

# Gastronomy and the contribution to the sustainable development of tourism in the Serra da Estrela Region: the case of the Museu do Pão

Cristina Rodrigues\* Manuel Salgado\*\* Paula Pires\*\*\*  
Rafaela Silva\*\*\*\*

Polytechnic Institute of Guarda (Portugal)

**Abstract:** Tourism can enhance regions with relevant endogenous resources where gastronomy can assert itself as a strategic product due to its contribution to the tourism experience. The present research focused on the relevance of gastronomy to the development of tourism in the Serra da Estrela region, for which a qualitative analysis was carried out based on a case study - the Museu do Pão museum complex - through semi-structured interviews with the directors of the Museu do Pão (Bread Museum) and the Municipality of Seia, in accordance with the literature and articulated with the research question and objectives. As a result, it was found that gastronomy makes a strong contribution to the sustainable development of the territory under study, with the Museu do Pão playing a central role in this process. This suggests that the valorisation of this asset in Serra da Estrela has an analogous function to other regions with similar characteristics.

**Keywords:** Gastronomy; Tourist products; Serra da Estrela; Sustainability; Endogenous products.

## La gastronomía y la contribución al desarrollo sostenible del turismo en la región de la Serra da Estrela: el caso del Museu do Pão

**Resumen:** El turismo puede potenciar regiones con recursos endógenos relevantes, donde la gastronomía puede imponerse como producto estratégico por su contribución a la experiencia turística. La presente investigación se centró en el estudio de la importancia de la gastronomía para el desarrollo del turismo en la Región de la Serra da Estrela, para lo cual se utilizó un análisis cualitativo basado en un estudio de caso - el Complejo Museológico del Museu do Pão, a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas con los directores del Museu do Pão (Museo del Pan) y del Ayuntamiento de Seia, de acuerdo con la literatura y articulado con la pregunta y el objetivo de la investigación. Como resultado, se verificó que la gastronomía tiene una fuerte contribución para el desarrollo sostenible del territorio estudiado, teniendo el Museu do Pão un papel central en este proceso, lo que permite concluir que la valorización de este activo en la Serra da Estrela tiene un papel similar al de otras regiones con características similares.

**Palabras Clave:** Gastronomía; Producto turístico; Serra da Estrela; Sostenibilidad; Productos endógenos.

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is an activity capable of generating territorial development dynamics and stimulating other activities around it. In recent years it has recorded significant growth results, abruptly interrupted by the pandemic of COVID-19, with data for 2020 showing historic falls worldwide. In the post-pandemic context, it will be important to reactivate this activity with approaches that allow it to be relaunched with greater sustainability, especially of tourism destinations. This may be one of the most relevant challenges, particularly with regard to regions that traditionally have less tourism demand, but

\* Polytechnic Institute of Guarda (Portugal); E-mail: [cristinarodrigues@ipg.pt](mailto:cristinarodrigues@ipg.pt); <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2424-4432>

\*\* Polytechnic Institute of Guarda (Portugal); E-mail: [manuelsalgado@ipg.pt](mailto:manuelsalgado@ipg.pt); <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5218-5348>

\*\*\* Polytechnic Institute of Guarda (Portugal); E-mail: [paulapires@ipg.pt](mailto:paulapires@ipg.pt); <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0771-5319>

\*\*\*\* Polytechnic Institute of Guarda (Portugal); E-mail: [silvarafaela@ipg.pt](mailto:silvarafaela@ipg.pt); <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4555-888X>

with strong tourism attractions based on natural environments and rural activities, as in the case of regions with low population density, where it is necessary to invest in tourism practices based on the enhancement of authenticity and uniqueness of tourist experiences.

The Serra da Estrela region is part of the NUTS II - Central Region of Portugal, of which the Municipality of Seia is a part, and presents a strong tendency of reduction and aging of the population. In tourist terms, this territory has a vast patrimonial heritage, and stood out in the pandemic scenario, having registered promising levels of demand in comparison to the national fall. There was a strong demand for the interior of Portugal, in this context, known for safety and for its natural environment, which provided an opportunity for rural areas to stand out and show their potential in terms of tourism. Thus, the role of tourism activity may prove to be fundamental to counteract this negative picture of a territory with so many potentialities, and specifically gastronomy, based on the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the territory, can be a highly promising asset, when worked as a tourism product.

Taking into account these premises, this research focuses on the study of Gastronomy as an important tourism product in the Serra da Estrela region, defining as objectives: 1. Analyse the relevance of Gastronomy for tourism development; 2. Identify the Museu do Pão (Bread Museum) as a resource and factor of tourism attraction; 3. Understand the synergies with the surrounding territory; 4. List the actions developed to recover and promote the gastronomic heritage; 5. Investigate the contribution of the Museu do Pão to the desired sustainable development. In order to respond to the proposed objectives, the starting question was defined as: In what way does the Museu do Pão affirm gastronomy as a tourist product in the Serra da Estrela region? As a methodology, it was decided to carry out a qualitative investigation, based on a simple case study, allowing a focused and comprehensive analysis of this situation, processes and/or professional practices. Located in the Municipality of Seia (Portugal), the Museu do Pão, was chosen as a case study, whose successful tourism structure in the surroundings of Serra da Estrela, allows a deep and detailed analysis with several sources of evidence.

