

Entrepreneurs in rural tourism: Do lifestyle motivations contribute to management practices that enhance sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems?



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ABSTRACT

Rural territories may benefit from the entrepreneurial dynamics created by small tourism businesses, especially if associated to lifestyle motivations of respective entrepreneurs. Despite distrust amongst some researchers regarding small tourism businesses' contribution to rural economies, their potential role for enhancing rural development, should not be neglected. Given the relatively scarce empirical evidence regarding particularly the role of lifestyle entrepreneurs for the development of sustainable entrepreneurial rural ecosystems and communities, the present case-study research, conducted in a rural hinterland region in Southern Portugal (Alto Alentejo), seeks to fill this gap and reveal these entrepreneurs' role for the regeneration of rural economies, in diverse dimensions. The study explores motivations and management practices of rural tourism entrepreneurs as well as the consequences of their actions, considering data obtained from eight small tourism accommodation units, whose owners participated in semi-structured interviews. Content analysis reveals that the entrepreneurs are motivated by different factors, with lifestyle motivation playing a central role. Challenging the findings of other studies on small businesses in tourism, business efficiency and success are evident as a constant concern, and management practices, although informal, prove to be accurate. In fact, particularly those entrepreneurs more driven by lifestyle motivations show sustainability concerns, reflected in strategies of cross-selling, investments in biological agriculture, ecologically sound management, or the manifold setting into value of local culture. Interestingly, these projects are rewarding to their owners, reveal long-term planning and tend to generate robust networks, which clearly contribute not only to a dynamic but also more sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem of tourism in rural areas.

1. Introduction

Small businesses in rural tourism face multiple constraints, in many circumstances worsened by their location in rural areas and their reduced size. Businesses in this specific context face a reality in which entrepreneurs have to overcome various difficulties in managing and making their business feasible, such as the lack of managerial resources and skills or the incapacity to hire qualified staff (Morrison & Teixeira, 2004; Park, Doh, & Kim, 2014; Phelan & Sharpley, 2011; Smallbone, Baldock, & Burgess, 2002).

There has been a growing interest in sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems in the last decades (e.g. Cohen, 2006; Neumeyer & Santos, 2018; Theodoraki, Messoghem, & Rice, 2018; Torres Valdés, 2018). However, little is still known about the factors driving success and sustainability of these entrepreneurial ecosystems (Cavallo, Ghezzi, &

Balocco, 2018; Maroufkhani, Wagner, & Ismail, 2018).

A recent debate on 'lifestyle entrepreneurship' suggests that one of these potential success factors would be the corresponding entrepreneurial orientation that can be found in some of the small business owners, apparently contributing to more proactive, entrepreneurial and sustainable management practices, thus leading to better overall performance and results (Boluk & Mottiar, 2014; Bosworth & Farrell, 2011). At the same time, these entrepreneurs appear to be valuable players in boosting local economy and the sustainable development of the region where they operate their businesses. Tourism entrepreneurship typically promotes new investment, creation of jobs and income, but can also help increase the perception of value of unique endogenous resources, like local products. The resulting economic and social dynamics bring new usages to old resources, revitalizing small communities through, for example, local and extra-

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local networks, strengthened local trading and increase in social capital, essential to these small communities' survival (Eusébio, Kastenholz, & Breda, 2014; McGehee, Knollenberg, & Komorowski, 2015; Saxena, Clark, Oliver, & Ilbery, 2007).

Lifestyle entrepreneurs are individuals who develop their business as part of a lifestyle strategy that they believe to be more interesting, balanced or sustainable (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Marcketti, Niehm, & Fuloria, 2006). The passion for nature, life in the countryside or the possibility of balancing work with family or other personal interests are aspects that motivate these entrepreneurs and keep them optimistic and confident in the future. Commitment to business results is, in this context, an indispensable condition to maintain the desired way of living. Therefore, management practices tend to reflect that concern and appear to be more professional. The management practices reflect, on the one hand, entrepreneurs' values and beliefs, apart from their professional and academic background. Most of these agents' profiles show high levels of academic and professional qualification, with relevant experience, although not always in tourism (Akbaba, 2012; Marchant & Mottiar, 2011). Concerns regarding sustainability become visible in these actors' involvement in local communities, in their efforts in developing local and extra-local networks, partnerships and joint initiatives of enhancing local economy, namely through the promotion of unique local resources (Carvalho, Lima, Kastenholz, & Sousa, 2016; Eusébio et al., 2014; McGehee et al., 2015; Pato & Kastenholz, 2017). The drive to start a small business, and a tourism business in particular, is in many cases related to the desire to make a contribution to the revitalization of certain places that, for some reason, they are attached to (Mottiar, 2016; Paniagua, 2002). Rural tourism businesses, although typically of small size and affected by rural contexts (i.e. remoteness from large markets, from skilled labor force and disperse business networks), can be successful and give a valuable contribution to entrepreneurial dynamics of inland territories, also because they depend on their surrounding natural and social environment to maintain the business and the desired lifestyle.

Despite the mentioned growing interest in sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs), the need of rural tourism businesses to cooperate and the increasing awareness of the potential of lifestyle entrepreneurs in providing particularly interesting and innovative businesses, their role in contributing to sustainable EEs has been largely neglected.

This study intends to explore the motivations and management practices of rural tourism entrepreneurs, particularly of those whose profile aligns with lifestyle concerns. The research aims to understand the results achieved by these entrepreneurs, contributions to the creation of sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems in the villages where their businesses are located, namely by promoting entrepreneurial dynamics and the sustainable development of the villages.

1.1. Rural tourism

Rural areas are increasingly affected by the loss of economic opportunities and by a significant decrease in population, which impacts negatively on local economies. Tourism potential for development of these settings has been widely recognized (Bramwell & Lane, 1994; Carlsen, Morrison, & Weber, 2008; OECD, 1994; Silva, 2006; Thomas, Shaw, & Page, 2011), however also the challenges associated to actually realizing this potential in frequently constrained local contexts and in an increasingly competitive environment (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). Rural economies benefit from new investments, job creation and the dynamics of tourism businesses, particularly if well connected to other economic sectors (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Kim & Jamal, 2015; Kompulla, 2014). Additionally, direct tourist spending on tourism services but also on other local services and products is as an important outcome of rural tourism businesses (Kastenholz, Eusébio, & Carneiro, 2016; Kim & Jamal, 2015; Randelli & Martellozzo, 2019; Silva, 2006).

The tourism industry is characterized in Portugal, as in many other countries, by small family businesses, dealing with capital constraints and being managed with a strong operational focus, i.e. few businesses have planning, growth and marketing strategies (Ateljevic, 2007; Getz & Peterson, 2005; Morrison, 2006; Park et al., 2014; Pato & Kastenholz, 2017). Many of these small enterprises remain small, with weak economic indicators in terms of job creation, sales growth and turnover (Ateljevic, 2007; Hollick & Braun, 2005). However, it is worthwhile noting that many small businesses account for relevant contributions to rural territories and communities, where economic alternatives are scarce, and the possibility of maintaining a minimum population base is, in itself, highly valuable (Cunha, Kastenholz, & Carneiro, 2016; Eusébio et al., 2014).

