

## **Bolinhol de Vizela: with genesis in 1884, now gastronomic heritage and tourist resource**

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### **Abstract**

For more than 130 years, Bolinhol has been part of the gastronomic heritage of Vizela, concentrating relevant historical, cultural and economic characteristics that deserve to be protected, preserved, valued and promoted. A unique cake that is a gastronomic asset of the Municipality of Vizela, in the North region of Portugal. Its genesis dates back to 1884. The history of the cake and its growing prominence can be seen alongside the development of Vizela hot springs and, inherently, of the locality itself. Especially from the beginning of the 20th century, with the completion of important works in the transport and communications network, the English linked to the Port Wine trade, as well as tourists from the North of Portugal and Spain, all with significant economic power, chose Vizela to attend the thermal baths. For the development of this article, with an essayistic character, therefore descriptive but also reflective, a qualitative methodology was applied, in order to understand the historical path of the cake, what have guaranteed its longevity and what is its relevance in the local social, economic and tourist dynamics. Today, Bolinhol, in addition to being an icon of Vizela's gastronomy and culture, legacy of several generations, is a relevant tourist resource in the local dynamics, both tourist and economic, also a brand and its promotion and commercialization generate positive impacts.

**Keywords:** Tourism. Economy. Gastronomy. History. Heritage.

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

For Cavaco and Simões (2009), competitiveness on a global scale, innovation and the search for differentiation lead to the emergence of diverse and different tourist products. For these authors, the typification of niche tourism thus becomes a necessity, not only for a better understanding of the magnitude and diversity of the phenomenon, but

also, and from a more operational point of view, for better programming, development, promotion and commercialization of the respective tourism products.

Cavaco and Simões (2009) also alert us to the relationship between tourism and territory, which is significant. The territory is the place where the tourist activity is carried out and, sometimes, it is the tourist resource itself.

Gastronomy is a good example of this harmony between tourism and territory. For Hall and Mitchell (2005), gastronomic tourism is a booming market. This type of tourism has a direct relationship with the quality of the products offered, that is, the search for quality products with regard to gastronomic tourism is a reality. These authors argue that the development of a gastronomic tourism destination, especially at a regional level, is directly related to the brand image of the production sites of a given product. Gastronomy starts to have a prominent role in tourist activity and is fundamental in the tourist experience, as the tourist/consumer, through his memories, even after the experience occurred, is led to return to a certain place because of that same gastronomic experience that he experienced or, simply, recommends that destination to other people, because of a certain product that he consumed and liked.

It is this scope that serves as a starting point for the development of this article, focused on a specific product with origins in a territory that is also specific. More specifically the cake called “Bolinhol de Vizela”.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

For Valbona and Costa (2003), cultural heritage refers to various material and immaterial goods, to symbolic elements that help to configure the identity of a territory, once socially legitimized. As the authors show, tourism can enhance the revaluation of cultural heritage, generating something like a vicious circle: if tourism brings more revenue, heritage resources can be rehabilitated and preserved, as well as the respective support infrastructures, and consequently more conditions are created that may allow the attraction of more visitors and so on (VALBONA; COSTA, 2003).

According to Baptista and Durão (2011), the sustainability of cultural heritage depends on the preservation of social and cultural memory, allowing the recovery of traditions, exalting their survival, adaptation to changes and the preservation of cultural identity.

For Martins (2011), there is a need to highlight the value and potential of cultural heritage, because, according to the author, if we know how to manage it, heritage translates into a resource for durable development and quality of life.

According to Cavaco (2001), tourist practices are complex and characterized by constant renewal, so there is a reinterpretation, revaluation and reinvention of tourist places along with the creation of others.

Added to this is the fact that consumers of tourism products/destinations are increasingly better informed, and respond to the offer in a responsible, demanding and experienced manner, on the one hand, and on the other hand, tourism operators aware of this evolution, had to change their offers in the sense of having discipline and respect for the places to be explored and visited, and above all for the contacts and experiences with the native populations (CAVACO, 2001).

On the other hand, and as Santos (2006) argues, there is a relationship between the global and the local, which does not always manifest itself peacefully, which leads to reflection within the cultural territories themselves, which are forced to question their origins and singularities. For the author, the issue of authenticity and uniqueness are

increasingly present, in a context of heterogeneity, serving to discuss the identity essence of increasingly virtual and translocal communities.

