

Menus as Instruments for **Communicating Endogenous Products**: The case of Restaurants in Pousadas de Portugal

Cristina Barroco ¹ [cbarroco@estgv.ipv.pt]

Tiago Gonçalves ² [tiago.goncalves@pestana.com]

Abstract | Restaurant menus can be much more than the presentation of dishes, they can showcase a set of endogenous products, while at the same time allowing the customer to get to know a little more about the territory, through gastronomy. When done well, menus can be instruments for promoting gastronomic tourism, taking customers on authentic journeys through the flavours and knowledge of the territory. The main aim of this paper is to identify how endogenous products are being communicated in menus, using the case study of Pousadas de Portugal restaurants for this purpose. The menus of three restaurants were analysed using a grid that made it possible to identify which endogenous products were presented and how this information was transmitted to the customer. The analysis allowed us to conclude that all the restaurants offer contemporary regional cuisine representative of the territories in which they are located. All menus feature short, interesting stories about some of the dishes. The word "Regional" appears several times on the menus and the dishes' names mention some territories. To complement the analysis, 25 chefs were surveyed, who were asked about the importance of including local products in their menus. Promoting these

¹ PhD in Tourism from the University of Aveiro (Portugal). Associate Professor in the School of Technology and Management of the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu (Portugal). Full member of CISED – Centre for Research in Digital Services.

² Master's in marketing and communication in Coimbra Educational School of the Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra (Portugal). Assistant Professor in the School of Technology and Management of The Polytechnic Institute of Cávado and Ave (Portugal). Assistant Area Manager for North, Center and Madeira at Pousadas de Portugal, Pestana Hotel Group (Portugal).

products can help preserve and showcase the unique cultural identity of a region and can contribute to sustainable development and environmental conservation.

Keywords | endogenous products, menus, regional development, Pousadas de Portugal

1. Introduction

Gastronomy tourism, focused on exploring the culinary cultures of local communities in urban and rural areas with their unique traditional values, has heightened interest in rich culinary destinations and encouraged many food and beverage firms to incorporate local cuisine into their menus (Iflazoglu & Yaman, 2020). A restaurant menu is more than just a list of dishes, it plays a crucial role in a customer's gastronomic experience. It represents one of the first interactions customers have with the restaurant, communicating its concept and identity. A well-crafted menu can serve as an effective marketing tool, highlighting the restaurant's special, seasonal, or exclusive dishes, enhancing the customer experience and satisfaction. Reading the menu, making choices, and anticipating the dishes can contribute to creating a memorable gastronomic experience. According Rady et al. (2021), good menus are an important factor in competitiveness for the tourist destination.

There have been several studies on restaurants menus developed in recent years: menu analysis models, menu design, menu planning, translated menus, nutrition information and local cuisine in the menus. However, the existence of any study on menus as instruments for communicating endogenous products is unknown. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to identify how endogenous products are being communicated in menus and for this purpose, a case study of the Pousadas de Portugal restaurants was conducted. For this Portuguese group, investing in the promotion of endogenous products serves as a means to foster sustainable development, preserve heritage and national identity, and meet the needs of an increasingly conscientious and informed customer base.

In order to pursue the aim of this study, a literature review on the importance of using endogenous products, menu development and the incorporation of products into menus will be conducted, followed by the methodology, presentation and discussion of results, and conclusions, which highlight the main limitations of this study, contributions and future research directions.

2. Theoretical framework

Gastronomic tourism embraces products and experiences that embody the distinctive human and geographical aspects of a destination. When consumed, these offerings genuinely convey the nuances of the local cultural landscape (Hillel et al., 2013). Also, the awareness of sustainability in contemporary gastronomy leads to improvements not only in local development and sustainability but also in the sensory quality of food, which is far superior to that of industrialized products (Correia Junior et al., 2021). According to Pamukçu et al. (2021), the existence of certified food products is an asset and an important contribution to the protection of the culture, traditions, and cultural heritage of regions. The traditional certified products can be classified into: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG).

