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QUALITY AS RURAL MARKETING STRATEGY¹

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INTRODUCTION

Rural areas across European Union (EU) are involved in processes of deep re-definition that answer to different models or discourses about rurality and the proper way to develop them. In some areas, this process materialise on a progressive specialization towards quality, either on goods and services (Marsden, 1998). This new understanding of rurality has finally released it from the false mask that described rural areas population as stationary and static. Also, this redefinition is related with the post-industrial society needs and demands, which ask rural areas to provide not just food stocks, but goods and services that incorporate notions of quality, nature, roots and tradition. These elements add value to rural products, and allow them to get a distinguished position in an increasingly globalised market.

This paper analyses the process of quality construction as marketing strategy for rural areas, focusing on the specific character that these dynamics gained throughout the EU Rural Development Policy implementation. This process shall be understood within the framework of the new European rurality, which defined quality, differentiation and territory as the three key premises that provide these areas with new functions.

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TERRITORIAL APPROACH IN THE NEW DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS.

To talk about RD in Europe is to talk about the new perspective brought by the new Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) at the beginning of the 90s, a new perspective that recognized the interrelation between agriculture and society. This perspective speaks about general economic restructuring from scale to scope economy, re-embedding agriculture and supporting flexible specialization (Piore & Sabel, 1984, Panzar & Willing, 1992; Saccomandi, 1998; Ploeg *et al*, 2000; Ventura & Milone, 2000; Marsden *et al*, 2002, Ploeg & Marsden, 2008).

At the end of the 20th century, the CAP showed up several incoherences with a changing regional and global context: (a) it over endears the EU budget, (b) contradicts ongoing international negotiations within the GATT-WTO, (c) and ignores new issues rising on the political field, such as environment protection, safety and food hygiene. Therefore, a new perspective was necessary, and this new perspective would request new functions to the agricultural sector beyond commodities production; farmers should get involve in tutoring health, save-keeping environment, landscape and territory, and preserve tradition and culture. The aim was to insist in two necessary but forgotten triads, *agriculture-health-nutrition* and *agriculture-environment-territory* (Bencardino and Marotta, 2000). To achieve this objective it was necessary to harmonize supply and demand, reducing commodity production, and in addition, arrange new environment protection measures and new RD initiatives.

This new perspective was embodied in a new RD Policy that added the territorial approach, which holds the redefinition of territory from *territory as support* to *territory as resource*, linking new initiatives with local culture, image and identity (Lozano, 2009). The aim of this new ethos is to strengthen a new model for rural space, through initiatives that incentivizes a modern and competitive agricultural sector. A new agriculture working for rural areas whose mission will not be just commodities mass production, but also to promote an active rural world able to preserve natural and cultural landscapes, and offer a new range of quality products.⁴

From this guideline, new programs and initiatives were designed, having as main representative the LEADER Initiative. This initiative was articulated around several axes,

⁴ In this sense, the new CAP seems to have a double game, supporting a competitive agriculture oriented to international markets, but at the same time promoting an extensive agriculture environmentally friendly. This dual productive model involves an internal contradiction, where, according to the unequal investment, the first one is clearly winner. Nevertheless, the inclusion of this secondary agricultural model in the official documents should be considered a positive contribution to the CAP, because it is the platform where new projects and initiatives find the necessary support.

where the specificity and innovative character of the initiative dwells: bottom-up elaboration and implementation of strategies, area-based local development strategies, networking, local-public partnership (LAG), integrated and multisectoral actions, innovation, and cooperation. This revolutionary methodology transformed *Leader* in one of the best and more efficient instruments of institutional development, and also the framework where nowadays any action in rural areas gets enrolled (Esparcia, 2000; Highy & Nemes, 2007). Therefore, this new local agencies (the LAG) become the place where new economic changes are administrated and managed. It seems obvious that one of the main objectives of the LAGs will be to promote and empower, even to lead, local productive systems, which explain the impulse that the PDO received once this initiative was formally established, as we will explain later.