Regarding this relationship between the binomial of globalization and local identity, in terms of gastronomic tourism, Hall and Mitchell (2002) also argue that from the seeds of the globalization strong local food identities and sustainable food systems have the potential to grow with tourism playing an important role, highlighting the work of local communities in strengthening their cultural identities.

The multiplier effect of tourism is too evident, especially at the level of local and regional development and, as consumers seek unique and authentic experiences, expressing their individuality and escaping the mass markets, market segmentation gains greater importance (MIDDLETON, 2002).

For Richards (2002) a large proportion of most tourist experiences are spent either consuming food and drink, or deciding what and where to consume, one of the main tasks of tourist marketing being to make the eating experience memorable.

Since the value of gastronomy is undeniable, of the legal provisions in Portugal regarding gastronomic heritage, it is worth mentioning the Resolution of the Council of Ministers n. 96/2000, of July 26, in which the cultural and identity value that exists in national gastronomy was recognized, which must be defended in terms of authenticity and disseminated at local, national and international level, emphasizing in paragraph 2 of the said resolution, which is understood to be national gastronomy the traditional Portuguese recipes, based, namely, on raw materials of fauna and flora used at national, regional or local level, as well as in agri-food products produced in Portugal, and which, due to their own characteristics, reveal interest from a historical, ethnographic, social or technical point of view, evidencing values of memory, antiquity, authenticity, singularity or exemplarity (REPÚBLICA PORTUGUESA, 2000).

This Resolution also highlights the importance of internal and external promotion of national gastronomy, namely with the aim of boosting tourist demand and the regime for the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage, as evidenced in article 91, which should deserve special protection [...] oral expressions of cultural transmission and traditional ways of doing things, namely traditional construction and manufacturing techniques and ways of preparing food (REPÚBLICA PORTUGUESA, 2000).

The issue of uniqueness and authenticity of products has become one of the concerns of most tourist destinations (MARTINS; BAPTISTA; COSTA, 2012). For the authors, competitiveness and the tourist differential are obtained when places are concerned with offering unique or rare experiences to be found. And, reinforce these authors, regarding the development of gastronomic products, the involvement of agents responsible for tourism is essential, as it allows interaction between producers, suppliers, consumers and the local community.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

Given the purpose to develop an essayistic, therefore descriptive and reflective article, an attempt was made in order to understand the historical path of the cake, what have guaranteed its longevity and what is its relevance in the relationship between tourist supply and demand.

In a broader context, and to establish relations of coherence, the necessary literature review was carried out, also with the intention of, in this way, trying to clarify the object of study, being able to substantiate the theoretical framework of the work and identify the structuring themes.

In specific terms, taking into account the interest that the cake has aroused over time, content considered interesting and helpful for this specific purpose was published, both in physical format and on the internet. Thus, with regard to documentary research, published books whose content is entirely dedicated to “Bolinhol” were consulted and analysed, as well as content available online. In any case, was found that there is still some deficit in terms of the existence of a coherent and reliable bibliography dedicated to the cake, what limited the research.

In order to obtain data related to the production of the cake, including human resources and volume of invoicing from the companies that produce the cake, trying to assess its importance at a social, economic and tourist dynamics, although with some difficulty, testimonies were collected from the cake producers, through the participant-observation technique, within which the interview technique was also applied, specifically of the unstructured type.

Thus, in the organization and development of this research, it should be noted that a qualitative methodology was applied since, according to Fortin et al. (2009), in qualitative research facts and principles are determined by historical and cultural contexts, with different realities.

#### **4 RESULTS**

Within the scope of the research carried out, namely through the collection and analysis of information, it can be seen that the longevity of the cake that was studied is associated with the history of a locality in the North of Portugal and its identity, more precisely Vizela.

In the city of Vizela, located in the Northern region of Portugal and made up of 5 parishes, covering an area of 24,7 km<sup>2</sup>, the tourist and cultural field presents a diversified offer. Its identity is particularly related to culture, as a result of both historical events and of the development inherent to the latest policies regarding culture and tourism. The cultural dynamics of Vizela is nowadays characterized for its tradition and modernity. The presence of thermal waters dates back to the 18th century, as the first facilities were created in 1785. The authenticity is present in the material and immaterial heritage, as well as in diverse leisure spaces, where natural elements stand out. As for gastronomic offer, the highlight goes to “Bolinhol” (CÂMARA MUNICIPAL DE VIZELA, 2022).

