

“A Little Unspoilt Paradise”: Profile and Practices of Tourism-Related Lifestyle Migrant Entrepreneurs in Southern Portugal

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the potential of the fairly recent phenomenon of entrepreneurial lifestyle migration, in the context of rural Algarve (Portugal) from the perspective of lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs (LMEs) and their socio-economic contribution to the development of rural areas. The study focuses on the profile of LMEs who are active in tourism businesses, by analysing the results of an online survey with a sample of 60 business owners and semi-structured interviews with 16 representatives of local councils. Findings show that these LMEs are well-settled, intend to stay and invest in the future. Despite facing complex challenges, including push factors such as bureaucratic obstacles and language barriers, results reveal that lifestyle orientations remain a priority. We argue that if the potential for tourism-related LMEs to contribute with sustainable practices to support tourism development is to be realised, public efforts to support these communities need to be stable and long term.

KEYWORDS

Rural Entrepreneurship, Lifestyle Migrant Entrepreneurs, Rural Tourism, Low Density Areas, Algarve (Portugal).

ARTICLE HISTORY

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship in rural tourism areas has garnered significant research attention over the past decade (Stone & Stubbs, 2007; Pato & Teixeira, 2016; Masoomi, Rezaei-Moghaddam, & Teixeira, 2023). Rural tourism has been increasingly regarded as “an ecologically and socially sustainable form of tourism” (Pröbstl-Haider, Melzer, & Jiricka, 2014, p. 216) that generates economic and social benefits for the local communities (Pröbstl-Haider, Melzer, & Jiricka, 2014; Dias, Palacios-Florencio, & Hallak, 2023). The growth of rural tourism reflects two prevailing trends: the rise of a lifestyle-led and leisure-oriented society, and the substantial investments in tourism as a strategy for rural development and revitalisation (Walmsley, 2003). At the same time, the focus on lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs has intensified within academic literature, with studies often exploring ways of achieving a balance between lifestyle and entrepreneurial orientations (Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Stone & Stubbs, 2007; Thomas, Shaw, & Page, 2011). In rural settings, the perceived success of small businesses that lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs build and run is to be found in more proactive, entrepreneurial, and sustainable management practices (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Cunha, Kastenholz, & Carneiro, 2020). The context of this research is the rural area of the Algarve, in southern Portugal, which suffers from the same shortcomings as other rural and somewhat remote locations: increased depopulation, ageing population, and outward migration. Thus, migrant entrepreneurs to the rural Algarve may also be regarded as a countermeasure to tackle the ensuing problems. This research contributes valuable knowledge on addressing the need to reconsider and rebuild rural and sustainable tourism practices. This is aligned with the imperative to develop policies which require the consolidation of expertise held by diverse stakeholders from both public and private sectors (OECD, 2006). While existing research extensively examines the economic and social impacts of rural tourism businesses (cf. Madanaguli, Kaur, Bresciani, & Dhir, 2021), empirical research into the characteristics, objectives, expectations, and sustainability concerns of these lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs in rural areas is scarce, particularly in the context of Portugal. In fact, little is known about these entrepreneurs and their actual reasons for starting a business in geographical and social contexts which cannot be considered to be the easiest, most comfortable setting (Siemens, 2014). This study aims to fill this research gap, providing insights into the unique features of entrepreneurial lifestyle migration to the rural Algarve and its implications for the tourism sector.

As such, this study brings together three research domains: (1) the migrants themselves (from abroad or from national geographical locations other than the Algarve), (2) entrepreneurship (in the low-density rural areas of the Algarve, Portugal), and (3) the rural tourism sector. Although small businesses in rural, often sparsely populated areas generally face various constraints and challenges, many of the migrants studied here claim they have “come to build a business” and that the rural Algarve is their “home” for the foreseeable future. Thus, these migrants play a crucial role in the revitalisation of depopulated areas. They seem to follow more proactive, entrepreneurial, and sustainable management practices, targeting niche tourism practices and special interests, which are considerably distant, both geographically and as a business model, from mass tourism. Indeed, as the Algarve rural areas undergo economic and social changes, it is relevant to study migrant lifestyle entrepreneurs related to tourism, from the perspective of self-employment and self-directed economic activities (Stone & Stubbs, 2007), given their potential to contribute to the sustainable development of tourism and rural areas.

To address the issues and challenges listed above, this paper is guided by the following research questions. First, since demographic and motivational insights are crucial for understanding the individuals behind these businesses: *What are the demographic profiles of lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs in rural tourism areas of the Algarve?* (RQ1) and *which factors motivate these entrepreneurs to establish tourism businesses in rural settings?* (RQ2). Next, to explore the characteristics of the businesses operated by these entrepreneurs, we ask, *What types of tourism-related businesses are being established by lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs in rural Algarve?* (RQ3). Additionally, the challenges faced, including identifying the (lack of) sources of information and support, were also explored by asking *what specific challenges lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs encounter in rural tourism areas?* (RQ4) The role of lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs in rural development and revitalization is also central to the study. Therefore, the final research question is *what role can these businesses play in the broader rural development of the region?* (RQ5) This question is approached

through the optics of the local governance representatives in order to uncover how the impacts of such businesses on local communities and the economy are perceived.