QUALITY FOOD AND THE NEW ALIMENTARY CONTEXT

The new direction that development projects are taken is strongly related with a change in the consumption patterns on post-industrial societies, where a new discourses can be identified. This discourse mixes a set of values that breakdown previous paradigms, such as environmental care, food safety and health concerns. New values that seem to be indissoluble united from local products image, a union that materializes under different labels such as *traditional, natural, organic, biological, PDO*, etc, (Bérard & Marchenay, 2004).

At the same time, the increase in quality goods consumption is also related with a transition from mass-production and mass-consumption economy, supported on *fordism* and *taylorism* models, to a new value economy (Bueno & Aguilar, 2003), developed in post-industrial societies and characterized by small size business, flexible specialization, continuous innovation, and adaptability to new tendencies and tastes. Old models of mass production in the 70s started to show up deficiencies as a result of their stiffness, these models were not able to adapt themselves to the multiple opening markets, neither to the continuous changes on customers demands. In that moment appeared what Harvey (1989) called *flexible accumulation system* (Harvey, 1987; Amin & Robins, 1990), new productive orientations characterized by decreasing size on productive process, intensive use of machines designed for fast and inexpensive re-adaptation, *just in time* production and new technologies incorporation.

It is very important to denote that in the new predominant discourse born at the beginning of the 90s, it is possible to see a return to old-fashion values, such as tradition, genuineness, artisan, natural... references that modern times denigrated, defining them as icons of underdevelopment and poverty. But nowadays, in a globalizing world, they have become an

anchor for consumers that look for the “good times”, the times before mass society (Aguilar & Lozano, 2008).

From this perspective it is possible to understand that in such context as the current one, deeply influenced by the lost of reference due to globalization and society McDonalization (Ritzer, 1996), there have been an increase of local food demand; food that comes from specific eco-system, produced using local know-how, embedded in history, etc. These products let consumers to satisfy their needs of rooting and territorial anchoring. Their consumption, in consonance with the “experiential marketing” guidelines (Schmitt, 1999), evokes feelings and sensations linked with nostalgic images of spaces whose values are in opposition to the urban world, re-conceptualised as industrialised, polluted and overcrowded. In some way, although the urban-rural dichotomy seems to be overcome, it is interesting to see how it survives and is reproduced on the symbolic level (Aguilar, 2007).

Last years scandals on the food industry have increased risk perception on a global level (Beck, 1999), which open questions about production and distribution systems, either the controls that suppose to guarantee this products safety. In this way, against the gradual foodstuff standardization that hide or blur information about origins either composition, nowadays, products expose to climate and physical variations rise as more “naturals”, safer and better-quality (Nygard & Storstad, 1998), because their origin can be traced.

TERRITORY AND QUALITY STRATEGIES IN ANDALUSIA.

Andalusia is located in the south of Iberian Peninsula, and it is one of the Spanish and European territories where agriculture and agro-food industry have higher specific weight; thus a very important role in economy and employment. In other words, if Spain is one of the first Member States in agro-industrial production – 13% of EU Agrarian Final Production (AFP) comes from Spain-, Andalusia is one of the main European territorial in agriculture production, because 23,5% of Spanish AFP comes from this region (MAPA, 2003). If we go further in this date, it is possible to notice that most of the Andalusian AFP comes from pedological crops adapted to specific climate conditions, such as olive trees or vineyard. Nevertheless, an important share of the AFP comes also from herbaceous crops and protected crops (strawberry and vegetables). In Andalusia, total economically active population (EAP) in this sector is 369.975 people, which means 11,9% of the total EAP in the region.

In Andalusia, olive crops is the main one in terms of surface, but horticultural production is higher due to intensive plastic farming at the Andalusian coast line. This important production

-which raised 5.126 thousands of tons in 2000-, is characterized by a high level of water consumption and productivity. Thus, it is an increasing production with a clear objective of exportation. Olive trees have a lower gross production (4.429 thousands of tons in 2000) and also a lower share of AFP, but they have a key role on regional structure, on employment creation and population stability (MAPA, 2000).

