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Sustainable use of endogenous touristic resources of rural areas: two portuguese case studies

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Abstract

Empirical evidence shows that tourism can give a real contribution to regional development and, in the case of certain remote and economic lagged territories, it is the sector best placed to achieve this goal. This role of tourism as to do, namely, with the possibility of taking profit of the endogenous resources of these territories. Meanwhile, the opportunities are not the same for each region and it is easy to understand that, considering the resources available, not every one has the choice to base its development strategy in the tourism sector.

On the other hand, sustainable development depends, both, on conservation and valorisation of the resources potential and on diversification of tourism activities and products, no matter the agents or policy options are.

Based on empirical research carried out in Caminha and Paredes de Coura portuguese municipalities, and in what Tourism in Rural Areas (TRA) is concerned, we present in this paper a preliminary evaluation of the social and economic impacts of the tourism strategies followed. We also aim to extract some policy implications in order to better design future approaches to this issue of taking profit from resources endowment of territories. The starting point is the one of tourism based on quality, which serves the interests of local populations.

Key words: endogenous resources; sustainable development; tourism in rural areas.

Introduction

It is usually admitted that tourism plays an important role in economic development, providing long-term benefits to local economies, mostly when implemented on a sustained way. The capacity of tourism to establish synergies with several other activities, like lodging, feeding, drinking, transport and entertainment services for tourists, makes tourism a structuring sector of many economies.

In many developed countries and in developing ones tourism is today a strategic sector. This is the Portuguese case where tourism is presented as a strategic cluster by the *Economic and Social Development Plan for 2000/2006*. In this document tourism is officially claimed to be one pivotal activity to achieve the economic and social development of the nation and of its regions, particularly for the remote and lagged ones.

Assuming the analysis of the available touristic resources crucial to define the tourist vocation of a territory, and, above all, to select the best touristic alternative within the range of available possibilities (Cerro, 1993), this investigation aims to present a preliminary evaluation of the social and economic impacts of tourism in certain rural areas. In this case, the municipalities chosen were Caminha and Paredes de Coura, two Portuguese municipalities located in the Spanish (Galiza) border. Meanwhile, we believe Tourism in Rural Areas (TRA) will be only an instrument of development if the established strategy succeeds to incorporate the local values and culture.

Taking these two cases, we also aim to extract some policy indications, in order to better design future approaches to this issue of taking profit from resources endowment of territories.

From this perspective, following Boullon (2000), it is useful to remind that tourism, like any other economic industry, tends to locate in the most favourable area of the physical space, that is, in those places endowed with the adequate attributes according to the nature of the activity. Therefore, tourist attractions are inputs into the tourism sector and they constitute the main reason behind tourists travelling to those territories. As a matter of fact, visitors travel to those regions either to know their touristic attributes either to enjoy activities programmed to satisfy tourists' expectations.

1. Tourism in Rural Areas

1.1 *Tourism as an endogenous resources strategy*

In recent times, tourism has been advocated as an efficient way to promote the development of the so-called less favoured or lagged regions. However, in spite of the remarkable perspectives tourism sector can open to economies in the medium and long term, it is essential tourism will be taken from as a sustainable economic and environmental growth approach. In this sense, it will be crucial regions put their emphasis not only on diversification of tourism activities and products, but also on strategic partnerships, as well as on conservation and valorisation of the cultural and natural heritage. Indeed, tourism needs to diversify and to decentralise itself, taking advantage of the potential of regions and their ability to generate alternative tourism products (Ribeiro, 2001).

For the success of the tourism activities in certain territories, it becomes important to rely on the local resources. This thought comes from the endogenous development paradigm, developed since late 1970's/beginning of the 1980's in opposition to the traditional regional models and policies.

As it is common known, the traditional regional policy follows an approach "from above", a growing model relying on spatial concentration and spatial economic redistribution of economic activities in order to attain the reduction of regional income disparities, using, for such, external resources. As a consequence of its scarce performance, this model has fallen into disuse. As Barquero (1995) refers, the "new" approach "from bellow", more concerned with the economic development of cities and territories and with reducing regional development disparities, makes use of not only external resources but, above all, endogenous resources. This new strategy sustains the idea that economic development doesn't have to be necessarily polarised and concentrated in large cities; it can be diffuse if regions have capability to use successfully the endogenous resources and the potential of territories.

The expression "endogenous development", itself, (or "development from below", as some prefer to call it) reflects, as underlined by Polèse (1998), the idea that success of a region depend, lastly, on its own capacity to initiate and lead an economic growing process that will allow it to become prosperous, based on the initiative and technical know-how of its inhabitants and companies. This way, the sources of development lie in

the region itself, in its people, its institutions, its sense of community and, perhaps first of all, in the innovation and entrepreneurship capacity of its population (Polèse, 1998a). The involvement of local people and enterprises in development planning allows the use of the available resources, whilst designing competitive solutions for resolving their growth problems and constraints. This development doesn't mean the implementation of great industrial projects and, according to Henriques and Neves (1986), should be decided at the smallest territorial scale and starting from the territorial identity of populations. It implies a decentralized public administration, guided by intermediate organisms which will support in material or financial terms the companies. As a result, it is expected that local development might generate a reduction of the dependence of the region from national governments and external economic agents (Polèse, 1998).

It is worth mentioning that the emphasis given to local environments has the merit of putting the emphasis on resources and capabilities of regions, but, as Polèse (1998) says, it can also be the largest weakness of the model, once the resources of territories ("milieux ") are not the same everywhere.