The research will proceed with the literature review and the geographical and tourist framework of the territory under study. Then, the research methodology and the defined analysis model are explained. Afterwards, we proceed with the analysis and discussion of results and finally the conclusions and future lines of research.

## **2. The importance of gastronomy in the sustainable development of tourism destinations**

Despite tourism's important contribution to the global economy, the strong growth trajectory was abruptly interrupted by the pandemic of COVID-19. According to the UNWTO (2021), tourism will have suffered its worst year on record in 2020, with international arrivals falling by 74% and destinations around the world receiving one billion fewer international arrivals than in the previous year.

The gradual and much-desired normalisation of travel requires, however, a new approach to relaunch tourism, because returning to the classic formulas for reactivating this activity is a temptation that should be avoided and in this new context will most likely have diminished effectiveness (Hall et al., 2020), which coupled with the challenges of sustainable tourism could lead to actions to recover traditional activities that can greatly contribute to leverage regions with low population density (Garcés, 2020).

Considering that tourism is evident as a promoter of regional economies, the use of gastronomy and endogenous resources, as tourism products, can turn them into competitive, differentiating and valuable products. On the other hand, tourism has specificities according to the various motivations and preferences of tourists for tourism products that give the receiving core its tourist vocation and power of attraction (Beni, 2003).

The importance of food as an important tourism resource, being a strong attraction for tourists to travel to a destination, is such that this is an increasingly studied subject. (Lee & Scott, 2015). Tourists consider food to be an important aspect when they decide to travel and this element accounts for more than a third of tourist's trip expenditure, so how it is prepared and experienced is of particular importance. Among the happiest memories, can be the experience of dining in a place where local dishes are prepared or served (Goeldner et al., 2002 Goeldner, Ritchie & McIntosh, 2002; Quan & Wang, 2004) and the knowledge of local cuisine is a way to create a greater bond between tourists and the destinations, assuming an extremely important role in the quality of the tourism experience (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Guzmán & Cañizares, 2012). Also, Kivela and Crotts (2006), reveal that gastronomy plays such an

important role in the tourism experience that some tourists may even return to the same destination to taste and live the experience again.

Gastronomy has an increasing importance as a tourism product and can constitute an identity brand of a region or country, contributing to the promotion of a destination. According to Vitorino (2017, p.1), “even when gastronomy is not the primary motivation for a trip there is always the need to enjoy basic food services and this is often a way for tourists to understand the culture of the places and create memories”. Contributing to foster tourism and to the appreciation of local cuisine, gastronomy offers income to the local population as business opportunities, and also, ways of survival in many cases (Corner & Angelo, 2008).

Tourists are increasingly paying more attention to the gastronomy of destinations, often being even the main purpose of the visit, or an important part of the tourism experience as a whole. Gastronomic tourism presents itself as an opportunity to promote and strengthen destinations, and these aspects should be considered when developing tourism plans, considering gastronomy as a vital part of the character of any tourism destination, giving it a key role in its promotion and development (Guzmán & Cañizares, 2012).

The UNWTO (2012) states that gastronomic tourism applies to visitors who plan their trips partially or totally with the motivation to taste the local gastronomy, or participate in activities related to this theme and which is being developed as a tourism product. This is a type of tourism that corresponds to travel experiences for recreational or entertainment purposes that include visits to food producers, participation in gastronomic festivals, tastings of quality food products or any food-related tourism activity (Hall & Sharples, 2003; Kim & Ellis, 2014).

Gastronomy, as an important component of the world’s intangible heritage and an increasingly important attraction for tourists, was the motto for UNWTO to organize the 1st World Forum on Gastronomic Tourism in 2015, having held its 6th edition in 2021 under the theme “Gastronomic tourism: promoting rural tourism and regional development”, closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) and aiming to demonstrate the importance of gastronomic tourism in enhancing the reputation of destinations and empowering local communities, highlighting the strategies that farmers and small rural producers can practice. They can also use their gastronomic heritage to directly and indirectly promote tourism, thus making a positive contribution to the local and regional economy.

Turismo de Portugal (Portuguese national public body for tourism) identifies gastronomy and wine as one of tourism’s strategic assets, that enriches the tourist experience, adds value to the territory and leverages differentiating assets. Tourism and gastronomy can be accomplices in the art of tourist attraction and motivation, with gastronomic tourism emerging as a powerful strategy for differentiating destinations (Turismo de Portugal, 2017).

Portuguese gastronomy was recognised as an intangible asset of Portugal’s cultural heritage through a legislative document in 2000<sup>1</sup>, with emphasis on the value of the culinary arts and the creation of increased responsibilities for the defence of its authenticity and for its enhancement and dissemination, consolidating the recognition of its tourist attraction component and the effort to continuously develop the catering sector, with special effects on the development of the agricultural sector and traditional and genuine products, favouring regional diversity as an enrichment factor. This relevant food diversity enabled Portugal to participate in a joint application that allowed UNESCO to include the Mediterranean Diet in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013, as it represents for all an example of sustainability, quality of life and well-being, revealing the gastronomic identity of the Portuguese territory that blends with local and regional productions, but also with Mediterranean heritages.