According to Kalenjuk et al. (2014, p. 100):

- (i) PDO: encompasses agricultural and alimentary products which are produced and prepared in a certain geographical area by using appropriate knowledge and skills.
- (ii) PGI: include agricultural and alimentary products which are closely linked to the geographical area and at least one phase of production, processing or preparation takes place in this region.
- (iii) TSG: highlights traditional character of a product, either in composition or means of production.

Endogenous products can be a key element in the development of gastronomic tourism and have received some attention from researchers in recent times. As an example, the study by Barroco and Amaro (2023) is referenced, where several certified Portuguese products are identified within gastronomic routes (e.g., traditional Portuguese cured codfish, Alentejo olive oil, Beira Baixa olive oil, Marofa lamb, Lafões veal and Fundão cherries). The same holds for Duque et al. (2023), who identified that the traditional certified products are very important for the development of tourism, as tourists are increasingly looking for higher quality products, healthy eating and activities that encourage sustainability. The concern for high-quality food, combined with environmental care, has grown over the years (Correia Junior et al., 2021). This shift is also reflected in the inclusion of specific products on menus, highlighting the ongoing transition toward sustainable and healthy options.

The use of certified products on restaurant menus can draw tourists' attention to the need for their preservation and increase their consumption, contributing to the development of

territories. They also represent an opportunity for tourists to explore the gastronomy of the regions and spark curiosity to learn about the producers, suppliers, ancestral cooking methods, and participate in events or gastronomic routes. According to Kalenjuk et al. (2014), to increase tourist spending, the solution lies in authentic, protected, agricultural, food, and gastronomic products. For these authors tourists not only consume these products on-site but also have the option to take them home as souvenirs.

The literature review indicates that menus play a vital role in recognizing and confirming restaurants as pivotal hubs within gastronomic destinations. Menu is the core of food and beverage operations and communicates not only the food and beverage offerings but also the image of the firm (Ozdemir & Caliskan, 2014). The study of Magnini and Kim (2016) shows that the physical attributes of a restaurant menu do transmit signals to the potential diner regarding levels of scale and service. According to these authors a restaurant's physical menu is an initial signal to a customer about his/her impending restaurant experience. "Defined as a list of food and drinks items obtainable for purchase, or a list of food and drink items that will be served" (Rady et al., 2021, p. 232), menus have been analysed from various perspectives. Existing studies on menu are related to the areas of menu planning (Kivela, 2003) and there are some models that need to be highlighted: Menu Analysis Model by Miller (1980), Menu Engineering Model by Kasavana and Smith (1982) and Cost/Margin Analysis Model by Pavesic (1985). Each menu analysis model provides a quantitative assessment of distinct variables and enhancement strategies linked to the ratings allocated to individual dishes. In 2006, Lee and Lee compare the characteristics of Kasavana and Smith and Pavesic analysis techniques and according to Ozdemir and Caliskan (2014) the major menu management issues are menu planning, menu pricing, menu designing, menu operating and menu development.

Also, the design of the menus is regarded as a variable that has a considerable potential in influencing customers' item-ordering behaviour and perceptions (Bowen & Morris, 1995, Kivela, 2003, Ozdemir & Caliskan, 2015). According to Baiomy et al. (2019), menu design, item descriptions, and variety were significant predictors of customer satisfaction, and restaurants need to understand better the complex association between menu attributes and customer satisfaction. The restaurants should understand tourists' expectations and provide satisfactory service and products by bringing to light peculiar foods of an area with new flavours and authentic ingredients (Yurtseven & Kaya, 2011).

Bowen and Morris (1995) found that menu design could increase the sales of items. The authors show the effectiveness of using menu design techniques (copy, colour, paper, typeface, layout...) to sell a specific menu item. By highlighting the correct items, the menu can be used to sell profitable items, resulting in satisfied customers. According to these authors location on the menu is also important. As people read, their vision travel across the page in predictable patterns. According to Ozdemir and Caliskan (2015) menu design has four main dimensions: menu item position, menu item description, menu item label and menu card characteristics.