This is the case of the tourism activity. In fact, the opportunities are not similar for each region and, considering the resources available, not every one has the choice to base its development strategy in the tourism sector. For some regions tourism assumes a vital role, for others it is a development factor and for others it constitutes a small co-adjutant factor with more or less expression according to the existing conditions (Cunha, 1997).

Indeed, it is now widely accepted that the conditions are changing. A society in constant mutation, ecological more and more conscious, searching for a new quality of life and alerted for the negative effects of mass tourism, has provided the bases for the diversification of tourism activities and products. As a direct result, the tourism sector is quickly developing new products and market segments, opening a wide field of opportunities. One of these products, which has faced recently an increasing demand, is tourism in rural areas (TRA).

The development of this market cannot be considered accidental or temporary; it is the result of the evolution of the societal model. The saturation of some coastal touristic areas and the evolution of tourist motivations transformed the rural space in an important tourist destination, particularly when it gathers attributes of singularity and authenticity in what concerns to nature/ecology, heritage and culture.

As a consequence, attributes as the environmental quality, the peacefulness, the contact with nature and a non massified space, as well as the preference for shorter periods of vacations, are issues that have increased the tourist's interest for rural spaces. On the other hand, financial benefits made available by the European Union and other public sources allowed a wide and heterogeneous supply that, somehow, reflects the rising importance of this modality of tourism.

1.2 Tourism as a sustainable activity

Regarding rural development, tourism in rural areas has assumed the role of the better placed activity to achieve the socio-economic revitalisation of lagged regions. This role will be as successful as tourism might incorporate resources, history, traditions and culture of each region.

Rural tourism is a growing sector and a powerful instrument towards the diversification of rural economies affected by the decline of agriculture, as well as a factor favouring pluri-activity taking the synergies it is able to generate with a wide range of other activities. This type of tourism, although being a minor part of the total tourist market, is able to offer a valuable contribution to the sustainability of rural economies. This can be observed not only in terms of income and employment generated but also in terms of natural resource conservation or preservation, as well as in what refers to the rehabilitation of the artistic and cultural heritage of rural spaces it is able to produce – just mentioning the more evident positive impacts (Vera, 1997).

Although the development of the rural tourism has numerous advantages, it can also cause several problems. In order to minimize these problems, it is necessary to define alternative tourist development strategies which attain a responsible use of rural territories, searching to rend compatible the interests of tourism, environment and local community ones (Vera, 1997; Bote Gómez, 2001).

In this sense, the definition of the model or strategy of tourism development in rural areas should choose to elect the following targets, which are quite different from the ones envisaged by the traditional tourism industry (Bote Gómez, 2001):

- to match conservation and development of touristic resources. Indeed, having rural landscapes usually an important natural and socio-cultural heritage, the tourism development should respect the integrity of its resources (attractive landscape,

peacefulness and resting ambience, popular architecture, etc.). As a consequence, it is necessary to avoid, on one hand, the 'fundamentalist or static protectionism' and, on the other hand, the 'productiviste development', as both cause resources degradation or destruction and the misuse of rural space;

- taking the concentration and large scale of the supply which characterizes the mass tourism strategy, it is suggested to adopt instead a non concentrated and small scale supply (of lodging and recreation). This supply must be coordinate at the local and the commercial levels (due to promotional, commercial and management reasons);

- besides the financial returns necessary to obtain the viability of investments made, this strategy favours the contact with nature and an authentic dialogue between the rural and urban population through a set of socio-cultural activities;

- this type of tourism has to be organized and managed for the rural population in order to optimize the direct and indirect benefits of tourism in those areas. Therefore, rural tourism should not be managed by a reduced number of managers and intermediary agents who don't belong to the rural community. On the contrary, the rural society must give their consent to the strategy and be directly committed. Only this way is possible to get the partnership between the community members necessary to develop the complex tasks involved in and the preservation of touristic resources.

Given this, any rural tourism development should elect, as Vera (1997) suggests, the following targets: sustainable use of resources; revitalization of local economies; quality of management; integration of local population; organized and controlled development, which implies to reject mass tourism; and, definitively, sustainability.

2. The TRA in Portugal

Before moving forward, it is important to present some statistical data on last years evolution of tourism in rural areas in Portugal.

In what respects the tourism in rural areas, the beginning of the 21st century is characterised by the growth of the number of TRA establishments¹ and the number of beds offered, in all types of facilities. This has been happening since the first year that we retained (Table 1).

Table 1

Total number of TRA establishments and accommodation capacity, by types

Types of facilities	Number of establishments					Number of bed places				
	2002	2001	2000	1999	Average Var. %	2002	2001	2000	1999	Average Var. %
Turismo de Habitação	244	228	229	214	4,5%	2677	2371	2375	2183	7,2%
Turismo Rural	358	284	280	262	11,5%	3256	2379	2347	2208	14,8%
Agroturismo	145	122	119	115	8,3%	1738	1386	1350	1295	10,8%
Casas de Campo	116	51	40	15	107,2%	763	340	221	90	107,9%
Turismo de Aldeia	3	(a)	-	-	-	99	(a)	-	-	-
Total	866	685	668	606	13,1%	8533	6476	6293	5776	14,5%

(a) – Type not considered in 2001

Source: DGT

As illustrated by Table 1, after a first stage, most of the establishments that entered in operation belonged to the Turismo Rural (TR), Agro-Turismo (AG) and Casas de Campo (CC) types of accommodation. Such evolution contributed to the reduction of the proportion of the Turismo de Habitação (TH) type (starting point of the TRA in Portugal) in the total number of establishments.