From the tourists' point of view, tourism in rural areas is expected to provide integration in an idealized environment, which is quite different from the urban, i.e. it permits an escape from urban stress factors, such as pollution, noise, artificial and congested living contexts (Kastenholz, Lima, & Sousa, 2012). This sometimes called 'rural idyll' (Figueiredo, 2009; MacNaghten & Urry, 1998; McCarthy, 2008) includes opportunities for enjoyment of the countryside and its nature, appreciation of culture and traditions, and close social interaction, characterized by a dimension of genuine hospitality, also reflected in a personalized service (Kastenholz & Sparrer, 2009). The owners of small rural tourism businesses are well positioned to supply such a service, acting as 'cultural brokers' that provide opportunities of immersion in local culture, playing therefore a crucial role (Kastenholz & Sparrer, 2009). As highlighted by some studies (Cunha, 2016; Lewis, 2005; McGehee & Kim, 2004), the way they are doing business reveals a genuine concern about place and community, integrating local people, resources and 'distinctive features', aspects highly valued by target segments of rural tourism. The impact of this particular form of entrepreneurship goes far beyond economic figures, and although the total economic impact in terms of job and income generation may be modest, there are contributions to local economic and social dynamics, that may help keep rural communities alive, specifically by maintaining traditional farms and connected activities like food and handicraft production alive. Tourists here have the opportunity of appreciating the real context of farmers' daily work and life, sharing the local environment and culture, including landscape, typical architecture and gastronomy heritage (Cavaco, 2000; Eusébio et al., 2014; Sanagustín Sanagustín Fons, Moseñe Fierro, & Patiño, 2011). As a matter of fact, the tourism system integrates several activities, resources and stakeholders, enabling the creation of appealing overall rural tourism experiences, attracting visitors and boosting the place's local economy, if well managed and articulated (Kastenholz, Lima, & Sousa, 2012; Saxena et al., 2007). Rural territories dispose of a unique set of natural and cultural resources that might represent good business opportunities. Local businesses and inspired entrepreneurs are crucial to transform those resources into attractive and competitive tourism products, desirably, sustainable ones (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Parrish, 2007).

1.2. Lifestyle entrepreneurs in tourism

Entrepreneurs of small tourism businesses in rural contexts, although heterogeneous, have been reported as driven by lifestyle motives, enjoying a high socio-economic and cultural status (Silva, 2006) with the "family first" orientation towards their businesses (Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Pato & Kastenholz, 2017). Motivations to create the business are mostly centered on quality of life and local environmental variables, and frequently comprise the desire to contribute to a more sustainable environment (Boluk & Mottiar, 2014; Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Parrish, 2010). A passion for the countryside and the rural way of life and the possibility to work autonomously, along with the aspiration to enjoy a certain lifestyle, are common motives driving lifestyle entrepreneurs in rural tourism (Cunha et al., 2016; Kompulla, 2004;

Markantoni & van Hoven, 2012). The motivation, in this context, is frequently associated with the wish of enhancing the entrepreneur's and his/her family's quality of life, along with some intangible rewards such as pride, personal growth and a sense of achievement and empowerment (Lashley & Rowson, 2010; Marcketti et al., 2006; Markantoni & van Hoven, 2012). Increasingly principals of ecology and sustainability values are additional motivations ('ecopreneurs'), while also the desire to "inform and educate" tourists about agriculture, the countryside and its preservation (agri-tourism) has been reported amongst rural tourism entrepreneurs (Boluk & Mottiar, 2014; McGehee & Kim, 2004). Social entrepreneurs in tourism have been reported as individuals who identify, in rural contexts, opportunities to address their social goals while helping communities to sustain their way of living, either facilitating the development of a collective vision to destination development, or implementing responsible tourism initiatives (e.g. volunteer tourism) (Mottiar, Bolluk & Kline, 2018).

Lifestyle entrepreneurs in rural tourism businesses are individuals actively seeking a different lifestyle in rural territories. They may be involved in a range of activities of relevance to themselves and to their families, leading to more than business success (Cunha, 2016; Marcketti et al., 2006). They create and manage businesses aligned with their personal values, beliefs, interests and passions, and although not pursuing profits and material wealth at any cost or as the main goal, they cannot be considered as eccentrics or *bon-vivants* totally lacking interest in the economic success of their business (Marcketti et al., 2006). Although affected by rural context (i.e. remoteness from large markets, from skilled labor force, poor infrastructure, lack of specialized public services and disperse business networks), these entrepreneurs present economic concerns, plan (controlled) expansion and aim at business success, while effectively revealing success in satisfying their clients (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011). Their contributions and impacts on rural territories and communities have been widely discussed.

Some authors state that many entrepreneurs in tourism are driven by lifestyle motives, having little formal qualifications, no prior management experience or professional tourism skills, characteristics commonly associated with low performance (Getz & Peterson, 2005; Hollick & Braun, 2005; Morrison, 2006; Peters, Frehse, & Buhalis, 2009). Regardless of these arguments, some of the entrepreneurs with a strong lifestyle motivation show an approach to business that seems to be more entrepreneurial in nature, contributing to proactive management practices. They are frequently particularly capable of understanding tourists' needs and desires because they actually value most what these tourists look for in the countryside, sometimes having moved away from the city and radically opted against a stressful modern urban life (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Komppulla, 2004; Paniagua, 2002). On the other hand, many of these entrepreneurs have gained professional working skills in other domains that are transferable to their tourism business. Their skills, attitudes and lifestyle motivations permit them develop management practices that appear to be also more sustainable, generating positive business results, as well as entrepreneurial and personal fulfillment (Boluk & Mottiar, 2014; Cunha, 2016). Valuing the countryside, its unique endogenous resources, these entrepreneurs typically try to integrate local food and other products into their rural tourism businesses; they tend to value local traditions and frequently make an effort to be part of local community dynamics (Mottiar, 2016; Ollenburg, 2006). They are often more open to partnerships and local networks while also helping establish networks to the urban markets, to whom they have natural connections (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; McGehee et al., 2015). They value nature and local heritage, help setting it into value and are concerned about protecting it, also because they identify with the place (Mottiar, 2016).

Consequently, although quality of life variables are important to understand the motivation of these entrepreneurs to enter rural tourism businesses, evidence shows that lifestyle motivations do not necessarily imply the disregard of economic objectives. In fact, in many cases,

lifestyle motives are embedded within an economic agenda, the two types of motives being intrinsically linked and positively related to good results of the businesses as well as to a positive contribution of these businesses to a more dynamic and sustainable local tourism system (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Cunha et al., 2016; Hall & Rusher, 2004; Shaw & Williams, 2004; Skokic & Morrison, 2011).