There are also some studies about translated restaurant menus (e.g. Fuentes-Luque, 2016; Saihong, 2019). The accurate translation of menus is very important for the tourism industry and according Saihong (2019) translations that exclude a dish's ingredients, cooking methods, or cultural associations may deter consumers. According to this author, menus should strike a balance between providing consumers with information about ingredients, flavours, and cooking methods of specific dishes, while also allowing a dish to go beyond its physical attributes by highlighting the cultural distinctiveness through its name.

Providing nutrition information in menu descriptions has begun to receive a particular academic attention (eg. Yoon & George, 2012) as also the inclusion of local cuisine in the menus (eg. Iflazoglu & Yaman, 2020, Yurtseven & Kaya, 2011) and of course the service person can have a great influence on the choice of a menu item (Bowen & Morris, 1995).

According to Kivela (2003) detailed description of an item positively influences the probability of choosing that item. Very common in the hospitality industry and many restaurant chains is the use of descriptive menu labels in an effort to influence customers' choice and attitudes (Wansink et al., 2001). In this study, the authors show that descriptive menu labels can help stimulate first-time consumption and can help encourage repeat sales. Some adjectives used on a menu item label can help trigger different feelings and expectations of consumers. Accordingly, they suggest four types of labels:

- (i) Geographic Labels (labels that claim to reproduce the same flavours that are specifically found in geographic areas).
- (ii) Affective Labels (alluding to emotions can trigger happy memories of family, tradition, and nationalism).
- (iii) Sensory Labels (describe the taste, smell, and “mouth feel” of the menu item).

- (iv) Brand Labels (a cross-promotion with a related brand that has important associations that can make the menu item seem more attractive).

The role of chefs assumes great importance because they are a key component in the creation of a menu. According to Martins and Ramos (2017), chefs are increasingly valuing terroir products (regional/local) in their menus, which are planted, harvested, or caught in the region, or even matured locally.

The concept of the terroir restaurant provides a space in which the diner can consume tangible elements of both culture and landscape (Tresidder, 2015). For this author this kind of restaurants often adopt a creative and organic approach to the sourcing of ingredients through foraging and embedding the cuisine within local culture, history and environment.

The concept of terroir emphasizes the unique characteristics of a region's climate, soil, and landscape, making the use of local products in restaurant menus essential for showcasing the authenticity and cultural identity of the territory. According to Tresider (2015), the terroir restaurant provides a space in which the diner can consume tangible elements of both culture and landscape. For this author, this kind of restaurant often adopts a creative and organic approach to the sourcing of ingredients through foraging and embedding the cuisine within local culture, history, and environment.

However, to attract tourists it is crucial that we grasp the unique characteristics of the region's and how we communicate this to potential visitors. For Pousadas de Portugal, investing in the valorisation of endogenous products is a way of promoting sustainable development, the preservation of heritage and national identity, and satisfying the demands of increasingly conscious and informed customers. Promoting these products helps preserve and showcase the unique cultural identity of a region, supporting these products can contribute to sustainable development and environmental conservation and it can attract visitors seeking authentic local experiences and unique flavours.

The Pousadas de Portugal are part of the Pestana Group. As Portugal's largest hotel and leisure chain, among European Top 30 hotel groups, Pestana Hotel Group has been making a name for itself since it opened its first hotel in Madeira Island in 1972. The Pestana Group has grown to become one of the largest tourism and leisure groups in Portugal, with a diverse portfolio that includes hotels, resorts, restaurants and real estate developments. Pousadas de Portugal, a key brand under the Pestana Group, epitomize the essence of Portuguese hospitality, with their exceptional culinary excellence, offering a unique blend of cultural