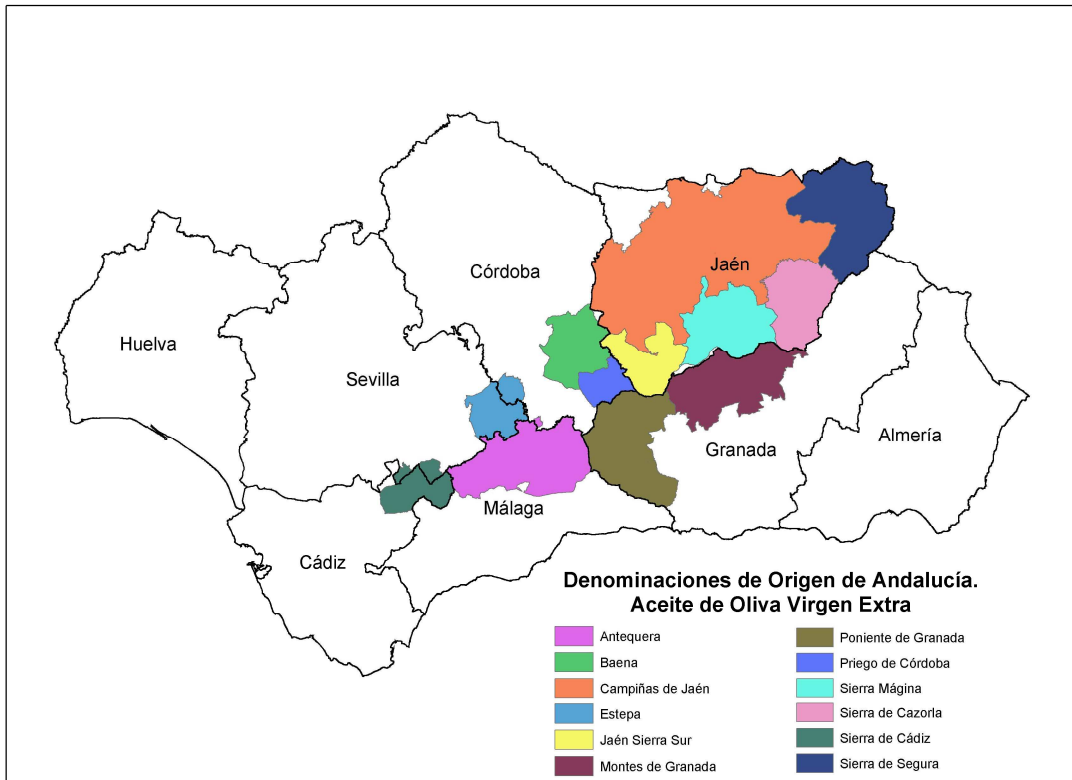
In the same way, this region is also the first European region in terms of agro-industrial establishment. This sector is the most important in the Andalusian economy, by both, operating income (22%) and employment rate (20%) (Consejería de Economía, Junta de Andalucía, 2007). The Andalusian agro-food sector is characterized by small-scale enterprises, a high degree of diversification amongst in the production system, and they are mostly allocated in rural areas. Thus, there is a strong relationship between the agro-food sector and the territory, including its resources. Furthermore, the importance of the local socio-economic structure is a decisive element for a balanced and sustainable development.

