cultural relevance of specific agro-food products⁷. These processes of definition and streamlining have been particularly intense in a territory like the *Oeste*, characterized as it is by notable agro-ecological diversity (drier mountains and watered valleys, open to maritime or continental influences), and a tradition of polyculture production systems.

On a typical farm in the *Oeste* region it was common to find several fruit trees on the edges of plots dedicated to garden produce or cereals. Monoculture was rare. The plots of land, ranging between 0.5 and 10 hectares, were seldom flat and often interspersed with small urban areas and forests. The efforts of local diversity promoted by political and intellectual elites led to the stabilization of an image of the *Oeste* based on two types of products, and linked to two main areas. To the north there was a tradition of fruit production (apples, pears, peaches, and more). It was mostly associated with the towns of Alcobaça and Caldas da Rainha. The tradition probably dates to the founding of the medieval monastery of the Cistercian Order. Torres Vedras, in the South, favoured with a natural environment for the production of wines with *personality*, had a long-established connection to wine. This sector has been stimulated over the centuries due to the proximity to Lisbon, capital of the country since the Middle Ages.

However, it must be noted that between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century there was no consensus among the authors on the boundaries of the *Oeste* (Costa, 1900)⁸. Despite this, economic dynamism contributed to the strong association of the *Oeste* with wine, given the economic importance of Torres Vedras. This was amplified by the socio-economic context of the second half of the nineteenth century, which favoured the expansion of vineyards, a change in agricultural practices, a landscape transformation, and an increase of the economic and political importance of local farmers. These changes were part of the first phase of agricultural trade globalization in the Iberian Peninsula (Pamuk and Williamson, 2000). During this phase, in addition to economic problems, Portugal experienced periods of institutional and political instability⁹; associated with these were bouts of regional and territorial identity strengthening.

The uncertainty about the boundaries and formation of the *Oeste* was reduced during 40 years of the twentieth century due to the emergence of the authoritarian

state. Following the rise of a fascist-inspired political regime that ruled the country between 1933 and 1974, the state created the conditions to formalize the *Oeste* as containing 12 to 13 counties, and to confirm wine as the hegemonic production of the region.

The idea of this subregion was reinforced by a polarization between Torres Vedras in the south, and Caldas da Rainha in the north. The former had economic and political weight as the main wine producing area of the country. The latter was the most important town in the fruit-growing area; it also, maintained a residual economic and social importance in the region and country.

The polarization of agricultural production was further consolidated by the state through the development of a wine research centre in the town of Dois Portos (near Torres Vedras) and of a fruit research centre in Alcobaça. However, even if the tensions between Caldas and Torres were very visible at times, the *Oeste* region has been subjected to the dynamics of cohesion and exclusion, solidarity and opposition to various objectives (Freire, 2010). What is important to stress is that in these political dynamics, which are inherent to perhaps all regions¹⁰, wine and fruit played a central, entangled, role.

The configuration of the agricultural areas and the economic performance of wine and fruit were strongly conditioned by the role of corporate bodies that, since the nineteen-thirties, had protected each of these two products: the National Fruit Board (1936) and the National Wine Board (1937). These organizations constituted themselves as the preferred instruments in implementing the state policy apparatus. They were highly protectionist for wine and more liberal for fruit. Whilst the wine sector was strengthening its position in the regional economy, the National Wine Board created local services, building a more robust network of warehouses and specialized technical assistance for wines and spirits. After the Second World War, the wine cooperatives formed in the winemaking municipalities joined this network of corporate services.

In the *Oeste* many wine cooperatives were created, in some cases more than one in each municipality, whilst other agricultural products were confined to different cooperatives, such as the Cooperativa Agrícola do Bombarral (1966) or the Cooperativa Agrícola dos Fruticultores do Cadaval (1969). The institutional distribution in the *Oeste* resembles the national distribution, in which the networks of corporate services and cooperatives established for fruit and other agricultural

products had a weaker institutional and economic weight. During the dictatorship there was no mobilization for free association. Thus, civil and professional associations were scarce and even cooperatives were under tight supervision by corporate bodies. In practice, all of these organizations were financially and politically dependent on the state.

