

CONFLICTS AND NEGOTIATIONS AROUND FOOD LABELS' STRATEGIES AND REPRESENTATIONS

E. Aguilar¹; C. Gómez-Benito², C. Lozano², I. López¹; S. Amaya³; E. Luque²; A. Pérez¹, M. Moreno²

¹ Dpto. Antropología Social. Universidad de Sevilla

² Dpto. Sociología II. UNED

³ Dpto. Economía General, Universidad de Cádiz

Corresponding Autor: eaguilar@us.es

This paper explores the emergence of a "new rurality" that connects new strategies in rural territories with new notions of quality in urban populations. The results correspond to a current coordinated project entitled: "Territories and meanings of quality: new strategies and representations of food systems"¹.

Rural development strategies based on quality production (PDOs, IGP, Territorial Labels, etc.) have two types of conditions for success. "Internal" conditions that have to do with the social, cultural and economic dynamics among local actors and their relationship to the institutional framework. "External" conditions imply that the shape of the strategies applied by local actors depends too on their evaluation of the potential demand by consumer of their products. It is also apparent that not all configurations of actors and development strategies allow the achievement of the multiple goals intended, and so it becomes of the greatest interest to analyse processes in which different development models confront one another, with the ensuing tensions and conflicts.

The objectives of this article are: 1) to identify and study comparatively regional development strategies and processes based on quality production and on the territorial "anchoring" of agri-food products, identifying the main sources of conflict between quality labels, territories and actors. 2) To connect these initiatives to social representations of quality schemes, as seen by the diverse agents participating in it, with special attention to consumers. 3) to study whether they facilitate (or hinder) new connection models among these actors, especially between producers and consumers.

The results we report are the outcome of a study based on two years of fieldwork with a comparative approach developed in Spain, The Netherlands, and France. We made 280 interviews to producers, processors, technicians, politicians, associations and consumers in different quality labels related to Iberian Ham; Cheese and Olive Oil.

¹ This project is composed by two sub-projects: *The production of quality: New rural strategies for new consumers* I+D (CSO2010-22074-C03-01). *Invisible food. Social representations of agri-food systems: causes, consequences and transformations* I+D (CSO2010-22074-C03-02).

This paper shows that as well as the positive synergies, such initiatives constitute a locus of conflict, negotiation and power between the parties and involve exclusion of certain actors. These strategies can be counterproductive or null if the link among food product, territory and reputation doesn't corresponds with the pre-existing images consumers have of a product, that is, with mental maps of quality.