

Towards a geography of tourism and agrarian initiatives. The case of Lamego and Távora

João Pedro Mendonça*

University of Maia (Portugal)

Abstract: The agrarian change constitutes for many rural territories an alternative to the existing and traditional forms of production. This fact is particularly evident in areas of less social and economic dynamism, as is the case of Lamego and Távora in the Douro region - north of Portugal. In general terms, this region has witnessed a demographic decline and a reconfiguration of its agrarian economic structure, which used to be highly dependent on wine and fruit (apple) productions. Rural transformation has been supported by local producers and their initiatives, as well as by European and Portuguese agricultural policies. Its main consequences will be presented in this article as a case study.

Keywords: Rural change; Agrarian initiatives; Local development; Lamego and Távora region.

En dirección a una geografía de las iniciativas agrarias y del turismo. El caso de Lamego y Távora

Resumen: El cambio agrario constituye para muchos territorios rurales una alternativa a las formas de producción existentes y tradicionales. Este hecho es particularmente evidente en áreas de menor dinamismo social y económico, como es el caso de Lamego y Távora en la región del Duero - norte de Portugal. En términos generales, esta región ha sido testigo de un declive demográfico y una reconfiguración de su estructura económica agraria, que solía ser muy dependiente de las producciones de vino y frutas (manzana). La transformación rural ha sido apoyada por los productores locales y sus iniciativas, así como por las políticas agrícolas europeas y portuguesas. Sus principales consecuencias serán presentadas en este artículo como un caso de estudio.

Palabras Clave: Cambio rural; Iniciativas agrarias; Desarrollo local; Región de Lamego y Távora

1. Introduction

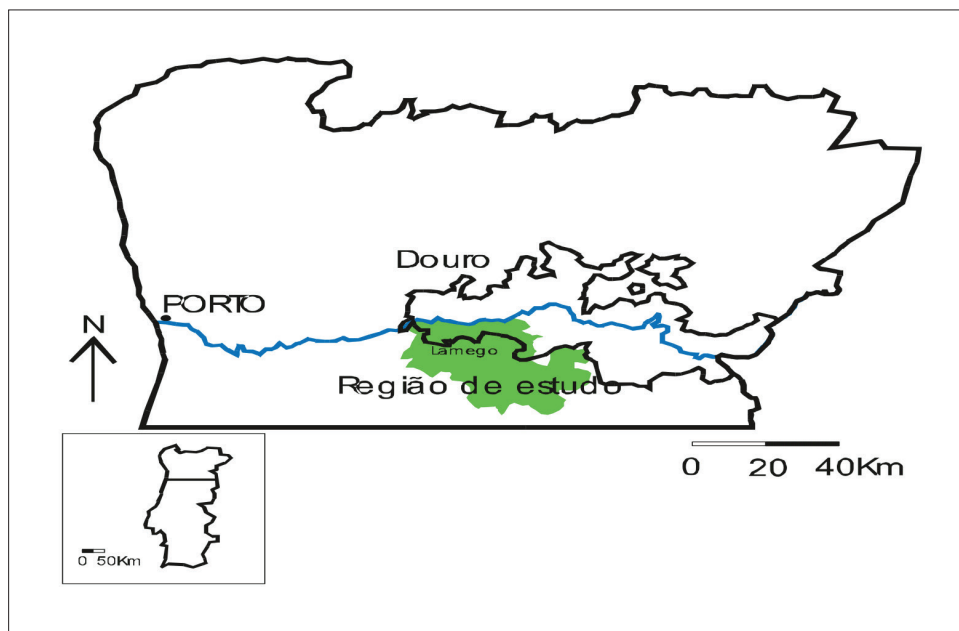
Currently, there are several challenges facing rural areas. If before their main function was to guarantee the obtaining of agricultural products, today they assume a multiple function, not only economic, they are the guardians of the environmental balance of many areas, they are linked to the usufruct and/or preservation of a rich historical and cultural heritage, so new activities related to tourism are installed there, to name just a few examples. In this regard, see also the opinions that had already been expressed since the end of the 20th century by authors such as Arlindo Cunha (Cunha, 2000) J. Varela, for the Portuguese case (Varela, 1993: 99-104) or Bernard Kayser, André Brun, Jean Cavaillès, Philippe Lacombe (1994), regarding the transformations carried out in rural areas throughout Europe (Kayser, Brun, Cavaillès, Lacombe, 1994).