The 1970s and 1980s corresponded to a period of major changes in the country and in the agricultural landscape. Following the military coup of April 1974, which ended the dictatorship and brought about a democratization process, the agricultural policies changed together with the institutional organizations. The corporate bodies for wine and fruit had different functions in the governance of each economic subsector. The National Fruit Board was extinguished in 1987, but its implementation was weak in the territory. It was decommissioned with the change of political regime and had little ability to mobilize support. The National Wine Board persisted until 1986, when it was replaced by the Institute of the Vine and Wine. After this, broader changes in institutional responsibilities and policies for this subsector were observed.

Portugal's accession to the European Economic Community in 1986 was another factor that induced profound changes in agriculture and institutions. The negotiation process that began in 1977, turned out to be a long and difficult one, largely due to agricultural issues. The structuring of the wine sector was among the most important of these (Le-Bihan et al, 1986). Wine was already a surplus product in the Community and the accession of two other great wine producers – Portugal and Spain – was viewed with great apprehension by other competing countries, especially France and Italy.

The significant changes in policies, institutions and economic activities related to vines and wine, which occurred in the *Oeste* and in other producing areas, were part of the adjustments required by complex negotiations imposed by the CAP regime. Portugal's accession made producers and business entrepreneurs more vulnerable to the impacts of liberalized international markets, where the national regime of tariffs and quotas on imports were changed or abolished. Farmers and market agents were able to seize business opportunities created by the combination of these extra-local forces with local dynamics. During this period, the institutional and production changes driven by the PAC have accelerated the configuration of a new regional agri-food system that has been gradually shaped since the 1960s and 1970s (Lains, 2009).

In order to comply with EU demands for quantity and quality, farmers were awarded financial incentives to uproot vineyards and to fit their crop choices to demand. Since the nineteenth century agronomists have identified orchards as a desirable alternative to vineyards in the *Oeste* region, to almost no avail. However, in the 1980s political and economic conditions were finally established to increase fruit production in the region. These changes had repercussions both on the spatial configuration of new crops and on regional food cultures.

At this time, the area was crosscut by tensions, which put into question the wine sector as the main profit making activity of the region and, hence, its regional identity. During these turbulent times some authors sought to assess the relevance of the territorial identity. As has been noted on other occasions, Estremadura never stimulated strong feelings of belonging (Ribeiro, 1991). Yet, the same was not true for its *Oeste* subregion. In the 1980s, Diogo Abreu (Abreu, 1988) noted that there was a strong identity in this area, especially along the route between Caldas da Rainha and Torres Vedras. These feelings would seem to have played a role in the institutionalization of relatively stable administrative borders around the region through the establishment of the Association of Municipalities of the *Oeste* region, created in 1987 (replaced in 2008 by the Inter-municipal Community of the *Oeste*). Twelve municipalities made up the Association. Recognition of these feelings was also behind the government's decision to define the *Oeste* as one of the subregions included in the Region of Lisbon and Tagus Valley, created in 1986 to better accommodate the implementation of European rural development policies. After all, the *Oeste* became one of the Portuguese areas that “most mobilizes its economic agents (producers and consumers) towards a feeling of belonging to a territorial unit where it makes sense to build a common destiny” (Gaspar, 1993, p. 114).

