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Portuguese Sardines - from the ritual to the brand

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Abstract

Place branding is a network of associations in the consumer's mind, based on the visual, verbal, and behavioral expression of a place. Food can be an important tool to summarize it as it is part of the culture of a city and its symbolic capital. Food is imaginary, a ritual and a social construction. This paper aims to explore a ritual that has turned into one of the brands of Lisbon in the past few years. The fresh sardines barbecued out of doors, during Saint Anthony's festival, has become a symbol that can be found on t-shirts, magnets and all kinds of souvenirs. Over the year, tourists can buy sardine shaped objects in very cheap stores to luxurious shops. There is even a whole boutique dedicated to the fish: "The Fantastic World of Portuguese Sardines" and an annual competition promoted by the city council to choose the five most emblematic designs of sardines. In order to analyze the Sardine phenomenon from a city branding point of view, the objective of this paper is to comprehend what associations are made by foreigners when they are outside of Lisbon. As a methodological procedure five sardines prototypes, were used in questioning to which city they are related. The interviews were carried in Madrid, Lyon, Rome and London in April and May 2017. Upon completion of the analysis, the results of the city branding strategy adopted by the city council to promote the sardines as the official symbol of Lisbon is seen as a Folkmarketing action. The effects are positive, but are still local. On the other hand, significant participation of the Lisbon's dwellers in the Sardines Contest was observed, which seems to be a good way to promote the pride, the city identity and the brand by their best ambassador: the citizens.

Keywords: Sardines; Lisbon; branding; identity; folk.

The ritual

The name 'sardine' probably comes from the relationship with the Mediterranean island of Sardinia, where the fish were once abundant (Matthiessen, 2011). From the Latin *sardina*, the fish came to be called sardine in English during the early fifteenth Century (Hoad, 2003).

According to Borges *et al.* (2003) sardines (*Sardina pilchardus* W.) are the species of pelagic¹ fish of major socioeconomic importance for the Portuguese fishing community and industry, since they reproduce along the entire Portuguese coast.

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¹ From the Latin *pelagos*, which means "open sea".



Even though there is currently a tendency to reduce landings of sardines in Portugal, the average level of weight discharged per year is about 35,000 tons of sardines (INE, 2017). Due to its abundance and its low price in the late nineteenth Century, the fish became popular as it meant a good possibility of acquiring protein for the poorest families in Lisbon. In the end of the nineteenth Century the sale of the fish was made outdoors in the street, according to Cordeiro (2001) was possible to find dozens of varinas² selling sardines in a straw basket.

Just as the fish was marketed, it was also consumed. In the popular neighborhoods of Lisbon, the sardine was cooked in the street by residents, for them the street was the extension of their houses, which provided a permanent conviviality among neighbors. This ritual is practiced because the sardine is a fish very sensitive to the handling and does not tolerate great preparation. In its most basic form it is only salted and placed to roast in the ember.

"Cooking a meat rich in fat causes it to liquefy, drip into the embers and evaporate quickly. The fumes released infuse the air, impregnate the clothes, the bodies. For this reason, it is risky to grill sardines in the apartments. It is preferable to do it outdoors" (Almeida 2017, 25)

In this way, it was common during the summer, when the sardines are fat and their skin is easily freed, to find by the doors of the houses people barbecuing the fish. A shared meal without luxury, where the sardine is eaten with the hand on a slice of bread (appendix I).

In the early twentieth Century, the barbecued sardines became a source of income for the residents of the popular neighborhoods in the Saint Antony evening (June 12). Some families went to Alfama, Bica and Mouraria, to dine the delicacy. These families came from the working classes, who experienced the economic growth of Lisbon due to industrialization. According to Almeida (2017) at this point the sardine is no longer eaten with the hand, since people went to this party with their best clothes, tidy hair and jewels. They began to eat sitting at tables with towels, glasses, plates and cutlery (appendix II).