¹ Turismo de Habitação (tourism in manor-houses) – this is a family-style accommodation service for tourists provided in old private houses which, because of their architectural, historic or artistic value, are representative of a certain period, namely manor-houses or palaces (DGT, 2004).

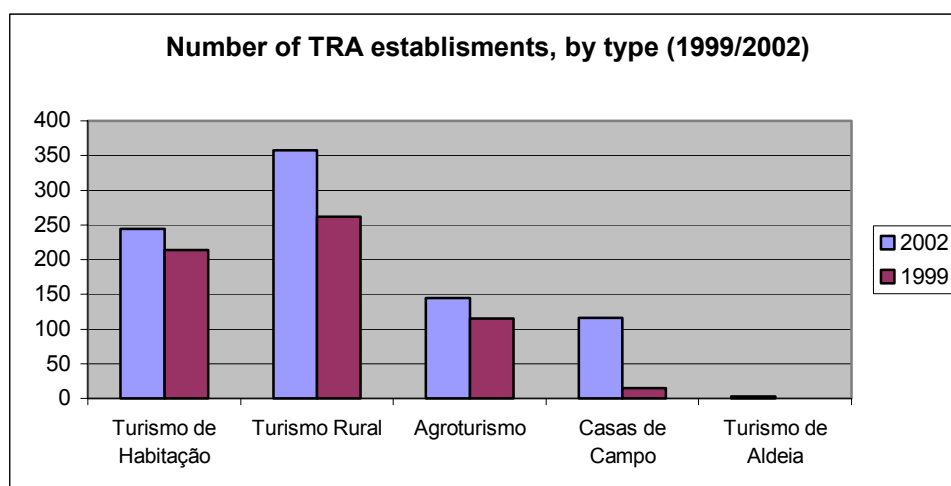
Turismo Rural (rural tourism) – this is a family-style accommodation service for tourists provided in private cottages which, because of their building materials and other characteristics, form an integral part of the typical regional architecture (DGT, 2004).

Agro-Turismo (agricultural tourism) - this is a family-style accommodation service for tourists provided in private farmhouses, enabling guests to follow and discover more about farming activity or to take part in the work that is done there, respecting the rules established by the manager of the business (DGT, 2004).

Turismo de Aldeia (village tourism) – a group of at least five houses located in a village, historic village or rural centre, managed in an integrated way by one single managing body. The design of these houses and the materials used in their building must be such as to ensure that they are fully integrated into the village's typical architecture (DGT, 2004).

Casas de Campo (country houses) - this is an accommodation service for tourists provided by private houses in rural areas, whether or not the owners or legal proprietors inhabit them. Their design, building materials and other characteristics must be integrated into both the architecture and rustic environment of the area in which they are located (DGT, 2004).

Graph 1



In 2002, from a total of 866 TRA establishments functioning throughout Portugal, 244 were devoted to TH, 358 to TR, 145 to AG, 116 to CC and 3 integrated TA.

The north part of the country, just as in previous years, continued to be the region with larger lodging supply (3568 beds, integrated at 1813 rooms, distributed by 372 TRA establishments). The Centre region occupied the second place, with 1672 beds, in 171 TRA establishments. The Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira were, however, the ones that presented last years higher growth rates.

Table 2

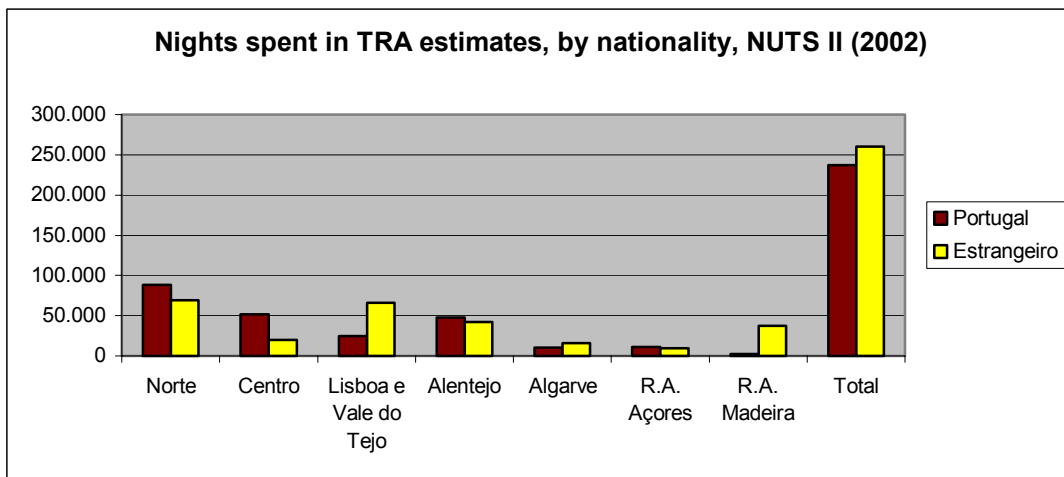
Number of TRA establishments and accommodation capacity, by NUT II

NUTS II	Number of establishments					Number of bed places				
	2002	2001	2000	1999	Average Var %	2002	2001	2000	1999	Average Var %
North region	372	283	274	262	13,1%	3568	2597	2528	2394	15,2%
Centre region	171	132	130	118	13,8%	1672	1230	1199	1102	15,8%
Lisbonne and V. Tejo	99	95	96	98	0,4%	1064	981	985	1003	2,1%
Alentejo region	111	90	84	84	10,2%	1239	904	831	844	14,8%
Algarve region	24	19	19	18	10,6%	247	207	207	197	8,1%
Continente	777	619	603	580	10,7%	7790	5919	5750	5540	12,8%
A. R. Madeira	41	31	30	15	45,2%	361	264	250	116	52,6%
A.R Azores	48	35	35	11	85,1%	382	293	293	120	58,2%
Total	866	685	668	606	13,1%	8533	6476	6293	5776	14,5%

Source: DGT

In what concerns the TRA demand, according the visitor's nationality, if we take the 2002 we conclude that 52,4% were foreign and 47,6% Portuguese. Germany occupied the first place, followed by United Kingdom and Holland. However, just this last country increased its weight, comparing with the previous year.

