

## Towns in a Rural World

Edited by

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Focusing on the strategic position of towns in rural development, this book explores how they act as hotspots for knowledge creation, diffusion for vital business life and innovation, and social networks and community bonds. By doing so, towns – even the smallest – can cope with processes of socio-economic decline and promote a geographically balanced income distribution and sustainable production structure. The contributors to this volume examine how to take advantage of the great potential offered by urban areas in the rural world to favour competitiveness and encourage economic activity.

Taking a European perspective, the authors identify the main socio-economic advantages generated by urbanized population settlements that small and medium-sized rural towns can provide. Although much attention is currently focused on the efficient use of scarce natural resources and land, they argue that towns have an increasingly important economic and social role to play in rural areas.

*It sometimes seems that world cities capture all the limelight in our mediated world. By focusing on small cities, towns, and villages, this book is a refreshing departure from this oppressing trend. This impressive collection of seventeen original contributions on an array of socio-economic facets of towns and small cities by scholars from across Europe reaffirms that small may be beautiful and that balanced urban development is crucial to sustainable futures.*

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## Preface

The dichotomy of urban versus rural areas is increasingly losing its relevance. Urban lifestyles, industrial high-tech development, advanced service production, access to higher education, use of modern ICT facilities, they can all be found in rural areas. These areas are increasingly seen as ecological landmarks, characterized by a healthy life, a high environmental quality and a highly respected local identity. Nevertheless, rural areas are not uniform. On the contrary, they exhibit a rich variety of socio-economic, cultural, ecological and physical-geographical appearances. In addition, they also have a great diversity of settlement patterns in which normally towns play a key role of carriers and poles of socio-economic, cultural and political activity. Towns form the links between rural tradition and modern life.

Nowadays, it is almost impossible to write on such a topic like the future of small towns without taking into account societal views on the values of rural heritage and tradition, as a counterbalance for urban cultural and technical progress. In general, people are divided on what concerns the advantages and disadvantages of the historical rural exodus. During recent decades, this exodus has gradually emptied small rural towns to enlarge big towns all over the world. Such global movements have raised several social concerns such as whether high quality of life in big agglomerations is possible, and how the social tensions may be manageable in the future.

Rural towns are not just players in a protected and quiet rural area, but also are subjected to the forces of internationalization, social networks, and modern ICT and technology. Their economic vitality is not undisputed, and in various cases it is even threatened. Although a resort to the old traditional 'village model' is not feasible, it is important to explore pathways that link the historical position of rural towns to the challenges of a high-tech society. Can we combine rurality with modernity?

Solutions for such concerns require a broad social consensus, and through informed democratic channels citizens have to be made aware of actions that are needed in times of change. Hence, policy makers and planners are no longer totally free to act independently from deep-rooted public opinion. It is important to find out what the citizens really want before taking final decisions on rurality and urbanity. Taking this into consideration, for citizens, local living conditions belong to those sets of amenities that mean much to them. In general, the population is reluctant to let small towns vanish, as they are part of a poetic and romantic imagery of childhood and enchantment – a historic past view of hope and expectation of glory. It is painful to abandon the best memories and forget the poetry of past lifestyles. So, is it really necessary to let such memories fade away?



This volume contains a set of original research contributions on the position of towns in rural areas. They are the result of a research programme at the University of the Algarve in Faro, Portugal on rural-urban developments. After a careful review procedure they were selected for publication in the present book. The editors wish to thank Patricia Ellman, who took care of the editorial check of this volume, and Ellen Woudstra, who did the finishing touch. And of course, all authors have to be thanked for their willingness to torture their brains in order to produce a high-quality contribution to this volume on 'Towns in a Rural World'.

*Faro and Amsterdam*

TERESA DE NORONHA VAZ,  
EVELINE VAN LEEUWEN and PETER NIJKAMP

# PART I

## Introduction

# Rural Tourism in Peripheral Areas: Evidence from the Portuguese Municipality of Almeida

Fernando P. Fonseca and Rui A.R. Ramos

## 12.1. Introduction

Constrained by remoteness and underdevelopment, rural areas have limited options for economic development. In Portugal, this affects more or less severely all the inland and mountain areas, where demographic erosion has already led to the partial (and, in some cases, to the complete) depopulation of several villages and small towns. The recognition of this trend has been generating growing concern over these territories, as manifested in communitarian, national and regional programmes and plans to promote alternative ways of development. To stimulate rural economies, it has become inevitable for rural regions to seek alternative uses for local resources. The two main driving forces are grounded in the diversification of these economies and in the enlargement of new territorial functions. Despite the top down orientation of the public policies, rural communities have a determinant role in the management of local resources. Although they approach it with a strong cooperative and entrepreneurial mind, this is usually insufficient in these territories. The reversal of this strongly rooted path is perhaps the biggest challenge that these vulnerable territories have to face, in order to establish internal networks and new patterns of governance and collective mobilization.

With comparatively advantageous effects in income and employment generation, tourism is an option for enhancing rural lifestyles and for inducing positive changes in the distribution of income in underprivileged regions (Liu, 2006). In fact, tourism has been presented as a key activity to achieve the economic diversification and the social regeneration of less-favoured territories. In particular, tourism has been widely promoted as an effective source of income and employment, particularly in peripheral rural areas where traditional agrarian industries and activities have declined (Sharpley, 2002). The integration of such alternative sources may help to equilibrate local economies and to encourage local development. On the other hand, more and more tourists are seeking rural destinations which are able to offer pleasant experiences combining heritage, nature, landscape, authenticity and quietness. This may explain the enthusiasm

	GDP	K	L	KR	LR	R	CDI
GDP	1						
K	0.986553	1					
L	0.979816	0.945945	1				
KR	0.938835	0.969402	0.890284	1			
LR	0.964198	0.981223	0.933774	0.984511	1		
R	-0.68619	-0.65134	-0.67022	-0.56186	-0.61342	1	
CDI	0.871108	0.843122	0.84971	0.833364	0.826794	-0.71122	1

Notes: \*Variables: Gross domestic product GDP; Gross fixed capital formation K; Employed population L; R&D total expenditures KR; R&D employees LR; Percentage of rural population R; Composite territorial index of development CDI.

around the potential of tourism to stimulate the economy of the less favoured territories.

Similarly to what is happening in Europe and overseas, in Portugal rural tourism (RT) has become a recurrent and strategic subject in a wide range of public speeches, written documents and policies, often aimed at sustaining the economy of peripheral territories. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the extent to which this role for RT represents a realistic tourism development strategy. Based upon research on the development of RT in the Portuguese rural municipality of Almeida, it highlights the challenges and problems encountered by RT entrepreneurs. At the same time, this chapter identifies a number of issues, which oppose the success of RT development, and analyses the true impact of RT in this border municipality. The selection of Almeida as a case study for this research is supported by four main reasons: (i) the chapter extends previous research undertaken by the authors in this municipality (Fonseca, 2006; Fonseca and Ramos, 2007; Fonseca and Ramos, 2008b); (ii) Almeida is located in peripheral and underprivileged region and shows a cycle of demographic and economic decline; (iii) the municipality has several important attractions to reinforce its position in the RT segment; and (iv) local actors classify tourism as the most promising activity to reverse Almeida's economic, social and cultural decline. These findings are supported by a survey from 2008 carried out with the owners of RT establishments located in Almeida.

In order to reach the aims outlined above, the chapter is organized as follows. In Section 12.2 we revisit the relevant literature about tourism benefits and constraints in the socio-economic regeneration of peripheral territories. Then, we trace the origins and evolution of RT, focusing the analysis on the Portuguese context. Finally, in Section 12.3 we present and discuss the results of the Almeida case study, comparing the findings extracted from RT entrepreneur's surveys with the principles derived in Section 12.2. Section 12.4 concludes.