Authors such as Alberti (Alberti, 2000: 120-157) also exemplify in the European space such different cases as Tuscany in Italy, Barroso in Portugal, or the Grenadine vineyard in Spain. Despite being territorial contexts with distinct characteristics, it is concluded that in each of them, there was a transition from traditional forms of economic organization to modern systems. In these processes, the decisions of local actors were decisive, so that, based on an external stimulus, such as the establishment of a large industrial unit, investment by emigrants returning to their region of origin or the action of rural development programs, if the aforementioned modernization took place¹.

* University of Maia (Portugal); E-mail: mendonca.u@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5212-1758>

In the present case, it is proposed to analyze a process of agricultural specialization and modernization around the fruit sector and the requalification of viticulture in the small demarcation of Lamego and Távora (maps 1), trying to understand the role of institutional initiatives and small local producers in these transformation dynamics.

Maps 1: Viticulture in the small demarcation of Lamego and Távora



Source: Author's elaboration.

Similar to the conclusions obtained in other works on rural and agrarian development that focused on these themes, the ability to mobilize agricultural producers will be analyzed, concluding that it is from the initiative and innovation demonstrated by fruit and winegrowers that results lead to the progress of this type of rural areas (Mendonça, 2011).

As mentioned initially, the starting point of the theoretical and conceptual discussion began with the analysis of the term “development”, first in a generic way and in a second point applied to rural areas and the perception of the multiplicity of transformations that have been taking place there. In this sense, it coincided with a perspective of evolution not only merely economic and social, but promoting the conservation of resources for present and future generations, that is, sustainable. The methodology used includes the analysis of statistical data on the increase in fruit production and the categorization of producers according to their capacity for innovation and transformation of their agricultural units. After this differentiation, an in-depth survey was applied to 40 fruit and vine growers. It was also useful for the consolidation of the methodological matrix and for the definition of the structure of the work, the investigation around the agricultural policies of the Portuguese state, in particular the ones that most interested for the study of the dynamics in Lamego and Távora: apple fruit growing and viticulture.

2. Theoretical framework

After the mid-1980s, the focus of the debate on changes in rural areas shifted from issues of agricultural competitiveness and abandonment of agriculture to the emphasis on diversifying strategies and

opportunities (Loureço, 1985), which implies specific and integrative policies if they want to preserve certain environmental aspects at risk.

Aspects such as health protection, agricultural improvements and the storage of products become priorities. Intervention is also beginning at the level of the fruit and wine production lines.

Currently, there is talk of the need to combat the depopulation of less dynamic rural areas and bring the levels of development between these and the richest regions closer together, appealing to alternatives such as multiple activities or establishing specific policies to support regions where the problems are more severe. Issues such as soil degradation and contamination also become a reason for analysis and discussion (Gonçalves & Mendonça, 2021). The reform of the Structural Funds, through the establishment of selective support measures depending on the type of regions concerned, the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy or the establishment of specific rural development programs are other initiatives. In the case study presented in this text, the role of the main interlocutors that perform and materialize them in the territory will be detailed (technicians and leaders of local authorities, public and private economic agents, agricultural cooperatives, etc.). It will start from an initial hypothesis in which we try to relate the different actors involved, considering their contribution to the decision-making process.

Based on the above consideration, the statistical indicators characterizing the activities carried out within the agricultural holding were complemented by quantitative data but also of qualitative nature, obtained from the local services of the Ministry of Agriculture and regional services of the Financial Institute for Support to the Development of Portuguese Agriculture and in producer associations and cooperatives. This review allowed us to respond to two objectives that we initially set ourselves; that of identifying the role of technical and financial management bodies (public as well as private) insofar as they have provided, together with individual producers, to the ongoing transformations².