In a context of the end of the pandemic, tourism in rural territories deserves special attention, as it can help to revive local economies and above all to decentralise tourism towards less frequented destinations, with authentic, genuine and sustainable development offers. It is in this perspective that tourism development in these territories, guardians of authenticity and the environment, finds an opportunity that should be rethought and well used.

### **3. The Serra da Estrela region: a tourism destination with a unique gastronomic Heritage**

The region of Serra da Estrela is a part of the NUTS II - Central Region of Portugal, belongs to the Intermunicipal Community Beiras and Serra da Estrela (NUTS III) and has integrated the Serra da Estrela Natural Park (PNSE), created in 1976, which has an extension of 88 850 hectares, covering 6

municipalities: Celorico da Beira, Covilhã, Gouveia, Guarda, Manteigas and Seia, whose area corresponds to the territory under analysis in this research.

Seia is a municipality belonging to the district of Guarda and has a population density of 49.9 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> (CENSOS 2021 INE, 2021). According to data from PORDATA and INE (2021), analysing the evolution of the resident population in the last 10 years (variation 2011/2021), it appears that Portugal (NUTS I) registered a fall of approximately 2%, being this trend also visible in the Central Region, with a fall of 4.3% and in a more accentuated way in the target region of study, with a fall of 9.8% and the Municipality of Seia with a fall of 11.9%. In the same period of time, along with the depopulation that is being witnessed, there is a worsening at the level of population ageing, with an increase of 49% in the ageing index in the region under study, higher than the 40% registered in Portugal and in the Centre Region, but lower than the Municipality of Seia, in which the ageing index increased by 54%.

In this context, we conclude that the Serra da Estrela territory needs to be revitalised in order to rejuvenate the population, and tourism may prove to be fundamental in counteracting this negative picture of a territory with so much potential.

In terms of tourism, Serra da Estrela is part of the Central Portugal Tourism Region, which endogenously has enormous potential and a wide variety of attraction factors (mountains, protected areas, forests, rivers, thermal waters, historic villages, schist villages, museums, cathedrals, castles, churches, monasteries, manor houses, handicrafts and a very rich regional gastronomy), in addition to its privileged location, good accessibility and the hospitality of the residents (Salgado & Leitão, 2011). The Serra da Estrela region is also characterised by a tourism offer based on 4 main lines of action: Historical and cultural heritage; Religious tourism; Nature tourism and Active tourism. Equally, the Regional Plan for Touristic Development of the Centre Region 20-30 mentions as strategic pillars of development for the region, Gastronomy and Wine, Corporate and Business and also Lifestyle, Inspirational and other new trends. In relation to tourism demand, it is mostly dominated by the domestic market, while externally the main markets are the Spanish, French, Brazilian and German markets (Turismo Centro de Portugal, 2019).

Regarding tourism demand, in a 2016-2020 analysis and according to PORTADA PORDATA and INE (2021) data, there was a generalised increase until 2019: Portugal (mainland), 22%; Centre, 26%; PNSE Region, 13%. This trend was only countered in the Municipality of Seia where there was a variation of -22%. However, this growth path was abruptly interrupted due to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and it is assessed that global tourism has suffered, in 2020, its worst year since records began, with international arrivals falling 74% (Alonso et al., 2021). The scenario in Portugal followed the global trend and thus the number of overnight stays in Portugal, in 2020, recorded a fall of 62.4% compared to 2019, as did the Centre Region with a fall of 52.9%. Still, the PNSE region recorded a drop of 36% and the Municipality of Seia of 23.8%, both below the drop recorded at the national level. Along with overnight stays, there was also a generalised increase in income until 2019: Portugal (mainland), 42.7%; Centre, 38.6%; PNSE Region, 32%; Municipality of Seia, 15.2%. In the year 2020, revenues in Portugal, recorded a drop of 65.9% compared to 2019, as did the Centre region with a drop of 53.8%. Even so, the PNSE region recorded a fall of 35.4% and the Municipality of Seia of 29.9%, both below the fall recorded at the national level.

These values may be justified by the internal movements of the Portuguese residents made to rural and inland areas of Portugal during the pandemic. Therefore, the year 2020 may present itself as an example of opportunity for the interior to show its visitors the best it has to offer, concluding that natural territories tend to be increasingly sought after and, in this sense, "the development of tourism should ensure the sustainability of territorial models, guaranteeing economic and financial viability (...) promoting the participation and commitment of all agents in the process of (re)construction of the territory and its balanced evolution, as a pillar of governance in an effective project of increasing social well-being" (Fernandes, 2011, p.27).