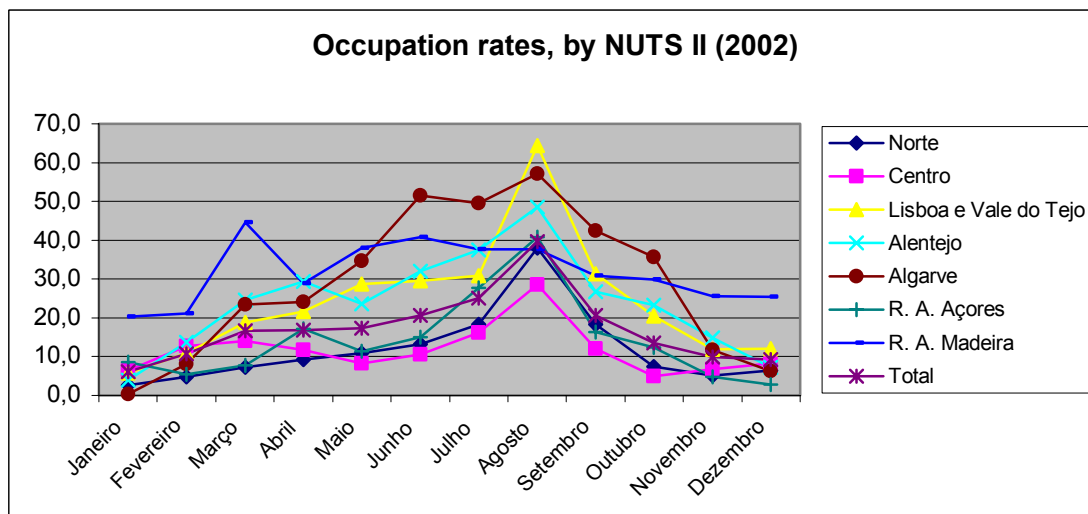
Graph 2



To better understand the dimension of TRA in Portugal, it is important to keep in mind the following aspects: although the TRA establishments represented 31,3% of total lodging, they just represented 3,9% of the rooms supply and 3,4% of the national accommodation capacity (even so, if we make a more meticulous reading of data, excluding the greater urban centres and the coastal zones, we would get a better understanding of the real situation). On the other hand, the occupation-bed rates, in 2002 (just as in previous years), were quite low (17,5%, on average), far away from occupational rates of the remaining categories of touristic establishments (estimated to have reached 41,1%).

An obvious seasonal pattern in the tourist demand is verified, not only in the foreign visitors' behaviour but also in the national ones. Meanwhile, national visitors demand is significantly less concentrated than the foreigner one.

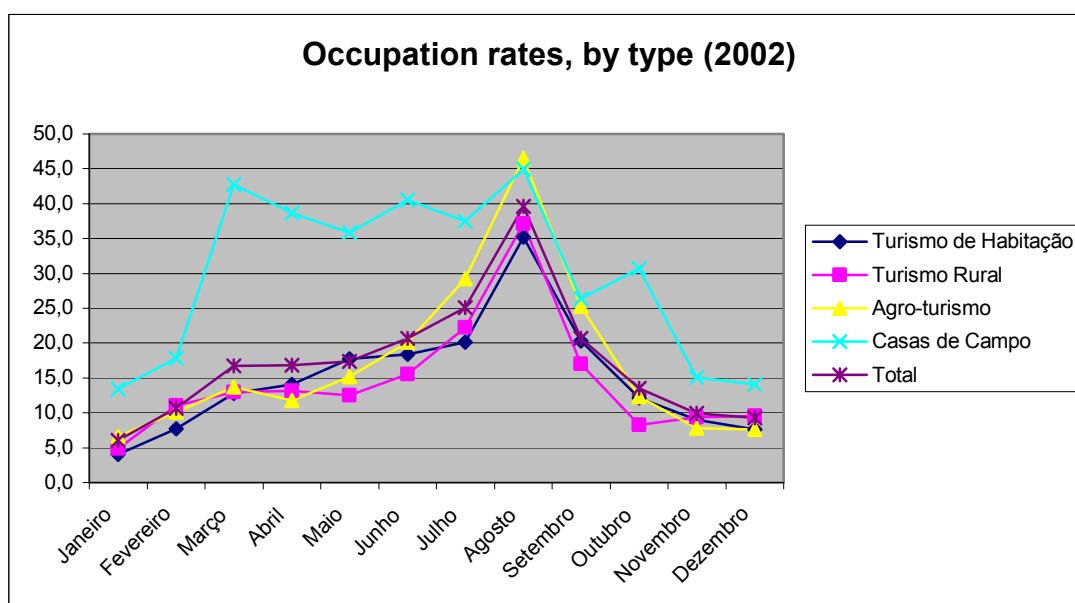
Graph 3



In fact, seasonality is a major problem that the TRA has to face, representing the months of July to September those where the demand is larger (with occupational rates above 20%), reaching, in total, about 45% of the total annual booking. January, November and December correspond to the low season (with occupational rates under 10%).