² Women who in the past sold fish in the streets, initially called 'Ovarinas' - because they came from the region called 'Ovar', a small seaside town that always lived from fishing (see Cordeiro 2001).



The Fantastic World of Portuguese Sardines

In addition to being consumed fresh, the sardines are also an extremely important raw material for the canning industry. Portugal has a long tradition in canning fish, since from the first Century AD the sardine was transformed into preserved and exported throughout the Roman Empire in ceramic amphorae (Bombico, 2014). The first canned sardine's factory was established in its territory at the end of the nineteenth Century, by the initiative of French industrialists, attracted by the abundance of fish on the Portuguese coast (Prata and Rollo 2010).

Some authors (Lopes, 1946; Bernardo, 1946) point to the year 1865 as the beginning of the modern canning industry in Portugal, with the installation of a tuna factory in Vila Real de Santo António and later, in 1889, with the inauguration of the canning industry of sardines in Setúbal. During the period corresponding to World War II, Portugal became the world's leading producer of canned sardines.

Preserved sardines are so important to Portuguese history that COMUR - Canning Factory of Murtosa, has created a store to honor them. In Lisbon the "Fantastic World of Portuguese Sardine" is located in the Rossio square, in the center of the city, a region with great flow of tourists. There are also branches of the store in the city of Porto and in Vila Moura.

The circus-themed shop has carousels, a miniature Ferris wheel, staff dressed as magicians, lots of light and a custom soundtrack created by the artist Carlos Alberto Moniz. There are 100 models of different cans, the content is always the same: 160 grams of sardine in olive oil, all are sold at the same price: 5 euros (appendix III). For each year (1916 to 2016) there is a can with a specific color which describe an event and an outstanding birth, for example a can of 1988 refers to the operation of the Hubble Space Telescope and also the birth of the singers Rihanna and Adele (appendix IV). In 1982 was the premiere of the film of "E.T." and the birth of Prince William.

Sardine Contest

The intention to honor the popular importance of the sardines was manifested long before the appearance of its colorful circus. The little fish is a theme of Fernando Pessoa's poetry, Amália Rodrigues's song, works of art by the ceramist and aquarist Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro and it is present in proverbial language in several senses.

Based on this assumption, since 2003, the Company Management Equipment and Cultural Animation of Lisbon (EGEAC) have adopted sardines as the identity/brand of the Lisbon Festivities. Currently in commemoration of Saint Anthony's Day, the historic districts celebrate

with food and music throughout the month of June (appendix V). The streets are decorated with colored flags and some bars are installed to sell beer and barbecued sardines in a slice of bread for a price ranging from 2 to 8 euros.

The graphic element of the Lisbon Festivities was developed between 2003 and 2008 by the studio Silva Designers under the order of EGEAC and with the theme defined by the autarchy. In 2009, seven plastic artists and illustrators were invited to create new designs and in 2010 due to the celebration of the centenary of the Republic, these same artists created sardines in the colors of the Portuguese flag.

In 2011 came the idea to invite all citizens to participate and create their own sardines, the challenge proposes the design of a sardine, a new look to the fish, and tests the imagination of professional designers and amateurs. The campaign that was well received by the population was repeated in 2012, receiving 3526 proposals and awarded 4 sardines (appendix VI) with monetary prizes, one of which was chosen through a public vote promoted on the social network Facebook. The 150 most voted sardines on the Internet were part of the event communication materials and, along with the winners chosen by the jury and some three-dimensional proposals built on various media integrated the exhibition 'A Sardinha é nossa!' (The Sardine is ours!).

In 2017 in its 7th edition, the Sardines Contest received 5168 proposals from 60 countries. In seven years, the contest has received more than 40,000 prototypes. Currently each person can submit up to three drawings which must be accompanied by a brief synopsis, the theme is opened and participation is free, the five authors of the winning sardines win the prize of 2,000 euros each. The winning sardines became the brand of the party that year, every media campaign, promotional material and graphic support receives the colors and designs of these five sardines.