Serra da Estrela has a strong symbolic, cognitive and affective value for tourists and gastronomy and wines is a differentiating resource that characterises the tourism potential of the region, where there are natural conditions for the existence of food products that translate into a typical, original and appealing gastronomy, assuming a symbolic cultural value that represents the identity of this destination and the local communities (Silva et al., 2018). Since gastronomy is a strength point of this region, an offer based on specific products can be developed in order to improve the image and competitiveness of Serra da Estrela as a tourism destination and also respond to a more challenging tourism demand for new products and sustainable tourism development (Salgado & Leitão, 2011).

The agricultural products of the Serra da Estrela region, commonly referred to as endogenous products, traditional products, typical products, regional products or local products are the basis of the region's gastronomy. Their characteristics are essentially due to the natural and human factors of that geographical environment and are the products that tourists seek to find. Rodrigues (2020) and Pires (2021) refer to the main products of the Serra da Estrela region as being: olive oil, lamb, kid, chestnuts, cherries, cherovia, smoked sausages, white beans, honey, bread, sheep's cheese and curd cheese, trout and wine.

Some of these products have exceptional quality and characteristics covered by the systems of protection and enhancement of agri-food products, such as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), defined by the European Union through Regulation (EU) N.º 1151/2012, of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 21 November 2012, and are identified on the website of the Portuguese Regional Directorate of Agriculture and Rural Development (DGADR) as follows: Beira Interior Olive Oils DOP, Serra da Estrela Lamb DOP, Bravo de Esmolfe Apple DOP, Serra da Estrela Cheese DOP, Serra da Estrela Curd Cheese DOP, Lamb of Beira IGP, Kid of Beira IGP and Beira Alta Apple IGP (DGADR, 2022).

This way, there are gastronomic specialities considered typical of the Serra da Estrela region such as: salt cod with cornbread, lamb (roasted, stewed or grilled), kid (roasted, stewed or grilled), "chanfana" (goat stew), "feijoca à pastor" (stewed pork, smoked sausages and white beans), "lagaradas" (salt cod with olive oil), "truta com molho de escabeche" (trout with vinegar marinade), "arroz doce" (rice pudding), "leite creme" (creme brulee), "papas de milho" (cornmeal porridge), "requeijão com doce de abóbora" (curd cheese with pumpkin jam) and "tigelada" (baked sweet with eggs, sugar and milk) (Rodrigues, 2020; Pires, 2021).

In effect, Scarpato (2003, as cited in Junior et al. 2021, p.1) refers that "Gastronomy, being the most advanced form of human beings connecting to their food, has the role of bringing global society closer; promoting sustainability through the production of local food, biodiversity, transmitting knowledge, promoting, consequently, social well-being, mainly within the tourist activity".

#### 4. Methodology

This research is centred on the study of gastronomy as an important tourist product in the Serra da Estrela region, for which five objectives were defined, as previously mentioned, stipulating as an initial question the following: In what way does the Museu do Pão affirm gastronomy as a tourist product in the Serra da Estrela region?

As methodology, we chose to conduct a qualitative research, based on the case study, allowing a more focused and comprehensive analysis of certain situations, processes and/or professional practices (Morgado, 2012). The unit of analysis for the case study was the Museu do Pão museum complex (Bread Museum). A simple case study, as this one is intended, is an appropriate and justifiable methodology, namely when the case represents a critical test of the existing theory, when it is a rare or unique occurrence, or when the case serves a revelatory purpose (Yin, 1994). The Museu do Pão, as a successful touristic structure in the Serra da Estrela surroundings, allows a deep and detailed analysis in several evidence spaces namely: museum rooms, restaurant and traditional grocery store.

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews, realized in January 2022, with the private entity and target of the case study - the Museu do Pão and the public entity – the Municipality of Seia, assessing local and regional policies. The interviews were carried out personally in order to grant some degree of freedom to the participants, given the characteristics of this study. The questions were designed in accordance with the literature, the proposed objectives and with the same purpose, in order to allow comparing and reaching conclusions based on the comparative method.

The interviews were elaborated in order to answer the following hypotheses: H1) Gastronomy is a tourism product for Seia and the Serra da Estrela region; H2) The Museu do Pão (Bread Museum) is a resource and a tourist attraction factor; H3) Synergies are established among stakeholders; H4) Actions are developed to recover and leverage gastronomic heritage H5) The Museu do Pão contributes to sustainable development. Regarding the content analysis the analysis model, the same structure was followed.

## 5. Characterisation of the Museu do Pão (Bread Museum)

The Museum Complex of the Museu do Pão is original in its theme and its structure, which justifies this study, representing a significant contribution to the knowledge and construction of the theory. Located in the city of Seia, as a gateway to the Serra da Estrela, it is also justified by the high numbers of visitation. This is a private investment that dates back to 1996, by the initiative of a group of teachers and entrepreneurs with abundant interest in traditional mountain gastronomy, who during the following six years, gathered numerous assets and created this structure (Amado, 2011; Carvalho, 2012).

Inaugurated in 2002, it is part of the business group “O Valor do Tempo” and presents itself as a tribute to the theme of the Bread, assuming itself as one of the greatest references of museology in Portugal and the largest complex dedicated to the theme in the world. (Museu do Pão, 2022).