Contrary to most studies in this research domain (cf. Madanaguli et al., 2021; Masoomi et al., 2023), this empirical study follows two approaches: a quantitative methodological approach via a questionnaire survey applied to tourism-related business owners and a complementary qualitative approach via interviews to the representatives of local governance. The questionnaire survey intends to draw the profile and explore the motivations of lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs in the rural area of the Algarve. To accomplish this, we aim to understand (1) the lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs' demographic profile, (2) what motivates these entrepreneurs to open a tourism business in a rural area, (3) the kind of business enterprises established, and (4) if they plan to stay. Furthermore, we intend to (5) list the sustainability practices lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs intend to invest in. We draw on the interviews to understand what the municipalities actively implement to foster this type of entrepreneurship. Additionally, the paper aims to highlight the significance of this form of entrepreneurial activity in terms of present and future local and regional development, thus enabling better policy decisions from local and regional decision-makers.

This paper has been structured as follows: following the introduction, section 2 presents the theoretical framework supporting the study; section 3 covers the overview of the study, a description of the data, and the identification of the methodology; the empirical results and their discussion are contained in section 4, which is followed by two sections with discussion and conclusions, limitations and future research.

2. Theoretical Background and Geographical Context

2.1 The Role of Tourism Businesses in Peripheral Rural Areas

Rural tourism has been recognized as a very relevant means and often regarded as “a remedy” to develop local economies, support regional identity (e.g. Pröbstl-Haider et al., 2014), and possibly slow down depopulation due to massive outmigration of mostly young people (Anderson, 2000).

Understanding what ‘rural’ signifies is relevant to understanding the specific economic and social challenges businesses face in this context. One consensual definition sees rural areas as located at some distance from urban areas, with a low population density and a high economic dependence on natural resources and/or agriculture (OECD, 2006; Siemens, 2014). As many studies have recognized over the past two to three decades, rural areas are often affected by scarce employment opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and limited economic diversity (Dana, Gurau, & Lasch, 2014; Castro & Ferreira, 2019; Cunha et al., 2020). Consequently, this leads to a decline in the infrastructure of rural municipalities along with an ageing population, an exodus of young people, low density of business activities, and a reduction in basic services, which in turn can lead to a vicious circle of further depopulation in these areas (OECD, 2006), and a general feeling that such regions have been abandoned by the central government (Almeida, 2017). This phenomenon has been noted to occur in places around the world such as the United States (Johnson & Lichter, 2019), Australia (Walmsley, 2003), and several countries in Europe (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011), including Portugal (Almeida, 2017; Cunha et al., 2020).

An important boost in such rural areas is the in-migration of national and international future entrepreneurs who pursue practices based on their hobbies or special interests to “realise their desired way of life” (Eimermann & Kordel, 2018, p. 242) while showing genuine concern about place and community, integrating local people and resources. Such attributes are also valued by niche segments of rural tourists. Consequently, the effect of this form of entrepreneurship is not limited to economic figures, because the total economic impact in terms of job and income making may be modest. Nevertheless, there are impactful contributions to local economic and social dynamics, which could contribute to keeping rural communities alive, for example by maintaining traditional farms and connected activities like food and hand-craft production (Cunha et al., 2020). However, the successful realization of this potential is frequently constrained by local contexts (Cunha et al., 2020) and also by the fact that in many instances business owners or entrepreneurs do not have the necessary experience in starting and running a small business, both in terms of income, profit and employee numbers (Siemens, 2014). Furthermore, rural businesses

in general “are located in contexts that are potentially more challenging and hostile than those in urban settings” (Siemens, 2014, p. 124), and usually face various types of constraints and challenges, (e.g., lack of qualified and even unqualified staff) (Siemens, 2014; Cunha et al., 2020).

2.2 Lifestyle Migrant Entrepreneurs

In recent decades, lifestyle migration has garnered attention, exploring the motivations driving people to relocate to different countries. Key factors include climate, perceived quality of life, and age, with a notable trend among those in the later stages of life (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009) but also, increasingly, those still of working age (Torkington & Ribeiro, 2019). The Algarve region, with over 23% of its population having foreign origin and residence status in Portugal (INE, 2023), has witnessed a growth in migrants opting to live and establish tourism-related businesses in rural areas, termed as lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs in the literature (Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Thomas et al., 2011).

Machado and Azevedo (2009, p. 27) have highlighted that EU migrants in Portugal, who are relatively under-studied, represent the ‘socially successful’ migrants. Generally, ‘successful’ or positive outcomes in migration receive less attention than unsuccessful or problematic outcomes. The concept of ‘success’ in migration can be understood from two main perspectives. On the one hand, in a more ‘objective’ social sense, it relates to the societal contributions of migrants—such as economic contributions through paying taxes, supporting local economies through consumption, or engaging in ‘foreign investment’ by purchasing upmarket properties or starting businesses. The literature notes that ‘lifestyle migrants’ are considered ‘desirable’ for these reasons (Torkington, 2014). Therefore, in the Algarve, the increasing numbers of these migrants settling in the region might be regarded as a ‘successful outcome’ both by and for the local community (Torkington & Ribeiro, 2019). While existing studies in the Algarve primarily focus on urban, coastal lifestyle migrants, (Torkington, 2012; Torkington & Ribeiro, 2019), our study aims to present a distinct perspective. Specifically, our focus is on migrant entrepreneurs who, despite not being too old and sometimes even of working age, have settled in the rural and remote areas of the Algarve.

These lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs (LMEs) often engage in rural tourism businesses, actively seeking a different lifestyle aligned with their personal values and passions (Cunha et al., 2020). Managing small enterprises, they strive to balance financial goals with non-financial indicators (Dias & Silva, 2021), emphasizing their “commitment to change their lifestyle” (Ateljevic, 2020, p. 471). Despite limited management experience or professional tourism skills (Getz & Peterson, 2005; Morrison, 2006; Peters, Frehse, & Buhalis, 2009; Cunha et al., 2020), their strong lifestyle motivations enable them to comprehend tourists’ needs, drawing from their own experiences as tourists in the same geographical locations where they establish businesses.

Typically, lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs are not native to the area, and often lack fluency in the local language. However, they may exhibit a penchant for risk-taking, creative thinking and initiative, leveraging observed opportunities to create value (Fadda, 2020). These proactive small business owners often follow sustainable management practices, contributing to the local economy and fostering the sustainable development of tourism-related businesses. Their ventures, including short-term accommodation rentals, guided tours, restaurants, cafés and bars, target niche tourism practices and special interests, setting them apart geographically and aspirationally from mass tourism. Existing literature attests to their substantial contributions, introducing new ideas, knowledge and skills to rural areas while connecting local products and services to new markets (Weidinger & Kordel, 2016; Eimermann & Kordel, 2018).

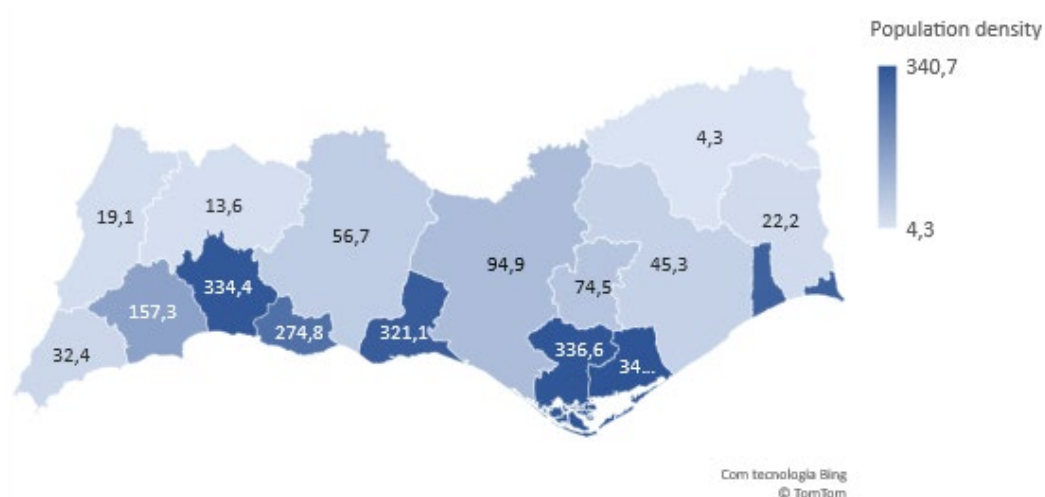
3. Overview of the Study and Geographical Setting

The Algarve is a region with around 470,000 inhabitants, of which 109,000 are foreign nationals with official residence status (INE, 2023). It covers an area of around 4,996.8 km² (around 5.4% of the total land area of Portugal) and is divided into three distinct natural sub-regions: the coast (*litoral*), the *barrocal* (low-lands area between the coast and the hills, where most of the Algarve’s agricultural activity is located) and the hills (*serra*), as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Natural Sub-regions of the Algarve

Source: Câmara Municipal de Lagos (2023)

The rural area of the Algarve comprises the *barrocal* and *serra* sub-regions, with a low population density (Figure 2). According to a local official report (CCDR Algarve, 2015), several factors contribute to the decline of rural areas in the region. These factors encompass the significant disruption of the socio-economic fabric caused by outward migration since the 1960s, resulting in the loss of human resources and an increasingly aging population. Additionally, there is a notable divergence in socio-economic development indicators between the inland and coastal zones of the Algarve. The report underscores the difficulties in attracting and retaining a younger population and highlights the ineffectiveness of strategies and investments in reversing stagnation trends. Consequently, the issues outlined in the report align, overall, with the report from OECD (2006) and parallel challenges faced by many southern European regions. These include limited access to and the closure of public health, education, and administrative services; insufficient public transportation affecting connectivity to remote areas; outdated and inadequate basic sanitation; and a scarcity of job opportunities.