Such seasonal patterns may find explanation in the fact that some of the TRA establishments do not open on an annual basis. They are usually closed during the low season, that is, the traditionally low season in what regards sun and seaside tourism.

Graph 4



If one observes the occupation-bed rates, by types of TRA facilities, we recognised that Casas de Campo are the TRA establishments with higher occupational rates (30,1%, in 2002). There, the seasonal levels are less evident, which allows to justify last years increase in the number of this type of establishments.

3. Case studies

Based on empirical research carried out in Caminha and Paredes de Coura Portuguese municipalities, this study seeks to understand the specific paths that took the TRA implementation in the above mentioned municipalities and to present a preliminary evaluation of the social and economic impacts of the strategies followed.

These two municipalities of the Minho-Lima NUT III are located in the north-west of Portugal, in the border with Spain (Galiza). However, Caminha is located in the coastline and has already some tradition in TRA, while Paredes de Coura, inland town of Alto Minho, seems being now discovering this touristic product.

The data were collected through face-to-face inquiry, directed to the universe of TRA establishments installed in the territories we chose to analyse. The interviews took place between November and December 2004. The receptivity to the inquiry has shown to be high, existing just a case in Caminha and two cases in the Paredes de Coura municipality where we found not readiness to answer to the questionnaire. In these three cases the data was collected from official statistical sources.

In the next section of the paper we present the results we got. In order to better design future approaches to the issue of taking profit from resources endowment of territories, after the results presentation we suggest some policy implications extracted from these two case studies.

3.1 *The case of Caminha*

The municipality of Caminha is divided in 20 parishes², distributed by an area of about 138 km². According to the 2001 Census, Caminha possessed 16 897 inhabitants, having benefited from a population increase since the previous census. Its active population rounded 7 thousand inhabitants, distributed by the tertiary sector (59%), the secondary sector (34%) and the primary one, with just 7% of the active population.

Endowed with varied and attractive landscapes, the municipality of Caminha possesses diversified and qualified natural, patrimonial and cultural resources, which allowed the growth of the tourism industry, mainly the one related with sun and seaside. However, the whole year, mostly during the periods of festivities and in the weekends, many people choose Caminha as their tourist destination. It is also elected as local for having a second residence.

The geomorphologic configuration is quite varied. It is a place to where converge three rivers (Minho, Coura and Âncora). It is also endowed with some hills and small mountains. Those are the cases of Argela, Venade, Vilarelho, Cristelo and Arga, whose

² The smallest administrative level existing in Portugal.

quota approaches the 700 meters of altitude. In almost the whole municipality, the climate is mild and reasonable pleasant, with strong influence of the sea.

The TRA has some presence in Caminha, not just because of its historical and architectonic heritage, namely its old and elegant houses, but also because visitors have the possibility of exploring the existing exuberant environment and landscapes, as already mentioned.

In the Caminha municipality, the TRA is represented by the houses shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Identification and location of the TRA establishments, in 2004 (Caminha)

Identification of the houses	TRA types of facilities	Parish	Distance to municipality centre	Activity beginning
Hotel Rural Casa da Anta	HR	Lanhelas	6 km	1983
Quinta da Graça	TH	Vilarelho	0,5 km	1985
Casa da Eira	TR	Moledo	2,5 km	1991
Casa da Torre	TR	Ancora	9 km	1995
Casa de Leiras	TR	Matriz	0,5 km	2001
Quinta da Cantareira	TR	Vilar de Mouros	5 km	2002
Casa do Esteiró	TR	Vilarelho	1,5 km	-

Source: Authors' elaboration

The analysis of Table 3 allows concluding, on one hand, that these houses are present in just six of the twenty parishes of the municipality and, on the other hand, that all the dwellings are located in the coastline, extending for the whole coast of Caminha. Of those establishments, one of them is devoted to the modality of Hotel Rural ³ (in the beginning it was classified as Turismo Rural), another takes the form of Turismo de Habitação, and the remaining five are devoted to Turismo Rural.

In what concerns the characteristics of the TRA establishments and evolution of the property, Table 4 synthesizes some important additional elements.

³ Hotel Rural (rural hotel) - hotel structure located in rural areas out of the administrative town of the municipality whose population, according to the last demographic census, shall be more than 20 000 inhabitants, whose propose is to offer accommodation and other related services, including meals; this services imply a monetary cost (DGT, 2004).

Table 4**Brief characterization of the TRA establishments (Caminha)**

Identification of the houses	Total area of the property	Century of construction	Generations in the family	Before TRA
Hotel Rural Casa da Anta	Nr	XVII	2	Farm
Quinta da Graça	1,5 ha	XVII	Acquired	Dwelling
Casa da Eira	5000 m ²	XIX	Acquired	Farm
Casa da Torre	5000 m ²	XIX	3	Dwelling
Casa de Leiras	2 ha	XVII/XVIII	Since always	Dwelling
Quinta da Cantareira	4800 m ²	XVIII	Acquired	Farm
Casa do Esteiró	-	XVIII	Since always	Dwelling

Source: Authors' elaboration

* Nr – Didn't answer

The three houses placed closer to the centre of Caminha (Quinta da Graça, Casa de Leiras and Casa do Esteiró) have a high historical and architectonic value and they suffered slight alterations regarding its original style.

