

# Lifestyle Entrepreneurs: The Case of Rural Tourism



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**Abstract** Tourism is considered a potential tool for developing rural territories which are increasingly affected by loss of economic opportunities and, consequently, some social problems such as depopulation and population ageing. Rural tourism lifestyle entrepreneurs are tourism business owners actively seeking a different lifestyle in rural territories.

This chapter presents a discussion of the role and contributions of lifestyle entrepreneurs in rural tourism to the development of the respective territories and the impact of the entrepreneurial activity provoked by this particular type of business owners. A systematic literature review was complemented by the results of a case study carried out in the Alto Alentejo, a rural region in the southern inner part of Portugal. The results considered here were part of a broader qualitative in-depth research.

The impacts of entrepreneurial activity may be found, among other aspects, in the maintenance of links with the land and property, the preservation of traditional food and job creation for entrepreneurs and their families and the creation of ‘social capital’ essential to the sustainability especially of small and rural communities.

**Keywords** Lifestyle entrepreneurs · Motivations · Impacts · Rural tourism

## 1 Introduction

In several countries, tourism is considered a potential tool for developing rural territories which are increasingly affected by loss of economic opportunities and, consequently, some social problems such as depopulation and population ageing (Kastenholz 2004, 2010). Through tourism development, rural economies may benefit not only from direct tourist spending but also from increased awareness and

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175

promotion of local products, new investments, job creation and the increasing dynamics of already existing businesses (Bosworth and Farrell 2011). Entrepreneurial activity in these territories may as well influence the way local people use their own and the countryside's resources, thus increasing the perception of value of that unique endogenous capital, apart from visitors' curiosity and demand. Additionally, the creation of small tourism businesses can contribute to change the face of many of these locations, helping to create a new economic and social dynamic, which brings new usages to old resources. The involvement of local communities in this resource-based transformation is essential for sustainable development and some of the small rural tourism enterprises have the potential to promote it. It is believed that these businesses may contribute to the regeneration of many rural economies and to sustainable rural development through, among other factors, a combination of local and extra-local networks, increasing local trade and creating an important 'social capital', essential to these small communities (Kastenholz et al. 2014; Saxena et al. 2007).

Rural tourism lifestyle entrepreneurs are tourism business owners actively seeking a different lifestyle in rural territories, being typically involved in a range of activities of relevance to themselves and their families, which are not directly related to business success (Cunha 2016; Marcketti et al. 2006). Motivations to create the business are centered on quality of life and local environmental variables (Bosworth and Farrell 2011; Cunha 2016), and comprise, frequently, the desire to contribute to a more sustainable environment (Bolluk and Mottiar 2014; Bosworth and Farrell 2011; Cunha 2016).

The development of rural territories is strongly related to the ability of attracting new investments that help bring new opportunities to local people and even attract new residents. In the case of rural tourism an expanded and well articulated supply system, capable of delivering an appealing overall experience of the "rural", responding to diverse motivations of tourists in rural areas and making the best use of endogenous resources is currently recognized as crucial to guarantee rural tourist establishments' business success (Kastenholz et al. 2012; Lane 2009). It is in this context that the owner of small rural tourism businesses can play a crucial role because, as evidenced by some authors (e.g. Lewis 2005), many of these entrepreneurs create a business not only to work, but also and above all to live in it. This concept of entrepreneurship can be the basis of a more personalized supply and services that reveal a genuine concern about place and community, integrating local people, resources and 'distinctive features', aspects highly valued by target segments of small rural tourism businesses. These aspects are also of great importance to enhance local economy (Bosworth and Farrell 2011; Kastenholz et al. 2014).

This chapter discusses the role and contributions of lifestyle entrepreneurs in rural tourism to the development of the respective territories. The impact of the entrepreneurial activity provoked by this particular type of business owners may help transform lives in territories that struggle to survive, therefore specific motivations and management practices of these entrepreneurs as well as outcomes of their businesses must be recognized, with diverse conceptual and empirical discussions contributing to a more profound understanding of the phenomenon.

## 2 Tourism Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas

The relevance of entrepreneurship in tourism has been recognised, particularly in the last two decades, as an important topic in tourism studies (Morrison et al. 2010; Thomas et al. 2011). Entrepreneurship research may also be valuable to understand the new usages of rural settings and resources, the dynamics created by different stakeholders and the ongoing development of rural locations.

The potential of tourism for developing rural areas, increasingly affected by the loss of economic opportunities and a significant decrease in population, has been recognised (Carlsen et al. 2008; Kastenholz 2004; Silva 2006). Rural economies benefit from new investments, job creation and the dynamics of already established tourism businesses, particularly if well connected to other economic sectors (Bosworth and Farrell 2011). Additionally, direct tourist spending, increased awareness and promotion of local products should be considered as an outcome of rural tourism businesses (Cunha 2016; Kastenholz 2004; Silva 2006).