1.3. Sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems

Researchers in the field of entrepreneurship have recently shifted their focus from studies of entrepreneurs and ventures to that of entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs). Entrepreneurial ecosystems can be understood as "the sets of actors, institutions, social networks and cultural values that produce and sustain entrepreneurial activity" (Roundy, Bradshaw, & Brockman, 2018, p.1).

This concept holds that every ecosystem is specific to its geographical boundaries and, in line with these geographical specificities, opportunities for entrepreneurs differ as well as entrepreneurial spirit typical of distinct societies. Entrepreneurial ecosystems are embedded in national culture, legal and institutional environments, marked by their own micro-culture (Maroufkhani et al., 2018). Although arguments have emerged questioning the importance of the local dimension of entrepreneurship (Autio et al., 2017), others consider the local dimension as a dominant ingredient in entrepreneurship, despite the unlectable impact of digitalization and globalization (Acs, Stam, Audretsch, & O'Connor, 2017; Cavallo et al., 2017; Florida, Adler, & Mellander, 2017).

Recent research has identified the key components of EEs, including venture capital, support organizations, human capital, markets, and connections among system components (Isenberg, 2011; Spiegel, 2017). However, others consider that the heterogeneous nature of ecosystems is overlooked and need deeper focus (Acs et al., 2017). One fundamental aspect of EEs variation is resilience, or the degree to which EEs can continuously recover from and adapt to exogenous shocks and pressures (Cadenasso, Pickett, & Grove, 2006). Resilience can determine if an ecosystem is able to respond to disruptions, but depends on a balance between diversity and coherence of components of EEs, reflecting a kind of paradoxical tension. Diversity across EEs is present in industry variety, types of ventures, business models, support organizations, and in participants' characteristics (investors, customers, entrepreneurs) (Roundy, Brockman, & Bradshaw, 2017). Tourism is, by definition, a highly complex sector, often conceptualized as a system (Gunn, 1994; Leiper, 1979), whose main elements and core attractors are located in specific places, with particular physical and human geography shaping unique tourist experience opportunities (Ashworth & Voogdt, 1991; Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Kastenholz, 2018). Especially in rural tourism, this complexity has long been recognized and emphasized as both a source of opportunities and challenges (Cawley & Gilmore, 2008; Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Saxena et al., 2007; Sharpley, 2005). Kastenholz, Carneiro & Marques (2012:248) conceptualize rural tourism as: '*a complex economic and social activity, defined by a particular geographical, physical and human context, designed as rural, shaped by complex interdependencies, a high degree of diversity and continuous change, simultaneously influencing the development of the rural territories in which it occurs.*' The multiplicity of, typically small, enterprises, frequently lacking resources, professional skills and business connections, in a demanding, competitive global market context is frequently stressed (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Pato & Kastenholz, 2017; Skokic, Lynch, & Morrison, 2019), as is the dependence on local actors from distinct, but complementary sectors (such as agriculture or handcraft production). This reality calls for integrative rural destination approaches (Kastenholz, Carneiro & Marques 2012; Saxena et al., 2007), setting into value leadership capacities and bridging and bonding social capital (McGehee, Knollenberg, & Komorowski, 2016), as well as an innovative, entrepreneurial spirit (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Bosworth & Farrell, 2011). Networks, even if of an informal nature, have been

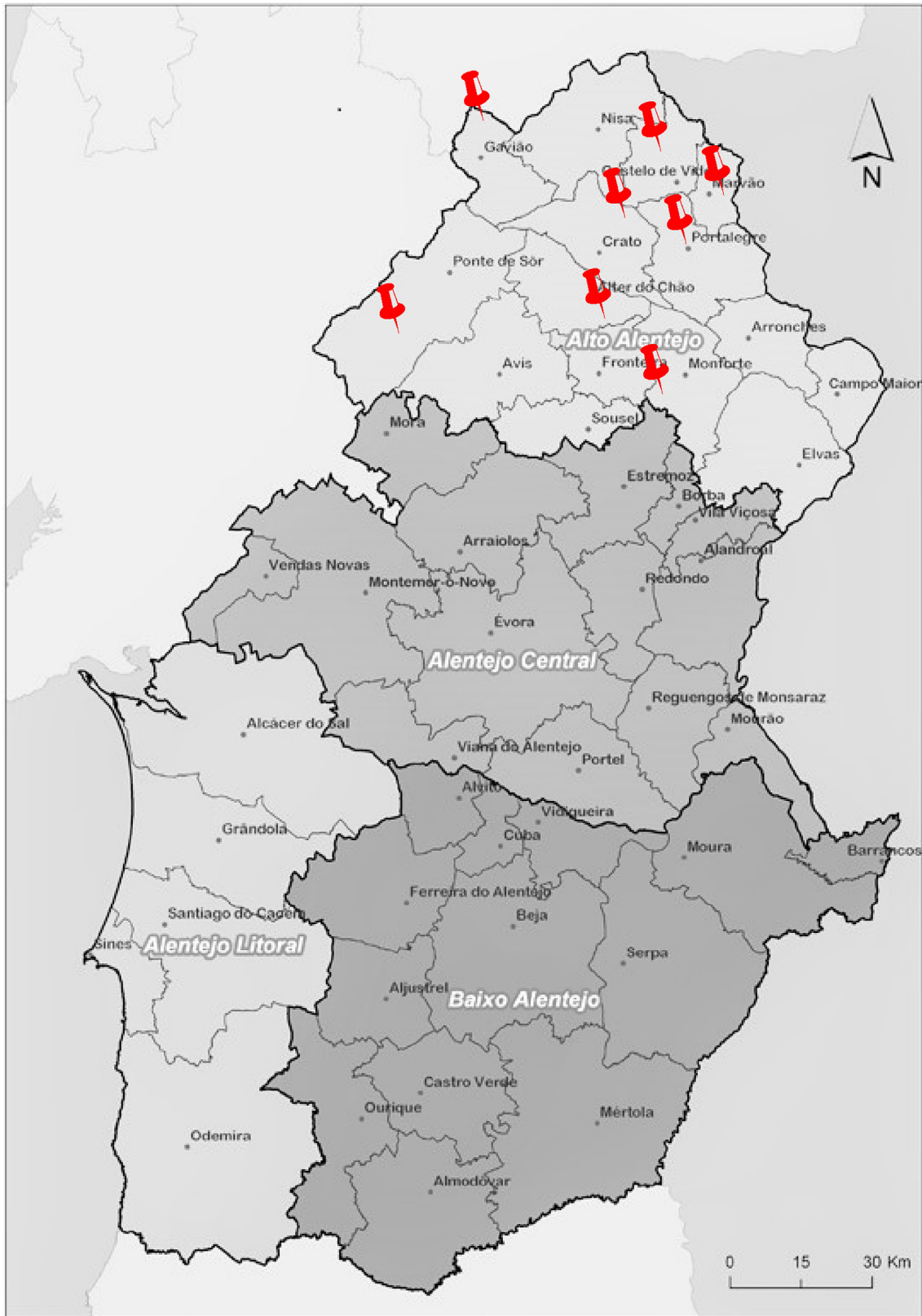


Fig. 1. –Location of the businesses under analysis in the Alto Alentejo Region (Portugal)
Source: CCDR Alentejo (2015).

highlighted as a necessary condition for entrepreneurial activity to flourish, not only in the start-up stage, but also during establishment and growth of the enterprises (Skokic et al., 2019). In fact, networks are suggested to have a significant influence on the entrepreneurial process which, along with the rural tourism entrepreneurs' role as a “network architect”, play a crucial role in overcoming the challenges of smallness and increasing competitiveness (Mottiar, Boluk, & King, 2018; Skokic et al., 2019). Lifestyle entrepreneurs in rural tourism bring, from their urban origin or life experience, the knowledge and networks (“bridging social capital”), essential to contribute to the diversity and dynamic quality of entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural areas and reveal, at the same time, common values and behaviours (Ateljjevic & Doorne, 2000; Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; McGehee et al., 2016).