The 150 finalist sardines are printed in Polyphthalamide (PPA) and participate in an exhibition open to the public. The five winning sardines also printed in PPA are distributed among the population on the days of the event. According to Paulo Almeida, Communication Coordinator of EGEAC, 'it was noticed in 2012 that the sardines that were decorating the city were being stolen, so the next year we decided to print in large quantities and distribute it to anyone who wants to'. It is normal today to find these sardines decorating houses, offices and restaurants.

Perceiving the interest of the population in the colored sardines, the souvenir and decoration shops started to create key chains, fridge



magnets, t-shirts, ashtrays, and various objects inspired by this theme (appendix VII). The sardine transcended June's brand to become the brand of the city all year round.

Methodology and results

Five PPA prototypes of sardine, the finalists from 2011 to 2016 (appendix III), were used during interviews with the inhabitants of four cities: Madrid (Spain), Rome (Italy), Lyon (France) and London (UK) in April and May 2017. The goal was to determine which European city the people associated the sardines with and if they agreed with the brand selection of Lisbon.

Ten people were interviewed in each city; there being an equal number of men and women ranging in age from 18 to 70 years. For the semi-structured interviews, a script was created that could be modified to match the interaction and comments of the interviewee. The interviews took place in a central area of each city³. Since the focus was on local residents, interviews with tourists were avoided. The discussions were conducted in English, French and Spanish, as appropriate, and all were recorded with the prior consent of the interviewees. All the EGEAC's PPA prints of sardine had the Portuguese government's logo and the name of the artist who created the illustration. During the interviews, this information was concealed with tape so it would not influence the responses; the interviewees held and scrutinised each sardine print while answering the questions.

The first question sought to understand what the shape meant to the interviewee. Most respondents claimed it was a fish, though some thought it was a miniature surfboard. The second question asked which type of fish was represented and the responses varied greatly—from tuna, shark, dolphin and salmon to a generic fish. Only 20% of the respondents suggested that it could be a sardine.

By the third question, it had been confirmed that the prototype was a representation of a sardine and each person was asked: Which city in Europe does this sardine represent? Respondents started to look for answers based on the illustration and described a region. The 46-year-old Italian man asked: 'Is it the Amalfi Coast?'; The 31-year-old Englishman said: 'It's from some Mediterranean coast city' and the 24-year-old Frenchwoman stated: 'It must be in southern Europe'.

When the 40 respondents were questioned about a specific city, 15% stated that it would be Marseille (France), 15% Sardinia (Italy), 10% Sicily (Italy), 5% Naples (Italy), 5% Cádiz (Spain) and 15% believed it

³ In London on the streets of Soho, in Lyon at Place Bellecour, in Rome at Piazza Navona and in Madrid at the entrance of San Miguel Market.

was other cities (Venice, a city in Galicia, a city in Greece, a city in Croatia, Barcelona and Rotterdam). Ultimately, 35% of the respondents agreed that the sardines represented Lisbon; five were French, six were English, two were Spanish and only one was Italian. Eighty percent of the people who were correct had visited Lisbon within the past three years, although only two were in the city during the June festivities.

The 50-year-old Frenchwoman who said that the sardines represented Lisbon, stated: 'These two sardines contain representative designs, such as the houses in the Alfama neighbourhood and a Fado singer. Also, when I was in Lisbon last spring, I noticed several things relating to sardines, like magnets and shirts for sale'. The 34-year-old Spaniard, who believed that the sardines represented Cádiz, protested: 'Sardines do not represent Lisbon, what represents Lisbon is the *bacalhau* (salted codfish)'. Continuing in this vein, the 67-year-old Italian said: 'A good symbol of Lisbon is the yellow train (Elétrico 28) that circulates through the city or even the Barcelos Rooster, but not the sardine'.

Many of the interviewees from Lyon, Rome and Madrid named places from their own countries; the French mentioned Marseille, the Italians talked about Sardinia, Sicily and Naples and the Spaniards claimed Galicia and Cádiz. Interestingly, the English, who did not recognise themselves in the illustrations, did not mention any of their cities.