3. The data

We are in the presence of seven municipalities: Armamar, Lamego, Moimenta da Beira, Penedono, Sernancelhe, Tabuaço and Tarouca, which together cover an area of 1085 Km², with a total resident population of 71,412 individuals, which is equivalent to a population density of 65.8 inhab./Km².

In this area, the predominance of the agrarian economy based on small property is especially clear, although it also includes other forms of economic exploitation of the land, such as those resulting from medium capitalist property in the Demarcated Douro Region. In the specific case of apple fruit growing in Lamego and Távora, it is pertinent to analyze the dynamics of specialization and productive concentration in what in recent decades has been the Portuguese fruit growing region where this production has increased the most.

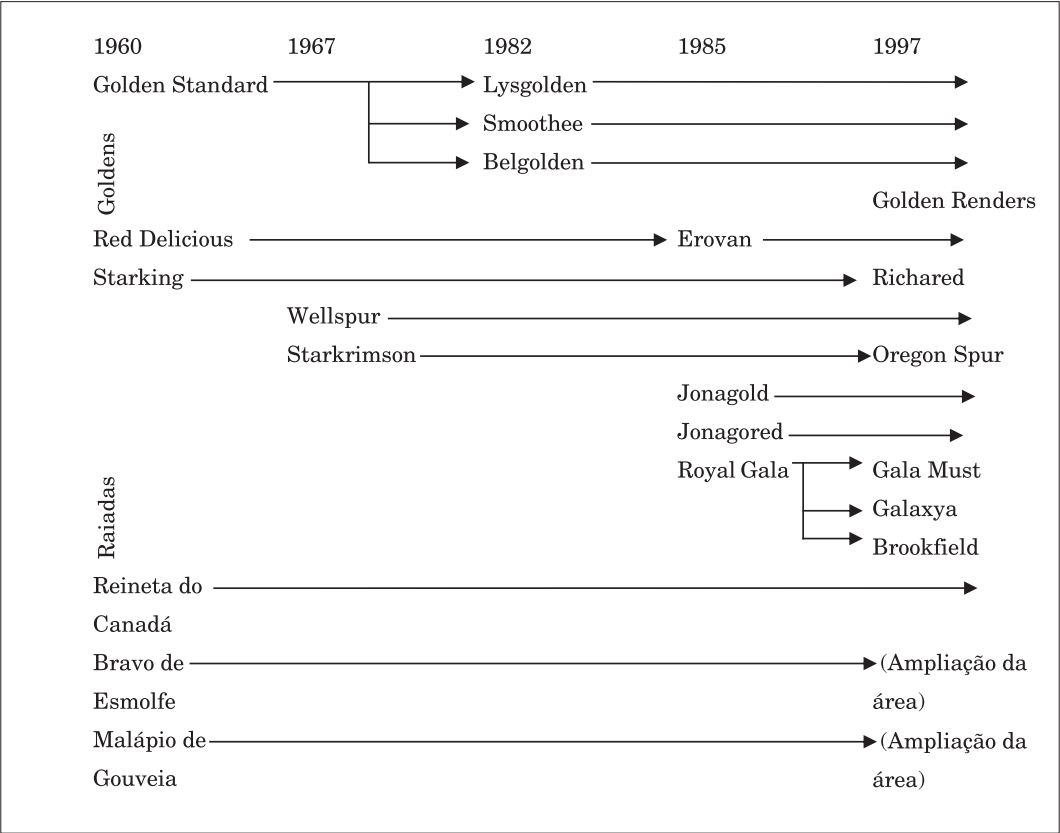
In the mid-60s of the 20th century, the process of installing and monitoring the industrial orchards in Lamego and Távora was consolidated, with much more assiduous contact between the Ministry's central structure, based in Alcobaça, and the technicians of the V Technical Brigade. This area, despite still having little representation at the time in the context of national production, was beginning to be considered by the leaders of the National Fruit Plans. From that date and until the present, it has not differed from what has been done in terms of technical evolution in Portuguese fruit growing as a whole, in terms of the varieties introduced and the use of rootstocks (image 1).