The tourism industry in Portugal is characterized, as in many other countries, by small family businesses, dealing with capital constraints and being managed with a strong operational focus, meaning few businesses have planning, growth and marketing strategies (Ateljevic 2007; Getz and Peterson 2005; Morrison 2006; Park et al. 2014). Additionally, tourism industry is perceived as “easy to manage” with no significant entry barriers identified and little management or tourism skills required (Ateljevic 2007; Morrison 2006). Many of these small enterprises remain small, with weak economic indicators as job creation, growth and turnover (Ateljevic 2007; Hollick and Braun 2005). However, it is important to remark 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 et al. 2016).

Entrepreneurs in rural tourism, 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 and Carlsen 2000; Pato 2012). The family can play a very major role in the business development, especially in small business contexts. Family may be an important support for entrepreneurs, helping with different tasks, decision making and even financing business operations (Bosworth and Farrell 2011; Getz and Petersen 2005). In rural tourism accommodation units, families can be, as well, of great value in recreating a typical atmosphere of country houses, appealing to nostalgic memories of life in the countryside (Sidali et al. 2013).

Small tourism businesses in rural locations are often run by couples, named “copreneurs”, where management is intrinsically linked to family routines, presenting considerable challenges to entrepreneurs, namely in balancing business and family needs (Getz and Carlsen 2000; Shaw and Williams 2004). However, the “copreneurs” are supporting each other in business tasks and everyday life tasks,

many of them recognizing that enterprises could not succeed without the help from their spouses (Cunha 2016).

The owners choose to enter tourism business as a strategy to change their lifestyle or due to a particular lifecycle stage, namely a semi-retirement situation or the desire to care for small children (Getz and Petersen 2005; Cunha et al. 2016). Among other motivations, the desire to work autonomously, to have a rewarding professional activity, to utilize existing resources (country houses, farms, family heritages) and to live in a non-urban environment (perceived as less stressful and healthier) are common to rural tourism entrepreneurs (Cunha 2016; Komppula 2004; Paniagua 2002). In fact, rural tourism businesses are also related to a counter urbanization trend, a progressive process carried out by qualified individuals, with the management knowledge and experience and also the required capital to invest (Bosworth and Farrell 2011; Cunha 2016; Paniagua 2002). Rural tourism, in this context, represents an opportunity to move to the countryside, away from the stress of urban life. The business is created as a strategy to obtain the desired lifestyle (Marketti et al. 2006), and is therefore much more a life choice than a career decision. These new immigrants are helping to transform small villages and the rural landscape. Through the different activities developed, many of them contribute to reinforce interdependencies between local economies and global dynamics, and tourism is a good example of these mutually reinforcing local-global processes (Escribano and Mormont 2006).

Global demand for tourism products is characterized by complexity and increased requirements for quality, authenticity, uniqueness and alternative, more sustainable products (Lane 2009; Lane and Kastenholz 2015). Rural tourism provides unique, memorable, yet complex experiences. They are lived and co-created in a particular context (territorial, natural, social and cultural) by the so called “new tourist” (Clemenson and Lane 1997; Lane 2009), who is recognised as a central element in the value creation process (Kastenholz et al. 2012). Tourists looking for rural tourism products, as already suggested, they seek authentic experiences, travel independently and are frequently connected to values of ecology, health, creativity, human relations and personal growth (Ateljevic and Doorne 2000).

Rural tourism is expected to provide integration in an environment, different from the urban, which includes opportunities for enjoyment of the countryside and nature, appreciation of culture and traditions, and social interaction, characterized by a dimension of genuine hospitality, also reflected in a personalized service within the rural tourism accommodation (Kastenholz and Sparrer 2009). The owners of small rural tourism businesses are well positioned to supply such a service, playing therefore, a crucial role. As highlighted by some studies (Cunha 2016; Lewis 2005) the way they are doing business carries a genuine concern about place and community, integrating local people, resources and ‘distinctive features’, aspects highly valued by target segments of rural tourism. These entrepreneurs may, indeed, facilitate the guests’ understanding of and integration into local culture and community life (Kastenholz and Sparrer 2009). The impact of this particular form of entrepreneurship goes far beyond economic figures, and although global impacts may be considered modest, contributions to local economic and social dynamics must be recognized (Cavaco 2000; Cunha et al. 2016; Kastenholz 2010). The

tourism system integrates several activities and stakeholders, enabling the creation of a consistent and appealing image of the rural destination, attracting tourists and improving the local economy (Kastenholz 2010; Saxena et al. 2007). Rural territories have a unique set of natural and cultural resources that might represent good business opportunities. Entrepreneurs are the privileged actors to transform those resources into competitive tourism products, desirably, sustainable ones (Eusébio and Figueiredo 2014; Kastenholz et al. 2014; Parrish 2007).

### 3 Lifestyle Entrepreneurs in Tourism

Rural tourism lifestyle entrepreneurs are tourism business owners actively seeking a different lifestyle in rural territories. They may be involved in a range of activities of relevance to themselves and their families, beyond the business success (Cunha 2016; Marcketti et al. 2006). They are described as individuals who create and manage businesses aligned with their personal values, beliefs, interests and passions, and although not pursuing wealth as the main goal, cannot be considered as eccentrics or *bon-vivants* (Marcketti et al. 2006). Lifestyle, in this context, is related to the balance between personal life and work and to some activities or hobbies entrepreneurs wish to maintain while running their businesses (Ateljevic and Doorne 2000; Gelderen 2007).