heritage and modern luxury. These unique hotels are often situated in historically significant buildings, such as castles, palaces, or monasteries, offering guests an immersive cultural experience of luxury, traditional or historical hotels that provide an authentic experience by combining history, tradition, and comfort. At the heart of their offering is a commitment to providing an exceptional food & beverage experience that celebrates local cuisine while embracing global gastronomic trends. With a focus on fresh, high-quality ingredients, each dish is crafted to offer a unique taste of Portugal's rich gastronomic heritage. The dedication to culinary innovation and impeccable service makes every dining experience memorable. The Group is committed to preserving the rich Portuguese culture while providing guests with an unparalleled experience of elegance and refinement. Looking ahead, the Group is committed to innovation and sustainability, aiming to expand its footprint globally while preserving the local charm and historical significance of its properties. Strategic investments in technology and infrastructure, along with a focus on eco-friendly practices, are at the forefront of the future plans to ensure continued growth and excellence in service.

3. Methodology

The menus of three restaurants integrated in Pousadas de Portugal were analysed: the restaurant at Pousada da Ria, the restaurant at Pousada da Serra da Estrela and the Viriato restaurant at Pousada de Viseu. The restaurants of these three Pousadas are located in the Central region of Portugal (Figure 1).

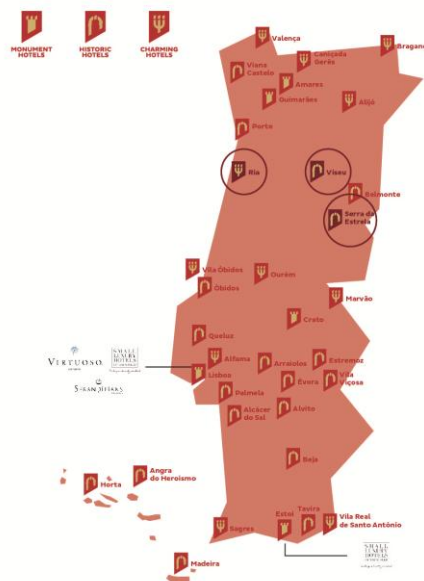


Figure 1. Map with the marked locations of the three restaurants subject to analysis

Source: Developed by Marketing Department Pousadas de Portugal (2024)

This analysis was carried out in October 2023. To analyse the menus, a grid was developed that made it possible to identify which endogenous products were presented and how this information was transmitted to the customer. In cases where this allusion was not clear, an attempt was made to understand the relationship with the territory through the name of the products. It was also identified the existence or not of certified products: PDO, PGI and TSG.

To complement this approach, and because the role of chefs is crucial in menu development, it was decided to survey some chefs. For this purpose, a small questionnaire survey was developed and administered during the months of January and February 2024, where the chefs were questioned about: *“What is the relevance of including local/traditional products on the menu?”*. Twenty-five responses from chefs working in Portugal were validated, and their answers were subjected to a content analysis.

4. Discussion of Results

We will present the analysis of the restaurant menus, followed by the analysis of the questionnaires administered to the 25 chefs.

4.1. Analysis of the menus of the restaurants at the Pousadas de Portugal

Each of the analysed menus has the dishes divided into nine groups: 1) Couvert, 2) Starters, 3) Soups, 4) Pasta, Salad and Vegetarian, 5) Fish, 6) Meat, 7) Desserts, 8) Fruits, 9) Ice Creams. The analysis of each of these groups allows us to conclude that the three restaurants offer contemporary regional cuisine representative of the territories in which they are located.

The Pousada da Ria restaurant has a privileged view of the Aveiro estuary, where we can enjoy the sunset and the movement of boats. The atmosphere is cozy and elegant, perfect for a family meal or a special occasion. The restaurant offers typical cuisine of the region, with a focus on fish dishes (horse mackerel, sardines, clams, cuttlefish, fish soup, seafood cream soup, salmon, shrimp, mussel, seafood sauce, seafood pasta, sea bass, groove razor clam, grouper, codfish).