What happened in this region at the end of the 50's was different: it resulted from the diffusion of the technical principles emanating from Alcobaça and that started from its research and experimentation center for fruit growing. However, if the State showed interest in expanding the area of fruit production in different regions of the country, something that had already been happening since the Fruit Development Plans of the 1930s, something more than technical decentralization was needed from the decision-making center in Lisbon, so that rationalized fruit farming could be implemented in this region. The intervention of a landowner in the region was decisive for the State to include this area in its plan to expand national orchards. That leader was the Count of Alpedrinha, D. Francisco Manuel de Vilhena³.

In our opinion, this cooperative effort had two consequences that interfered and still interfere with the effectiveness and profitability of these organizational structures. The examples that we had the opportunity to get to know in the four municipalities studied made it possible to evidence, from interviews with managers and technicians, as well as with some of the members and by comparing

the various cooperatives, the following aspects: they are structures whose implementation followed a logic of municipal dimension, not always the most recommendable from a financial and technical point of view, but which resulted from national guidelines. The technical and human equipment and the creation of structures for the elaboration and bottling of wines was a slow process and to which satisfactory levels of feasibility and even endowment did not always correspond. Later, the same happened with fruit, since in the area not exclusively wine-growing, some cooperatives began, in the 1970s/80s, to also integrate these products into their transformation and marketing chains. As an obstacle to this process, there is the overlapping of individual structures in terms of commerce, since many producers have their own cold rooms and their own sales outlets. After the previous phase, some other associative bodies have also emerged with the vocation of providing technical support to fruit and wine-growing farms.

Image 1: Synthesis of the evolution of the varieties of the Lamego and Távora orchards



Source: Interviews with technicians from agricultural areas (own elaboration).

Methodologically, we chose to consider two selection factors: to establish which owners of farms would be the target of the in-depth interview without having their own cold storage facilities and those who did. Using the methodology of content analysis, a description was made of the different strategies and decision-making processes that have interfered in the dynamics undertaken by the various agricultural producers. It will be seen below that in most cases the dedication to agriculture followed a family bond, sometimes of several generations, but the transition from the traditional crops of the region (potatoes, cereals and cattle raising) to monoculture of orchards resulted from the influence of certain local leaders.

In addition to the individual initiative component that was just analyzed above, there was an institutional and legislative change (image 3) that also interfered in the agrarian development process. It is important to discuss our results. We have already seen that the average size of agricultural holdings is still far from an ideal situation. We will see below that this atomization is repeated in the technical and commercial support structure.

The transition from a situation of an internal, protected and closed market, with direct subsidies (trees from official nurseries) and mandatory technical support, when linked to the subsidy system, to another, in which external competition is very intense and in which the apple production sector is only subsidized indirectly, is mentioned by several producers as one of the reasons for the current difficulties. In the 60s and 70s of the 20th century, many producers became rich with their orchards. It is important to remember that there was a period of intense expansion of the internal market, with the growth of urbanization rates in the country, the emergence of a middle class that started to buy fruit daily, due to changes in food consumption habits and an increase in the power of purchase.

On the other hand, in the case of wine, the emergence of individual producers-bottlers, holders of medium-sized properties, even if it includes some of the cooperative wineries that are registered in this typology, did not call into question the hegemony of the exporters in the commercialization of Port Wine, since they dominate around 98% of the business. In terms of the domestic market, producer-bottlers still manage to have some representation (for the year 2002 they represented around 7% of the volume of wine sold) and their importance for exports is notoriously small.