The location chosen is closely linked to the origin of the project’s mentors and the need they felt to decentralize culture, bringing it to the inland of Portugal, being an inevitability and the obvious location for a project integrating the community. Celebrating 20 years of success, it is receiving annually over 80,000 visitors (ACIP, 2022).

This infrastructure is composed by museum rooms, a bar/library, a traditional grocery shop, a restaurant and a bakery, making it a complete tourism product with synergies and complementarities between the various facilities. The four museum rooms represent the history of the traditional cycle of Portuguese bread: from cultivation, cereal processing, milling, baking, until it reaches our tables, through documents and ancient records that provide a comprehensive and enriching description of bread, in its various forms (art, social, political and religious). The Library-Bar, open to visitors and to the local community, is a space for leisure and culture, as it has a notable library specialised in the theme of the Museum and frequently develops cultural activities, namely thematic gatherings. The grocery shop recreates the experiences and customs of the old village grocery shops and sells the main products of the region. In this space, tradition and innovation go hand in hand. The traditional breads and biscuits of the Serra da Estrela are sold, as well as other innovative breads and biscuits produced in the Museum’s bakery. The restaurant is a wide-open space and a true gastronomic research centre where the ancient and always noble traditional flavours are rediscovered. Although it is a restaurant, this space transcends its function, being dedicated to the collection of knowledge and creation of unique gastronomic experiences, where the bread is never forgotten (Museu do Pão, 2022).

## 6. Analysis and discussion of results

After conducting the interviews, we proceeded to the analysis, according to the model defined in methodological terms, and also to the respective discussion of the results which are now reported.

### H1. Gastronomy is a tourism product for Seia and the Serra da Estrela region

Regarding gastronomy as a tourism product, both interviewees mentioned that although they are aware that it is not the main attraction factor, it is of special relevance and is a strategic product recognised by tourists visiting Seia and the Serra da Estrela region, which corroborates what was highlighted in the literature review (Vitorino, 2017).

The responsible from the Museu do Pão mentioned that gastronomy reflects the local identity, allowing the preservation of traditions and the creation of authentic and memorable experiences, as it reflects and transposes the local reality to the tourist offer, with the valorisation of genuine and authentic products. She also stated that it is a distinctive factor of the region and that the meal, being a necessity of the visitor, can also be a tourism experience, a moment of sharing, conviviality and celebration that allows enjoying the surroundings of the Serra da Estrela region and the space of the Museum. It was also stated that visitors refer that they “*are often surprised with the rich gastronomy of this territory and it becomes a very important part of their trip*”, considering that it can enrich the tourist experience, provide well-being, as referenced by Goeldner et al. (2002), and even increase the average stay in the region.

From the Municipality’s perspective, gastronomy is also a differentiating factor, considering that tourists should take advantage of the fact that they are visiting this territory to get to know it, an idea that also agrees with the literature. On the other hand, the Mayor of Seia considers that gastronomy, as an attraction factor, can enhance Seia and the region, either “*the visitation facilities, or others such as the landscape, nature and the offer of experiences*”, leading to the creation of infrastructures and the

valorisation and promotion of local products, an idea in agreement with the conclusions of Guzmán and Cañizares (2012).

Finally, with regard to endogenous products considered strategic for gastronomy as a tourism product (Table 1), both entities indicate olive oil, lamb, smoked sausages, bread and cheese, and the Museu do Pão believes that lamb is a product with development potential, stating that “*lamb can be king (...)* *cheese is already valued and it’s time to praise lamb*”.

**Table 1: Strategic endogenous products in the Serra da Estrela region’s gastronomy**

Museu do Pão	Municipality of Seia
Olive oil	Olive oil
Serra da Estrela Lamb	Serra da Estrela Lamb
Smoked Sausages	Smoked Sausages
Bread (rye, corn and wheat)	Bread (rye, corn and wheat)
Serra da Estrela cheese and curd cheese	Serra da Estrela Cheese
White beans	Honey
Smoked Ham	Wine

**Source:** Elaborated by the authors based on the interviews

The responsible of the Museu do Pão also states that gastronomy should guarantee authenticity and “*truth*” and that despite the fact that it is not always easy to affirm gastronomy as a key tourism product, Seia and the region have products that, although they may have similarities at a national level, are genuine and with which they intend to continue working. The orientation should be towards the aforementioned truth and the preservation of the local gastronomy as an intangible asset that is part of the cultural heritage.

## **H2. The Museu do Pão (Bread Museum) is a resource and a tourist attraction factor**

The Museu do Pão claims to be a resource and tourist attraction factor of national and international reference, stating that “*people that come, sometimes they don’t know Seia, but they know the museum*” being an anchor for the recognition of the territory. In agreement, the Mayor of Seia considers that the Museum “*is an ambassador of the gastronomy of the region, and some tourists identify Seia through the Museu do Pão and there is a notoriety of the municipality and its products due to the Museum*”. This data is in line with the literature, which refers the importance of the food theme as a tourist resource and the food culture constitutes a strong attraction for tourists (Lee & Scott, 2015).