“Bolinhol” is a cake, a type of sponge cake that is presented with a soft sugar coating. This coating results from the preparation of a careful syrup, later manually brushed on the refined quality dough, slightly damp. This combination gives this cake an incomparable flavor, thus making it a memorable sensory experience. The recipe is made up of ingredients selected under indispensable qualitative criteria and essentially acquired from suppliers who in turn guarantee their quality; eggs, flour and sugar. A cake that results from know-how, from the art of experienced hands, from an essentially artisanal process, without resorting to sophisticated means or industrial techniques, therefore faithful to its origins, facts that ensure the preservation of identity and quality (IDEM).

**Figure 1 - Manual application of sugar syrup to the cake**



Source: Néilson Carvalheiro (2019)

According to Cunha (2021), a possible reference to what could have been an initial version of the current “Bolinhol” appeared in the newspaper “Vimaranense” on May 3, 1892, when they wrote about the presentation of “doce bolinholo” in the pilgrimage of Nossa Senhora da Madre Deus, in the parish of S. Pedro de Azurém.

But what can be considered as the genesis of the cake we have today takes place in 1884, when on September 3rd of that year Joaquim Ribeiro Ferreira, then widower, carpenter and father of Joaquina Pedrosa Ferreira da Silva, marries Albina Alves Torres, a baker and also a widow, thus beginning the dynasty of the Ribeiro Ferreira family linked to bakery. It was this lady who transmitted the art of bakery to her husband, who in turn would open the first sponge cake shop in 1905, and to the then young woman and her stepdaughter, Joaquina Pedrosa Ferreira da Silva. A curious piece of information is the fact that in 1918 the cake took on a rectangular shape, which it still has today, in result of a request from Joaquina Pedrosa Ferreira da Silva to Joaquim Teixeira Martins da Cunha, who worked as a tinker (CUNHA, 2021).

Joaquina Pedrosa Ferreira da Silva, according to what is written in the book “O Pão de Ló Coberto de Vizela – Apontamentos para a História”, whose information was collected by António Cunha and edited by the Municipality of Vizela in 2021, is considered the creator of the cake “Bolinhol”, initially called “Pão de Ló Coberto de Vizela”. She was born in March 1874 and died in May 1922, aged 49. Considered the creator because, after having been a seller of various sweets in strategic places in Vizela to those who visited the locality to, mainly, enjoy its thermal facilities, it was that lady who developed and perfected the sponge cake that existed at the time, drier and with a round shape. She transformed it into a rectangular shape, as previously mentioned, and applied sugar syrup on top, making it more appealing (IDEM).

This cake, throughout its existence, has collected several distinctions and several awards. In 1923, Joaquim Ribeiro Ferreira, took this cake to the Industrial Agricultural Exhibition of Guimarães, where it received an honorable mention. In 1986 won the “Portuguese Tradition and Prestige Trophy”, in 1994 the “Great International Prize for the Best Image”, in 2000 the “Leader of Good Service Award”, then the “International Gold Star Trophy for Quality”, in 2002 the “National Gastronomy Competition - Minho and Douro Litoral” (IBIDEM).

At the same time, over the decades and as a result of the work made by the producers that emerged, there were participations in gastronomy festivals, shows of

convent bakery, both throughout Portugal, Spain and France, with occasional presences in television programs (OLIVEIRA; SALGADO, 2001; CUNHA, 2021).

In 2019 “Bolinhol de Vizela” was one of the winners of the national contest “7 Maravilhas Doces de Portugal” (7 Sweet Wonders of Portugal), broadcast for several weeks on television nationwide and on open channel. The preparation and submission of the candidacy for this competition was responsibility of the Municipality of Vizela, with participation in the different rounds having been carried out in collaboration with the companies producing the cake and with the involvement of the local community. But obtaining this distinction at national level, promoted and disseminated intensely throughout the country, meant above all the recognition of the effort and dedication developed over more than a century by people wholly dedicated to the manufacture of the cake. It should be remembered that 907 cakes were in the contest (CÂMARA MUNICIPAL DE VIZELA, 2022).

According to the City Council of Vizela (2022), that victory, in addition to reaffirming the identity of a people, allows the promotion of Vizela, consolidating a strategy to boost traditional trade, in particular those who proudly produce and sell “Bolinhol”, also boosting the restaurants offer, which has another “asset” on its tables.