Paradoxically, however, the political and economic changes imposed by CAP policies wiped out the image of the *Oeste* as *the land of wine*. The European Directives fostered the decline of vineyard areas, the selection of particular grape varieties, the standardization of manufacturing processes, the reorganization of market chains and the development of marketing strategies. The ability to produce wines according to the established criteria has allowed the demarcation of new wine regions, which demonstrates, as suggested by Virginie Amilien (2005), the dynamic interaction between tradition and innovation involved in reconfiguring *terroir* products. Taking as reference the ‘old’ *Oeste* winery area circumscribed by the

Association of Municipalities of the *Oeste*, different wine appellations have been recognised. All have different names and a closer geographical proximity to the *terroir* they embody. Although these new wines have different characteristics, they were all institutionally included under the same DOC appellation and managed by the same trade association. First, this broad region received the appellation ‘wines from Estremadura’ in 1933. More recently, in 2009, the committee of the wine region of Lisbon changed this appellation to ‘wines of Lisbon’. This represented the culmination of a long and disputed process of qualification of wines from this region. But this new designation echoes earlier controversies, which were hyped by the state protection granted in the mid-eighteenth century to the Port wine. Since that time the authorities and wine growers in Lisbon, in various historical circumstances, have tried to establish the brand ‘wines of Lisbon’, yet with no success. The designation of the Lisbon region has never had territorial expression, and even when used, did not involve such a broad area as the one being now assigned. In practice, the classification system of regional wines of Lisbon does not put emphasis on the territory, but only on the commercial product. Thus, this is a marketing strategy, which links this label to the growing prestige of the capital of Lisbon as a touristic historical site. Yet, the wines with this classification can be made from blends of grapes from anywhere within the defined broad area of Lisbon. These are just some of the changes that have been implemented; there are many others that encompass the types and percentages of authorized varieties. Such changes further heighten the complex articulation of the *terroir* concept with the political and economic contexts of power in which they are embedded (Bowen, 2010).

In the processes of re-territorialization of wine production and marketing ongoing since the mid-1980s, the ‘old’ notion of the *Oeste* region was not suited to translate the innovations that were being introduced in the ‘old’ wine sector¹¹. The positive images associated with the term ‘*Oeste*’ were now being transferred onto a ‘new’ product icon of the area: the Rocha pear. This new icon was subject to streamlining processes applied to all fruit varieties able to compete on the same physical and symbolic territory. As discussed below, the granting of PDO status to the Western Rocha pear in March 2003 established the association between this pear variety and an *Oeste* region geographically wider than what had been established by the state and popular processes of cultural identification.

In the 1980s, the national fruit producers were poorly organized by profession and sector thanks to the legacy of the New State's restrictions on associations. Existent cooperatives were feeble and mainly geared to production and storage. Thus, they lacked clear business or marketing strategies. The producers of the *Oeste* region sought solutions to deal with new problems arising from economic and institutional changes. In contrast, institutions and corporate bodies that regulated the wine sector were important mediators of tensions and conflicts triggered by changes in this sector. They failed to represent all interests in the subsector, however. The institutional framework for fruits was not as historically consolidated as was that for wine. Institutional disruption during the transition to democracy left room for the emergence of associations outfitted to represent all interests in the fruit subsector. Hence, conflicts became more numerous and explicit. The most serious problems stemmed from difficulties in bringing the products to the domestic market, and in competing with the lower prices of imported fruit from other countries.

It was in a context of new problems, grievances, and proposed solutions that in 1989 the 'revolution of the *Oeste*', as it became known at the time, broke out. This rural revolt began in Bombarral (now an important town in the Western Rocha pear subsector, albeit not the most important), where several producers of fruit (especially Rocha pear) blocked the roads in the region for days, causing chaos. This event marked a breakthrough in the local conflict. It contributed in a major way to the consolidation of Western Rocha pear as the dominant symbol of the area, forced sectoral organisation, and stimulated the reconfiguration of horticultural activities in the region (Caleiras, 2000; ANP, n.d.). The few associations created then¹² began drawing up plans and strategies to organise the fruit sector. At a time when many farmers were being forced to abandon the production of wine and find business alternatives elsewhere, these strategic moves helped the government to recognise the economic value of regional products and the development potential of exporting the Rocha pear, given the storability that makes it ideal for long-distance transport.