Therefore, the strong territorial anchor that characterise the agro-food industry has been very important in order to add value to their products. It also supported the creation of a quality promotion policy, which endorse the use of distinctive symbols (Perrier-Cornet & Sylvander, 2000). This strategy is so strong in this region that Andalusian has 24 Protected Designations of Origin (PDO), 6 Protected Geographical Indications (PGI), and 13 protected regional wines. To get a better picture of quality production, it would be necessary to add to these numbers the importance that other denomination –such as organic farming- are achieving. Indeed, Andalusia has become a referent in Spain and Europe in the last years (O'Connor *et al*, 2006)

Due to the importance of the olive oil sector in Andalusia's regional economy, olive oil PDOs are the most numerous, with a total number of thirteen. As an example of this, we can notice the fact that, being Spain the first producer and exporter of olives and olive oil in the world, 77% of this production comes from Andalusia. At the same time, 45% of the *almazaras*⁵ - which produce 77% of Spanish olive oil, are also allocated in this region, as well as 60 % of the total olive groves.

⁵ Olive oil mill. The *Almazara* is a key element in the sector, not only it has an economic function -as the place where the olives are milled- but it also has a social function as knot with the network. In most of the cases, olive oil farmers' co-operatives in Andalusia are born in order to offer this service to their members.

MAP 1. OLIVE OIL PDO LOCATION



Source: Regional Government for Agriculture and Fishery, Junta de Andalucía

MAP 2 ANDALUSIAN GEOGRAPHICAL MAP



Source: Regional Government for Agriculture and Fishery, Junta de Andalucía

In Andalusia -as can be notice in these maps- most of the olive oil PDOs are allocated in mountainous areas. It is not just a coincidence, olive trees are less productive in mountainous areas, and these certifications were conceived as a strategy to make them profitable (Sanz & Macias, 2005).

QUALITY AND CERTIFICATION

Quality protection through geographical indications in the agro-food sector is a practice with long tradition on the Mediterranean countries. In fact, geographical indications were already regulated in the southern countries on the 1920s, several decades before the current Protected Geographical Status (PGS) framework came into force. This early protection figures aimed to protect and preserve specific product from particular areas. Portugal, France, Spain and Italy were, and still are, pioneers on this kind of regulation; a regulation that was firstly designed for wine sector and later expanded to other products. In fact, it was the 80s EU's enlargement to the southern countries what increased pressure for EU regulations⁶, which finally passed in 1992 the PGS framework, which is currently governed by the Council Regulation (EC) No 510/2006 of 20 March 2006, known as *Regulation on the protection of geographical indications and designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs*. Nowadays, this tendency continues within the EU, where 75% of the goods labelled under the PGS framework still are from southern countries (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006).

In the case of Spain, the quality label strategy was formally adopted in 1932, with the *Estatuto del Vino*, which regulated the *Denomination of Origin* (DO) as a legal figure for wine production. In 1970, the government passed a law that embraced other products such as olive oil, cheese, and cured ham. In 1992, with the arrival of the EU PGS framework, the Spanish DO and SD (Specific Designation) figures were finally translated to PDO and PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) respectively⁷. These two types of geographical descriptions are different, PDO describe foodstuffs which are produced, processed and prepared in a given geographical area using recognised know-how, PGI indicates a link with the area in at least one of the three stages.

⁶ According to some scholars (see Ventura *et al*, in O'Connors *et al* 2006: 22), these enlargement also change the CAP perspective increasing support on "mediterranean" products. Before the CAP use to support products characteristic from north European countries production, such as cereals and livestock,

⁷ Ministry of Agriculture, Fishery and Nutrition Law, January 25th of 1994.

It can be said that the differential added value of this goods is rooted in their territorial link. So, it is their *territorial anchorage* (Zimmerman, 1998, 2001) what introduces the distinctive characteristic of the product. It means that the final products incorporate the any inherent quality attributed to the territory, both kind of, natural (climate, ecosystem, geography, etc.) and the cultural qualities (local techniques, traditional knowledge, history, etc.). According to the current regulation (EC 510/2006, art. 2.1), it is the final amount of this concrete and intangible characteristic what makes any product susceptible of protection.