Another theme is that of heritage, related to viticulture, as wine is beginning to stand out in the promotion strategies carried out by farms and by producers and traders. Old mills and wine production instruments have been recovered, using them in certain harvests, to which a special character is attributed, for example, mentioning this aspect on the label itself. Images or drawings of the traditional terraces of the Douro also appear frequently on the bottles. All these aspects can be differentiators in a wine market, where its promotion characteristics tend to be increasingly standardized. The Douro must continue to explore these aspects of landscape differentiation. Only in this way will producers be able to compensate, at least in part, for the higher production costs, as they are located in a mountain wine-growing area.

Image 2: Summary of reform measures in the fruit sector – major steps in the apple sector

20's
Creation of the Alcobaca Orchards Reconstitution Board in 1921
30's, 40's and 50's
Fruit Campaign
First measures to rationalize production came up against the lack of modern orchards in the country
60's and 70's
Technical reformism and financial incentives for “economically viable” farms
Resizing of sales structures
80's and 90's
Absence of specific measures under the Fruit and Vegetables Common Policies for the apple production
The use of indirect support measures

Source: Own elaboration.

Subsequent studies carried out by technicians assigned to work in Lamego and Távora in the fruit sector showed how not only planting practices are changed, but also the varieties planted. Up until then, the tall trees (free standing) were subject to small interventions in terms of pruning, thus developing considerably. Regional varieties predominated, with a repertoire from the early 1960s pointing to the existence of 23 varieties. As an alternative, during this first experience, it is suggested to maintain the “Bravo de Esmolfe” variety and to introduce “Reineta” from Canada and Starking. In smaller quantities, Golden Delicious and Winterbanana were planted. In the first few years, the income obtained was considerable, to the point that technicians from Alcobaca paid a visit to the orchard to see the results obtained.

In a short time, the first placements were made on the Porto market, through buyers who came to see the orchard while it was still in flower. The sale therefore took place at the tree, the health costs being borne equally by the buyer. To avoid the hottest period and as the trip took a long time, it had to be carried out at night. The apples followed the road, packed in wicker “baskets” and wooden boxes. The commercial success, at first generating distrust on the part of the remaining farmers in Armamar, quickly led them to consider fruit growing as an alternative to their meager income.

It should be noted, however, that the performance of the technical services at that stage was carried out on a voluntary basis by the fruit growers. Only the most educated and informed normally had the initiative to seek help.

The technicians often felt that the new teachings clashed with the established practices, especially those referring to the degree of intensification of planting, spacing and ways of driving the trees. Parallel to technical advice, the Brigades employees had another important function: they provided professional training to pruner candidates and courses for plant sanitary treatments.

4. Tourism in Távora-Varosa

This group of counties, all of them marked by a strong presence of the agricultural economy, had for centuries coalesced around the city of Lamego, whose importance derives from the fact that it is the seat of the Bishop. In addition of being known for its historical legacy, related to the ecclesiastical function, it is the testimony of several periods of evolution of the wine region. In the 16th century, Douro wines were still known by the designation of “Wines of Lamego”.

The city also stands out for its monumental component, particularly from the medieval period (Castelo, Sé), and for the 18th century emblazoned houses. Around the city, in several municipalities already mentioned, the testimonies of the historical past are also significant, with special emphasis on the Cistercian convents of S. João de Tarouca and Salzedas, Ponte de Ucanha in Tarouca and S. Pedro das Águias in Tabuaço. There are also numerous traces of Romanization and even of earlier times. In order to boost the tourist use of this heritage, four medieval routes were established on the initiative of the Commercial and Industrial Association of Lamego and the Douro Sul Valley, with these municipalities included in three of them. The other component is the wine tourism routes, such as the Port Wine/ Douro and the Távora-Varosa Region one.