## 12.2. The Relation between Tourism and Rural Development

### 12.2.1. The golden view of tourism as a development tool

Tourism as a strategy for economic growth has been on the international and Portuguese regional development agenda for some time and in different contexts. Peripheral rural areas in many countries have undergone economic restructuring since the early 1990s, as part of the transition from Fordist to Post-Fordist methods of production (Cawley and Gillmor, 2008). Sharpley (2002) emphasizes that a significant portion of the European structural funding has been invested in tourist development projects. This includes 1/3 of the funds provided by the LEADER (an EU Communitarian programme geared to the development of rural economies), which were invested in projects related to tourism. Furthermore, RT development programmes have become increasingly common elsewhere, such as those in the

USA, where 30 states have developed tourism policies specifically targeted at rural areas (Sharpley, 2002). Also Israel et al. (1997) show that, despite its recent origin, RT is a growing activity and an alternative way of obtaining supplements in the rural settlements (*kibbutzim*), where agriculture has declined. In Malaysia, tourism is largely seen as an economic tool of rural development and regional authorities anticipate a strong growth in the tourist industry (Liu, 2006). Also in many other countries, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand and in the Eastern Europe and Pacific regions, tourism is employed as a vehicle of economic growth and diversification for rural areas (Sharpley, 2002).

In Portugal, tourism is being considered as a tool for rural development by several policies, plans and authors. At the national scale, the National Strategic Plan for Rural Development (published in 2007) supports tourist investments in rural areas as a way to diversify rural economies. The National Programme for Territorial Planning Policy (Law number 58/2007, 4 September) highlights the development of tourist initiatives in the depressed rural areas through the exploitation of their heritage and natural values. Also the National Strategic Plan for Tourism (Resolution of the Council of Ministers number 53/2007, 4 April) classifies as *strategic* many products that are frequently located in rural areas: namely, nature tourism, health/wellness tourism and cultural touring. At the municipal scale, tourism also occupies a key position in development policies and in political speeches, and is often considered a priority sector. Moreira (2000) identifies tourism as having an important role in the peripheral municipalities due to the lack of other alternatives and sources of development. In these cases, tourism appears almost as the last opportunity to save the future of rural communities. Furthermore, there is a large number of publications focused on the experiences of tourism in the development of unfavoured areas (Buhalis, 1999; MacDonald and Jolliffe, 2003; Nash and Martin, 2003), as well as on the advantages of developing tourism initiatives in the Portuguese peripheral territories (Cristóvão, 1999; Ribeiro and Marques, 2000).

If there is such a strong agreement, what benefits can tourism actually bring to the development of peripheral areas? According to Sharpley (2002), the support given to tourism by public and private entities is expected in response to the downturn suffered by several rural economies, which has caused the decrease of employment and income levels of traditional agrarian activities. That may explain why tourism has been embraced as a potential tool to overcome the declining trend of these areas. In fact, the interest of tourism as a development strategy has grown in recent decades, partly in response to the changes in agricultural and rural policies and also to the changes in thinking and practice in the tourism market (Snowdon et al., 1997).

The benefits brought by tourism are interrelated and can be summarized in three great domains: economic, social and environmental/cultural. Tourism has been identified as one of the primary activities with the potential to assist local communities in developing economic diversity (Byrd et al., 2009), reducing reliance on agriculture and providing new economic opportunities. In this sense,

tourism can contribute to economic growth and to the diversification of local economic resources. This can be achieved through the creation of jobs in both new (tourism-related) and existing businesses, trades and crafts, and by the emergence of new markets for agricultural products. In turn, this can support a wide range of services and activities related to tourism, e.g. commerce, dynamism, culture, and transport (EC, 1998; Fleischer, 1999; Cardoso, 2001). Hence, tourism has the potential to introduce new activities by reinforcing rural regions as places of leisure, as well as being residential areas and spaces with heritage value (Caffyn and Dahlström, 2005; Covas and Covas, 2007). At the same time, tourism is proposed as a vehicle to renew agriculture and other rural production by creating an added-value commercial channel for local produce (Liu, 2006) that is mostly demanded by tourists for its singularity and quality (Fleischer and Tchetchnik, 2005). In the social domain, it is believed that tourism can also bring important contributions. According to Cănoves et al. (2004), tourism can contribute to the maintenance of public services (health care, public transport, equipment, etc.) and increases opportunities for social contacts and exchange, thus reducing the isolation of the communities. In some cases, tourism can also contribute to the repopulation of rural areas. With regard to the cultural domain, tourism should offer support for the preservation of landscapes and stimulate the protection, conservation and improvement of natural ecosystems (Garcia-Ramon et al., 1995; López-López, 2001; Cănoves et al. 2004). Furthermore, the built and intangible heritage is often included in these safeguard policies (Orbaşli, 2000). In fact, the quality and the uniqueness of natural and cultural heritage is incontestably the most powerful attraction for tourists who are searching for the appeal of rural areas (Fonseca and Ramos, 2008a).

Despite the benefits mentioned in the relevant literature, these advantages remain the subject of discussion, as the real impacts of tourism development in rural areas are very specific for each territory. The conclusions of research advise caution about the relevance given to tourism. In the next subsection we underline the main issues related to these constraints.

### 1.2.2.2. *The dark side of tourism as a development tool*

Without undermining the role of tourism as a tool of economic growth and diversification, both at the level of the individual farmers and more widely in the local economy, the practical results obtained are frequently far from the theoretical benefits claimed. According to several authors and researchers, the relation between tourism and development in rural regions is unbalanced. A lot of unsupported expectations have been ascribed to the role of tourism, mainly by public policies and rhetoric. Some authors (Cristóvão, 1999; Ribeiro and Marques, 2000; Sharpley and Vass, 2006) claim that this exaggerated attention given to tourism results from rhetoric which is excessive relative to the limited results actually achieved. Along this line of thinking, other authors argue that tourism should not be considered a panacea that can be successfully applied to all rural areas. For instance, Byrd et

al. (2009) strongly argue that tourism is not a panacea for economic decline, as it can bring both positive and negative consequences to rural areas. In the same way, Sharpley (2002), notes that tourism must be treated with some caution when labelled as a vehicle of rural development. Furthermore, Gunn (1994) emphasizes that there is no other form of development that has so many far-reaching tentacles as tourism. This means that the extent to which tourism contributes effectively to rural development is uncertain in many cases. As Sharpley (2002) notes, a large number of factors (both local and exogenous) oppose the achievement of rural economic diversification and growth through tourism.

More support from these ideas comes from Fleischer and Felsenstein (2000), who argue that at the back of every reason for promoting tourism in rural areas, there is a counter-reason. Thus, while tourism is heralded as a job producer, it is also blamed for creating low wages, seasonal employment and a reduced number of jobs. These problems are related, respectively, to the lack of qualifications for some of the jobs created (Ribeiro and Marques, 2000), to the seasonality of the demand (Cadima et al., 2001) and to the reduced demand for rural amenities, known as non-massive or Post-Fordist tourism (Balabanian, 1999; Fonseca and Ramos, 2007). For instance, Ribeiro and Marques (2000) concluded that their case study (based on the inner region of Trás-os-Montes, Portugal), that rural tourism generated, on average, only two new jobs in each unit, only one of which is a paid job (the other is performed by the owner's relative).

Despite the tourists' origins (most come from socio-economically privileged strata), several researchers show that tourism incomes are particularly reduced when compared with the initial investment and are mainly absorbed by the accommodation sector (bed and breakfast). According to Fleischer and Pizam (1997) the small size of rural tourism firms contributes to this problem, as well as the high seasonality of demand. One of the most recurrent problems in this context is related to some weaknesses that characterize rural areas: namely, the lack of (cultural) animation and equipment that are responsible for the short tourist stays and for the small amount spent. This means that the weaknesses are associated with the rural areas themselves rather than with the tourists.