The Serra da Estrela Restaurant, located in the former Covilhã Sanatorium, has a spacious and bright dining room with granite columns and huge vaulted windows, featuring a discreet and sober decoration. Everything traditional receives a more modern treatment, and the wine list boasts the finest references to the wines of Beira that are worth trying. the herbs and aromas

of the mountains accompany all the dishes, such as Juniper rice flavoured with gorse (Juniper is harvested from shrubs in the high areas of Serra da Estrela at 1600 meters). The regional cheese "Serra da Estrela" (classified as DOP) is mentioned four times.

The Pousada de Viseu restaurant is an elegant and welcoming space where we can savour original interpretations of typical regional cuisine, accompanied by a selection of quality Dão wines. There is a greater concern with the communication/identification of endogenous products. In the "Meat" group, of the four dishes presented, three are identified with the symbol of the municipality of Viseu (Figure 2). This allows the customer to clearly understand that they are facing representative dishes from the region.

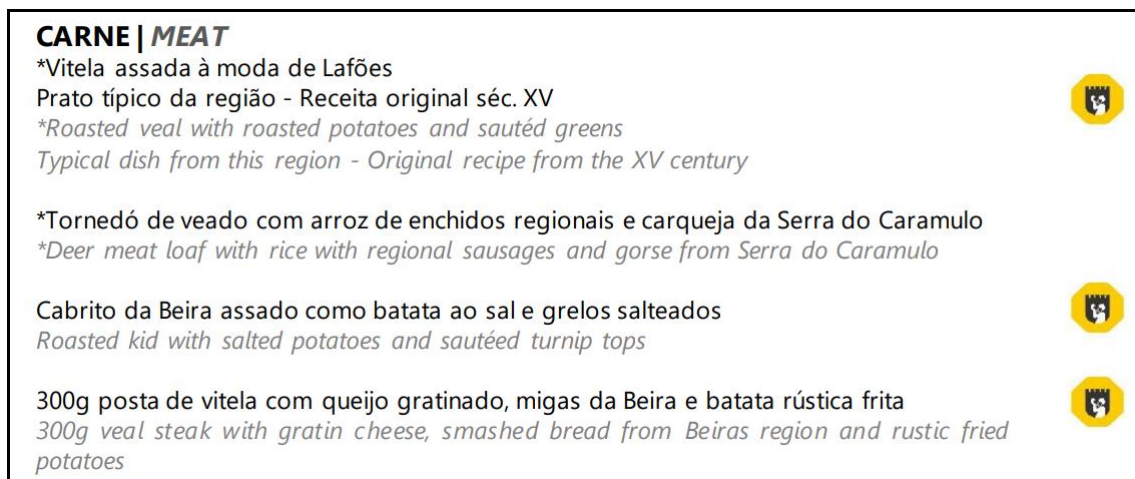


Figure 2. Part of the Menu Restaurant at Pousada de Viseu

Source: Menu Restaurant Pousada de Viseu

In the group of "Desserts", of the five presented, two are identified with the symbol of the municipality of Viseu and 1 with the symbols of Viseu and Vouzela (Figure 3). The regional cheese "Serra da Estrela" is marked two times.

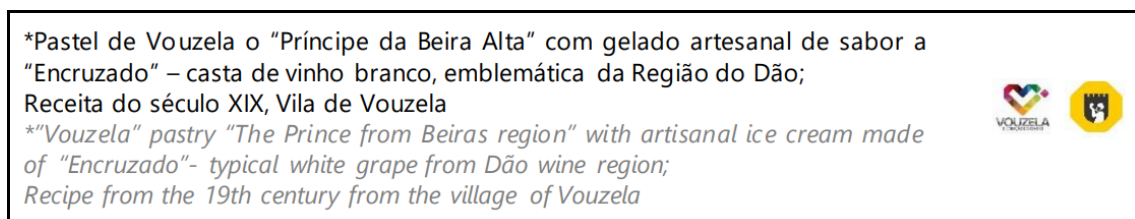


Figure 3. Part of the Menu Restaurant at Pousada de Viseu

Source: Menu Restaurant Pousada de Viseu

Highlight is the "Desserts" group, where the three restaurants present typical desserts from the regions, including a short description of them and a little of their history. The menu of the Pousada de Aveiro tells a humorous story about the 'ovos moles' from Aveiro, engaging the customer and certainly encouraging them to order this dessert (Figure 4).