Table 1: Tourism exploitation in the Douro region

Theme	Forms of tourist exploitation
Nature	“Active tourism” (BTT routes, mountaineering, hiking...); Observation trails in the Douro International Natural Park
Wine	Viticulture Port wine route (winetourism); Távora-Varosa wine route
Culture	Popular culture Festivals and pilgrimages; Handicraft fairs and shows
High Culture	High Culture Meetings “Casa de Mateus”; Silver Biennial; Cultural routes (Medieval...)
Museums	Museum of Lamego; Port Wine Museum- Régua; Museum of Côa
Others	Other Congresses, Conventions; Meetings (Old cars...) “Almond trees in bloom”; Sport internships (river activities)
Exploring	Exploring Gastronomy; Routes of popular architecture and ethnography
Developing	Bird sightseeing; Routes of popular architecture and ethnography

Source: The author.

Authors such as Carmina Cavaco use the expression “light tourism” (Cavaco, 1996) to designate tourist activity based on quality and specificity (Cavaco, 1999), namely by the type of accommodation and food, human relations and personalized treatment, aspects that the Douro, in general, and this

area in particular, can offer, in opposition to the typical forms of reception of the areas of greater affluence .

The tourist exploitation of the Douro region can also be developed through different types of thematic tourism services and products (table 1).

On the other hand, as mentioned by Cravidão and Cunha (Cravidão, & Cunha, 1993), it is necessary to avoid crossing load thresholds that jeopardize the survival of tourism. In this sense, initiatives such as the classification of the Douro as a world heritage site are essential.

Another aspect that we seek to highlight, concerns cultural practices. Two ways of materializing this happy union between tourism and the maintenance of traditional local knowledge can be mentioned: the constitution of thematic routes (Gonçalves, 2018) around the monumental and ethnographic heritage, or in the case of the Demarcated Region, the one related to the dissemination of wine producing activities, especially those that concern ancestral practices, but also, through demonstrative processes of more modern practices (Gonçalves, 2018). From all that has been said, the contribution of tourism to the establishment of a population that might otherwise tend to leave the Douro.

5. Conclusions

This work focused on the agricultural reformism of a small territory near the Douro Valley – Lamego and Távora. The theoretical framework perspective was divided into two items. The first

sought to discuss the main lines that guided the transformations of the European countryside. The second developed in more depth Portuguese agricultural reformism from the end of the 19th century to the present.

It is in this context that the transition from an eminently internal, protected and closed fruit market took place to an open market subject to very strong external competition, upon accession to the European Economic Community in 1986. Direct subsidies, even in small amounts (namely those referring to agro-environmental measures), in a fruit sector that has not been intervened, but in which the principles of technical, logistical and promotional rationalization have allowed the creation of a new typology of exploitation. Previously, the initiative was practically limited to farmers linked to the guilds, generally landowners with greater capacity to obtain specific training and information, currently with the introduction of new principles of productive rationalization, seed selection, improvement of fruit conservation processes (first networks of cold) and the establishment of their own marketing mechanisms, make it possible to lower unit production costs. Greater external competition did not exclude a significant increase in national production, particularly in the case of the production of the national variety “rocha” pear and apples.

Since the 1980s, the area of fruit production has been expanding, not only in terms of the total area, but also giving rise to a growing specialization, intensification and concentration of production. A smaller number of farms and an increase in the average area of farms have occurred not only in the parishes of fruit specialization, but also in the mountain area, where other cultures and livestock and cereal farming continue to be dominant.

The most recent Common Agricultural Policy reforms, namely those following the 2003 one, seem to be able to better address the specificities of our agriculture in general and of Lamego and Távora in particular. Portugal adapts in a particularly advantageous way to a regional agricultural production specialization based on obtaining products of geographical origin and with moderately intensive production levels.

The application document of the region to world heritage, points out the importance of wine-growing landscapes, as being able to integrate this interactivity between man and nature. We can say that the contribution of the classification is relevant and can play an important role in the maintenance of the population and in the economic and social valorization of the region. Since this is an area characterized as depressed in economic and social terms, tourism must be an integral part of the process of diversifying the economic base and be closely linked to the viability of viticulture itself.

Finally, it is concluded that we are facing a dynamic in which tradition and innovation, national agricultural policies, but also the influence of local leaders were combined. The future of this region has been defined through the territory and its agents.