Another issue is related to the real impact of tourism in the rural development process. Several authors (Umbelino, 1998; Cristóvão, 1999; Barros, 2003) have concluded that a good portion of tourist incomes are captured by exogenous entities, mainly by travel agencies and other institutions that organize and explore tourist activities. Once again, the small scale of local firms and the lack of financial resources and skills are the main reasons that explain the interference of organizations from other territories in the exploitation of rural amenities. That interference extends to the offer of rural goods in the tourism establishments, which are usually replaced by products originating in other regions, contradicting the purpose of regenerating those traditional activities that are mostly attached to tourism (Cristóvão, 1999; Joaquim, 1999). Again, the origin of this problem is associated with the insufficient exploitation of resources by local organizations and to the lack of entrepreneurial behaviour. As Fleischer and Tchetchnik (2005)

note, in some cases there is almost a divorce between rural accommodation and agriculture, despite the demand for and the touristic value of rural goods. In the particular case of *agro-tourism* (a typology of rural accommodation described in the next section), some research shows that a large portion of tourist incomes are obtained by the farmers, but the other rural organizations benefit less (Fleischer and Pizam, 1997).

There can be other undesirable consequences of tourism development in rural areas. For instance, Fleischer and Felsenstein (2000) and Orbaşlı (2000) emphasize the degradation of valuable and infinite resources (tangible heritage) that could be caused by tourist pressure. On the other hand, as Sharples (2002) demystified the situation, not all rural areas are equally attractive to rural tourists, and the simple offer of accommodation facilities does not guarantee future demand. Only the places with better rural appeal and interesting product packages can expect larger expenditures by tourists. Related to this, the lack of quality of accommodation, services and resources is a common problem that frustrates rural tourists' expectations, as they normally seek products of high quality (Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2005). The lack of skills, the scarce resources, the small size of firms and the lack of coordination between organizations usually hamper the entrepreneurs' ability to provide products of better quality. At the same time, this affects the way rural amenities are packaged and promoted through marketing operations. Given all the prerequisites for success, as Fleischer and Felsenstein (2000) remark, in such cases government subsidies may be required to maintain the social benefits promoted by tourism.

### 12.2.3. *The tourist impact in review and further approaches*

As we can conclude from the previous discussion, tourism is associated with both desirable and unfavourable impacts to rural areas, in an unbalanced relationship (see Table 12.1). Although not always evident, the magnitude of the constraints involved suggests that tourism is not the magic solution to the problems of rural areas. Furthermore, the limitations described and experienced in many places is evidence of the high expectations resting on tourism and the gap between rhetorical speeches and the practical results obtained. As argued by Sharples (2002), tourism may not always represent the most suitable development path, whilst the costs and other weaknesses may restrict the potential economic returns. Hence, in many cases, tourism does not have the potential to underpin a sustained development process in the peripheral rural areas.

Considering the nature and the institutional limitations of rural areas positioned in inner regions, which changes (and challenges) can be presented to these territories to obtain more benefits from tourism? A critical issue emphasized by Fleischer and Tchetchik (2005) is related to the interconnectivity of tourism with other sectors, i.e., tourism is not footloose, but depends on several related activities. In the same way, to face efficiently the external competition and the rapid changes promoted by globalization, a great degree of involvement is needed

from tourist entrepreneurs, as argued by Barros (2003) and Lordkipanidze et al. (2005). Nevertheless, in rural territories, owing to their specific nature and skills, institutional innovation and economic cooperation have greater difficulties of penetration.

The lack of an entrepreneurial mind constitutes another common barrier in the development of tourism in peripheral rural areas. Besides their economic unattractiveness and disinvestment in these areas (at least in the Portuguese case), other factors, such as the small market, the low and elderly skills, restrict the low level of entrepreneurship even more. On the other hand, in peripheral areas, tourism comprises mainly small entrepreneurs and family-centred firms (Fleischer and Felsenstein, 2000; Lordkipanidze et al., 2005). As emphasized by these authors, if, on the one hand small enterprises can respond more quickly to new demands, on the other hand, their small resources can limit the capacity to take the necessary actions to face competition. In this context, the development of tourism entrepreneurship is even more important because it strengthens the local culture and identity, diversifies rural tourist activities, avoids conflicts of interest, reduces the rivalry that exists among private businessmen and prevents the cannibalism phenomenon between small firms. Because of the financial restrictions and the limited competence of entrepreneurs, public support from central and municipal administrations is the main incentive to launch new projects and encourage entrepreneurship.

Finally, the governance pattern in the inner rural areas, shaped by the dominance of public entities and characterized by a low-level of collective cooperation, is also responsible for the current situation. In this context, the strengthening of proximity relations, help and encouragement are essential to mobilize and persuade entities to develop new projects (Rhodes, 1996). As defended by some policies and authors, finding innovative governance models is one of the best ways to encourage entrepreneurial behaviour and exploit new opportunities of local development. These can bring together the contributions of the most influential entities based on cooperation and the setting-up of partnerships (Fonseca and Ramos, 2008a).

Moreover, aligning and joining the action of local entities is essential to provide more critical mass to projects and to obtain local synergies and complementarities. This way, it is possible to overcome the fragmentation and the limited extent of individual initiatives. Particularly in the case of Portugal, the strongly-rooted tradition of public dirigisme and the inexperience of management structures of collective participation constitute obstacles to the adoption of these mechanisms. One of the motives for this, is the frequent friction that arises between organizations with different levels of influence and legitimacy.

Table 12.1 The impacts of tourism on rural development

Benefits	Constraints
Generation of jobs	Reduced number and seasonal jobs
Diversification of the economic bases	Reduced and funnelled incomes (bed and breakfast)
New territorial functions	Small interaction with rural activities and populations
Rehabilitation of traditional activities	External organizations positioned as the main beneficiaries of the new incomes
Reinforcement of heritage protection	Cultural and environmental pressure
Reinforcement of environmental protection	Financial and technical deficiencies of the rural actors/entrepreneurs
Improvement of the rural areas' own image and the external promotion to attract exogenous resources	The limitations of the rural supply (low quality, lack of dynamism, disinvestment, etc.)
Encouragement of entrepreneurship and cooperation between the rural actors	The remoteness and the distance to the main urban centres

In conclusion, the success of projects (tourist or other) in peripheral rural areas is constrained by a deep and linked range of deficiencies that result from decades of wrong policies that tend to forget and ignore these territories, accentuating even more their peripheral and unattractive character. Reversing this trend presents an enormous challenge to rural entities and requires proportional (and real) support from the central administration.

#### 12.2.4. Description and evolution of the rural tourism concept

The concept of rural tourism (RT) has different interpretations and is frequently used in diverse contexts. According to some authors (Sharples and Sharples, 1997; Umbelino, 1998; Cunha, 2006), RT should not be understood as a *tourist product*, but as a *tourist activity developed in rural areas* because it comprises several activities and different types of tourism and accommodation.

RT is not a recent phenomenon in the developed countries. According to Menezes (2000) people have been travelling to the countryside on holidays in significant numbers since, at least, the early part of the 19th century, inspired by fine landscapes and a desire for peace and recreation. Likewise, Yagüe (2002) argues that RT has been practised since the Industrial Revolution, with homecoming connotations (understood as tourism sought by those city dwellers, originating in rural zones, who usually spent their vacations in their *home town*). In the developed countries, the rapid urbanization seen in the last two centuries was nurtured by strong migration from the countryside to the city, giving rise to deep social and economic changes in societies. Concerning tourism, this phenomenon emphasized

the countryside as a growing tourist destination for the new urban inhabitants, a pattern which has persisted to the present day (Sharples and Sharples, 1997).