One must acknowledge the importance both of diversity for the resilience of EEs and of the forces that promote coherence of these systems' functioning (Roundy et al., 2017). Stam (2015) highlights the interdependence and interconnected nature of the multiple actors of EEs. Individuals and organizations have to operate according to some degree of common vision, shared values and intentions, culminating unarticulated behaviours to achieve a certain coherence, which in turn creates the structure that gives form and solidity to the EEs (Roundy et al., 2017).

The ecosystem perspective recognizes that social context plays a fundamental role in allowing, stimulating and restricting entrepreneurship, but it does not discard the role of the single entrepreneur (Cavallo et al., 2018). In the entrepreneurial ecosystem approach, entrepreneurs are, indeed, most important players in creating the ecosystem and keeping it healthy (Stam, 2015), having the critical role of leading the entrepreneurship process (Feld, 2012). As remarked by Roundry et al. (2018), the intentionality of entrepreneurs is the force that motivates the emergence of an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Mottiar et al. (2018) found that social entrepreneurs in rural contexts have a significant role in identifying the opportunities to develop tourism potential in rural destinations, stressing their contribution to catalyze a collective vision and develop networks that help to achieve social objectives. The authors additionally stress that such entrepreneurs simultaneously help redesign rural tourism destinations, within new, eventually more sustainable forms of development.

Rural regions' economies show high levels of vulnerability to social, political and financial fluctuations, affecting negatively the capacity of small businesses to stay solvent (Kline, Hao, Alderman, Kleckley, & Gray, 2014). In certain contexts, rural tourism has been recognized as a viable strategy to enhance regional development contributing to the local entrepreneurial activity, promoted either by neo-rural entrepreneurs or local residents (Eusébio et al., 2014; Kallmuenzer, Nikolakis, Peters, & Zanon, 2018; Kastenholz, 2004; Kline et al., 2014). Several factors are known to be relevant to understand entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural contexts, namely the quality of life context, community culture, governance, networking or human and financial elements, among others (Kline et al., 2014). Nevertheless, other important aspects deserve attention, like lifestyle entrepreneurs' sustainability motivations and impacts. These may be related to the role of family dynamics, explaining these enterprises' long-term orientation and social embeddedness (Kallmuenzer et al., 2018), the entrepreneurs' attachment to the place and their genuine desire to have a positive impact on the local area (Mottiar, 2016; Mottiar et al., 2018). Neumeyer and Santos (2018) found that network density appears to be stronger among rural entrepreneurs who engage in sustainable business models. Such sustainable entrepreneurship has been defined as the recognition and exploitation of opportunities to create new products and services that provide economic, social and ecological gains to local communities (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). These sustainability-oriented business models comprise principles of community spirit, close relationships between entrepreneurs, customers and other stakeholders enhancing co-responsibility in production and consumption, defining the value proposition of products or services focused on ecological, social and

economic value, among others (Boons & Lüdeke-Freund, 2013). Lifestyle entrepreneurs embody a particular way of doing business, showing a clear motivation to cooperate and adopt sustainability values, both in their environmental and social dimensions (Ateljjevic & Doorne, 2000; Boluk & Mottiar, 2014; Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; McGehee & Kim, 2004). It is therefore worthwhile to analyse their behaviours and understand their effective contribution to more sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems' in rural contexts.

2. Methodology

This qualitative research is part of a broader case study approach, which was conducted in the southern inland of Portugal—the Alto Alentejo region (Fig. 1). This region has a total area of 6061.5 km² and 118.000 inhabitants, corresponding to 1.1% of Portugal's population (INE, 2014). It is a markedly low density territory (24 inhabitants per km²) and presents some features of remote rurality. The region shows, however, considerable tourism potential, with significant cultural heritage (e.g. the world heritage site Évora and the “Cante Alentejano”, the Alentejo Song, recognized as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO), award winning wine production and enjoyable food and wine tourism opportunities, beautiful landscapes, charming villages and hospitable communities (CIMMA, 2014; TP, 2015). The region's economy correspondingly presents some vitality, with trade, agriculture and tourism being among the most relevant activities (accommodation and restaurants represent 10% of the region's enterprises). Tourist demand has grown in the last years and tourists are coming to the region mainly due to heritage, culture and gastronomy. Increase in lodging capacity, along with other tourism services, follows the trend in tourist demand (CIMMA, 2014). As found in previous research, the Alto Alentejo concentrates an interesting amount and variety of small rural tourism businesses, owned and managed by lifestyle entrepreneurs (FLM, 2010; Leal, 2014).

The empirical study discussed in the present paper is based on eight case studies, carried out with data collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews held with entrepreneurs of eight small tourism accommodation units located in small villages. The empirical units were selected based on expert in the tourism field of the region of Alto Alentejo, who helped to identify accommodation units whose owners could have different levels of lifestyle entrepreneurship.

The entrepreneurs were also the owners and managers of the businesses. Interviews took place in the accommodation units, in a face-to-face context, and were all recorded for later transcription. A pilot case study was undertaken to ensure that the interview script was adequate in scope and length. Some little problems in both the interview guideline and the case study protocol were detected and corrected.

The data obtained from the interviews was complemented by additional data collected on-site, namely information from guest books, promotional leaflets, and direct observation at the accommodation units and the surrounding area. Also the units' websites were focus of analysis. Some short semi-structured interviews were also conducted to tourists hosted in the accommodation units. Data collection was carried out between March and May 2015, and all the interviews, data collection and on-site observation were carried out by the same researcher during the mentioned time period. This period corresponds to the mid-season of rural tourism in the region, permitting both reasonable conditions for interviewing the owners, upon previous request. The first author of the paper was hosted for some days in each accommodation unit under analysis, to conduct the interviews, and also to observe the unit's normal operations while providing services to guests, who were also interviewed.

The collection and transcription of the interview data was followed by a content analysis, and data was codified using qualitative analysis software - WebQDA. A “case-by-case” analysis was followed by a comparative analysis of the cases. The identification of the categories of analysis and the interpretation of results within the analysis of the

Table 1
Profiles of businesses.