At the beginning of the 1990s, taking advantage of European programs designed to shape and support the horticulture sub-sector¹³, a wave of dynamism in the fruit sector (especially Rocha pear) followed with the emergence of processing warehouses (e.g. Frutus, founded in 1992). In 1992, the publication of EU regulations that enabled the institutionalisation of GIs was well received by the agricultural sector and perceived as a new window of opportunity for Rocha pear producers. In 1993, the

National Association of Western Rocha pear growers was founded (ANP), the organization behind the qualification process of this variety as a PDO product. That year, the association and the Portuguese authorities (Ministry of Agriculture) submitted to the European Commission an application to obtain PDO status for this fruit. But the product specification dossier was not convincing in establishing the links between the *Oeste* region and Rocha pear. Over the next ten years, while the production and export of Rocha pear was growing, ANP and the technicians of the Ministry of Agriculture improved and refined the PDO application. This demanding work required a detailed characterization of the orchards in the region, and an in-depth description of production methods and quality selection of Rocha pear¹⁴. The process was finally concluded in March of 2003 with the award of PDO status to the Western Rocha pear.

If PDO classifications assigned by the European Union are closely linked to the notion of *terroir*, it is then necessary to determine how nature and culture are linked to uphold the status attributed to this pear variety. According to the Western Rocha pear specification dossier that justified its PDO status (ANP, 1997), the origin of this pear is credited to the horse trader Mr. Pedro António Rocha who, in the first half of nineteenth century, had a farm in Sintra (a village located in Lisbon's rural hinterland area). The 'myth of origin' of Rocha pear dates back to 1836 where a new pear variety with characteristics somewhat different from the others was found on Mr. Rocha's farm. This pear captured attention due to its distinct flavour, firm and white pulp with a thin and smooth skin. Another important feature was its good shelf life, and thus, having excellent properties for storage, transportation and handling. The fruit was probably obtained through random selection from the seed of its most common variety – *Pirus communis L.* –, and named after the farm owner. The myth continues by stating that Mr. Rocha had a great appreciation for this pear, showing it as often as possible to friends and acquaintances. Several of these friends took samples of this variety to grow in other areas, disseminating it beyond Sintra (ANP, 1997, p. 15).

This version of the pear's 'myth of origin', quoted in the official documents that enabled the assignment of PDO status to this pear, was popularized in early 20th century by the agricultural technician most dedicated to the study of this variety (Guilherme da Matta). But, as another technician, Artur Castilho, noted in the 1940s a less popular version of the origin, which linked it to the import of this pear from

France (Castilho, n.d.). In any case, there are no official records of the existence of Rocha pear in the *Oeste* region, at least before the last decades of the nineteenth-century. The pear was subject to a myriad of selection processes and quality improvements in official fruit stations, particularly the one sited in Alcobaça. In the mid-twentieth century, this pear was one of the varieties favoured by agronomists, mainly due to good storability and transportability, which enabled it to retain the original flavour, texture and colour for many months after harvest (August to May).

Interestingly, the local production and marketing dynamics have not led to an intensification of Rocha pear growth in the traditional fruit production areas of the *Oeste* region (e.g. the municipalities of Alcobaça and Caldas da Rainha). This fruit's origin. Instead the core of this fruit production and success is being built in Cadaval, where the ANP headquarters are based. Since the construction of the railway, Cadaval has presented an eccentric position regarding the main regional economic activities; herein the decades of *Oeste* wine prosperity were less visible. The increased production and commercial success of this fruit reveals two puzzling coincidences. On the one hand, it was precisely in Cadaval, currently one of the iconic places in this 'new' symbolic representation of the *Oeste* region, that Diogo Abreu (1998) found one of the weakest feelings of belonging to this region back in the 1980s. On the other hand, recalling what the first agriculturalists have written, this variety is better adapted to areas near the sea, which is not the case of Cadaval (geographically sited in an inland area and much drier). The existence in this county of a small parish called Peral (pear orchard in Portuguese) may indicate that there is a microclimate favourable to pear production. Yet, it is important to note that each pear variety demands specific edaphoclimatic conditions. And in any case, the origin of this town, which existed in the sixteenth century, is not associated with this pear that appeared only three centuries later. The map of the legally bound territory for the production of the Western Rocha pear reflects this agro-diversity (Figure 2).