However, the first rural tourists had a very different profile from those of today. Yagüe (2002) distinguishes the traditional RT, practised as a return to the origins, from the modern typology of RT. In the traditional pattern, homecoming was the main reason to spend holidays in rural areas. In the vacation period, usually in summertime, rural areas were visited by their former inhabitants, multiplying their population. Those visitors, would, however, be associated with a low level of expenditures and show reduced interest in complementary services. As a result, the positive impacts promoted by the first rural tourists were limited and occasional. The last three decades of the 20th century were characterized by the development of new RT modalities, which followed some behavioural and social changes operating in segments interested in the rural idyll: the Post-Fordism tourism. According to Salvá-Tomás (2000), Post-Fordist tourists pursue unique destinations that are expected to provide remarkable and richer experiences, as well as personal education through the contact with other cultures and places. In opposition to the conventional and still dominant tourist demand (the Fordist tourism guided by the triad *sun, sea, and sand*), this new framework defines a different profile where tourists, usually with more qualifications and social status, appreciate active holidays in authentic and relaxing destinations. In this context, rural spaces present a whole range of resources, compatible with the Post-Fordist expectations, offering cultural and recreational activities in inland areas not yet absorbed by the current way of urban life. Another contributing factor to Post-Fordism growth is the tendency towards splitting holiday periods, no longer concentrated entirely during the summer (short breaks), and the preference for small near destinations. According to several researchers (Hummelbrunner, 1993; Yagüe, 2002; Cánoves et al., 2006), RT is especially demanded by urban people, with high socio-cultural levels, medium-high purchasing power, aged between 25–45 years old. Post-Fordist tourists display a proactive attitude towards enjoying typical rural activities, including agriculture-related tasks, sports and landscape sightseeing, among others. Thus, as a result of the growth of demand, rural areas are offering more and more quality and diversified accommodation to attract tourists. Such tourism takes advantage of the existing supply in rural areas: namely, typical houses, and small living rooms and bedrooms farms. As emphasized by Yagüe (2002), the *new rural tourist* spends more than the first rural tourists, showing behaviour and consumption patterns that theoretically represent more value to rural development.

In Portugal, RT is mainly associated with culture and activities developed in peripheral regions, not yet absorbed by the modern urban lifestyle. The tourist demand for the rural idyll results from its persistence in the imagery of urban residents' memory. Or, as Menezes (2000) argues, it is based on the return to the origins, an attempt to re-establish the balance between man and nature, which was destroyed by urban and industrial development (a return to Nature as Rousseau wished). These principles are considered in the legislation which describes RT

in terms of units located in appropriate and typical houses, currently country mansions that offer accommodation and conveniences (equipments, structures and services) so that tourists can enjoy a complete and diversified product.

The first tourist investments in the Portuguese rural areas occurred in the 1950s through the creation of inns, state hotels located in historic places or in areas with scenic interest (Menezes, 2000). The number of inns significantly increased over the years and these can still be found today in different areas of Portugal. Nevertheless, and according to Cadima et al. (2001), the first RT official experiences took place in the 1970s in the small towns of Ponte de Lima, Vouzela, Castelo de Vide e Vila Viçosa, where a significant built heritage evokes the opulent and aristocratic past of these areas. The first rural accommodation was known as *dwelling-house tourism* and owned for the tourist exploitation of the heritage and landscape values in these small towns. The support given by the governmental authorities to the rehabilitation of historic mansions and country houses, significantly increased the amount of RT accommodation and, consequently, forced the legal regulation of RT in 1986 (Decree-Law number 256/86, 27 August). Then, over the course of time, different categories of accommodation were allowed. Nowadays, however, the law in force (Decree-Law number 39/2008, 7 March), only takes three different categories of RT into consideration: cottages, rural hotels, and agror-tourism units. *Cottages* are private houses located in villages where the owners or the householders may be living or not. In terms of design, materials and other characteristics, cottages should always be compatible with the dominant regional architecture. On the other hand, *rural hotels* define a typology constituted by either old or new buildings (with respect to the regional architecture) positioned outside the urban limits and providing a larger capacity than cottages. *Agro-tourism* is described as the provision of family accommodation in typical farmhouses, whilst allowing the boarders to participate and learn about how to conduct agrarian activities or to participate in other activities within the premises of the farm, under the supervision of the owner/manager. With respect to the dwelling-house tourism, the Decree-Law number 39/2008, 7 March, maintained the typology but shifted the territorial occupancy that now embraces both the rural and urban areas. Dwelling-house tourism is a typology reserved for large country mansions, representative of a certain period, distinguished by their architectural, historical and artistic value, providing accommodation and services both to their owners and to rural tourists.

Concerning the recent evolution of RT in Portugal, several studies show strong growth (Cadima et al., 2001; Cardoso, 2001; Jesus, 2007). In the same way, the official statistics reveal significant progress both in the rural demand and supply. Thus, in 2007, according to the Portuguese Tourism Institute, 1,023 RT establishments were licensed (11 per cent more in relation to 2006), offering a total of 11,327 beds. Furthermore, in 2007, the demand (nights in RT establishments) increased by 11 per cent compared with 2006. Interestingly, in 1990, only 223 RT units were in operation, the lodging capacity was 1,811 beds, and the nights spent in RT reached a total of 60,979 (DGT, 2000). However, despite the significant growth observed, RT still attracts only a small fraction of the Portuguese tourists

(Umbelino, 1998). This clearly results from the reduced scale of this segment in Portugal and the lack of potential to regenerate rural economies, even though tourists have a high buying power and an inclination to spend money during their holidays (Cristóvão, 1999).

### 12.3. Rural Tourism in the Municipality of Almeida

#### 12.3.1. Geographic description of Almeida

The Municipality of Almeida is located in the inland region of Beira Interior Norte (BIN) (Figure 12.1). The BIN has a low population density and is markedly characterized by rural features, with the city of Guarda standing out as the main polarized urban centre of the region. The Municipality is composed of 29 small villages where, according to the last Census (INE, 2002), 8,423 inhabitants live.

Like the surrounding region, Almeida is a territory that has aged and regressed demographically during the last decades. According to the 2001 Census (INE, 2002), Almeida had a population density of only 16 persons/km<sup>2</sup>, and the proportion of population aged over 65 years old was 29.8 per cent (1.3 per cent above the Portuguese average). The unattractive character of the Municipality is reflected in the loss of 19.2 per cent of the residents during the 1990s. The tendency for demographic emptiness appears as one of the main weaknesses of the municipality, which has lost half of its resident population over the last 40 years.

The municipal economic structure is also unbalanced. In 2001, the activity rate was low; the total population dependency rate (69 per cent) revealed that the active population was less than the inactive one. With 63 per cent of the population employed in activities belonging to the tertiary sector, the municipal economy demonstrated the importance of services and commercial activities in the small towns of Almeida and Vilar Formoso, the most important urban areas in the municipality. Together, they house 47.2 per cent of the entire population, clearly showing the municipal bipolarization. Overall, the manufacturing sector was one of the smallest in the entire region. The primary sector activities had considerable strength, employing 15 per cent of the active population (10 per cent above the Portuguese average, according to INE, 2002), which confirms the rural character of the municipality.

However, even agriculture seems to be affected by the depopulation and demographic aging. According to the INE (2001), the percentage of agricultural coverage and the total number of agricultural business decreased (by 30 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively) between 1989 and 1999. The loss of competitive capacity of local agriculture is confirmed by the fact that in 70 per cent of the agricultural business, most of the incomes had an origin external to the activity.