Figure 2. Population Density (No./ km²) by Place of Residence

Source: Own Elaboration (data from INE, 2023)

This study is part of a larger project to investigate tourism-related lifestyle migration in the rural Algarve, namely the need for sustainable development (including sustainable tourism) of depopulated rural areas, the involvement of and opportunities for migrants in entrepreneurial activities in rural areas, and understanding the growing trend for rural tourism in the area. Drawing from data collected from

a questionnaire survey, this paper is focused on obtaining profiling data, including socio-demographic data, reasons for choosing the rural Algarve as a destination, length of time living in the Algarve, type of business, foreseeable investment in possible sustainable practices, and perceived constraints to business development. In order to complement the perceived barriers and problems in creating a business, we also draw on data obtained from interviews conducted with local municipal governance to identify local public policies and measures from municipalities that might provide economic, legislative, and operational backup to support businesses operating in the tourism service sector owned and run by lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs and to encourage them to settle in the area. These interviews allow us to better understand the type of focus given to the community of LMEs and provide a more nuanced picture and interpretation of the interlinks and networking practices amongst the different communities inhabiting the rural Algarve. Finally, we draw on information collected from the municipality websites about the type of bureaux and desks provided for local entrepreneurs.

The survey data were collected through questionnaires made available in four languages (English, French, German, and Portuguese). The questionnaire was designed based on some studies applied to self-employed expatriates (Stone & Stubbs, 2007), entrepreneurial migrants (Pérez-Ramírez et al., 2014), lifestyle entrepreneurs (Fada, 2020), and lifestyle migrants (Torkington & Ribeiro, 2019). The questionnaire was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Algarve and it included a section on the privacy policy of this institution and authorisation for the collection and analysis of data for the purpose of the study. In addition to the privacy policy section, the questionnaire is further divided into three sections: business information, living in the Algarve, and personal information. It comprises a total of 31 questions, with the majority being multiple-choice close-ended queries. Within one of the open-ended questions, respondents were requested to provide brief statements regarding their impressions of rural Algarve and they could also provide further comments to some of the close-ended questions.

We conducted a total of 16 semi-structured interviews with local governance representatives (LGRs): one for each of the 16 Algarve municipalities (6 face-to-face; 9 online, and 1 telephone interview) between July 2022 and January 2023. and participants gave us their informed consent before starting the interviews and the interviews lasted between thirty and ninety minutes. Seven of the interviewees held the position of President or Vice-President of the respective municipal council, seven were councillors responsible for tourism and/or local businesses and entrepreneurship, and two were serving as Presidents of a rural freguesia.

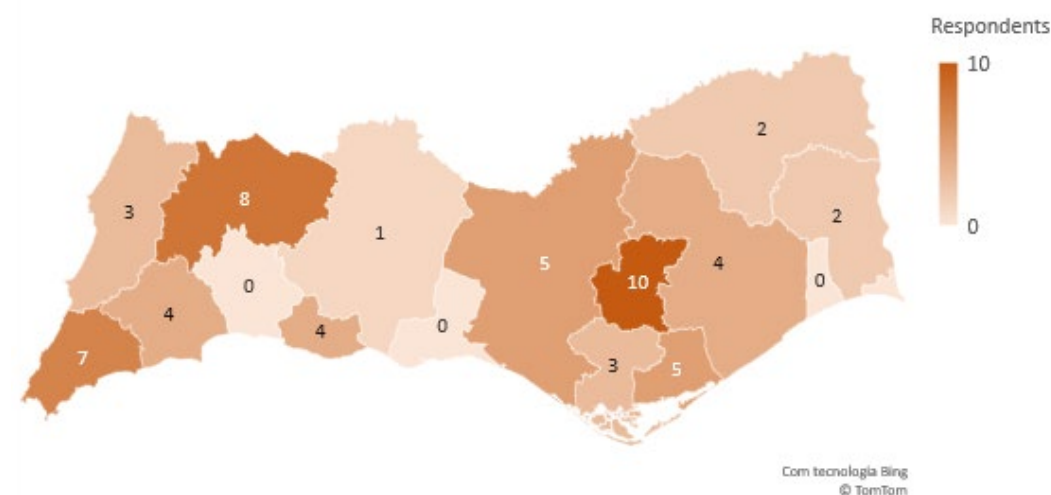
The interviews followed a topic guide with questions relating to the evolution and impacts of tourism in general, and rural tourism more specifically, in the municipality area, as well as the profiles and recognition of the impacts of migrant entrepreneurs. One focus point of these interviews was to understand how aware local governance representatives were of the potential of this type of entrepreneurship to contribute to the sustainable development of both tourism and local communities and the types of impacts it is causing from the social, economic, and environmental perspectives. Furthermore, the interviews also aimed to obtain information about the business and social networking activities of the migrants and their links to local communities, places and economies as well as any environmentally sustainable practices they engage in, thus securing a more rounded and richer description of social context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

A total of 1,705 potential lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs with tourism businesses were identified in the rural area of the Algarve, the majority of which (1,370) via the National Local Accommodation Register, as this database provides information on the nationality of its owners. The remainder were identified via social networks (Facebook and Instagram), municipalities' websites, and Google Maps. This cross-identification was applied since, similar to other studies of rural businesses (Siemens, 2014; Dias et al., 2023), there are no databases with business information that can specifically identify this particular type of entrepreneur. Although a total of 1,705 businesses were identified, 369 had non-existent or legal representative email addresses. As it has been pointed out by various scholars investigating lifestyle migration, the primary methodological challenge in researching this population lies in accessing them (Gustafson, 2008, Hannonen, 2018).