Figure 2 – The overlapping of the Oeste of pears and the Oeste of wines
Source: ANP - Associação Nacional de Produtores de Pêra Rocha, *Caderno de Especificações* (Cadaval: ANP), 1997.

The Rocha pear map includes 30 municipalities, and extends beyond the boundaries of the ‘old’ *Oeste* region (with about 12 to 13 municipalities), not only to the South to include Sintra (myth of origin), but also to the north and east, including cities such as Leiria, Santarém, Cartaxo and Vila Franca de Xira, where it is difficult to find ancestors of this fruit variety. Although the ‘*Oeste*’ name was removed from maps representing wine regions in Portugal, with the enlargement of the areas assigned to the Western Rocha pear and the new label ‘Wines of Lisbon’, an overlapping of territories ascribed to each of the regional products is observed. After all, these products – wine and pears – may have different GI names, but they can coexist in the same localities and ecosystems. In describing the changes occurring in the *Oeste* region at the turn of the 1980s to the 1990s, Ferreira da Costa stated that the vineyards were retreating to the hills and the orchards were occupying the floodplains (Ferreira da Costa, 1986). In so doing, both crops were being accommodated to their most favourable natural conditions. Today, however, through the observation of the landscape and the empirical data collected, it is clear that pear orchards are climbing up hills, covering large continuous areas (Figure 3).



Figure 3 – Landscape of wine and pears (*‘Poached pears in wine’*)
Source: Photo by the authors

Rocha pear production is mostly done under Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and irrigated systems. The (regulated) use of chemical inputs and the intensification of irrigation configure the ecological conditions for the intensive growth of Rocha pear. These agricultural practices try to reduce the risk inherent in developing crops outside their natural environment, but may prove to be ecologically unsustainable given the water stress problems they cause.

In economic and market terms, this is a profitable sector, which recorded strong growth in recent years. According to Fragata and colleagues (Fragata et al, 2007), among the 14 Portuguese fruits granted with PDO / PGI status, the Western Rocha pear is the most important, its main destination being the export market. According to data provided by ANP, which refers to the 2007/2008 harvesting campaign, the largest importer of Rocha pear is the United Kingdom (36%), followed by France (19%), Brazil (18%), Ireland (8%), the Russian Federation (6%) and Netherlands (4%). In 2007, the production of Rocha pear generated a turnover of 72 million Euros. In that same year, and in the *Oeste* region, there were 11594ha of agricultural land converted to Rocha pear orchards, with a total production of 127,800 tonnes and an average yield of 11t/ha. The average farm size was of 1.2 ha (INE, 2007). In 2010, the turnover ascended to 100 million Euros. The export market and big international retail soon became crucial drivers of this sector.

Many operators began to differentiate the product, exhibiting in fairs (e.g. National Fair of Rocha pear, which in 2010 was in its 17th edition) not only the fruit but also its various by-products (e.g. liqueurs, yogurt, juices, cakes and sweets). Moreover, this pear can also be found in local markets and produced according to organic farming methods, revealing different quality features.

Thus, the Rocha pear encapsulates disparate qualities in different markets where it is channelled. For the UK market it follows strict quality criteria (established by the supermarket chains and following the preferences of their customers), being calibrated and selected according to consumer segmentation and product differentiation (e.g. environmental impacts, food safety, good agricultural practices), all encompassed by strict private quality standards (e.g. GLOBALGAP, Tesco's Natures Choice). In the domestic market, the Rocha pear appears in various forms as well (as a PDO, as a differentiated quality fruit for various Portuguese supermarket chains, or as a local product for local consumers). Similarly to what Morgan and colleagues (Morgan et al, 2006) conclude for other agri-food products, the qualification of the Rocha pear lies at the heart of contested spaces of food quality, where trajectories of de-localization and re-localization configure and reconfigure these interstitial spaces. We can perhaps say that the qualification of different Rocha pears reflects not only the contested construction of the *Oeste* region, which is under a process of identity reconfiguration from wine to pears, but also the confluence of various systems of food production, distribution and marketing that overlap and intertwine in the same territory.