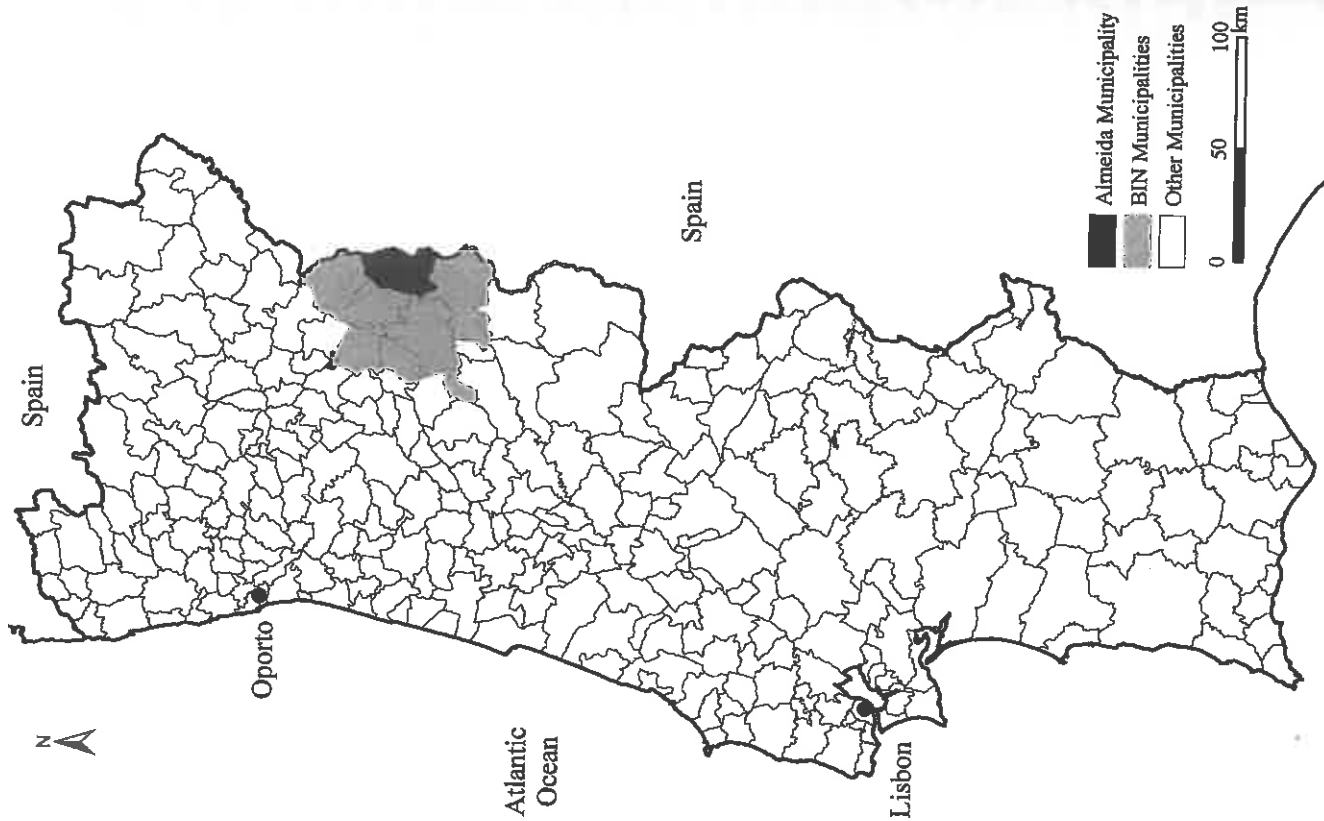


Figure 12.1 Geographic location of Beira Interior Norte and the Municipality of Almeida in Portugal

### 12.3.2. Tourist potentialities of Almeida

Tourist resources include both physical and intangible elements liable to motivate people to travel or to represent free time occupations/activities (Albino et al., 2000). Offering a tourist package requires a reasonable coordination between tourist resources (that should offer quality and diversity), appropriate equipment and tourist services, and an integrated exploitation performed by the local organizations. Because of their specific limitations, rural areas usually do not display tourist products in a structured manner.

Instead, the initiatives promoted by some entities are not organized, as is the case in Almeida, where the most important attraction resides in several products related to the cultural heritage.

#### Cultural resources

Cultural heritage stands out as the most important tourist resource of the municipality. In Figure 12.2 the most valuable heritage resources are depicted according to their distribution in the Almeida's *freguesias*, a lower political and administrative subdivision of the Portuguese municipalities. Almeida's fortress is the noblest heritage element of the municipality, and has been classified as National Monument since 1928 and as a Historic Village. The fortress is one of the most emblematic and well-preserved examples of the military architecture of the 17th century, where several valuable elements can be found, such as: the extensive wall in a stellar shape (Vauban structure), the double-arched gates, and various architectural elements of original military use (prison building, powder room, casemates, ancient artillery train, ancient artillery headquarters, and the ruins of the medieval castle destroyed during the 3rd Napoleonic Invasion).

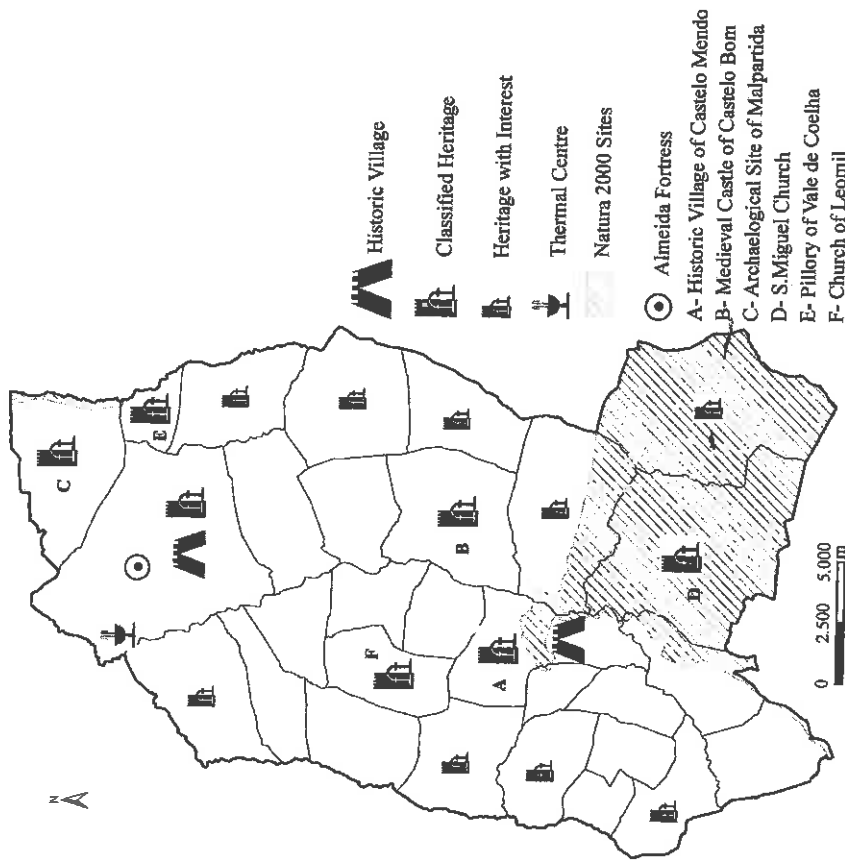
The Historic Village of Castelo Mendo (B) is also an outstanding example of heritage. Although the castle had already been classified as a National Monument in 1946, its interest was recognised again in 1984, when all the urban area enclosed by the walls was classified as being of Public Interest. Castelo Mendo is a medieval fortress that had an important defensive function till the establishment of a definite boundary line by the Alcañices Treaty (1297). Castelo Mendo has kept its medieval urban structure, with fine architectural features and many interesting civil (Manueline, Hispanic, Philipin, Judaic) and religious elements.

All around the Municipality of Almeida, there are other elements of architectural and historical interest, such as the walled village of Castelo Bom (C) with elements classified as National Monuments; the medieval pillory of Vale de Coelha (E); the St Miguel Church and megalithic monument of Malhada Sorda (G); and the archaeological site of Malpartida (D), among others.

In the intangible heritage domain, Almeida also has a rich and varied handicraft production, a traditional cuisine, regional products, folk groups and a very strong collective memory. Almeida is also known for its re-creation of the 3rd Napoleonic Invasion, which attracts different Napoleonic European Associations. Over the course of three days, the siege, the fighting and the capitulation of Almeida after



the castle was destroyed in an explosion are revisited in an authentic re-enactment of the 3rd Napoleonic Invasion. This is the event that attracts more tourists and visitors to Almeida.