The remaining ones, equally of recognized historical and architectonic value, were in the past the head of agricultural explorations that, with time, were broken into fragments. Nowadays, in none of the cases agricultural activities still occur. As a consequence, the surrounding lands have given place to beautiful gardens and fantastic landscapes.

All the houses have been restored in its interior to provide their tourists with modern-day comforts, while still preserving the original architecture. Just in two cases the owners made use of public financial supports for the accomplished improvements. In the remaining cases they used their own capitals and bank credit.

In what regards the characteristics of the establishments, Table 5 supplies a general picture.

Table 5**Rooms and services available to tourists (Caminha)**

Rooms and services	HR Casa da Anta	Quinta Graça	Casa Eira	Casa Torre	Casa Leiras	Quinta da Cantareira	Casa de Esteiró
Meals room	X**	X*	X*	X*	X*	X*	X*
Private living room		X			X		
Common living room	X	X	X		X	X	X
Card/billiard room		X***			X		
Swimming pool		X	X		X	X	
Children's playground					X		
Bicycles					X	X	X

Source: Authors' elaboration

* only breakfast

** it has a restaurant

*** in construction

As shown by Table 5, excluding the TRA unit that possesses a restaurant, all the houses serve only breakfast (according to Portuguese rules, that meal is included in the price of the accommodation). The reason pointed out by the operators comes from the existence in the neighbourhood of quality restaurants.

Besides the comfort, we could understand that there is some concern with the entertainment and pleasure the guests can have. Thus, the houses are providing on-site facilities in order to please the tourist and keep him occupied. The proximity to sea and fluvial beaches was the justification pointed out by two of the touristic houses for not having a swimming pool, although they recognize the importance of this kind of equipment.

It is useful to mention that, although all the houses are open during all the year, the touristic demand is highly seasonal, being concentrate on the months from June to September, just as it happens at the national level, with average length of stay of 4 days. The age groups that demands more this touristic product in Caminha is the one aged from 30 to 60 years, not only in the national tourists' case, but also in the foreigners' one. According to the data collected, one may conclude that the Spanish tourist demand isn't relevant, in spite of the proximity with Galiza. By nationality, visitors of Caminha TRA units come, mostly, from Germany, United Kingdom and Holland. This is remarkably similar to what happens at national level. Another issue we would like to underline is the kind of attendance it is offered by these TRA houses. As a matter of fact, there isn't a standardised treatment of the guests, that is, each house receives them differently, although having in mind to receive the visitors with quality.

As it was already mentioned, the Hotel Rural Casa da Anta, complementarily to the TRA accommodation facility, has a typical restaurant, which makes available the typical gastronomy of Minho. This restaurant serves not only the tourists accommodated in the TRA unit but also any other consumer, and, this way, constitutes a complement (appreciable) of revenue.

The implemented inquiry allowed, equally, to conclude that the management of the touristic houses is driven by people that already has an advanced age: just in Quinta da Graça case the age is inferior to 60 years. Apart the case of the just mentioned TRA unit, whose owner is a Dutch lady, the remaining ones have Portuguese owners, although just one is natural of the Caminha municipality.

The data also show that the proprietors have, in general, a high education level. Regarding the employment generated, the collected data make clear that the amount of

contracted workers is very reduced and comes, mostly, from the municipality, itself. The level of instruction is low and in contrast with what is common in the tourism sector, as an all, these employees work the whole year in the touristic houses.

As a final note, it is important to mention the dissatisfaction shown by the TRA owners regarding the promotion made of its tourist offer, criticizing the official organisms (national, regional and local) as well as the TRA proprietors' associations, PRIVETUR and TURIHAB. The contacted tourism operators recognise they get large advantages from their partnerships with tourism agencies, mainly in what refers to foreigners' recruitment. This same idea emerged also in Paredes de Coura, to which we will refer in the next section.

Some owners of the TRA units revealed, equally, disappointment for the lack of cooperation and dynamism of their business partners. Some have referred that there are operators that show satisfaction with the seasonal character of the existing touristic demand, not demonstrating interest in the change of the 'state of the things'.

3.2 The case of Paredes de Coura

Located in the heart of Alto Minho, the municipality of Paredes de Coura incorporates 21 parishes, distributed by 138,4 km². According to the Census of 2001, its population was 9415 inhabitants, representing a decrease of 9,8% in the resident population since 1991.

The analysis of the evolution and distribution of the active population by main activity sectors allows emphasising the change in the structure of the economic activities this municipality faced across recent decades, from a starting point of an agricultural base. In fact, since the 80's that the primary sector has been suffering a substantial decrease. The employment in this activity sector has fallen from 47% in 1991 to 18,5% in 2001. On the other hand, the secondary and tertiary sectors faced a strong increment, occupying in 2001, 38,1 and 43,4% of the labour force, respectively.

The municipality's historical, monumental and artistic heritage includes meaningful archaeological and ethnological remains, milestones, Roman bridges, medieval portions of the 'Portuguese Route to Santiago', a medieval bridge, the Romanesque church of Rubiães, the protected natural area of Corno do Bico, within other visiting attractions. This makes of Paredes de Coura a privileged area to the development of rural tourism.

In this sense, it is strange that 70% of the TRA establishments have just appeared in the last three years.

The next table (Table 6) identifies the existing TRA houses and it locates them regarding the centre of Paredes de Coura.