In this vein, food symbols have come to be juxtaposed in the administrative landscape. The symbolic juxtaposition reflect the ongoing regional identity changes taking place in the *Oeste* region, where new food narratives are re-invented and reconfigured. During fieldwork done in the area, it was clear that old regional signposts at the entry to towns had been replaced. The traditional images of grapevines and wine and vines had been supplanted by the new regional icon – the Rocha pear (Figure 4).



July 2009

November 2009

Figure 4 – Signposts on the same entry of the town of Cadaval at different times of the year.
Source: Photos by the authors

In addition to the impacts on the economy and the regions' rural development – deemed as the main objectives of European measures – the guidelines that PAC has followed since early 1990s are also having impacts on identity construction and the triggering of new conflicts. New imagery links are established with the rebuilding of symbols and conceptions of new place-based food narratives, even if no recent surveys exist to assess the feelings of belonging in these territories and the binding of different agricultural products to the discourses of identity.

Considering our objectives here, three main conclusions can be drawn from the material described:

Firstly, the *Oeste* is represented through multiple maps in which the region's municipalities are sometimes juxtaposed and other times missing. There is the 'old' *Oeste* composed of 12 to 13 municipalities that is maintained for administrative purposes (namely through the Inter-Municipal Community of the *Oeste* and the Region of Lisbon and Tagus Valley); then there is the old wine map fragmented into five DOC now gathered under the broad region of Lisbon; finally there is a new *Oeste* map, the one based in the Rocha pear, that goes beyond the *Oeste* of wines, extending its boundaries southwards, eastwards and to the North. Thus, the different mappings of the *Oeste* region are intrinsically associated with the qualification processes of place-based foods, namely of wines and pears. The most recent territorial

reconfiguration around the processes of qualification of Rocha pear and its interweaving with the old map of wine explains its association with an image of 'poached pears in wine'.

Secondly, the juxtaposition of pears with wine in the same territories is visible on the landscape. Both products dispute the same territory and the same natural resources. One can observe the spreading of Rocha pear orchards uphill, when they used to be in floodplains. There's a visible retreat of vineyards to the benefit of the Rocha pear monoculture. This affects not only the imagery of the *Oeste* regional landscape, but also the biodiversity and ecological sustainability of this territory. The high yields of Rocha pear are obtained through intensive water use, given the demands of an irrigated crop system. The immediate consequences are the aggravation of water stress in this region, an aspect that farmers interviewed in this study are very aware of. There are strategies put in place to minimise environmental problems that stem from the intensive pear production system, namely more growers are converting their explorations to integrated pest management (IPM). Moreover, big international retailers demand the inclusion of ethical and ecological principles in growers' practices, so that they comply with the strict requirements of private quality standards and labels. Other fruits in the *Oeste* region are being assigned GI classifications, namely Maçã de Alcobaça (an apple variety with IGP status), which may help farmers to diversify their crops beyond a fragile dependence on Rocha pear monoculture.

Thirdly, the emergence of Rocha pear as the new icon of the *Oeste* region, together with the external pressures enforced by CAP reforms, triggered the design of new marketing and economic strategies by the wine sector. Instead of conforming to a business-threatening situation, wine cooperatives, associations and growers gave a strong response in revitalising the sector. There was investment in a strategy of quality diversification, targeting new consumers with different quality labels. Plus, new DOC classifications were assigned in order to capture the local specificities of the *terroir* of wines. Therefore, the *Oeste* region managed to create two successful products – wines and pears – and to use strategies of food qualification to create economic benefits.