**Figure 12.2 Distinctive heritage in the Municipality of Almeida**

#### *Natural resources*

The natural resources of Almeida are equally rich and diverse. Nature and landscape reveal little impact from human activities on account of the low urbanization and industrialization in the Almeida area. As a result, Almeida has good environmental preservation, with large areas relatively unaffected by human activities. The inclusion of two sites of the National Natura 2000 Network (Figure 12.2) attests the important function of Almeida in nature conservation. The traditional prevalence of agriculture also plays an important role in the landscape and in habitat maintenance (with several species of cynegetic importance). The hot-spring of Almeida has also been known since ancient times for its medicinal and therapeutic properties. The morphological conditions, characterized by the

presence of a tableland, dissected by the Coa river valley, along which flows the main water course of the region, allow the practice of different types of nature activities (hiking, cycling, horse-riding, balloon flights, orientateering, canoeing, rafting, etc.).

#### 12.3.3. Methodology

On the basis of previous research conducted by the authors in Almeida (Fonseca, 2006; Fonseca and Ramos, 2007), tourism was identified by the regional and the local entities surveyed as the most promising activity to reverse the negative tendencies affecting Almeida. Thus, the data used to achieve the purpose of this chapter, *i.e.* the analysis of the socio-economic impact of RT in the economic development, comes from a cross-sectional survey of RT operators in Almeida. The survey included a wide range of questions concerning the elements, the hospitality and the organization of each unit of rural accommodation. The survey questionnaires were subdivided into six parts. In the first part, the aim of the survey was to collect some general information about the individual RT establishments, such as their identification, location, typology and start of activity. The second part was related to the description of the entrepreneurs' profile: namely, their age, educational level, origin and business motivation. In the third part, the survey focused on the description of the supply of tourist accommodation, data of particular importance to analyse the lodging capacity, its characteristics and relation with the local economy and activities. These data included a description of the hospitality units, the garden, the view from the units and the tourist activities related to the accommodation. The fourth section was related to the demand characterization, including the guests' origins and occupations and their average stay during the year. This information was also very relevant in order to understand what attracts tourists to Almeida. The fifth part focused on organizational questions to understand, among other things, the marketing strategies undertaken by RT operators, as well as the level of cooperation maintained with other local or regional organizations. The questions included in the sixth and last part aimed to understand the impacts of RT on heritage regeneration and the rehabilitation of traditional activities. Also in this part, the owners with a working farm were asked about the agricultural elements relevant to the RT accommodation. Other kinds of questions included the capital and labour inputs of the owners. A general overview of tourism potentialities and deficiencies was also requested, in order to assess the entrepreneurs' opinion.

The surveys questionnaires were structured in a closed answer format with a typology of multiple choice options. In some questions the Likert scale was used to evaluate the entrepreneurs' agreement/disagreement concerning their content. To gather other points previously not covered, an open-ended comments section was attached at the end of survey. The use of different question types to determine the nature and the quality of the data obtained is justified by the need to cover some relevant variables related to RT in a compact survey format. The surveys

were undertaken between June and July 2008. The main findings will be described in the following subsections.

#### 12.3.4. A general overview of tourism activity in Almeida

Considering the existing equipment and accommodation, Almeida's tourist supply is relatively reduced, both in quality and in lodging capacity and covers different categories that include conventional accommodation, RT accommodation, and one inn. In the conventional segment, and taking into account the establishments classified by the Directorate General for Tourism, Almeida has four units that represent 17 per cent of the BIN registered supply. In fact, only the main urban regional centre (Guarda) has a higher capacity. However, Almeida's accommodation capacity is even greater if the seven non-classified establishments located in the small town of Vilar Formoso are considered.

With respect to the evolution of the demand over recent years (from 2000 to 2006), the proportion of nights spent in Almeida's conventional accommodation was irregular with a tendency to decrease. In that period, the temporary stays had an average rate of 17,500/year (representing 20 per cent of the regional rate). Being the main receptor centre of the region, Guarda has a dominant position and in the period received 44 per cent of the temporary stays reported in the region. On the other hand, during that period, Almeida stands out as the BIN's municipality where the proportion of foreign guests was the highest, probably due to its position on the border which is crossed by the IP5, a motorway connection with Spain. In fact, the proportion of Portuguese tourist nights in Almeida's conventional accommodation (65 per cent) is less than that recorded in the remaining region. Besides, the Spanish tourists' temporary stays (17 per cent) are 11 per cent more than the regional values, while the French stays (7 per cent) also have a great significance. Nevertheless, the Almeida's tourist stays were shorter (1.1 nights) than the regional average (1.3 nights). The lack of tourist activities and the border position could be the main reasons for that difference.

Another perspective of the municipal tourist demand is given by Almeida's tourist office statistics, concerning the number of tourists/visitors who search this service to get information. According to this source, and taking into consideration the period between 2000 and 2007, the number of visitors increased by 112 per cent. In 2007, the tourist office received 81,402 visitors, a number 8 times higher than the municipal population. However, despite the numbers, the real impact of this significant tourist flow is unclear, and the answers to questions such as: *How many visitors spent money in Almeida?* or *How many visitors plan to return to Almeida in the future?* are unknown.

#### 12.3.5. Rural tourism impact in the development of the Municipality of Almeida

##### *Almeida's rural tourism supply and entrepreneur's description*

Compared with conventional establishments, the regional position of Almeida in the RT segment is less advantageous. In fact, the three RT units located in the municipality only represent 5.4 per cent of the regional supply, suggesting that Almeida's accommodation is oriented to other demands and specific markets. The prevalence of conventional accommodation with general low quality (such as boarding houses), mainly in the small town of Vilar Formoso, seems to be part of a strategy to attract the people passing over the border. The low rate of tourist stays corroborates this hypothesis.

According to the surveys, Almeida's establishments are mainly of the cottage type described above, although one unit is within a farm (not exploited by the owner as agro-tourism accommodation because of the investments and legal procedures required). As in many other Portuguese peripheral territories, the RT phenomenon in Almeida is relatively recent, with the first unit beginning its activity in 1998, and the last opened its doors in 2003. Two of the cottages are located inside the walls of Almeida's fortress and the other in the village of Freixo (20km from Almeida). Almeida's cottages occupy typical buildings (one of them was built in the 18th century) while the Freixo unit functions in a typical regional style house of 1720 which is located in a farm. All the three buildings were repaired according to the original architectural plan and respect the legal requirements for these establishments. Their furniture was made using local materials and hand crafted by local artisans. With no exception, all the operators surveyed complained about the insufficient financial support from the central administration to repair and convert the original buildings. In one case, the respondent said that the building renovation costs had reached €200,000, but the return on that investment is not expected in a short/medium term. In fact, only one entrepreneur had benefited from public subsidies to renovate an old building amounting to €25,000 provided by a programme managed by the Centre Regional Coordination and Development Commission. The finance needed for these operations and, as we will see, the low revenues generated with RT, restrict the survival of entrepreneurs with no other sources of income. To overcome these difficulties, all Almeida's RT entrepreneurs have other professional activities, for which they obtain most of their incomes. RT is therefore managed as a complementary activity and as a partial source of income. The pleasure of the activity and the motivation in rehabilitating the (family) legacy were highlighted by the entrepreneurs as the most important reasons to make the investments.

The lodging capacity is low (but still enough to meet the demand, as we will emphasize), offering together 12 rooms and 24 beds. RT units are occupied during the whole year and the prices charged do not oscillate in accordance with changes in demand during the high and low seasons. In Almeida, the average daily single-room price for bed and breakfast in traditional rural accommodation fluctuates between €60 and €80. These prices are significantly higher than those charged by

the owners of conventional accommodation, where a stay can cost less than €30. The price gap between conventional and RT accommodation also demonstrates the different socio-economic status of the guests.

All Almeida's RT units provided common services (dining-room, sitting-room, games room), with one of them also having a swimming-pool (important due to the geographic position of Almeida, far from the sea and river beaches). Catering only included breakfast, which is justified by the respondents on account of the short average stays of the guests and the existence of restaurants in the vicinity.