Data collection took place from 27 May to 18 July 2022 among the 1336 business owners identified with available contacts. Given the low response rate, emails were sent on two separate occasions requesting

responses to the questionnaire available via LimeSurvey software. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Although the sample of 60 respondents is non-probabilistic, and therefore insufficient for any form of generalization, the questionnaires collected covered most of the 16 municipalities' distribution of the foreign population in the Algarve by the municipality of residence (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 3. Number of Respondents by Municipality of Residence



Source: Own Elaboration

4. Empirical Findings

This section presents and discusses the findings related to the 60 respondents' (1) profiles, (2) migration motivations to the rural Algarve, (3) reasons for starting a business, (4) main obstacles for business growth, and (5) foreseeable investments. Data relating to the lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs' characteristics and their business activities are detailed in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. Additionally, data from the interviews with the local governance representatives will also be drawn upon to shed some light on how these entities view the role of LMEs in the broader development of rural areas in the region and how they support the lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs' activities and challenges.

4.1 Who are the Lifestyle Migrant Entrepreneurs in the Rural Algarve?

Just over half of the lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs surveyed are male, with an average age of 49 when they started their business in the region. They are English (20%), German (17%), Dutch (13%) and Portuguese (13%) and have a high level of academic qualifications. This academic profile is common to that found in other regions of Portugal (Castro & Ferreira, 2019; Cunha et al., 2020) and in studies conducted elsewhere in Europe (Stone & Stubbs, 2007). Almost two thirds have lived in the Algarve for more than 6 years and are not fluent in Portuguese, despite many (62%) having lived in the region for 10 years or more. Before coming to the Algarve, the vast majority were not business owners. Interestingly, though, the majority already intended to start their own business prior to relocating, a much higher number than that found elsewhere (Stone & Stubbs, 2007).

Table 1. Lifestyle Migrant Entrepreneurs' Profile

Profile variables	Categories	Frequency (%) / No.	Profile variables	Categories	Frequency (%) / No.
<i>Gender</i>	Male	52%	<i>Professional situation before coming to the Algarve</i>	Employee	56%
	Female	48%		Independent worker	22%
<i>Age at time of opening business</i>	Min	16		Entrepreneur	16%
	Max	72		Student	4%
	Mean	49,03		Other	2%
	Mode	55	<i>Living in the Algarve</i>	less than a year	8%
<i>Nationality</i>	English	20%		1 - 5 years	30%
	German	17%		6 - 10 years	26%
	Portuguese	13%		11- 15 years	4%
	Dutch	13%		more than 15 years	32%
	Belgian	12%	<i>Knowledge of the Portuguese language</i>	None	3%
	Dual	10%		A little	40%
	French	5%		Can get by	21%
	Other	10%		Fairly good	14%
<i>Education</i>	Master's or PhD	32%		Fluent	22%
	Bachelor's or first degree	45%	<i>Intention to open a business when moving to the Algarve</i>	Yes	58%
	Professional / Vocational qualifications	15%		No	25%
	Secondary school	5%		Maybe	17%
	Other	3%			

Source: Own Elaboration

On average, the majority of businesses surveyed were started around nine years ago and are in the accommodation sector (57%), mainly short-term rental accommodation (44%), but also restaurants (8%) and tourist entertainment companies. Like many other small and medium tourism enterprises, the businesses are family-owned (Dias et al., 2023), often operating all year round (60%), practically without employing any staff from outside the household, and their clients are mostly foreigners (65%).

Recent studies point to the need for these entrepreneurs to develop social, economic, and environmental attachments to the place and its community (Dias et al., 2023) and networks can be an important motivator of value creation (Mottiar, 2016). Nonetheless, our respondents do not seem to be particularly interested in being involved in partnerships, even if informal, but when they are, these are established with other companies in complementary businesses. The overall majority of respondents consider their business to be performing well (49%) or very well (32%).

Table 2. Business Profile

Profile variables	Categories	Frequency (%) / No.	Profile variables	Categories	Frequency (%) / No.
<i>Business sector</i>	<i>Alojamento local</i> (AL-short-term rentals, B&B, small guesthouse...)	44%	<i>No. employees outside the household (average)</i>	Men - Full-time	0,91
	Accommodation (hotel or similar)	13%		Men - Part-time	0,7
	Restaurants & catering	8%		Women - Full-time	1,27
	Guided tours (walking, cycling...)	7%		Women - Part-time	1,03
	Sports or water sports	5%	<i>Customers</i>	Mostly Portuguese	3%
	Agritourism	5%		A mixture of Portuguese and foreigners	32%
	Rental services (bicycles...)	5%		Mostly not Portuguese	65%
	Campsite / Motorhome park	5%		German	31%
	Retreats (yoga, etc)	3%		Dutch	22%
	Wine tourism	3%		English	19%
	Arts & crafts	2%		French	14%
	Other	1%		American	14%
<i>Operation</i>	Open all year round	60%	<i>Involvement in any networks /partnerships (with local businesses, tourist agencies, university, associations, etc.) in the Algarve</i>		
	Open seasonally	40%		Yes	34%
				No	66%
<i>Age of business</i>	Min	0	<i>Business performance</i>	Very good	32%
	Max	38		Quite good	49%
	Mean	8,88		Satisfactory	15%
	Mode	7		Quite poor	5%
				Very poor	0%