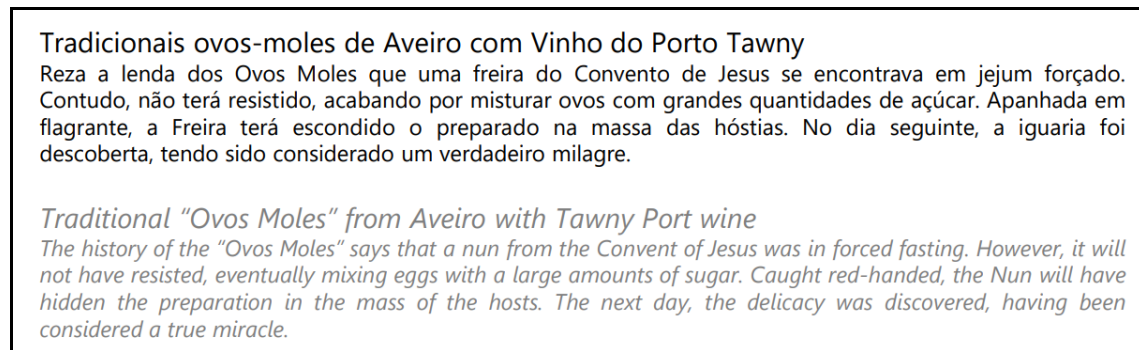


Figure 4. Part of the Menu Restaurant at Pousada de Aveiro

Source: Menu Restaurant Pousada de Aveiro

There are several other examples in the desserts of the three analysed menus that connect to emotions, memories and traditions:

- *Traditional sponge cake with "ovos moles" ice cream*: The Pão de Ló is the direct result of the know-how required for the preparation of the dough and its cooking, whose history dates back to the late eighteenth century.
- *"Garganta de Freira"*: Conventual sweet from Covilhã in 1912. Made with eggs and sugar syrup and wrapped in a wafer leaf.
- Regional cheese pudding from Serra da Estrela with lime sorbet and cinnamon crumble.
- Sheep's curd cheese pie with vanilla ice cream.
- *"Crème brûlée flavoured with lavender from our garden"*. Original recipe from 1962, published by François Massialot in his work "Le Cuisinier Royal et Bourgeois".
- *"Portuguese crispy dough pastry, with almond and filled with a navy bean jam and pecan nuts ice cream"*: is a typical sweet from Viseu. The Pastry was created to be a financial support for a social project, in village of Mangualde, that was originated in a context of deep economic crisis in Portugal and Europe with the Great Depression of 1929.

And the stories don't stop, the allusion to the territory's past is evident in some other dishes presented, such as a good example being the story of the tasty puff pastry filled with braised meat that introduces us to the way of life and customs of the textile in Covilhã (Figure 5).