In order to be perceptible, the special qualities of these products -which may not be perceived at a first glance- need to be linked to visual signs, hence it was critical to establish common quality symbols (Allaire & Sylvander, 1997). These visual devices (labels, logos, words) help consumers to identify quality products, increasing its chances of being perceived, and add credibility and trust to them. For this reason, the EU established two logos that identify PDO and PG:

FIGURE 1. CERTIFICATION' LOGOS



PDO European Logo



PG European Logo

It is important to notice that official quality recognition labels not only defend consumers interest, like commercial brands may do assuring that predefined desirable characteristic can be find in their products. They also defend producers, who can establish monopoly over goods reputation. This strategy has achieved a great importance in Spain. In 2001 there were 153 geographic designations, while nowadays there are 252 so far –out of which 165 are PDOs and 87 are GPIs.

This increasing process of quality certification can be linked with the new directives of Rural Development Policy; indeed, quality strategy is one of the main guidelines in most of the

LAG. This new rural institution –the LAGs- have been crucial in the creation of new PDO, in most of the cases they have leaded the application process, and they also have been able to activate and coordinate local actors.

Although there is a wide range of products under this kind of certification, three of them represent almost half of the total certifications: wine, olive oil and cheese. In the same way, but in a regional level, Andalusia is a representative region for this kind of strategy, because there are 35 geographic designations in this territory.

TABLE 1.GEOGRAPHIC DESIGNATIONS IN SPAIN (2009)

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PDO	GPI
Wine	68	68	-
Other wine products	2	2	-
Spirits	15	--	15
Cheese and butter	30	29	1
Rice	3	2	1
Legume	8	1	7
Vegetables	23	7	16
Fruit	20	13	7
Honey	3	2	1
Bakery goods	12	-	12
Olive Oil	31	31	-
Meat	16	-	16
Cured Ham	6	5	1
Cold meat and meat stuff	8	-	8
Spices and condiments	3	3	-
Fish, molluscs and crustaceans	3	1	2
Cider	1	1	-
TOTAL	252	165	87

Source: Ministry of Environment, Rural and Sea Areas

NATURE AS HIGH QUALITY LABEL

Nature is the second pillar of this strategy of high quality production for local agro-food. The introduction of this element in the general strategy was necessary for two reasons: it would

be another strategy to unfold added value to local products, and it would be a new element for Nature Protected Areas (NPAs) management. In this sense, it is important to remember that nature protection is a very important issue in Andalusia. This region has 153 NPAs, which means that 20% of the total region is under some nature protection regulation. Thus, an important part of the population is affected in a daily basis by these restrictive regulations.

Due to this context, it was necessary to create a new way to support local economies. Thus, the regional ministry of environment promoted a new label for local products allocated in NPAs, “Marca Parque Natural de Andalucía”⁸. This project seeks to promote enterprising initiatives that agree with the principles of sustainable development, providing them with a new element of differentiation that costumers would associate with environmental values, historical roots and local *know-how*. In other words, this label was created to benefit companies allocated in NPAs, giving them the monopoly of natural parks identities.

In this way, Natural Parks can offer to the visitor high quality and differentiated products and services linked with the NAP where they are. Therefore, a triple benefit can be observed as the main outcome of this strategy. First, costumers can identified easily this new offer thanks to the label “Parque Natural de Andalucía”. Second, local enterprising can benefit from the image of the NPA where they are allocated. Third, the Natural Park economy become “greener” due to the regulation that business have to follow in order to get the label

This label can be achieved by three kinds of products or services according to the internal regulation: local agro-food, traditional handicraft, and rural tourism establishment. Another of the main requirements to obtain the label is that they have to be made and/or offered within Natural Parks and in towns with less than 10.000 inhabitants. Nowadays, there are 193 enterprises and 1.125 products certified with this label, which means that they have to follow the three guidelines: high quality, environmental respect and local precedence. Thus, their consumption become an easy way to *taste nature* (Lozano & Durán, 2007), a symbolic method for landscape consumption and appropriation of a way of life.