Conclusions

By competing in a global market, place marketers are forced to decide which elements of national, local or regional identity can best contribute to the attractiveness and branding of a place, and which elements can most appropriately represent the place through its projected images. According to Govers and Go created meaning defines place identity and projects it by using narratives and visuals (2009, 63).

Two elements selected by Hall (1995) to construct the identity narrative of a place are: an emphasis on origins, continuity and tradition; and the idea of authenticity, original people and 'folk'.

The EGEAC's strategy to adopt sardines as the image of the Lisbon Festivals, as well as the establishment of COMUR's The Fantastic World of Portuguese Sardines, can be defined as a folk marketing strategy that Lucena Filho defines as 'a set of appropriations of the popular culture with communication objectives, to make an organisation's products and services visible to its target audiences' (2007, 90).



The strategy adopts the symbol of Lisbon's famous Festival of Saint Anthony as a communication and branding strategy for the city and its merchants. When the image of the sardine is converted to media content, one can see the results; namely, 35% of the respondents associate sardines with Lisbon even without having visited the city during the month of June.

Meaning and brand identity are created through local narratives, myths, events, heroes, local culture (gastronomy, art, literature, popular culture), emblems, religion, languages and rituals. Hofstede (2001) explains using rituals as codes of behaviour and the ways in which we handle daily or annual events to celebrate an occasion or to express mourning (2001, 20).

At the same time, the narratives created by place marketers to promote the identity of a place must be approved and embraced by the local population, according to Braun, Zenker, and Kavaratzis (2013), because residents are the 'making or breaking' of the whole process of territorial marketing. The four functions of brand development for a place include: being a target audience, an integral part, an ambassador and a citizen. Using the example of the sardine contest: 1) the residents are the target audience because the EGEAC wants to attract them to the June Festivities; 2) they are an integral part because, in addition to being able to 'create' their own sardines, the residents participate in the ritual of eating grilled sardines; 3) they are ambassadors from the moment they decide to participate in the contest and invite their friends, and when they use the sardines to decorate their spaces; and 4) they are citizens when they vote for their favourite sardines and have the right to do so.

The number of candidates in the EGEAC Sardine Contest, most of whom are Portuguese citizens, increases each year, says EGEAC Communication Coordinator Paulo Almeida. The circus-themed Fantastic World of Portuguese Sardines, which seems to have been created expressly for tourists, will be examined in a subsequent paper.

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Appendices



Appendix I. Barbecued Sardines

Unknown author, 1965.

Source: Lisbon Photography Archive, Collection Artur João Goulart
PT/AMLSB/PEL/005/S03623



Appendix II. Couple eating sardines with cutlery

Unknown author, 1960.

Source: Lisbon Photography Archive, Collection Artur João Goulart
PT/AMLSB/PEL/005/S03621



Appendix III. The Fantastic World of Portuguese Sardines
Souce: <http://www.mundofantasticodasardinha.pt/>



Appendix IV. Sardine Can of the year 1988
André Lins Nóbrega, 2017
Souce: purchased in The Fantastic World of Portuguese Sardines



Appendix V. Saint Anthony Day festivities

Photo 1: Amadeu Ferrari, 1960

Source: Lisbon Photography Archive,
Collection Artur João Goulart

PT/AMLSB/FER/004803

Photo 2 : José Frade\EGEAC, 2016

Source: <https://www.timeout.pt/>



Appendix VI. Winners of 2012 Sardine Contest

Source: <http://www.egeac.pt/>

118 Portuguese Sardines - from the ritual to the brand



Appendix VII. Objects inspired by Sardines

Source: <https://www.visitlisboa.com> <http://alfamashop.blogspot.pt/>



Appendix VIII. PVA prototype of Sardines used to do the interviews

André Lins Nóbrega, 2017

Source: given by Paulo Almeida from EGEAC