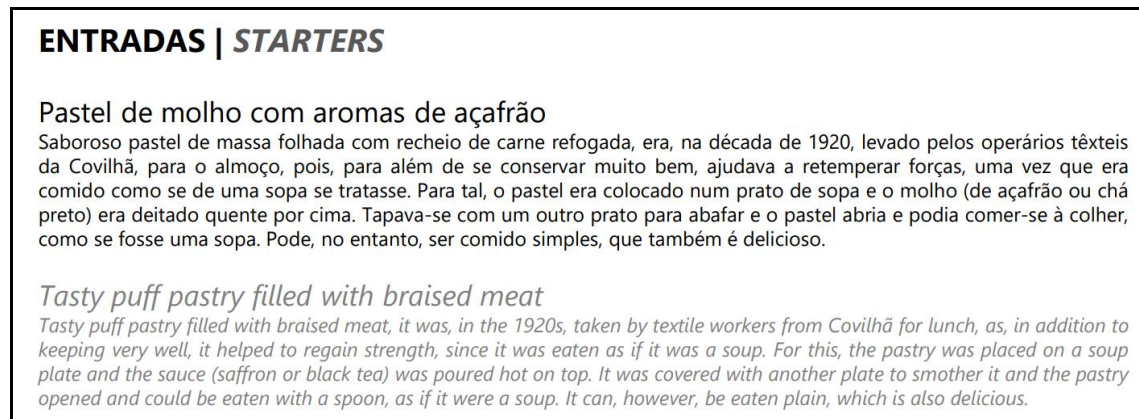


Figure 5. Part of the Menu Restaurant at Pousada Serra da Estrela

Source: Menu Restaurant Pousada Serra da Estrela

Finally, it was identified that the word "Regional" appears 11 times on the menus, associated with bread, cheese, croutons, and sausages. The dishes' names mention several territories: Lafões, Serra da Estrela, Serra do Caramulo, Beira, Vouzela, Viseu, Dão, Covilhã and Aveiro. This allusion to different territories can be an opportunity to arouse tourists' interest in visiting these regions and learning more, not only about gastronomy but also about traditions, customs, and complementary tourism products.

4.2. Questionnaires Analysis

The analysis of the 25 responses obtained allows us to conclude, regarding the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, that 8 chefs are women and 17 are men (68% of the responses). Concerning age groups, three are 30 years old or younger, six are between 41 and 50 years old, and 16 (64%) are between 31 and 40 years old. Thirteen chefs currently work in the Center of Portugal, six in the Northern region, three in the Alentejo, two in the Algarve, and one in Porto.

In Table 1, it can be seen that for all chefs, the inclusion of local/traditional products is very important. Chefs emphasize the value these products hold for consumers who increasingly

seek freshness and quality. These products are part of our culture, tradition and history. They represent the cuisine of the region and contribute to the development of the economy, serving as a way to support small producers. The inclusion of these products allows the creation of menus according to the seasons, featuring different products with unique flavours.

Furthermore, the chefs were asked if they wanted to leave any comments or make any suggestions. This question was open-ended, and below are some of the comments provided by the chefs “Including local products and suppliers contributes to reducing the carbon footprint” (Chef 2). “Contracting with local suppliers for protein, fruits, and vegetables” (Chef 15). Interestingly, Chef 10 mentions that “I have many regional and traditional products on the menu. But I don't feel that it's something decisive for selling dishes or having more meals in the restaurant”.

In this question, several issues were identified, among which we highlight: Chef 9: “...there are certain products that, as much as one would like to include them in the menu, it is not possible, like the case of dried fish from Nazaré, which can only be bought on site and in legal terms is not well defined, as well as other products and items that would have to undergo many changes in terms of HACCP and in fiscal terms by ASAE to be able to be included in a menu”; Chef 12: “...there is too much bureaucracy in our country for it to be attractive for professionals to produce and for professionals to include in their restaurant menus, so the so-called Zero Footprint will never be a reality”; Chef 16: “...it is important to check the minimum quantities with suppliers”; Chef 25: “... the ease of obtaining these artisanal products is sometimes much more complicated than resorting to large commercial retailers”.

Table 1. Question: What is the relevance of including local/traditional products on the menu?