By conducting a temporal analysis of these issues it is possible to understand how the product names and the *Oeste* region have been mutually constituted as arenas of food quality contestation, spanning not only multiple scales of power, but also cutting

across a myriad of other agro-food products. Taking an historical point of view, it is observed that from a variety of agricultural products in the *Oeste*, wine and pears have emerged as central elements not only of place-based economic dynamics, but also as icons in the construction of regional identities. In this vein, and positioning this case study in the broader agro-food literature on local food with its two schools of thought (the American and the European) we would contend that the local is not a ‘purified’ concept, instead it is seen as an open-ended and relational category, wherein territories, foods and scales are mutually constitutive and ‘contested social constructions’ (Du Puis and Goodman, 2005, p. 368).

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Notes

¹ Portugal joined the European Economic Community in 1986 and, like all other members, was subject to the rules of the Common Agricultural Policy. CAP was established in the early 1960s, and has been subject to major reforms since late 1980s.

² As described further down, the *Oeste* has been assigned to the territory that stretches along the north of the city of Lisbon up to the vicinity of the town of Leiria, covering an unsettled area located between the coast line and into inland, towards the Valley of Tagus River.

³ Within the European Union, geographical indications gained legal status in 1992 with the regulations EEC no. 2081/92 and EEC no. 2082/92.

⁴ The other protection schemes include Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG). The PGIs require two conditions: first, at least one phase of production take place within the geographical area (even if with imported raw material); second, there must be a link between positive product reputation or quality and area of origin. The TSGs make no reference to geographical origin. They are intended to guarantee a traditional production method (a local recipe, for example). PDOs and PGIs are considered Geographical Indications (GIs) according to the TRIPS (trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights) agreement, which is part of the global WTO agreements. See Josling (2006).

⁵ In terms of wines, Port wine, produced in northern Portugal's Douro Valley is considered the third oldest *appellation contrôlée* after Chianti, Italy (1716) and Tokaj, Hungary (1730). In terms of other products, Roquefort cheese is considered the first legally recognised geographical indication, dating from the 15th century.

⁶ The information for this case study was obtained from various materials, namely data collected through exploratory interviews with stakeholders in the area (local administration agencies, producer wine cooperatives, farmers, associations), data

gathered from official documents, statistical databases, local press, marketing brochures of the regional products and websites.

⁷ The Guide to Portugal aimed at a wide audience and published in the late 1920s is a good illustration of this.

⁸ For example, the series of hills and valleys devoted to the monoculture of vineyards, in some places coinciding with the *Oeste* Line train journey, did not lead Cincinnato da Costa, back in 1900, to single out the *Oeste* wine subregion from the Estremadura region.

⁹ Namely the disputes that broke out in the last years of the monarchy, the king's assassination in 1908, and the foundation of the 1st Republic in 1910, followed by successive governments of short duration until 1926, when the 'New State' emerged.

¹⁰ For an interesting and useful discussion of the difference between place and region see Cresswell (2004).

¹¹ In a first phase, the *Oeste* wine region was replaced with the term 'Estremadura', recovering part of the nineteenth century ideas. Even if the social memory in Estremadura was not associated with strong regional feelings, it was possible to take advantage of the void in social memory to redesign discourses and images by inventing references to a harmonious past. By contrast, the term '*Oeste*' was translated into the maintenance of a 'quantity' production model, and also, to cases of fraud and wine falsification, which were now necessary to exorcise. These past imagery associations were inconsistent with the new images of distinction, quality and *personality* on which the national bodies and specialist associations (e.g. Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of the Economy, the Institute of Vineyards and Wine and the Regional Wine Commission) wished to consolidate the commercial strategies of regional wines.

¹² Namely, APAS (Sobrena Growers Association, Cadaval) and AARA (Association of Farmers of Alcobaca Region).

¹³ In February 1992 it is created the programme NOVAGRI (short for Nova Agricultura, which stands for ‘new agriculture’ in English). It was a national programme to improve agriculture, enshrined in law n^o 103/92. It was shortly replaced and included under the PAC’s agri-environmental measures package (regulation (CEE) n. 2078/92).

¹⁴ Data collected from an interview with the agronomy engineer Ana Soeiro, who was a technician of the Ministry of Agriculture at the time and who closely followed the application of Western Rocha Pear to PDO quality status.