Profile	Businesses (managed by)							
	More lifestyle oriented				Less lifestyle oriented			
	Case 2	Case 3	Case 6	Case 8	Case 1	Case 4	Case 5	Case 7
How long in business (years)	14	5	5	3	15	29	7	7
Lodging capacity (beds)	11	8	8	6	9	14	8	9
Occupancy rate- room (2014)	n.a.	28%	35%	28%	10–20%	n.a.	20%	25%
National clients (%)	98%	85%	60%	56%	95%	90%	75%	90%
Length of Stay (average)	3-5 Nights	1-3 Nights	1-3 Nights	1-3 Nights	1-3 Nights	1-3 Nights	1-3 Nights	1-3 Nights
Turnover (thousand Euros, 2014)	< 50	< 50	50–150	< 50	n.a.	< 50	< 50	< 50
Employees (number)	1	2	2	0	1	2	0	1
Investment (thousands of euro)	250–500	< 250	> 500	250–500	250–500	< 250	250–500	< 250

Note: n.a. – no answer.
Source: own elaboration.

discourses benefitted from the previous literature review and consideration of complementary data from diverse sources. The analysis focuses on the entrepreneur and at the firm level, especially considering the entrepreneurs’ motivations and management practices adopted, including their contribution to local entrepreneurial dynamics, namely those promoting the creation of sustainable ecosystems. The analysis of the discourses was complemented with four word clouds carried out to better compare both the motivations and the management practices of the “more lifestyle oriented” entrepreneurs and the “less lifestyle oriented” ones.

2.1. Analysis and discussion of results

The cases integrating this study illustrate a reality of small family businesses, lodging units in rural areas with modest economic results (Table 1). These businesses, that required investments of up to 500 thousand euros, showed a business structure of up to 2 employees and, in most of the cases, a turnover of up to 50 thousand euros. The businesses present reduced lodging capacity (from 6 to 14 beds) and an occupancy rate of between 10% and 35%, which compares to an average occupancy rate of 17.4% in rural tourism units in 2015, in the Alentejo region. However, one must consider the relatively lower degree of appeal of the inland region in comparison to the coastal areas, due to the attraction of the beaches. Customers, mostly Portuguese, stay in the units between 1 and 3 nights and continuous efforts to extend this length of stay and to attract tourists from other countries are reported. Entrepreneurs consider, however, their business to be successful. The owners claim that their success lies in their clients’ satisfaction and loyalty, in the products’ and services’ quality and in the self-fulfilment

related to doing something they believe to be of value, for both the communities they live in and for themselves. This belief is particularly evident in a group of entrepreneurs highly motivated by lifestyle factors.

Entrepreneurs interviewed are individuals between the ages of 41 and 65 years, with higher education, relevant previous professional experience (half of them as entrepreneurs), although usually not in the tourism sector (Table 2). Different motivations supported the decision to create a tourism business in a rural location and quality of life motivations can be found for all entrepreneurs in this study, to different degrees, though. It was, thus, possible to identify two groups that differ regarding lifestyle motivations. Two word clouds help better understand the most relevant issues mentioned by entrepreneurs in their discourses concerning the motivations of the two groups (Figs. 2 and 3). Figs. 2 and 3 illustrate the differences between the two groups regarding lifestyle motivations. One group of entrepreneurs (cases 2, 3, 6 and 8) reveals more features typical of lifestyle entrepreneurs as clearly determinant for creating the rural tourism business (Fig. 2), showing motivations, such as a passion for the countryside and the goal to find the right balance in life, thereby achieving a different kind of ‘value’ in life, as a main result.

The other group, of “less lifestyle-oriented” entrepreneurs (cases 1, 4, 5 and 7), mentioned motivations regarding the desire to keep an inherited property within the family, using tourism business to guarantee enough income to preserve the houses and keep family memories “alive”. For 3 of these entrepreneurs, entering the business was actually motivated by the need of earning a living, i.e. as a regular ‘job’ motivated by the monetary outcome (Fig. 3), a motive which was not present in the previously mentioned group (Fig. 2).

Table 2
Profiles of entrepreneurs.

Profile	Entrepreneurs							
	More lifestyle oriented				Less lifestyle oriented			
	Case 2	Case 3	Case 6	Case 8	Case 1	Case 4	Case 5	Case 7
Age	54	41	62	51	65	57	53	42
Gender	M	F	M	F	M	M	F	M
Degree	Sociology (MSc)	Food Industry Eng. (BSc)	Management (PhD)	Engineering (BSc)	Engineering (BSc)	Management (BSc)	Education (BA)	Agronomy (BSc)
Marital Status	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married
Local origin?	Yes, but lived in city	No	No	No	Yes	Yes, but lived in city	No	Yes
Training/Experience in tourism?	No/Yes	No/No	Yes/No	No/No	No/No	No/Yes	No/No	No/No
Experience as an entrepreneur?	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Source: own elaboration.

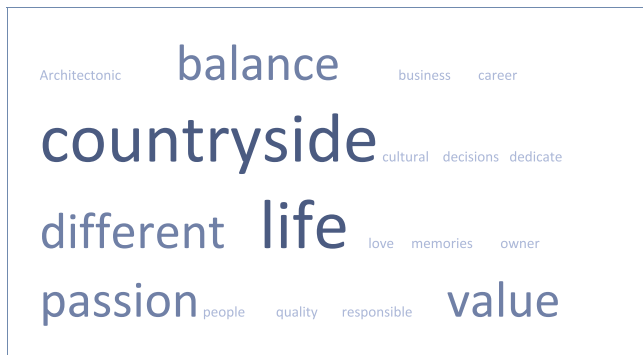


Fig. 2. Word cloud of motivations of the “more lifestyle-oriented” entrepreneurs

Source: Own elaboration.



Fig. 3. Word cloud of motivations of the “less lifestyle-oriented” entrepreneurs

Source: Own elaboration.

The analysis of the discourses confirmed that the more lifestyle-oriented entrepreneurs use the tourism business to achieve the objective of living in a particular way, in a particular, highly valued place and context. Tourism is also a strategy these entrepreneurs use to contribute to and to raise awareness for sustainability issues, since they actively engage in more responsible behaviour, adopting concrete management practices to enhance environmental and social sustainability. In research on social entrepreneurship in Ireland, South Africa and USA, Mottiar et al. (2018) found that tourism businesses were, for many entrepreneurs, a way to achieve their social goals. Authors present evidence that social entrepreneurs in rural settings, despite their multiple motivations, play an important role in rural destination development, by identifying opportunities, developing a common vision, leading others or strengthening networks. In the present study, all four lifestyle entrepreneurs had an urban origin or urban residence for several years. These four managers were considered as lifestyle entrepreneurs due to their particular motivation of running a business they identify with and which permits them to conciliate business purposes with other lifestyle goals, enabling them to achieve a balance between these two issues, as explained in further detail next. They reveal a particular passion about the countryside and report to have deliberately chosen the locality to settle down and create their business as a strategy to change their way of life: “We regarded the “Monte” (the estate) as a weekend site (...) in the meantime I attended a course of integrated olive production and became completely in love with olive groves and olive oil ... and then, we thought, maybe it was time to get fully dedicated to these activities. We decided then to move and live in it [the estate], as we realized that this was needed to make it work. I gave up my professional career to dedicate myself to olive oil, tourism and horses” (case 3). The desire to - sometimes radically - change the lifestyle (from urban to rural, from alienated to self-determined), and the need for a balance, is also present in much of the entrepreneurs' discourses: “It's just pretty