Chefs	Answers
1	It is very important for our customers to know the products of the region.
2	To introduce to customers from other regions of the country and international customers the richness we have in our sea, as well as sausages and meats.
3	It is important to use endogenous products because they are part of our tradition and history .
4	Very relevant , each restaurant should have traditional dishes from its region .
5	It allows for better management of raw materials, profitability, and a larger and better offering to the customer .
6	Quite relevant and it is something that nowadays should always not be disregarded and forgotten.
7	They are part of our history , of our cuisine, as long as we know how to work them, in the most common and traditional way adapted to the present day.
8	To be able to make known that each place has to offer the customer new flavours and traditions related to the region .
9	It is quite important , but as it is presented to me, the way to acquire products is not always possible.
10	It brings part of the local gastronomic culture and cultural habits . It brings the kitchen and the customers closer to the regional producers .
11	It is important for customers to get to know the local products.
12	It is very important for promotion to maintain the production of native products, the development of the local economy , and for environmental reasons.
13	It is important not only to maintain and promote the economy and sustainability of the area but also to support small local producers .
14	It is very relevant . They provide characteristic and unique flavours due to their growth and development in the geographic area.
15	Better offerings, variety, quality for the customer ... Possibility of creating more seasonal menus taking into account the time of year.
16	Products are important for customers to get to know the products of the region .
17;18	Freshness of the products.
19	Extreme importance , especially in the current times, customers are increasingly looking for quality above all in the product.
20	Absolutely. 100% of the products we use are local and typical .
21;22;23	Maximum importance .
24	Very important . It's also a way to help small producers and maintain the tradition of each area .
25	More natural products. Sometimes quality comes with a price. It's good for the local economy .

5. Conclusion

The relevance of including local/traditional products on the menu is related to the appreciation of regional culture and identity, as well as the promotion of sustainability and the local economy. By including these products, restaurants not only offer an authentic gastronomic experience to customers but also support local producers, contributing to the development of the community and the preservation of culinary traditions. Furthermore, the use of fresh and seasonal ingredients can enhance the quality of dishes and differentiate the establishment in the market, attracting an audience that values the authenticity and origin of food.

The literature review shows that menus can be essential for valuing and affirming restaurants as crucial locations in gastronomic destinations. The restaurant menus analysed here are already very concerned about including regional and differentiating products on their menus; however, these need to be continuously communicated clearly to the customer, and there may be some improvements.

In the study by Wansink et al. (2001), they show how restaurant managers can revitalize menus through the insertion of Geographic Labels, Affective Labels, Sensory Labels and Brand Labels. The menus analysed here clearly show that this is already taken into account, especially with regard to affective and sensory labels. The storytelling in some dishes is attractive and involves the customer in a story of the territory; however, these stories can extend to other dishes, making the territories where Pousadas de Portugal are located even more visible. It was also detected that none of the menus make any allusion to the existence of certified products (PDO, PGI, TSG), making it essential to understand in future studies why this does not exist.

This study also meets what Martins and Ramos (2017) had concluded, that chefs are increasingly valuing terroir products (regional/local) in their menus, since all the chefs surveyed (25) highly value the inclusion of these products. All the chefs also mention the importance of incorporating local cuisine in the menus, the same result as the study by Iflazoglu and Yaman (2020) and Yurtseven and Kaya (2011). Finally, Kivela (2003) mentioned that a detailed description of an item positively influences the probability of choosing that item, and there are several items in the analysed menus that have detailed and interesting descriptions.

The main limitation of this study is the small number of restaurant menus analysed, which does not allow us to extrapolate the results presented here. The fact that the restaurants surveyed are part of a hotel group (Pestana Pousadas de Portugal Monument & Historic Hotels) that already has significant concerns with the issue of promoting and preserving Portuguese gastronomy naturally conditions the results presented here. Also, the questionnaire administered to the chefs consisted of few questions, so it would be worthwhile in the future to develop a questionnaire that would allow for other types of analysis.

As referenced by Bowen and Morris (1995), the service person can have a great influence on the choice of a menu item. Therefore, for future studies, it would be important to understand the role of employees in explaining and selling dishes associated with the territory. It would also be interesting to analyse customers' perception regarding the presence of endogenous products and whether they are valued on the menus.

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