

Returning to the Spanish salted fish market

1. Name of research leader and project participants

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2. Project objectives

1. Give an account of Norwegian research connected to the Norwegian participants in the Spanish salted fish market and suggest possible roads ahead.
2. Investigate possible strategies for Norwegian salted fish producers to improve their competitiveness in the Spanish salted fish market by adapting to conventions in the market.
 - Identifying the Spanish conventions and preferences in connection with salted fish and with Norwegian salted fish.
3. Complete a theory discussion of the connection between conventions, experience economy and regional marketing.
4. Scrutinize the Norwegian salted fish producers' incentive to comply the conventions of the Spanish consumer.
5. Investigate how focus groups can be applied as a method in economical geography and in networking theory. And investigate if this is a method to use in marketing and in creating understanding for Norwegian salted fish.

3. Background

The Spanish market for salted fish products is undergoing a fundamental restructuring. Import volumes of salted fish to Spain more than doubled between 1991 and 2005 and represents an increasingly important market. After 1998 the Norwegian market share dropped from 34.7% to 9.6% in 2005, partly due to Iceland's recapturing of the Spanish salt fish market. In Finnmark, Norway, the fishing industry has been the most dominating form for employment. Export reduction to Spain has therefore influenced the region and may be a partial explanation of decline in employment and population.

4. Research problems

Is it possible for Norwegian salted fish producers to reverse their decline in the market share and increase their competitiveness in the Spanish salted fish market by adapting the Spanish conventions? What are the Spanish conventions and perceptions concerning salt fish in general, and Norwegian salt fish in particular? Is there a "salt fish experience" among Spanish consumers? Is it possible to establish conventions from the market domain of the production chain onto the raw product and processing units of the chain? Will Norwegian salted fish producers relate to the Spanish conventions? Are they willing to restructure production if this is considered necessary?

5. Theories and methodologies

The project relies on economical geography theory, production chain theories, convention theory, experience economy, theory on branding and marketing. Methodologically the project will focus on the last link in the production chain, the consumers, and the link that provides the consumers with salted fish mainly the shops (baccalo shops and markets) and HORECA. Focus groups as a panel survey will be established in three regions of Spain, Valencia, Galicia and The Basque country. The focus group also aims to create networks for increasing the understanding for Norwegian salted fish. Additionally focus groups will be investigated as a mean for regional marketing. Supplementary methods will be in depth interviews, observation and questionnaires.

6. Time schedule: Mars 2009 to Mars 2012

7. Total time needed: Three years