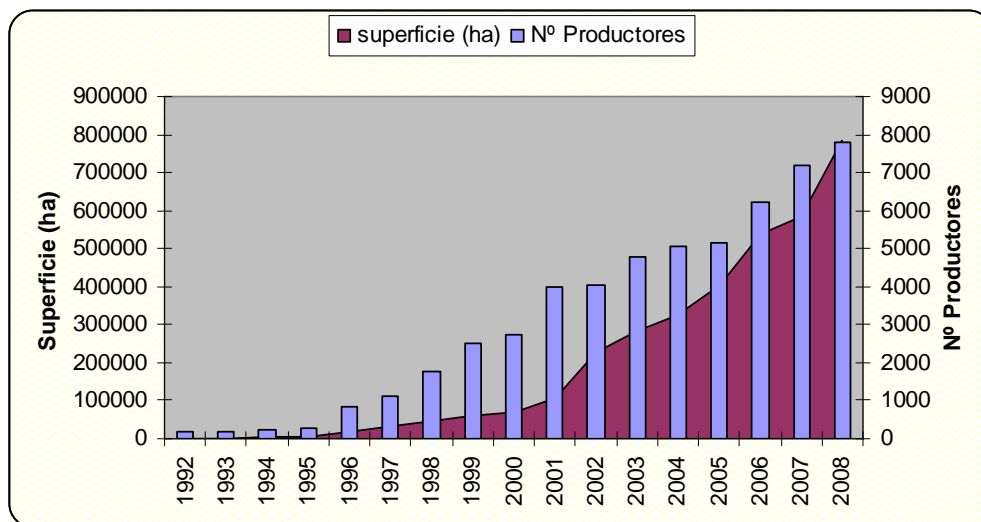
This strategy underlines the interest of public administration on sustainable rural development, linking local economy and nature protection. But it is not the only case where public administration try to link NPAs and sustainable development, there are different activities that have been promoted with more emphasis in this kind of areas, such as organic

⁸ This Project was elaborated taking as reference the initiative of French Natural Parks Federation, and with the support of the Project “*Adaptación de Empresas al Desarrollo Sostenible en los Parques Naturales*” (Adapt Community Initiative).

agriculture. Nature values are specially linked to organic agriculture⁹, which is another rising strategy for rural development. This activity has achieved an international expansion in the last decades, and Spain has participated actively in this growth. Nowadays, Spain is the seventh country on organic agriculture surface in the world, and the second within EU (Willer *et al*, 2008).

Andalusia is the most representative of the Spanish leadership in this sector for two reasons: (a) the early interest of regional public administration on sector regulation and institutional support, and (b) because this region account 60% of total Spanish certificated surface and more than 30% of producers. In the next graph it can be observed that far from be a stationary phenomenon, there is a continuous increase during this decade in both data (Direccion General de Agricultura Ecológica, Junta de Andalucía, 2007)

GRAPH 1. ORGANIC FARMING SURFACE AND PRODUCERS EVOLUTION IN ANDALUSIA



Source: Regional Government for Agriculture and Fishery

There are three main land uses for organic agricultural: pasture, grassland and forage. The three of them, together with forestry and wild harvest, account 76% of total organic agriculture surface. It means that the other 24% of the land uses are crops, such as cereals, leguminous, olive trees and dry nuts. In the same way, organic cattle-rising in Andalusia also experienced a great expansion from 124 farms in 2000 to the current 1.732, reaching leadership in Spain.

⁹ According to EU regulation (CE) NO 834/2007, organic agriculture means a management system that try to promote and preserve natural resource, generating biodiversity, respecting animal welfare, and produce food without chemical and/or synthetic waste.

This sector also received a strong institutional support since 2002. In that year the regional government approved a specific programme for organic agriculture named “*Plan Andaluz de Agricultura Ecológica 2002-2006*” (Andalusian Plan for Organic Agriculture, APOA), with a total budget of 93,8€ millions. Unfold of organic agriculture in NPAs is strongly linked with this plan, because it was one of the main measures of the APOA. Indeed, half of the total organic agriculture surface was allocated in NPAs in 2006 (Consejería de Medio Ambiente, Junta de Andalucía, 2006).