Source: Own Elaboration

4.2 Why they Chose to Move and Open a Business

When asked to describe the rural Algarve in an open-ended question, respondents offered various very positive phrases, such as “a little unspoilt paradise”. As such, their motivations for migrating are based essentially on symbolic factors such as the landscape and environment, the climate, the lifestyle, and their love of the Portuguese and the place (Table 2), therefore, presenting similar motivations to previous studies on motivations to leave the urban context and settle in rural areas (Dal Bello, Marques, Sacramento, & Galvão, 2022) and, up to a point, analogous to retiree lifestyle migrants, which are also in line with the usual perceived ‘lifestyle affordances’ associated with lifestyle migration in general (Torkington & Ribeiro, 2019). Contrary to the generalised view that lifestyle migrants tend to be older, retired individuals, the lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs under analysis came to the Algarve at a still active stage in their lives.

Table 3. Reasons for Choosing to Live in a Rural Area in the Algarve

Reasons	Frequency	Reasons	Frequency
Natural environment/landscape	63,3%	Leisure activities	15,0%
Climate	61,7%	Came here due to decision of family/ spouse/ partner	11,7%
Lifestyle	41,7%	Family/partner / friends already here	6,7%
I like the Portuguese way of life in the countryside	38,3%	Financial reasons	6,7%
I wanted to live in an unspoiled place	36,7%	I dislike my country of origin	3,3%
I like the Portuguese people	35,0%	Lack of opportunities in my country of origin	0,0%
I had been here on holiday before	21,7%	Other	0,0%
Work / business opportunities	18,3%		

Source: Own Elaboration.

Note: Respondents could select multiple options.

The motivations of lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs for developing their businesses in the rural geographical context of the Algarve (Table 4) are spurred by symbolic factors, as mentioned above, although they do not rule out material factors (such as the possibility of making an income or acquiring affordable housing), which is in line with the definition of lifestyle entrepreneurs according to Thomas et al. (2011). Many are driven by the desire to be self-employed, in a natural environment, which enables a particular commitment to an idealized lifestyle (e.g., living more simply than in their previous urban and consumerist lifestyle) or are driven by the desire to do something different, such as facing challenges, or living and working more sustainably, outside of urban areas (Ateljevic, 2020). A rather less important motivation is the desire for income, either as their main source of income or as a secondary source of income. Motivations linked to material ambitions ('higher earning potential') or social commitments to the community ('give something back to the community') are clearly not a priority.

Table 4. Motivations to Start a Business

Motivations	Frequency	Motivations	Frequency
To work for myself	40,0%	To move to a specific location	18,3%
To live in a certain environment (natural and/or social)	36,7%	To give something back to the community	18,3%
To enjoy a good lifestyle	36,7%	To take up a business opportunity	16,7%
To do something completely different in my life	35,0%	To avoid being unemployed	15,0%
To earn a living	28,3%	To try out an innovative idea	15,0%
To supplement my income	28,3%	To develop previous experience in the tourism sector	15,0%
To provide me with a challenge	26,7%	To achieve a higher earning potential	11,7%
To live and work in a sustainable way	26,7%	To have something to do	8,3%
To support my leisure interests	20,0%	To downscale/downsize	8,3%
To meet new people	20,0%	To gain prestige by running a business	1,7%
To escape an urban environment	20,0%	Other	8,3%

Source: Own Elaboration.

Note: Respondents could select multiple options.

However, there are obstacles to their endeavours that inhibit starting, and later on developing, their business, as illustrated in Table 5. These obstacles include bureaucratic and legal issues and challenges related to the language barrier. In the further comments section of the questionnaire, several of the re-

spondents mention bureaucracy, lack of knowledge, and “no one to provide correct information” on how to do business locally as the main obstacles and appeal to local governance to support them:

“There should be an organization dedicated exclusively to helping foreign investors to set up businesses, to understand the regulations and tax system as well as providing courses to learn how to use the different portals.”

These hurdles may limit involvement in informal networks and reflect a lesser need for integration with the local community (cf. Table 2). This is in line with studies conducted in Spain for a similar cohort but, interestingly, differs from studies conducted with tourism-related lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs in France (Stone & Stubbs, 2007). Stone and Stubbs (2007) attribute these country differences to the less educated and less international experience of the lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs in Spain compared to those in France. Almost a third refer to ‘lack of knowledge and skills’ which is a common barrier highlighted in other studies (Madanaguli et al., 2021). Very few respondents point to financing difficulties as a factor holding back the business and roughly one quarter of the respondents claim not to have encountered any obstacles at all.