much about keeping the balance ... here we have a life and we have a work” (case 8). In the same line of thought, the entrepreneur of case 6 states: “Do you know something? There's a moment in life when we think ‘I had enough’. I'm tired of complex relations in complex organizations ... it's time to take my own decisions, time to be the owner of my life”. Some of the life decisions taken were even more radical, involving moving to another country: “We wanted to move back because of our mothers who were both in the UK, our fathers died a few years ago, while we were in New Zealand, so they are alone ... here we are closer ...” (case 8 – a couple of British citizens who wanted to move back to Europe, but not to the UK, due to lifestyle preferences, after having lived in New Zealand).

The lifestyle profile is also related to a particular concept of doing business and attitude towards life, as well as an apparent higher consciousness of their role as active agents in local development. As in the Alto Alentejo, rural tourism entrepreneurs throughout Europe were identified as individuals who show special concern with alternative (more sustainable) paths of development, hence embodying it in their business. In the Aragon Region, Spain, the rural tourism actors reported a strong concern about nature preservation, agreeing that environment, along with authenticity and a sense of hospitality are the main ingredients for success of rural tourism activities (Sanagustín Fons et al., 2011). In Finland, Komppula (2014) found that rural entrepreneurs seem to take the responsibility for development of tourist destination competitiveness, showing strong commitment to their businesses, being cooperative and developing innovative, quality offers and tailored services to meet demand.

The two word clouds presented next show central topics mentioned when asked about the management practices carried out to the two groups under analysis – “the more lifestyle-oriented” and the “the less lifestyle-oriented” (see Figs. 4 and 5). Fig. 4 reflects some of the main concerns of the “more lifestyle-oriented” entrepreneurs, which condition their decisions and practices while running their businesses. In fact, one of the most mentioned words is network (in most cases with restaurants), with entrepreneurs agreeing on the high interest of establishing them to strengthen their capacity of attracting tourists and offer a higher quality experience to them, making them proud. They also refer to the farm and products as central to their business, presenting these issues as characteristic to their business more than just tourism services.

The management practices of the group designed as “less lifestyle-oriented” entrepreneurs reveal special concerns with quality of products and services, enhanced through a “well done service” and people's performance (working in the accommodation units) (Fig. 5). Cooperation is also quite mentioned, but not in a positive way. These entrepreneurs show high reticence towards the benefits of this practice.

The case number 2 refers to a local entrepreneur who, having lived away from his native village for several years (in diverse cities), returns



Fig. 4. Word cloud of management practices of “more lifestyle-oriented” entrepreneurs

Source: Own elaboration.



Fig. 5. Word cloud of management practices of “less lifestyle-oriented” entrepreneurs
Source: Own elaboration.

to his homeland motivated by the desire to “return to the origins”, and at the same time, preserve the family heritage, an old house and furniture in the family farm, which he considers a ‘hobby with a mission’: “*Me and my wife, we love to restore old things ... historical heritage with cultural and architectonic value and by doing so, help to maintain the place and people's memories alive ... the accommodation business helped achieve this*”. This entrepreneur emphasizes the contribution of his small tourism business to maintain the local socio-economic dynamics of the village, through the historical heritage preservation, the collaboration with other related tourism services and through the capacity to attract more tourists and extend their stay in the region. It is important to remark that, in this case, as in the other three with clear lifestyle motivation, this contribution is assumed by entrepreneurs as a “sense of mission”, a “duty”. In fact, they realize the importance of helping create a more dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem where other businesses can flourish, increasing and improving tourism supply and, through it, improving life conditions to local people as well, they feel connected to. Lifestyle entrepreneurs are especially aware that the villages, where they chose to invest in, are their home, essential to their own well-being, and the socio-economic dynamics created here are imperative to achieve their lifestyle aspirations. Likewise, other studies (Koppula, 2014; Mottiar et al., 2018) have reported the important role played by entrepreneurs in reinforcing entrepreneurial ecosystems. Skokic et al. (2019) underline the importance of informal networks among Croatian entrepreneurs in all stages of the entrepreneurial process. The authors found that this kind of cooperation constitutes a necessary condition for entrepreneurial activity in Croatia, being a central element of EE's dynamics.

Sustainability concerns of lifestyle entrepreneurs in this study, in line with other research (Sanagustín Fons et al., 2011), are also related to nature and landscape. The here interviewed owner-managers of rural tourism accommodation clearly wish to contribute to preserve the countryside, to appropriately use local resources and to live in a more responsible way in relation to nature: “*We see nature in a completely different way (...), we feel sad with the way we see some people mistreat the land (...) we believe we can bring the knowledge to help and influence others to behave differently, in a more responsible way, in a way that, by preserving the natural resources, value will be created for all residents.*” (case 6).

The business is thus an opportunity to live according to certain values and beliefs, underpinning a strategy of life rather than a mere career decision. It is also interesting to notice that this attitude embodies a desire of continuity: “*We hope our son (he's an agriculture engineer) will be interested in this project, the farm ... and will help us define strategies for the future of the business. We have the expectation he will soon take care of managing the business*” (case 6). Koppula reports the same concern among Finnish entrepreneurs, with succession being identified as a real problem: “so really many (rural tourism enterprises) have packed up and they have nobody to follow on (...) the key to development is with when the thing goes to the next generation (2014:367).

The performance of the small businesses reflects their nature and size. The entrepreneurs adopt an informal management style with *bottom-up* communication and a collaborative approach in relation to their staff. The figures (Table 1) show modest occupancy rates and turnover volumes, along with low levels of internationalization. However, it is clear that is the group of lifestyle entrepreneurs, compared to the less lifestyle-oriented rural tourism entrepreneurs, who presents the better results. This might be associated to some management practices discussed below.