Gastronomy is an important component of intangible heritage and an increasing attraction for tourists, as mentioned in the World Gastronomic Tourism Forum (2021). The Museum praises the bread, as a great theme and values the local food heritage with the great involvement of Serra da Estrela, allowing to recover and preserve the traditions and the collective and intergenerational memory. The responsible of the Museu do Pão affirmed “*we receive families and the elders are the true guides*” in the same way “*the children who visit us, in a school context, return again in a family context*”. For the Mayor of Seia, the Museu do Pão “*provides a complete experience, brings visitors, and in turn adds and boosts the development of other services, contributing to the necessary diversification and complementarity of the tourism offer*”.

In particular, in the case of the restaurant of the Museu do Pão, the Mayor of Seia says it is a great reference in the preservation of local gastronomy and “*provides authentic and memorable experiences, which raise gastronomy to the main attraction of the visit*”. In turn, the responsible of the Museum says that the restaurant provides true gastronomic experiences “*based on tradition and the Mediterranean diet that reflect the region*”. There is a concern in creating menus with simple and authentic ingredients, inclusion of seasonal and local products, characteristic aromatic herbs, such as “*the carqueja, the rosemary, (...) knowing exactly which ingredients we use, a food with time and with flavour*”. Visitors seek the identity of the local cuisine because they have this gastronomic memory or because they consciously want to taste the specialties/typical dishes (Table 2), which is in agreement with the literature. It refers that knowledge of the local cuisine is a way to create a greater bond between tourists and the

destinations (Quan & Wang, 2004) and where some tourists may even return to the same destination to taste and experience it again (Kivela & Crofts, 2006).

**Table 2: Main specialities/typical dishes of the Museu do Pão Restaurant**

Specialities/Typical Dishes	Desserts
Ensopado de grão com bacalhau (salt cod confit with chickpea stew)	Maçã assada (roast apple)
Bacalhau à Museu (baked salt cod with vegetables and bread)	Pêra bêbeda (pear with wine)
Bacalhau com queijo Serra da Estrela DOP (Salt cod with Serra da Estrela cheese DOP)	Papas de carolo (cornmeal porridge)
Polvo à lagareiro (roast octopus with potatoes)	Arroz-doce (rice pudding)
Truta (trout)	Leite creme (creme brulee)
Borrego grelhado (grilled lamb)	Pudim de pão (bread pudding)
Açorda de borrego (lamb stew with bread)	Barrigas de freira (pastry made with almonds, cinammon, egg and bread)
Javali com farinha de milho frita (wild boar with fried cornflour)	Tigelada (baked sweet with eggs, sugar and milk)

**Source:** Elaborated by the authors based on the interviews

### H3. Synergies are established among stakeholders

Considering that gastronomy presents itself as an opportunity to promote and strengthen destinations (Guzmán & Cañizares, 2012), it is necessary to establish synergies between the various stakeholders. In the opinion of the Mayor of Seia, the relationship with the Museu do Pão is *“fruitful and strong, there is a win-win relationship, with the organisation of promotional actions of structured tourism offer”*. In turn, the responsible of the Museu do Pão refers to a collaborative relationship given that they work on cooperative promotional activities, activities with schools, exhibitions and projects such as the Transhumance event and the mountain villages network.

As for other partnerships, the responsible of the Museu do Pão affirms good relations with the accommodation and restaurant stakeholders, as well as with local suppliers and producers and other entities, namely Estrelacoop - Serra da Estrela Cheese Producers Cooperative, Ancose - Serra da Estrela Sheep Breeders National Association. However, she recognises that the relationship with local producers can be effectively strengthened to the extent that *“there is no local production that can totally supply us, but we resort to local production whenever possible”*. They also actively collaborate with educational institutions, of different levels, as a museum that transmits culture and traditions, and taking into account the research and innovation aspect of their work.

Although the responsible of the Museu do Pão is very autonomous in its lines of action, *“and makes its projects happen”*, it assumes this aggregative role in the tourism offer of the region, and in agreement with the Mayor of Seia, both recognize the need to strengthen the stakeholders’ relationship, i.e., create a collaborative network, which works in the common sense to leverage the brand Serra da Estrela in the national and international tourism market. It is important to support strategies that revitalize agriculture and small rural producers, as they have a preponderant role in the local and regional development. As evidenced in the literature, gastronomic tourism has a strong component of aggregation, includes visits to food producers, participation in gastronomic festivals, in product tastings (Hall & Sharples, 2003; Kim & Ellis, 2014) and in this sense, the synergies and networking assume particular relevance.

### H4. Actions are developed to recover and leverage gastronomic heritage

The Museu do Pão sought to position itself through differentiation, enhancing regional gastronomy, based on *“(…) our products and our essence”* as a way of meeting customer expectations and needs and thus creating a bond between tourists and Serra da Estrela region, which is in agreement with Cohen

and Avieli (2004) and Guzmán and Cañizares (2012), since they understand that gastronomy “*is a product that unites people*”.