Concerning the entrepreneur's profile, their ages range from 45-64 years old and only one of them has a university qualification (the others have secondary education). It is important to highlight that none of these operators has qualifications in tourism or in related domains.

All the RT units are organized as small businesses and are managed by the owners. Among other reasons, the low occupancy level of Almeida's RT units is explained by ineffective marketing policies. Rather than working together to promote the sector collectively, local entrepreneurs are working only for their own benefit without engaging other external services and support. Promotional material is published in different vehicles, mostly of local and regional origin, and include pamphlets, brochures, newspapers and magazines. Only one establishment had its own site on the Web, while others were promoted elsewhere, such as the web page of Serra da Estrela Tourism. However, online reservations were not available for any of the RT units, demonstrating the technological neglect of this important and useful tool.

### 12.3.6. Almeida's rural tourism demand

The demand analysis is more indicative of the attractiveness of Almeida in the RT segment. As we reported, over recent years Almeida has had a significant increase in the number of tourists/visitors. Despite this increase being frequently highlighted by local organizations (mainly by the Municipal Government) as a proof of tourism development and maturity, the local benefits of this rise in numbers are, in fact, unknown. Questions, such as how many visitors stay overnight in Almeida, or how many of them eat in the restaurants, or buy souvenirs in the local shops, are yet to be clarified. Moreover, the official statistics concerning the period between 2001/2006 (INE, 2007) show different trends, with a rise of the total number of guests (+3 per cent), but a decrease of the nights spent in the establishments (-0.8 per cent).

However, the data collected can suggest the answer to those questions. A significant problem faced by the RT entrepreneurs is related to the reduced occupancy level. According to the respondents, occupancy is always under 20 per cent all through the year, even in the summer, traditionally the busiest period for tourism in Portugal, when Almeida receives the highest number of visitors. At the same time, the stay period of guests in Almeida's RT units is really low (mostly 1 night, rarely 2 nights or more), restricting even more the income gained and the RT contribution to local economic development. Almeida's RT entrepreneurs expressed

their disappointment with these levels, stating that they had expected much more business. Additionally, as we mentioned before, occupancy levels confirm that the low number of RT units is more than enough to satisfy the local demand.

The respondents advanced some specific reasons for the low level of business achieved. Repeated emphasis was given to the lack of facilities and tourist entertainment to strengthen the attractiveness and length of the guests' stays in Almeida. In spite of the public investments over recent years (for instance the construction of the new thermal centre and the Museum of Military Architecture), tourist equipment and services are still insufficient to retain tourists for longer periods. In Almeida, tourism is still very attached to the main visitor attraction (the fortress), as if no other efforts were needed to attract tourists.

However, the lack of cultural activities and equipment restricts the possibility of local culture and heritage being absorbed and perceived by tourists. This problem is exacerbated in the small villages where the more elementary services (like bars, restaurants, craft shops, etc.) are almost totally absent and, when they do exist, they have a quality incompatible with the RT requirements. In these cases, tourists are left to observe and explore (without tourist guidance) rural amenities, and particularly the built heritage, in visits that go on for only a few hours.

In these conditions, even considering the financial capacity and the predisposition to spend, rural tourists have no way of generating incomes for the local population. A second reason highlighted by respondents is related to the lack of local entrepreneurship. RT entrepreneurs considered the other local organizations (public and private) indifferent and lethargic concerning the risk of investment in a territory with the characteristics of Almeida. According to the respondents, the regional disinvestment, the reduced skills, the elderly entrepreneurs, and the wrong idea that all investments should be promoted by public bodies, are the main factors that have contributed to the insufficient entrepreneurship. While recognizing their own responsibilities, RT entrepreneurs also considered the lack of cooperation as a reason for the insufficient tourist activities, caused by the dominance of an individualist behaviour in managing each entity. The remoteness and the distance to the West coast, where the greatest proportion of the Portuguese population lives, were also mentioned by two respondents as a cause for the reduced tourist demand of Almeida.

Finally, entrepreneurs were asked to describe some general characteristics of their guests, to understand the profile of rural tourists attracted to Almeida. Thus, rural tourists can be male or female, mostly middle-aged adults (45 years old and above). The majority of the guests are entrepreneurs, independent workers, qualified workers and retired people, all of whom mainly have a university degree or a high school education. The very young and less-educated people do not tend to select Almeida's rural accommodation. These conclusions are in line with those of other studies undertaken in other rural destinations in Portugal (Silva, 2007) and abroad (Cánoves et al., 2006; Vela, 2009). Concerning the guests' origins, respondents declared that most of them come from other Portuguese regions, and Spain was the most represented country among the foreign tourists. This representation is also in accordance with the official statistics described previously. When asked about

their perception of tourists' motivations, respondents emphasize that rural tourists in Almeida are captivated by the heritage and the historic past of the fortress, by the quietness of the place (making it possible to rest and relax), by the desire to discover a new type of vacation and by the hospitality of the place.

### 12.3.7. Rural tourism's impact in the development of Almeida

The analysis focused on the supply and demand revealed several constraints (related to the specific market segment and including municipal and regional deficiencies) which suggests that RT does not make a strong contribution to local development, thus refuting several of the advantages attached to rural tourism previously described in Section 12.2.1.

In the socio-economic domain, the role played by RT is far from that expected. Firstly, and regarding employment, the RT units of Almeida did not create any paid jobs, since all accommodation is managed and exploited by the owners or by close relatives (usually the housewife). Entrepreneurs justified this by referring to the irregularity and low occupancy of accommodation that generates insufficient income to justify recruiting external workers. As Cánoves et al. (2004) mentioned in their study, rural tourism is frequently not considered as a *real job* because the incomes obtained are limited and are just intended to increase the family budget. Also, because RT is practised as a part-time activity, the owner can carry out other regular domestic tasks and work. Hence, the RT impacts identified in Almeida contradict one of the most defended positive impacts in rural economies. At the same time, this corroborates other national and international researches (Ribeiro and Marques, 2000; Fleischer and Felsenstein, 2000; Cánoves et al., 2004), thus confirming some excessive optimism around RT and its favourable contribution to employment. The lack of skilled professionals who can fulfil the requirements of a job related to RT was underlined as an additional problem.

Secondly, the impact of RT in the regeneration of traditional activities in the municipality is also very weak. In the three rural accommodation units analysed, the average amount of local goods consumed by tourists (handcraft and agricultural products, for instance) is less than 20 per cent of the total. This means that the great portion of products provided to tourists come from other regions. Again the critical problem is related to the small scale of RT activity and to the lack of entrepreneurial vision that provides an opportunity to external entities. For example, in the only accommodation unit based within a farm (in Freixo), the lack of tourist exploitation of farmers' services and products, demonstrates the absence of strategic vision and the deficiencies of local entrepreneurs. These findings show that RT can have only a limited role in economic diversification and in the regeneration of rural activities, contrary to earlier theoretical claims. Moreover, Joaquim (1999) came to identical conclusions in his research, arguing that RT is frequently not connected to rural development, but, instead, is sustained by exogenous resources and produces more profitable benefits for outsider entities.

Due to the low tourist exploitation of other local resources (nature, handcraft, intangible heritage, etc.), the contribution of RT to the regeneration of these elements is even more restricted. As far as nature tourism is concerned, there is a remarkable lack of equipment and some activities are very irregularly organized. As a result of this, the range of nature activities promoted by RT entrepreneurs is limited, and only one unit provides regular rides on horsesback and donkeys. The lack of public investments in the touristic exploitation of natural resources was highlighted by the respondents as the main cause of the stagnation observed in this segment. In fact, it is the unexploited character of Almeida's natural resources which is the most unique feature that tourists most appreciate. An identical situation was observed with respect to handcraft. In spite of their old age, the number of Almeida's artisans is high and their handcraft shows quality and diversity, including basketry, tapestry, lace, saddlebags and woodwork, among other products. However, the proportion of crafts provided to tourists in the RT accommodation is extremely low. The lack of cooperation among organizations emerges again as the dominant failing, exacerbated by the problems faced by artisans to control the distribution channels and to sell their products.