Although short-term oriented, the entrepreneurs’ (particularly lifestyle oriented ones) concern with growth, efficiency and economic results is notorious. Owners, especially those whose profile is clearly lifestyle, face the future with optimism and ambition, having concrete plans and projects for the business (some already in progress), which illustrates a clear entrepreneurial orientation. Contrasting with entrepreneurs less associated to lifestyle values and motivations, they intend to develop the business into new activities and experiences, exploring new market segments. The farms, i.e. agri-tourism businesses (cases 3 and 6), are good examples of this reality, having started business with farming activities (lavender planting and olive oil), then progressing to tourism activities, namely, accommodation services, food-related services (tasting events on farms), workshops and horse-riding lessons. The owners stress the importance of complementary activities for presenting a more appealing overall experience to their clients and to guarantee economic and financial sustainability of the business: “*At a certain point (of business development) we realized accommodation could help us improve income (...) we know we need all the activities to guarantee financial balance*” (case 6). They also emphasize this complementarity is helpful to reduce seasonality effects, improving effectiveness of operational management: “*Our activities are perfectly well spread during the year, making our lives a little bit easier ... in fact, each of the main tasks occur in a different season, fortunately. So, we have the possibility to dedicate ourselves fully to each one, at the right time*” (case 3). In Spain, in the Aragonese region, activity complementarity is also present as an interesting strategy for rural development, with tourism being presented as a sustainable alternative. It is sustained that complementary activities to farms provide not only economic profits, but also social benefits, like maintaining the family house and heritage (Sanagustín Fons et al., 2011).

The quality of service and tourist satisfaction is a concern common to all entrepreneurs in this study. However, lifestyle entrepreneurs who had lived in the city before and consciously opted for a life in the countryside are especially well prepared to understand the urban tourists' desires and thus, better satisfy the market. Owners also understand and recognize that cooperation is an interesting strategy to make the best of the overall place experience in the countryside. In fact, a more positive attitude towards this strategy is easily identified in lifestyle entrepreneurs, who are actively engaged in formal and informal networks. They consider cooperation as a viable way to leverage their businesses, to promote local resources and reinforce the destination attractiveness. In contrast, the entrepreneurs whose profile is less identified as lifestyle-oriented reveal higher levels of mistrust about the benefits of cooperation, preferring more self-contained and isolated business practices: “*When people come to propose some cooperation they only think about percentages (economic gain) ... it is always the same, I don't think it's correct ... no, I don't work like that*” (case 1).

The relevance of networks to small rural tourism businesses and to the complex and articulated overall tourism experience is quite evident in the present study, as widely reported by other research (Mottiar et al., 2018; Pilving, Kull Suskevics & Viira, 2019; Skokic et al., 2019). As before mentioned, lifestyle entrepreneurs are more likely to show an interest to participate in and develop networks. Partnerships with other local businesses may help improve the global supply and, thereby, strengthen both the destination's and each actor's attractiveness and competitive position, making visitors stay longer, as stated by more than one interviewees in the group of lifestyle entrepreneurs: “*We are*

trying to organize activities so that we can create a network in order to persuade our clients to stay in our farm longer' (case 6). As also stated by the English entrepreneur of case 8: "We have been talking with 2 other businesses of rural tourism nearby about marketing the 3 businesses together, and the Park (Natural Park of S. Mamede Mountain) as a central element, and maybe also 2 or 3 restaurants ... there's interest in it and I think something may develop from there". In one of the cases (3) it was reported that a more formal network was in progress: "We are trying to organize ourselves, learn about local resources and arrange a network of leisure activities that might help to retain tourists in the village for more than 1 or 2 days ... we are trying to implement a kind of an association". Lifestyle entrepreneurs also show special concern about understanding the territory's resources and the complementarity of products and services in order to inform their guests and thereby contribute to a more rewarding experience. In other European locations, like Ireland, Estonia and Finland, formal and informal networks are presented as valuable strategies to overcome many challenges faced by rural entrepreneurs, namely low investment capacity, seasonality and a lack of qualified staff (Komppula, 2014; Mottiar et al., 2018; Pilving, Kull, Suskevics, & Viira, 2019). Through cooperation, all tourism businesses and related services will benefit, strengthening the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Gastronomy is a service dimension in which cooperation is also visible. Entrepreneurs state that local products are their first choice when providing dishes or selling local products as souvenirs. These products are produced on their own farms or by other local producers, offered for consumption (breakfasts and tests) or for sale. The entrepreneur of case 3 owns a small local store which sells the organic products manufactured on the farm. In addition, products from local partners are also available: "We have some variety of products, we produce the olives and the olive oil, and then we have cousins and neighbors who produce wine, tea, honey, cheese ... food tourism is a must" (case 3). Gastronomy, particularly local food, also illustrates these entrepreneurs' concern with sustainability. The preference for serving local products is clear and, although we may find this concern in all kind of entrepreneurs, lifestyle entrepreneurs carefully manage this service element, because they are aware that tourists highly value this part of their experience. Specifically, the organic farming activity, which is based, among other aspects, on the respect for nature and small-scale production, must be highlighted in this context, mirroring a lifestyle concept strongly rooted in a particular value system and ethics. These ethics are increasingly adhered to by the 'post-modern' rural tourist (Sidali, Kastenholz, & Bianchi, 2013). The farm products are certified and, in one of the cases (case 6), present eco-labels.

Last but not least, the interviews held with the tourists staying on these farms confirm the motivations and benefits sought by the 'post-modern' rural tourist (Figueiredo, 2009; Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Sidali et al., 2013) who desire to escape the busy and stressful life of the city to enjoy a countryside experience marked by peacefulness, scenic beauty, harmony with nature and traditions, in a healthy, natural and unique living context. These desires mirror, in a way, some of the lifestyle entrepreneurs' reasons to invest in the rural tourism business thereby making them the ideal and most credible providers of desired countryside experiences.

3. Conclusions

This research has shown that lifestyle entrepreneurs in rural tourism, although facing many constraints related to rural context and small dimension of the company, present relatively well succeeded businesses that contribute to increased sustainability of the territories where they are located. In line with other studies (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Cunha et al., 2016; Keen, 2004; Lewis, 2005), their unique way of doing business, their "sense of mission", willingness to cooperate with others and understand common interests, trigger overall positive results as well as improved, apparently more sustainable entrepreneurial environments, worthy of mention (Komppula, 2014; Lane, 2016; Mottiar,

2016; Mottiar et al., 2018). Moreover, this paper highlights that these characteristics of lifestyle entrepreneurs are crucial for the creation of sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems, not only through the creation of successful accommodation business in rural areas, but also by promoting networks that contribute to the wellbeing of the local community in several ways, namely promoting the use and commercialisation of local products and activities, and increasing the business of companies with complementary supply. In a similar vein, Pilving et al. (2019), highlight in their study with Estonian entrepreneurs that networks exist both in formal and informal forms, bringing benefits for both partners involved and communities. They emphasize the influence of tourism going beyond the sector itself through its contribution to social cohesion and resilience of rural communities, via, for example, uniting community members and families, giving residents a sense of place and making rural people feel useful and needed.

