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Consumers' knowledge on protected designation of origin of food products - a cross cultural study

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Food products with Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) have been a success in Europe, with more than 1.000 products registered. Culture and sensory profiles play a key role on the authenticity of PDO products, constituting differentiating factors. However, these products are not easily reachable to consumers, as mostly are produced in micro-companies with local sales. Given the relevance of these products in the European heritage, culture and economy, it seems important to identify the knowledge and needs of consumers concerning PDO products. This will allow defining guidelines and reference elements for designing an innovative e-learning training course to improve European consumer knowledge on PDO products. This training will provide consumers a multidisciplinary knowledge regarding production, socioeconomic impact, manufacture and cultural aspects of PDO products.

A qualitative approach was used in 5 countries: Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Finland. In each country 2 focus groups were performed with consumers (n=85) aiming to identify the drivers and drawbacks of PDO products consumption. In addition, 5 in-depth-interviews (n=28) were conducted with regulatory PDO products boards and other stakeholders, aiming to identify the strengths/weakness of the PDO system. Data was transcribed verbatim, translated and content analysed.

Results showed that consumer's knowledge on PDO products is limited. Most products are famous for their name/region rather than for the PDO mark. Consumers buy the products not for the PDO mark, and some may not even comprehend the difference among them. A course on sensory evaluation, a *guide tasting* to be performed at home and a face-to-face tasting session with a specialized instructor are some key elements to be included in the further consumers training on PDO products.

These innovative elements will allow the acquisition of sensory capacities by European citizens which will let them to valorise quality and diversity of food PDO products.

Keywords: protected designation of origin, traditional foods, cross-cultural, qualitative studies