The main regional institution involved in this process is known as *Dirección General de Agricultura Ecológica*. Since the creation of this institution, one of its main achievements has been to help environmental administration to understand that organic agriculture and cattle raising are sustainable activities, and also that they are alternative niches for local population. These activities have a positive impact on soil through non-chemical fertilisation; they also reduce soil erosion and increase biodiversity, which preserve natural resource from extinction.

At the same time, most of the publicly owned land has been certified by regional government as organically use land, which means that the private farmers that rent them had to restructure their productive system to organic farmers. Natural Park *Sierra de Cazorla Segura y Las Villas* is a good example of this phenomenon. This NPA is allocated at the northwest of the region, and it is the biggest in the whole country. During the last 4 years, there has been an open dialogue between the Natural Park administration and the local population. This negotiation process has as main objective to develop organic farming in the area. It has not been an easy dialogue, both parts have been in an open conflict since the declaration of the area as NPA, due to the restrictive regulation that attach this kind of declaration. Nevertheless, this experience had a very positive outcome, because local population has becomes active on natural resources management (Aguilar et al, 2009).

So far, organic agriculture promotion on NPAs seems to us one of the most interesting initiatives among high quality production strategy. It is important to notice that this project links a wide open concept –such as organic agriculture- with specific territories, the NAPs. Therefore, customers get a double benefit: (a) they can buy a product whose quality and safety are guarantee; and at the same time, (b) they can get access to specific values linked with the territorial original, such as culture, tradition and nature.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to demonstrate that high quality products should be promoted taking on account the different processes where post-industrial society is involved, which also affect rural areas. Thus, a successful promotion would be the one able to link these products with these processes, and use this link to get an advantage in the currently globalised market.

In the first part of this paper, we have underlined the existing connection between the CAP's new directives about rural development and multifunctional agriculture with the new Andalusian strategy for high quality production in rural areas. In this sense, we have highlighted how new public awareness about industrial model consequences have opened the door for sustainable rural economies promotion. This new model can reduce overproduction and stimulate rural economies that use to be marginalised from the market. It is possible because this high quality production strategy becomes a new tool for rural communities in order to differentiate their products from other. Indeed, this strategy links the three pillars of the new rural scenario: high quality products, distinction, and territorial economy.

Secondly, it has been demonstrated that high quality agro-food promotion is a strategy that works successfully with the new global model of consumption. Economy of scale tends to disembed products from their references, this new model offers products territorially re-embedded; and at same time, products with higher levels of quality, safety and trust.

Thirdly, and following the previous idea, we have emphasized how this strategy connects with the new tendency of *distinctive consumption*; a new consumption tendency that breaks down the old patterns of mass consumption.

Then, we have analyzed the relationship between this increasing dynamic of high quality production in rural areas and rural development programs, underlining the increasing institutionalisation of these programs in Andalusia; an institutionalisation that is specially high in territorial marketing strategies.

In the last part of this paper, we have confirmed that this process of productive differentiation is associated with the deep transformation in the Spanish rural scenario. This transformation –which is an outcome of the new RDP-, is changing rural economies, which tends to move from raw agricultural production towards new economic model with higher profitability based

on existing endogenous resources. At the same time, this whole transformation is changing rural image from poorness and stillness to dynamic and innovative.

To conclude, although there are some challenges that still need to be overcome, high quality strategies give rural economies the right direction towards a new model of economic differentiation. One of the main outcomes of this new model is therefore the re-embedding of agro-food within their original territory, which helps consumers to experience food in a different way than within the traditional economy of scale. Consequently, rural areas have become one of the most interesting and productive scenarios to analyse the interaction between tradition and innovation, and the combination of the past legacy and the seek for better future

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