Bibliography

- Alberti, G. 2000. Desarrollo rural, instituciones y procesos de cambio institucional. In Carmagnani, M. & Gordillo de Anda, G. (coord.), *Desarrollo social y cambios productivos en el mundo rural europeo contemporáneo* pp.120-157). México D. F.: El Colegio de México; Fideicomiso Historia de las Américas; Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Cavaco, C. 1999. *Desenvolvimento rural: desafio e utopia*. Lisboa: Centro de Estudos Geográficos da Universidade de Lisboa.
- Cavaco, C. 1996. *Turismo e Lazeres*. Lisboa: Centro de Estudos Geográficos da Universidade de Lisboa.
- Cravidão, F. & Cunha, J. 1993. Ambiente e práticas turísticas em Portugal. in *Inforgeo - Revista da Associação Portuguesa de Geógrafos*, 6 (dez.).
- Cunha, A. 2000. *A Política Agrícola Comum e o Futuro do Mundo Rural*. Lisboa: Plátano Editora.
- Dias, A. 1995. *Turismo no espaço rural. Um estudo sobre o sector de alojamento em espaço rural na região do Douro*. Vila Real: UTAD.
- Gonçalves, E. & Mendonça, J. P. 2021. Transformações do espaço rural e dinâmicas de desenvolvimento territorial e turístico do Douro. In Sacramento, O.; Gonçalves, E & Pereiro Pérez, X. (eds.), *Douro turístico: representações, recursos e políticas* (pp.45-62). Maia/Vila Real: Ed. ISMAI. ISBN 978-989-99997-8-1
- Gonçalves, E. 2018. Douro em movimento, aldeias com vida – Caderno de boas práticas. *PASOS. Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural*, 16 (2): 457-464. 7121 Doi: <https://doi.org/10.25145/j.pasos.2018.16.032>
- Kayser, B.; Brun, A.; Cavallès, J. & Lacombe, P. 1994. *Pour une ruralité choisie*, Marseille: Datar/Éditions de l'Aube.
- Lourenço, F. & Rodrigo, I. 1985. Política agrária e reconversão da agricultura e fruticultura no distrito da Guarda. In Paulouro, A., “Jornadas da Beira Interior” (I Vol., pp.145-191). Fundação: *Jornal do Fundão*.
- Mendonça, J. 2011. *Geografia das microiniciativas agrárias e do turismo em Lamego e Távora*. Maia: ISMAI Press e CEDTUR.
- Varela, J. 1992. *A agricultura e o espaço rural*. Lisboa: Direção geral de planeamento e agricultura; Ministério da agricultura.

Notes

- ¹ The great diversity of case studies marks a new stage in the approach of this type of dynamics, which is no longer exclusively applicable to the formation of industrial districts, but may refer to agriculture, tourism promotion, etc.
- ² There are not many references about the profile of the fruit-growing investor. One of the few works in this sense is that of Lourenço and Rodrigo (Lourenço and Rodrigo, 1985) on fruit development in the district of Guarda. Through an exhaustive survey of the social groups involved in the process, the authors argue that the intensification of fruit growing in this specific case was not limited to state action. The similarities with Lamego and Távora are evident.
- ³ For the reconstitution of this history, information was provided by the relatives of this precursor of the introduction of fruit farming in the region and who are currently the descendants and owners of the largest farm in the parish of “Gojim” – “Armamar” (27 ha). Dialogues with his last caretaker were also useful, especially with regard to the commercial procedures adopted in the period of start-up of rationalized fruit growing. Another contribution, possibly even the most enriching, resulted from a lengthy visit to the Professional Agricultural School of Lamego. The conversation with its director proved to be extremely enlightening, as he was one of the first technical elements of the then Ministry of Agriculture to intervene in this initial period.

Recibido: 11/05/2022
 Reenviado: 12/08/2022
 Aceptado: 20/09/2022
 Sometido a evaluación por pares anónimos