In the present study, the multiple activities carried out on farms of lifestyle entrepreneurs, such as organic farming, diverse tourism activities (such as accommodation or equestrian tourism), or the trade of farm food products (olive oil or wine), show a complementarity that seems to contribute to a greater operational and financial balance of the businesses analysed, but also to a richer overall experience supply at the rural destination (Kastenholz, Carneiro, Marques, & Lima, 2012). The differentiated products and services of high quality seem to meet the desires of a tourist demand characterized by a growing interest in the "authentic", increasingly motivated by a healthy lifestyle and more meaningful countryside experiences (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Cederholm & Hultman, 2010; Kastenholz, Eusébio, Carneiro, & Figueiredo, 2013; Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Sidali et al., 2013). Komppula (2014) also found evidence for this phenomenon in Finland, as perceived by rural tourism entrepreneurs, with correspondingly innovative and higher quality experience offers considered as crucial for destination competitiveness. The present research also corroborates the importance of some of the tourist experience dimensions highlighted in the rural tourism literature, namely the role of host-guest interaction (Kastenholz et al., 2013; Kastenholz & Sparrer, 2009), of sensorial and landscape experiences (Carneiro, Lima, & Lavrador Silva, 2015), of the intensification and prolonging of the experience through local, particularly, food products (Kastenholz et al., 2016; Sidali et al., 2013), as well as of co-creation based on local resources (Carvalho et al., 2016). These experience-enhancing strategies are strongly enhanced through collaboration and coordination amongst the different stakeholders in tourism and associated activities, with lifestyle entrepreneurs assuming a key role in that process, as confirmed in the cases analysed in the present study. Since entrepreneurial capabilities are often scarce in rural contexts (Komppula (2014)), while unique experiences based on distinctive endogenous resources (which cannot be replicated elsewhere) sustain important strategies of differentiation and sustainability (Kastenholz, Carneiro, et al., 2012; Romão, Machino, & Nijkamp, 2018), lifestyle entrepreneurs may bring higher value and precious benefits for EEs and consequently local communities.

Business success is, in the here analysed cases of lifestyle entrepreneurs, closely linked to the personal success and self-realization of entrepreneurs, confirming results of other studies (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Reijonen & Komppula, 2007). Particularly, agri-tourism is understood as a quite impactful life decision, with multiple implications on daily life of the entrepreneur and his/her family, and not just a career choice (Marcketti et al., 2006). That is why the combination of both job and life satisfaction, marking lifestyle entrepreneurship, is central to the evaluation of success. However, since the here analysed individuals have taken the risk to invest in a distinct, demanding business and in an unfamiliar working context, economic success is also important to them. Last but not least, the here analysed entrepreneurs seem to derive increased motivation from consequent recognition and prestige achieved through their successful business, which additionally impacts on their motivation to pursue business development by improving and expanding it. Also amongst Finnish

entrepreneurs investments in the facilities and willingness to expand the business show commitment to the industry present a way to contribute to the entrepreneurial milieu, strengthening competitiveness of a tourist destination (Komppula 2014). The author suggests that this behaviour will have a positive effect in attracting other entrepreneurs to the region, who will feel inspired and motivated by these role models. Entrepreneurs are recognized as a key element in EEs, inspiring the whole entrepreneurial process (Feld, 2012), with their motivation to invest in business being determinant to sustainable EEs, which are particularly needed in rural areas seeking for alternatives to declining agriculture, as in the here studied case. This study highlights the engagement of lifestyle entrepreneurs in making their business successful, in multiple ways. The dimensions of sustainable entrepreneurship were clearly identified in these success conceptions, namely regarding not only economic, but also social and ecological business purposes, benefiting apart from the single entrepreneur and his/her family, additionally other local partners and the community they feel attached to.

Rural tourism businesses, promoted by entrepreneurs, whose particular way of managing business aligns with what is sometimes considered the essence of tourism in rural areas (Cavaco, 1995), seems to be particularly well positioned to respond to the “new demand” made up of high potential market niches interested in unique local heritage experiences, authenticity and sustainability (Carvalho et al., 2016; Lane & Kastenholtz, 2015; Sidali et al., 2015). Simultaneously, this type of complex and innovative offer in rural areas not only strengthens the growth of a specific business, but also that of other businesses with which partnerships and networks are established, presenting themselves as examples to follow and thus assuming an interesting, sometimes leadership (McGehee et al., 2015) role in the rural territory's sustainable development. In this research lifestyle entrepreneurs of rural tourism accommodation are likely to establish partnerships with other local organizations that manage tourism attractions, that manage tourism facilities (e.g. restaurants), that offer leisure activities, or that produce local products (e.g. gastronomic products), with all these organizations benefiting from this cooperation. These entrepreneurs have thus a crucial role in developing sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural areas. In fact, this research shows lifestyle entrepreneurs often act as mediators between the different actors of EEs, namely local entrepreneurs, public sector agencies, financial bodies, local community leaders. This *catalyst* role, identified in other studies in rural tourism as well (McGehee et al., 2015; Mottiar et al., 2018), is precious in bringing together interests and actions around a common vision. The lifestyle entrepreneurs have the knowledge, experience and, above all, the drive to lead the “entrepreneurial mission”, assumed, in most of the cases, as a life purpose. They are, in fact, more than just owners of a single business and understand the importance of the overall place experience sought by tourists, requiring an articulated destination offer. They are, consequently truly engaged in networking, acting as agents who bring different interests together, helping to strengthen local entrepreneurial dynamics. Lifestyle entrepreneurs establish, more easily, internal and external networks, contributing to reinforce the tourism entrepreneurship milieu, which is particularly fragile in rural settings.

The personal fulfilment achieved with the business is also important to guarantee continuity of the tourism activity, visible in additional investments and projects, in intergenerational plans of some family firms, and in embeddedness in communities through engaging in activities that are beneficial to the local area (Kallmuenzer et al., 2018; Mottiar, 2016). The lifestyle entrepreneurs analysed show, for different reasons (e.g. family ties, passion for the countryside), strong connection to the place, which can be determinant in their desire to invest in both their business and the destination and in their deep commitment to develop it and make it successful, which should be determinant for the sustainability of EEs (Komppula (2014)). Lifestyle entrepreneurs may thus stimulate dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystems, badly needed in rural areas. In rural tourism, this means, necessarily, cooperation between diverse small businesses and actors that together offer unique,

innovative, well-articulated and memorable experiences (Kastenholtz, Carneiro, et al., 2012). Entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural tourism can also be strengthened through ties to the community, with engaged lifestyle entrepreneurs apparently bringing innovation, market understanding, diversity and also more articulation and coherence to entrepreneurial ecosystems, important features to increase the resilience and sustainability of these systems (Neumeier & Santos, 2018; Roundy et al., 2017).

This study of lifestyle entrepreneurs in rural tourism thereby revealed the particular role of these entrepreneurs in setting into value, not only their properties and businesses, but also local culture and other actors and resources of the rural destination. It thereby shows the importance of these agents in stimulating, through their vision, enthusiasm and market understanding, entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural areas that frequently lack initiative, due to modest human, social and financial capital.

The present paper provides relevant contributions. Nevertheless, this qualitative research should be complemented by quantitative studies, which would permit testing the existence of a relationship between lifestyle motivations and management practices that enhance sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems, using statistical analysis such as bivariate analysis.

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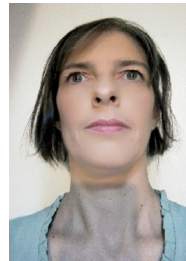
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