Table 5. The Main Obstacles to Starting a Business in the Algarve

Obstacles	Frequency
The process is lengthy and bureaucratic	40,0%
Lack of knowledge and skills on how to do business in Portugal	31,7%
Language barriers	30,0%
Legal obstacles (i.e. business regulations, insurance requirements)	26,7%
Difficulties in accessing finance	10,0%
None	23,3%
Other	11,7%

Source: Own Elaboration.

Note: Respondents could select multiple options.

4.3 Local Impacts

The Algarve Regional Programme 2021-2027 (2021), under the objective of investment in jobs and growth for the ultra-peripheral regions, proposed investments and financial support for inland areas of the Algarve within the dimensions of ‘smart regions’ and ‘green regions’. As a result, the questionnaire included a question on future investments, providing a list of options related to the two aforementioned objectives. Despite the identified obstacles, the lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs express their intention to remain in the Algarve and continue to invest, preferably in sustainable processes such as renewable energies and water management. As illustrated in Table 6, only a fifth of them aim to create more jobs and engage in material reuse. The figure is not particularly high, but many of the respondents are already engaged in various forms of recycling of materials. These findings underscore a strong commitment to environmentally sustainable practices within business operations. This aligns with Bosworth and Farrell’s (2011) suggestion that, overall, these owners exhibit a highly proactive, entrepreneurial, and sustainable management focus.

Table 6. Future Investments in or through Business

Future Investments	Frequency
Renewable energies (e.g. solar or wind)	40,0%
Digital marketing	25,0%
Sustainable water management (e.g. equipment to minimize water consumption, maximize waste or greywater re-use)	23,3%
Creating more jobs	21,7%
The re-use of materials (e.g. plastics, glass, paper) within the company	21,7%
Environmental and species protection actions / increasing biodiversity	16,7%
Increasing the use of the same infrastructure or equipment (e.g. buildings, vehicles) for different purposes	16,7%
Creating new products	13,3%
Joint projects with other companies	10,0%
Actions that facilitate the use of bicycles among employees and/or clients	8,3%
Investing in the Algarve coastal area	3,3%
Research and development (R&D) networks	1,7%
No intention to invest	18,3%

Source: Own Elaboration.

Note: Respondents could select multiple options.

4.4 Local Governance and Lifestyle Migrant Entrepreneurship

The success of entrepreneurship in rural areas is often considered to be dependent on the effectiveness of policies and many studies focus on policy measures (Masoomi et al., 2023). A further factor in attracting and maintaining migrants entrepreneurial activity is the level of practical institutional support offered (Skandalis, 2014), particularly by local governance offices, which are often the first port of call for newcomers needing informational and legal support. In the case of the Algarve, most councils' official websites do indeed specify some sort of official bureau or desk aimed at guiding and supporting local entrepreneurs in building a new business, e.g. business incubators. They also have bureaus dedicated to supporting migrants, such as SOS Line for Immigrants, Bureau to Support Emigrants, or even classes of Portuguese as a Foreign Language, although these appear to be aimed at and mainly used by economic migrants from non-EU origins.

The findings from our study reveal that the local governance representatives interviewed seem to have very little knowledge about the particularities of lifestyle migrant entrepreneurship, nor do they have systematised information on who the lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs are or their types of businesses. Many councillors were quite frank about their lack of information, with statements like: *"I have no record of foreign entrepreneurs in the inland areas"* (CM_C) or *"I don't have any hard data."* (CM_F) The overriding impression gained from our data is that the perception of LMEs is rather vague – there is an awareness that they might be 'different' from other migrants or entrepreneurs, but the LGRs are mostly unable to pinpoint what these differences might be as the following extract from an interview with one of the municipal representatives illustrates: *"Many of them may not be entrepreneurs in the sense of... but they come to live here and rehabilitate the villages."* (CM_E). Indeed, the interviews highlighted the fact that the local municipal council representatives do not seem focused on identifying or acknowledging the needs of this particular type of migrant entrepreneur. For instance, they do not seem to be aware that the major challenge faced by the LMEs involves negotiating the seemingly complex bureaucratic and legal processes; therefore it is unsurprising that they do not have specific strategies and practical measures on how to support them, such as specialized staff and/or staff who speak English.

Conversely, some of the councillors suggested, implicitly or explicitly, that some of the 'foreigners' were unwilling to abide by local regulations and laws, either through a false sense of entitlement or in pursuit of 'alternative' values and ideals, leading in some cases to businesses *"operating on the margins of regularisation"*. (CM_K)

As one interviewee put it:

"That is the difficulty that we sometimes have, which is [...] for them to realize that there are in fact some rules here, that, despite being a natural place, there are rules here, that we cannot escape from and therefore have to be respected". (CM_L)

There also seems to be a general perception that LMEs are able to seek out other means of support since they are financially positioned to do so, thus shifting the responsibility away from the public sector:

"Usually foreigners from Northern Europe, British, Germans and so on, ask for the support of a lawyer - professionally they are people with a different financial capacity".

On the other hand, they are aware of the potential importance in terms of socio-economic opportunities and affordances that the lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs bring to the municipality, as the following extracts exemplify:

"It's obvious that it's important for us that this kind of people are part of our territory; I mean, it helps us to grow and therefore economically it also helps us to grow, doesn't it?" (CM_M).