Table 6
Identification and location of the TRA establishments, in 2004 (Paredes de Coura)

Identification of the houses	TRA types of facilities	Parish	Distance to Paredes de Coura	Activity beginning
Casa do Paço	TR	Ferreira	5,5 km	1994
Casa Paz do Outeiro	TR	Ferreira	6 km	1994
Casa Cerejas	TR	Bico	5,2 km	2004
Quinta da Cruz	TR	Linhares	6 km	2003
Sonho da Seara	TR	Bico	5,5 km	2004
Quinta de Favães	TR	Moselos	3,5 km	2002
Quinta S. Roque	CC	Rubiães	7 km	2004

Source: Authors' elaboration

As illustrated by the above table, only five from twenty-one parishes of Paredes de Coura offer this type of tourist accommodation. Just one TRA unit is placed at less than 5 km from the centre of the municipality, and all of them are sharply inserted in rural space. It is likewise important to mention that two of the establishments also benefit of the proximity of the protected natural area of Corno do Bico.

The TRA supply of Paredes de Coura is scarce, basically it offers the Turismo Rural type, having opened recently a Casa de Campo (Quinta de S.Roque).

Despite the existence in the municipality of noble houses from the 16th, the 17th and the 18th centuries (houses with recognised architectonic value and typically rural characteristics), which have belonged to wealthy aristocratic farmers, or others from the 19th century, belonging to the great bourgeoisie, this didn't favour the development of TRA activity until very recently. In fact, being not available traditional tourism accommodation in Paredes de Coura (the existing accommodation unit was just a 1st category pension), one should expect a stronger initiative from TRA potential operators in order to capture the forecasted opportunity. What ever the reason was, it is interesting to verify that more than 50% of the TRA establishments began to operate just in the last two years.

Differently from the Caminha case, the issue of public financial helps to TRA was decisive to the owners of these tourist establishments. Indeed, the possibility of

reconstructing and adapting the houses to the comforts of nowadays, with the guarantee of preservation of the architectonic heritage, was fundamental for the beginning of the touristic activity in Paredes de Coura. In this sense, having in mind the declarations of the interviewed owners, their motivation was more the preservation of the houses than to become TRA operators.

The characteristics of the TRA establishments we can find in Paredes de Coura are shown in the table below.

Table 7
Brief characterization of the TRA establishments (Paredes de Coura)

Identification of the houses	Total area of the property	Century of construction	Generations in the family	Before TRA
Casa do Paço	5,2 ha	XVI	Acquired	Dwelling
Casa Paz do Outeiro	1,5 ha	XIX	3	Dwelling
Casa Cerejas	2 ha	XVIII	3	Farm
Quinta da Cruz	3,5 há	XVIII	4	Farm
Sonho da Seara	1 ha	XVIII	Acquired	Farm
Quinta de Favões	-	XVII	Since always	Farm
Quinta S. Roque	-	-	-	Farm

Source: Authors' elaboration

Although, these tourist houses are nowadays small properties, they use to be part of large agricultural explorations that, with the time, were fractionated.

Presently, in none of the cases agricultural activities have place to complement the touristic activity. However, in the case of one unit, it existed until recently the handmade production of goat cheese, in which the tourists could participate. The cheese was commercialized with success; however the lady in charge had to suspend the activity for lack of means, above all human resources.

All the contacted TRA houses were recuperated in its interior to offer the comforts demanded by the tourist vocation they have developed, making use of public financial support, with one exception where just own capitals were used. Some of the owners declared to have acquired and recuperated old and rustic furniture, as well as ornamental objects to decorate the interiors and to turn them more consentaneous with the external environment. The contiguous lands were also recovered, resulting beautiful landscaped spaces, endowed with entertainment equipments.

In what concern the TRA owner's profile, in the majority of the cases they are females (with one only exception, that also corresponds to the older operator), with an average

of age around the 52 years. They detain university degrees (also here, the exception corresponds to the proprietor above mentioned). All of them have Portuguese nationality but just three of them are natural of the municipality of Paredes de Coura.

With respect to the services available in the establishments, Table 8 provides the necessary information.

Table 8
Rooms and services available to the tourists (Paredes de Coura)

Rooms and services	Casa do Paço	Casa Paz Outeiro	Casa Cerejas	Quinta Cruz	Sonho Seara	Quinta Favães	Quinta S. Roque
Meals room	X*	X**	X**	X*	X**	X*	X*
Private living room		X	X			X	
Common living room	X		X	X	X		X
Card/billiard room	X		X	X	X	X	
Swimming pool	X***	X	X	X	X	X	X
Children's playground		X					
Bicycles		X	X		X		
Horses		X					

Source: Authors' elaboration

* only breakfast

** meals may be served upon prior request and agreement with the proprietor

*** in construction

Considering the above shown data, we may conclude that just three houses serve main meals to its customers, even so, by request. The remaining establishments just provide breakfast. The reason pointed out to this is the short permanence of the visitors in the houses, since the tourists use them, mostly, as support for the exploration of the surrounding territory.

The Casa Paz do Outeiro unit provides its guests the opportunity to ride, which is a strong surplus value, as declared by the landlady. All establishments have swimming pool (excepting Casa do Paço that foresees its supply soon), equipment considered by all the proprietors essential for this type of establishment, located in inland areas.

In what concerns paid workers employment in these touristic units, in the majority of the situations it is feminine, with low instruction level - almost exclusively the primary school. Their recruitment takes place in the municipality.

Additionally, although the experience of most of the houses is still short, from the results of the inquiry we got, we can materialise a few remarks: the first one is to underline the existence of a seasonal demand, in the summer; the second regards the

average length of stay, that goes from three to eight days; the third is to note that the majority of the national clients is coming from the north of the country and Lisbon and Valley of Tejo. We can also add that foreigners come mostly from Germany and Holland and that national tourists are, predominantly, between 31 and 60 years old. In the foreigner visitor's case, they use to be from the age groups above the 46 years old.