Thirdly, the direct impact of RT in the rehabilitation of the local houses is mainly restricted to the buildings where the units are installed. Therefore, most of buildings do not benefit from RT, and physical deterioration and abandonment is becoming more and more evident, especially in the more peripheral villages of Almeida. When asked about future investments in the conversion of buildings into RT accommodation, entrepreneurs were evasive and refuted the idea, on the grounds of the low return obtained and the legal procedures required. Indirectly some important measures have been taken by the municipality to protect and regenerate the built heritage, as a strategy to reinforce the tourist attractiveness of Almeida. The municipal government makes conservation plans for those urban cores with more value (Almeida, Castelo Mendo, Castelo Bom and Vilar Formoso) in order to impose rule physical constraints and protect the historic, picturesque, architectural and aesthetic elements presented in those cores. With the same aim, these urban cores have benefited from public programmes (provided by the Centre Regional Coordination and Development Commission) to rehabilitate buildings façades and roofs according to the regional architectural style, in order to strengthen their urban cohesion.

Finally, at the organizational and institutional levels, RT has been incapable of stimulating a great dynamic of cooperation and involvement between local (and regional) public and private organizations. The lack of cooperation identified reflects not only the insufficient dialogue but also the conflicting interests, the rivalry and the competition between local entrepreneurs in attracting the scarce resources (tourists). Even in apparently simple domains, such as marketing, the cooperation between entities has been complex. In fact, the three RT operators work individually and no activity is put into practice jointly. The only exception is Casa do Cantinho (Almeida), which cooperates with Almeida's only inn in the

promotion and tourist animation of different cultural and nature activities, because of the common management of both units.

Despite local cooperation being clearly more difficult in territories with characteristics like Almeida's (Barros, 2003), it is essential to overcome the selfishness, the lack of dimension, and the fragmentation of the individual action of local entities. In fact, the implementation of a new pattern of involvement and governance could be the key to adopting a more efficient and sustainable exploitation of tourism (and of local development). This strategy would also support and stimulate the entrepreneurial behaviour, defining actions shared by all the organizations and adopting structural and complementary policies focused on the future.

#### 12.4. Conclusions

The exploitation of tourism resources in rural territories has generated great enthusiasm, and still continues to do so, as we can conclude by the volume of research, policies and actions undertaken. In peripheral territories, great hopes have been put into tourism, as a way to renew the economy, to promote the cultural values, and to improve the social conditions of rural areas. However, the results obtained in several rural territories advise some caution in the evaluation of the real impact of RT. That is why some authors (Cristóvão, 1999; Ribeiro and Marques, 2000) argue that tourism should not be considered as a panacea to solve all the rooted deficiencies of these areas.

The case of Almeida represents a paradigmatic example of this. Anchored in distinctive cultural and natural resources, the municipal organizations surveyed considered tourism as the most promising activity to reverse the declining trend experienced by Almeida in the last decades. Focusing on RT, we concluded that very many of its benefits can have a positive know-on effect in municipal development, when taking into consideration the creation of jobs, the rehabilitation of the urban heritage, and the economic diversification.

This research highlights several internal and external constraints that are explained by the analysis undertaken in this chapter. Considering tourism in its national dimension, we can verify that, with the exception of some policies and (scarce) resources oriented to this segment, the strongest investments are directed to the most important tourism regions and to massive tourism products, simply because they are more demanded and generate higher volume of incomes. In fact, the insufficient public financial support was identified by entrepreneurs as a huge obstacle to the sector's growth. Therefore, there are several inherent to the municipality itself which hold back the development of tourism activity and RT in particular. As the entrepreneurs recognized, the most important of these reasons is the lack of cooperation among local organizations, due to the absence of new models of governance that encourage the implementation of integrated strategies to raise the local critical mass. At the same time, the current divisions reflect the

individualism, the rivalry and the competitive attitude of local entrepreneurs. As Brunori and Rossi (2007) argue, this kind of entrepreneurial behaviour is common in rural areas, attesting to the failure of the strategies in place, and requires a deep change in the rooted and traditional way of governance. The lack of cooperation is present in two forms. Horizontally, in Almeida, the dialogue and cooperation is at a very low level (or nil if we consider only the entrepreneurs' activity), and has been driven by the municipal government. Vertically, the cooperation with other regional and border organizations is also limited and demonstrates the dominant pattern of public and individualist government. That position results from the focus on the Municipality's own territory, ignoring the potential located in the adjacent areas. Consequently, Almeida needs a new pattern of territorial organization, one that stimulates the dialogue between local organizations, encourages investments, makes the territory more attractive to exogenous resources, and defines a new and global policy of development that should answer the question: *What future do we want for Almeida?*

However, while perceiving the nature of these problems, some promising steps have been undertaken by the municipal government in order to reverse the state of things. In the recent past, several actions have been undertaken. One example of this is the creation of Almeida's Promotion Agency, a structure to coordinate actions among tourist operators who have been sponsored both by municipal and regional entities. There is the reinforcement of regional and border cooperation, with a partnership established with the Spanish city of Ciudad Rodrigo, in order to share experiences and develop common tourist actions. In addition, there has been growing investment in external promotion, with a presence in recent publications of the International Tourism Trade Fair of Madrid, the Lisbon Travel Market and the International Interior Tourism Trade Fair of Valladolid. These measures undertaken by the municipal government reveal a new concern for tourism promotion and organization and could constitute the first steps of broader and more effective territorial governance. At the same time, it suggests that the municipal government performs the leading role in the socio-economic animation, because of its greater capacity for local dialogue and mobilization. In fact, private organizations and particularly the local entrepreneurs are significantly more passive (although they should not be) and highly positioned as beneficiaries of public funds and supports.

The regional context of disinvestment and the socio-economic abandonment observed in rural areas located in peripheral regions also contributes to the low innovative and entrepreneurial spirit in tourism (as well as in other economic activities). This fact was also considered by the entrepreneurs as an impediment to tourism growth in Almeida. Additionally, this context repels investments and promotes an atmosphere of discredit and doubt about the future. The entrepreneurs' low levels of qualification, as well as their advanced age, are additional obstacles which discourage investments in RT. And these dominant characteristics of local entities will continue to discourage more investments in tourism in the future. The distance to (but not the isolation from) the main urban centres located on the west

Portuguese coast and to some Spanish towns, associated with the absence of an integrated and solid policy of tourist exploitation, also contributes to the feeble impact that RT has had in the socio-economic development of Almeida. Thus, RT weaknesses are much more due to the inability and incapacity of Almeida to induce tourists' expenditures, rather than to the tourists' own unwillingness to spend.

In conclusion, the Municipality of Almeida has a long way to go before tourism is in a position to better sustain its local development. For this purpose, tourism should be inserted in a global and integrated perspective. The two recommendations are: (i) the policies should favour and stimulate the participation and the involvement of the most representative organizations in the planning process, integrating the other policies and dimensions with tourism. This institutional solidarity is essential to obtain more critical mass, to encourage the entrepreneurial spirit and to concentrate resources in strategic and mobilizing actions; (ii) even though it transcends the municipal action and competence, Almeida should strengthen the touristic cohesion on a regional scale, preferably through the establishment of a common platform, where actions related to the planning activities and marketing should be undertaken. The global vision described is essential to reinforce tourism in Almeida, to ensure that RT can effectively contribute to renew the local economy, rather than just being a stereotypical idea of rural development.

Because of the common nature of the constraints involved, we also believe that the problems diagnosed in Almeida could be extrapolated to the BIN region as a whole. Enlarging the sample and the case study to the regional scale is proposed as future work, and we expect to report these findings in future publications.

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