"They themselves also need, in some way, to contribute to the community, don't they? Here's a broader view, let's say of their social responsibility, and even in terms of sustainability itself" (CM_I).

However, once again the awareness is expressed in vague and ambiguous terms, strongly suggesting that local governance has not really reflected upon this potential nor on the ways in which it could be fostered and enhanced. At the same time, we found that there was no real mention of any of the potential challenges and issues that might arise from this type of migrant entrepreneurship, not least of which might be the direct effects on land and property prices and the consequences of this in terms of further driving the exodus of the local population, especially the young.

5. Discussion

This study contributes to a better understanding of the migration and settlement patterns of migrant entrepreneurs dedicated to managing small-scale tourism-related enterprises in rural Algarve. Their businesses serve dual purposes: fulfilling the dream of pursuing a lifestyle in a natural unspoiled environment in the ideal climate and fostering small-scale business growth within the sustainability paradigm.

Results show various similarities among the entrepreneurs, most of whom are well educated and come from various national and professional backgrounds, generally feel well settled, and express intentions to stay. The motivations driving their relocation and business establishment reflect a transformational view of tourism, prioritizing overall quality of life over economic factors like income or career advancement (Eimmermann, Tomozeiu, & Carson, 2020). Their motivations align with the conceptualization of lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs in the literature (Eimmermann & Kordel, 2018; Dias et al., 2023). Even though the business service or product provided might be different, the specific set of challenges faced by their entrepreneurial activities are similar (e.g., long and complex bureaucratic processes and language barriers), and do not seem to deter the respondents from staying, or from planning future investments, predominantly in environmentally conscious initiatives (e.g., renewable energies, sustainable water management, and material re-use). Nonetheless, they point out the lack of support from official entities. These, on the other hand, do not seem particularly tuned in to their needs and challenges, even though they recognize their potential to create future important infrastructure (Siemens, 2019).

In contrast to the majority of studies on lifestyle migrants, the community described here is relatively young. Hence, in terms of practical implications, the lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs emerge as both a beneficial social and economic resource, inhabiting sparsely populated areas and contributing to local economic development. They have the potential not only to draw visitors and (perhaps) create jobs, but

also to establish synergies with local businesses, aligning with the assertions of Cunha et al. (2020). Businesses and communities are interconnected and do not function in isolated and independent domains (Siemens, 2019). However, the survey participants do not express a significant inclination to engage in partnerships, even informally, and this concurs with prior studies that show a lack of interest in integrating into the local community (Torkington & Ribeiro, 2019). When they do pursue such collaborations, they tend to form alliances with other companies in complementary industries.

On the other hand, in terms of local governance we found a lack of engagement with the potential of this type of entrepreneurial migration for the socio-economic development of rural areas; something which is already being recognised in other European countries. Policymakers and local decision-makers should recognize the significance of this entrepreneurial activity in rural Algarve, considering the potential benefits to civic organizations and the broader population from the knowledge and perspectives of these entrepreneurial migrants (Weidinger & Kordel, 2016). At the same time, however, there should be some reflection on what challenges and even threats may arise from encouraging, or failing to control, the inflows of relatively affluent migrants in areas which are not prepared for this.

6. Conclusion

The study investigated the phenomenon of entrepreneurial lifestyle migration in rural areas of the Algarve, Portugal, providing insights into the motivations, challenges, and contributions of lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs to the rural areas. The research encompasses three key domains: migration, entrepreneurship, and rural areas. Unlike the predominant qualitative approach present in two-thirds of previous studies on this topic (Madanaguli et al., 2021), our study employs a quantitative methodology through a questionnaire survey, offering an initial or entry-point for the understanding of lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs' profiles, although the uniqueness of each context and the limited survey responses do not allow for broad generalizations, as it was pointed out in the methodological section. The study also draws on interview information from local municipalities, which, in turn, reinforce the need to bring together both groups of stakeholders, in order to develop the rural areas in the long term.

As pointed out earlier, this research project is exploratory in nature. Nevertheless, we believe it makes a valuable, even if minor, contribution to raising awareness among local representatives about the importance of recognizing the impact of lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs in the rural Algarve. Also, as it is exploratory, the findings are highly specific to the context, which is a limitation in terms of its representativeness. As mentioned in the methodological section, there were difficulties in identifying migrant entrepreneurs due to the lack of systematised and up-to-date information in the available databases. Despite relying on a small non-representative sample, and the evident limitation in drawing generalisable conclusions, we believe that valid and relevant outcomes can be drawn for the future of rural areas in the Algarve. The findings indicate that emerging migration patterns are creating fresh prospects for the development of rural areas. If the potential for tourism-related lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs to contribute with sustainable practices to support tourism development should be realised, public efforts to support these communities need to be stable, long term and a mutual and reciprocal relationship between business and community must be fostered. Additionally, acceptance of place-based policies (OECD, 2006) which recognize and build opportunities and tackle disadvantages must be enacted.

Future research in this field could explore the long-term economic and societal impacts of entrepreneurial lifestyle migration, as well as delve deeper into the specific challenges faced by this unique community.

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