There is a constant concern at the Museu do Pão to guarantee a unique customer experience, which is achieved through excellent service. This is also visible in the positioning of the restaurant as a Gastronomic Research Centre, where there is a “*dynamic based on curiosity, sharing and teamwork*” in search of knowledge “*about food, techniques, cooking*” and a recipe “*inspired by the people and experiences of the mountains*”. Through knowledge, they seek to recreate and reinterpret regional recipes and adapt to current dietary restrictions and options “*seeking the balance and harmony of the dish*” and the customers’ health and safety, in order to perpetuate the symbolic and affective value of gastronomy for all, in line with the literature (Silva et al. Silva, Kastenholz & Abrantes, 2018).

In order to leverage the gastronomic heritage, both interviewees refer to the importance of ensuring the quality of endogenous products and ensure their certification, highlighting that this is a joint effort and not only of public entities. Some important actions have been developed in this sense by the Municipality of Seia, namely the adoption of a new communication strategy with a new image. This new image is based on the use of new technologies; the rehabilitation and remodeling of the Municipal Market, in order to boost local products and producers in a proximity market; and the attraction of new visitors, through promotional events, such as the Serra da Estrela Cheese Fair, of which the Museu do Pão is also an integral part.

Both the Mayor of Seia and the responsible of the Museu do Pão agree that the valorisation of products can help the region to establish itself as an exceptional tourism destination. However, they mention the need to rejuvenate the primary sector with “*new entrepreneurs that go beyond the old farmer*” in order to develop the sector, new products and new solutions based on innovation and sustainability of the territory, which will be factors of attraction to the region.

In turn, the Mayor of Seia highlights the primordial role of professional and higher education schools, namely the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Seia, which is seen as a point of knowledge and development of skills in the area of tourism and hospitality. This is considered fundamental for the tourism development of the region, thus becoming important players in the process of change, not only with the companies, but also with the local restaurants themselves, allowing them to differentiate.

The Mayor of Seia also highlights the importance of attracting visitors for a tourist experience, as happens with the Museu do Pão, also mentioning the possibility of this example being replicated in another context in order to “*enhance and tell the story of other products*”. The responsible of the Museu do Pão, as an integral part of the tourist experience at the destination, considers that there are also traditions that have been lost and are tending to be recovered, seeking to maintain and leverage the tradition of cereals by using flour from the local miller and natural yeast. In the same way, it affirms itself in the recovery of the shepherding sector, through the production of its own cheese and other products and also in the development of tourist experiences that are being planned, such as “*a day with the shepherd*”, in Quinta da Lagoa, property of the business group where the Museu do Pão is situated. The Municipality of Seia has also positioned itself in this recovery of traditions, namely with regard to shepherding, with the recovery of transhumance.

### **H5. The Museu do Pão contributes to sustainable development**

Because tourism proves to be preponderant in reviving local economies, it is essential that organisations are aligned in order to develop a more sustainable tourism model.

The Museu do Pão, in its 20 years of existence, has contributed not only to the promotion of regional gastronomy but also to the sustainable development of the territory, “*by the quality of service and attention, the friendliness, the good experiences*” that it provides, which are an attraction factor for the region. In turn, it leads to the development of other complementary tourism services, such as catering and accommodation, in agreement with the literature (Corner & Angelo, 2008). On the one hand, it is worth highlighting its commitment to the development of human potential, providing its employees with training and organisational culture, but also to the visitors themselves, through the transmission of traditions and culture. On the other hand, it favours “*the creation of employment and the improvement of the working conditions of the collaborators*” improving the quality of life, allowing family comfort such as “*giving conditions and level of education to the children*” and contributing to the economic development of the region. It also contributes to the social development, since the employability of the museum helps “*all the families that work here, allowing them to settle locally*”. In addition to the families, it is also possible to highlight the museum’s proximity to the scientific capital

of the universities, which, given their work in partnership, may lead to the retention of young talent working towards the development of the region.

It is also remarkable the enormous concern of the Museu do Pão in being aligned with and reflecting the Serra da Estrela region itself, as is visible in the way the restaurant “thinks and executes” its menus and also, as mentioned by the Mayor of Seia, by the fact that its offer is based “*on an experience, around a endogenous product and local traditions*”.

As studied by Salgado and Leitão (2011), gastronomy can improve the image and competitiveness of Serra da Estrela region and the challenge lies in responding to consumer needs in an innovative and active way, based on the identity and culture of the region. As the Museu do Pão itself does, other companies should seek to establish themselves in a proximity market, favouring small producers, giving emphasis to local products and creating attractive products for visitors. Only in this way will it be possible to preserve the identity of the territory, demonstrate the importance of gastronomic tourism in strengthening the reputation of destinations and empowering local communities, as, proclaimed in the last edition of the World Gastronomic Tourism Forum (2021) so that this “*can create new innovative jobs*” and a sustainable tourism model can be developed.

## 6. Conclusions

This study intended to understand the level of importance of gastronomy as a tourism product for the Serra da Estrela region, mainly supported by the knowledge of a case study – Museu do Pão (The Bread Museum). Thus, this study started from the assumption of the need for a paradigm shift in tourism development, which can be an opportunity for low density territories (Hall et al., Hall, Scott & Gössling, 2020; Garcés, 2020), which will be based on the sustainable tourism model.