In fact, within the scope of this research, it was verified that “Bolinhol de Vizela” is a prominent element in the tools and promotional actions that the Municipality respectively uses and carries out. More specifically in the digital tools at the Municipality disposal, such as social networks and a website, but also in tourist fairs in Portugal and Spain. Of note is the fact that the City Council of Vizela annually organizes a fair dedicated to the cake named “Feira do Bolinhol”, attracting thousands of visitors to Vizela.

In 2020, to value the cake and protect its origin, the City Council of Vizela started a certification process for “Bolinhol de Vizela”, which has already been completed and resulted in a specifications document to be complied by current and future cake producers in Vizela. Meanwhile, in 2021, the brand “Bolinhol de Vizela”, with an associated logo, was registered, in INPI - National Institute of Industrial Property, being owned by the Municipality of Vizela.

Within the scope of this research, although it was difficult to obtain complete and totally concrete information about human resources and volume of invoicing from the companies that produce the cake, as they prefer discretion and confidentiality, it was possible to collect information that allows registering that in the five companies that currently produce the cake, around 60 people work on there and the annual billing volume, considering only the “Bolinhol de Vizela” sales, exceeds five hundred thousand euros, half million euros.

With this information, adding to it the certainly considerable set of suppliers of those companies, it is assumed with some ease that the economic framework associated with “Bolinhol de Vizela” has considerable importance in the local economic dynamics, which includes the important maintenance of jobs and consequently the guarantee of income for several families, what is significant with regard to social balance.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

“Bolinhol”, in addition of being an icon of Vizela's gastronomy and culture, a legacy of several generations, is a significant product for the local economy, with direct and indirect positive impacts.

The fact that it is a distinctive element in the local gastronomic offer has, over time, allowed it to assume itself as an identifier of the tourist offer of Vizela, today recognized at regional and national level, being a factor of tourist attraction.

Within the scope of this research, both through the analysis of the information collected and above all through the observation carried out, it is verified the existence of a strong sense of belonging and pride in relation to the cake, by the producers, as well as by the local population and by the Municipality, which will certainly allow this cake to combine a past of interesting development with a future of equal success.

Despite registering the existence of literature dedicated to “Bolinhol”, which tries to portray as faithfully as possible its historical context, was identified some inconsistency with regard to the grounding of some reports or statements. Another constraint verified, although it may be considered natural due to the need for confidentiality, is the fact that it was difficult to obtain concrete information on human resources and volume of invoicing, forcing an exercise of data extrapolation with the necessary seriousness.

Despite the record of constraints within the scope of this research, it is more important to have verified that the longevity of the cake will be guaranteed by the desire of the producers to continue its production and distribution, by the experienced hands of dedicated professionals who guarantee the quality of the product, by the recognition from the local population, the demand from visitors and the interest in its protection and valuation by the local public authorities.

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### ***Bolinhol de Vizela: com génese em 1884, hoje património gastronómico e recurso turístico***

#### **Resumo**

*Há mais de 130 anos que o Bolinhol faz parte do património gastronómico de Vizela, concentrando características históricas, culturais e económicas relevantes que merecem ser protegidas, preservadas, valorizadas e promovidas. Um bolo único que é uma mais-valia gastronómica do Concelho de Vizela, na região Norte de Portugal. A sua génese remonta a 1884. A história do doce e o seu crescente destaque acompanham o desenvolvimento das termas de Vizela e, por inerência, da própria localidade. Sobretudo a partir do início do século XX, com a conclusão de importantes obras na rede de transportes e comunicações, os ingleses ligados ao comércio do Vinho do Porto, bem como os turistas do Norte de Portugal e Espanha, todos com significativo poder económico, optaram por Vizela para frequentar as termas. Para o desenvolvimento deste artigo, de carácter ensaístico, portanto descritivo, mas também reflexivo, aplicou-se uma metodologia qualitativa, a fim de compreender o percurso histórico do doce, o que garantiu a sua longevidade e qual a sua relevância na*



*dinâmica social, económica e turística local. Hoje, o Bolinhol, além de ser um ícone da gastronomia e cultura vizelense, legado de várias gerações, é um recurso turístico relevante na dinâmica local, tanto turística como económica, também uma marca, e a sua promoção e comercialização geram impactos positivos.*

**Palavras-chave:** Turismo. Economia. Gastronomia. História. Património.