As a final comment, we must refer that, although this touristic product is very recent and has a very restricted territorial expression in Paredes de Coura, the TRA has been generating some benefits to the municipality. This is the case in what refers to lodging services, particularly. From this circumstance the tourist is lesser than before a passing visitor and, by consequence, other activities, like effect restaurants and handicraft, are taking some advantage.

Being a recent phenomenon, the expectations are great. The proprietors that we have contacted believe that this touristic activity has real potential as instrument of Paredes de Coura development. They believe that, for going far, it is only necessary the authorities put a larger interest in the defence and promotion of this touristic product. Namely, the TRA operators claim a larger involvement of the local authorities, establishing a concerted strategy regarding the natural and built heritage preservation, the promotion of the local gastronomy and the rehabilitation of the handicraft. This would allow taking better profit of the local endogenous resources and contributing to seasonality reduction.

4. Policy implications and conclusions

The tourist use of the rural areas and, in particular, the specific touristic product we selected to study, has generated great expectation in many Portuguese regions. Likewise, it was followed with enormous curiosity by academics and other agents worried with development issues.

In the last three decades, the traditional sun and seaside tourism has marked the economic performance of Algarve and Madeira regions and, in a smaller degree, the one of Lisbon. Taking advantage of the natural potential of those territories, the tourism sector has confirmed itself as an important income and employment generator. Despite this, it was an additional cause of the strongly asymmetric and coastal growth of the country.

To constitute an instrument of development of the less favoured regions, the Portuguese tourism needs to decentralise and to diversify itself, taking advantage of the potential of the territories and configuring alternative tourism products. In a certain sense, it was that the idea that informed the touristic organisation of the territory that started to be implemented by 1986. However, the 'National Tourism Plan', established then, was soon discarded, getting lost the regional emphasis base pursued. As a consequence, inertia took charge of retaking the unbalanced path and limited the use of potential resources of the regions, which was the starting point of the plan.

Though, the beauty of the landscapes, the architectonic wealth of secular buildings, the exuberance of the gastronomy and of many cultural manifestations are a feature of multiple Portuguese regions, as it is the Minho case, in general, and the one of the municipalities of Caminha and Paredes de Coura. The excessive promotional investment made in the sun and seaside tourism has limited the commercial management of those other resources. As a result, less massified products are still waiting for their chance. They are, of course, more demanding in what regards to service quality, but, certainly, can carry progress in the sense of sustainable development and territorial balance.

Such complains are made by the TRA operators and by those agents that defend this touristic product is able of generating wealth and employment at local and regional level. To reach these kind of objectives, on one hand, TRA must use quality as a distinguishing factor and, on the other hand, it needs to efficiently explore the potential markets (that nobody doubts that exist). Financial resources must be made available for marketing promotion, but the articulation of efforts among the actors, either publics or private, is also needed.

Meanwhile, one should remark that, sometimes, excessive hope was placed in the creation of employment and income that the TRA product is able to generate. Regarding the issue, we think that, even if the results are quite modest, they are less hopeful, mostly, just because the expectations were excessive.

Traditionally, the rural space was an universe of activities, each one supplying a part of the resources that sustained the installed communities. The deficit of functional diversity of the rural areas was the result of the industrial revolution and of the subsequent urbanization. Therefore, we cannot fight the evils that the rural areas suffer, and that have been driving to its economic failure and intense demographic exodus, just with the key 'Tourism in Rural Areas'. Obviously, TRA can play an important role, as

large as the promotion policies are consequent, but certainly it won't be the only solution for countryside. This ambition becomes unfeasible given the limited and located expression of the resources used by TRA. This is also the reason why it doesn't make sense to think it will be the answer for all and any part of the national territory. Just as it happens with the sun and seaside tourism, TRA will have (has) the territorial concentrated expression that the singular resources of the regions makes possible. This can be verified in the actual geographical expression of the TRA product in the national territory and, also, in the examples given by the municipalities of Caminha and Paredes de Coura.

In what concerns to the Caminha and Paredes de Coura examples, the survey we carried out allowed verifying that an important tourist potential exists. This potential comes from the variety and singularity of its resources, and from the image of quality it benefits, despite the obvious limitations in terms of the human resources qualifications we found.

However, it will be important to know the level the implemented model is able to generate sustainable development, through a correct horizontal integration in the local productive system. It is likewise relevant to identify if the capabilities and available resources of related activities can be used, complementing and enlarging the offer of a diversified set of goods and services by the surrounding territory.

From another point of view, just as it was underlined by the contacted proprietors, it is important to give concrete steps as regards to promotions policies. TRA must be part of an endogenous resources promotion strategy, in order to avoid that this touristic product gets an economic impact below the expected one and restricted to the tourism operators. The regional and local authorities, particularly the regional commissions of tourism and the public authorities, have an irreplaceable role to play in this area: the regional commissions of tourism will have to assume a more active and effective role in the creation of true tourism 'cluster', instead of being just mere promotion agents; the local authorities, by their side, have to be more sensitive to the demands of total quality imposed by the sector. Concretely, they will have to assume a more severe attitude in what concerns to the tourist organisation and to the municipality territory organisation, from a general point of view, and to value the traditional architectonics' standards.

On the other hand, both entities (institutions and tourist operators) will have to pay more attention to the consumers' preferences. These preferences will be, at last, what will dictate the success or the failure of the strategy undertaken.

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