Tourism can be a promoter of the economies of regions with relevant endogenous resources, such as gastronomy, which should be enhanced as anchor products of the attractiveness of low-density territories, where they exist and, therefore, can be enjoyed in a perspective of integral experience, more authentic and genuine. This change in tourism consumption model will enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of destinations such as the Serra da Estrela region, through a model that enhances the quality and capacity of the tourism offer of the destination, in its various components.

The objective of analysing the relevance of gastronomy for the tourism development of a destination was fully achieved, as it can be seen that food increasingly constitutes a powerful motivation and attraction of the tourist trip, as well as a subject of study (Lee & Scott, 2015). In fact, the knowledge and enjoyment of local gastronomy plays an increasingly important role in the quality of the tourist experience, so it is essential to ensure its uniqueness in the context of sustainable destination tourism, both locally (Seia) and regionally (Serra da Estrela).

Gastronomy and wine is assumed as one of the strategic assets of Portuguese tourism, especially because it contributes decisively to the tourist experience, adding value to the territories and leveraging differentiating assets of destinations, particularly those classified as low-density such as Serra da Estrela. This region is characterized by having a diverse tourism offer, which should be based on the promotion of historical, cultural and religious heritage, as well as natural and rural, enhancing the development of tourism products based on this richness of heritage. This results in a typical cuisine supported by an offer based on unique products, highly valued by tourist demand, which enhances the image of Serra da Estrela as a competitive tourist destination and with a sustainable tourism development, the more the greater the use of regional endogenous resources.

It is therefore essential to understand the synergies between all the regional stakeholders in the Serra da Estrela region. In this scope of the gastronomy, we have to highlight the suppliers of own agricultural products of the Serra da Estrela region, which are endogenous products, regional (Rodrigues, 2020) or local (Pires, 2021), which exist in this territory resulting from the interaction of several natural and human factors. Some of these products have exceptional quality and characteristics covered by the systems of protection and enhancement of agri-food products in the region, which enabled the creation of gastronomic specialties considered typical of the region.

Given that the Museu do Pão, located in Seia, has been an important resource and tourism attraction factor for the Portuguese market, we wanted to investigate in depth its contribution to the sustainable development of the region. The identical theme of this museum makes it easy to understand that gastronomy is intended to be a product boosted by the private enterprise, but that it also goes beyond its scope to the development of tourism in the Serra da Estrela region. The interest of the promoters in traditional mountain gastronomy, who have gathered a vast heritage collection, justifies the choice

of this case study, which today is known and recognised at national level for the sustainable growth of the business group that owns the largest complex dedicated to the subject of bread in the world.

This research was essentially of a qualitative nature, based on the case study of the Museu do Pão. Important agents in the tourist development of the region were interviewed. In fact, in relation to H1, there is agreement that it is a strategic product, recognised by the interviewees and based on the perspective of the tourists who visit the region and also on the opinion of the authors. The responsible of the Museu do Pão mentioned that gastronomy reflects the local identity and traditions, allowing authentic and memorable experiences to visitors. The Mayor of Seia pointed out that gastronomy is also a differentiating factor and, as an attraction factor, and it can boost Seia and the Serra da Estrela region. There is also agreement in relation to the strategic endogenous products for the region's gastronomy, which were named by the interviewees. The second hypothesis (H2) is also validated, since the Museu do Pão is a resource and tourist attraction factor of local, national and international reference, being an anchor for the recognition of this territory, since the Museum is an ambassador of the gastronomy of the region and of the Municipality of Seia. Regarding possible synergies between stakeholders (H3), it appears that the relationship is fruitful and strong, collaborative, there is a win-win relationship, with the organisation of joint promotional activities. It is evidenced in the literature that gastronomic tourism has a strong component of aggregation of agents in the territory, including visits to food producers, participation in gastronomic festivals, in product tastings, generating synergies between partners and networking in the region. The actions aimed at leveraging gastronomic heritage (H4) are recognised by both interviewees, who highlight the quality of endogenous products and their certification for the enhancement of gastronomy, corroborating the perspective of various authors, as it allows tourism agents to unite around the gastronomic heritage of the region. In relation to H5, it can be seen that the 20 years of the Museu do Pão have contributed to the promotion of regional gastronomy and also to the sustainable development of the region, as Salgado and Leitão (2011) also assumed, because gastronomy can improve the image and competitiveness of the Serra da Estrela region based on the identity and culture of the region.

In summary, it was possible to verify that the five hypotheses presented in this research were approved by the interviewees, representatives of a local public authority and a private company, which constitutes the case study. This proves that gastronomy makes a strong contribution to the sustainable development of the destination Serra da Estrela and that in this territory the Museu do Pão plays a central role in this development, because of the theme and the approach and national reputation it gives to Seia and to the Serra da Estrela region. This contribution, which was confirmed by the interviews, is also verified in various studies presented in the literature review, allowing the conclusion that the promotion of gastronomy in the Serra da Estrela region has an analogous function to other regions with similar characteristics, particularly as low-density territories.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Legislative document, Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 96/2000 of 26 July

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