Motivations to create the business are centered on quality of life and local environmental variables (Bosworth and Farrell 2011; Cunha 2016), and comprise, frequently, the desire to contribute to a more sustainable environment (Bolluk and Mottiar 2014; Bosworth and Farrell 2011; Cunha 2016). 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 to lifestyle entrepreneurs in rural tourism (Cunha et al. 2016; Kompula 2004). The motivation, in this context, is frequently associated to quality of life and to the purpose of improving it (Marcketti et al. 2006), and also with ecology and sustainability values (ecopreneurs) or with the desire to “inform and educate” tourists about agriculture, the countryside and its preservation (agritourism) (Bolluk and Mottiar 2014; McGehee and Kim 2004).

Lifestyle entrepreneurs who create small rural tourism businesses, although affected by rural contexts (i.e. remoteness from large markets, from skilled labor force and disperse business networks) and driven by personal and family lifestyle goals, also present economic concerns, plans for expansion and focus on business success, while effectively revealing success in satisfying their clients (Bosworth and Farrell 2011). There is, in fact, an ongoing debate regarding the entrepreneurial nature of these businesses, their contributions and impacts on rural territories and communities. Some authors state that many entrepreneurs in tourism are driven by lifestyle motives, having little formal qualifications, no prior management experience or tourism skills, characteristics commonly associated with low performance (Getz and Peterson 2005; Hollick and Braun 2005; Morrison 2006; Peters et al. 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. These practices appear to be also more sustainable, generating positive business results, as well as entrepreneurial and personal fulfillment (Bolluk and Mottiar 2014; Cunha 2016). Although environment and quality of life variables are important to understand the motivation of these entrepreneurs to enter tourism businesses, evidence shows that the objectives of lifestyle are not necessarily in opposition to those of an economic nature. 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 business (Cunha 2016; Cunha et al. 2016; Hall and Rusher 2004; Shaw and Williams 2004).

This new concept of entrepreneurship, also called ‘new entrepreneurial ideal’ (Claire 2012), comprises social and cultural values as success factors along with objectives of business development and growth (economic perspective). According to the sustainability paradigm, growth should not be confounded with progress. It should be placed within an environmental context not as an “imposition” but rather an adaptation to this context that guarantees a positive long-term contribution of a business to a community/territory. Particularly, in small tourism businesses, “growth in quality but not in volume” should be considered an important goal, and organizational success should be more focused on relationships, integrity and lifestyle (Claire 2012; Kompulla 2004; Lewis 2005) and should be particularly adequate for rural tourism, whose market may be considered a “niche” market composed of several other “market niches” (Clemenson and Lane 1997).

Research in the field of lifestyle entrepreneurship also indicates that these entrepreneurs contribute to a higher perceived quality of the tourist experience, because the products benefit from entrepreneurs’ identification with the product and from this unique and most dedicated way of doing business (Cunha 2016; Keen 2004; Lewis 2005). Last but not least, lifestyle entrepreneurship is associated with the creation of ‘social capital’ essential to the sustainability especially of small and rural communities (Morrison 2006). It is also argued that it is precisely outside the economic field that major contributions of these small rural tourism businesses can be found. The contributions are, among others, the maintenance of links with the land and property, the preservation of traditional food and job creation for entrepreneurs and their families (Cavaco 2000; Silva 2006). Entrepreneurs contribute also to a livelier atmosphere in small, isolated villages through the attraction of tourists, very much appreciated by local populations (Kastenholz et al. 2013), thereby making rural territories also more attractive for residents.

## 4 Methodology

A systematic literature review was complemented by the results of a case study conducted in the Alto Alentejo, a rural region in the southern inner part of Portugal. The results considered for this chapter were part of a broader qualitative in-depth

research. Long, semi-structured interviews were held with entrepreneurs of eight small tourism accommodation units located in small villages. The interviewed entrepreneurs were also the owners and managers of the businesses. Other empirical data—collected between March and May 2015—complemented the interviews. Data sources included direct observation, diverse documentation and short interviews with guests.

A content analysis was performed, structured around the themes previously identified in rural tourism entrepreneurship literature. The data was organised and codified with the help of the software WebQDA (Web Qualitative Data Analysis). Categories were identified and the discourse was codified performing a case-by-case analysis, followed by a comparative analysis (cross-case analysis). The interpretation of results was supported by the previously mentioned literature review, other studies' results and conclusions.

The accommodation units considered in this study are all located in the same region. This option was due to the objective to harmonize as much as possible the geographical variables, and in so doing guarantee interviewed entrepreneurs run their businesses under very similar conditions (Fig. 1).

The focus of the analysis presented here is the entrepreneur and the firm level, considering mainly the aspects regarding the entrepreneurs' contributions to economic and social dynamics in the rural territory where they decided to locate their tourism businesses.

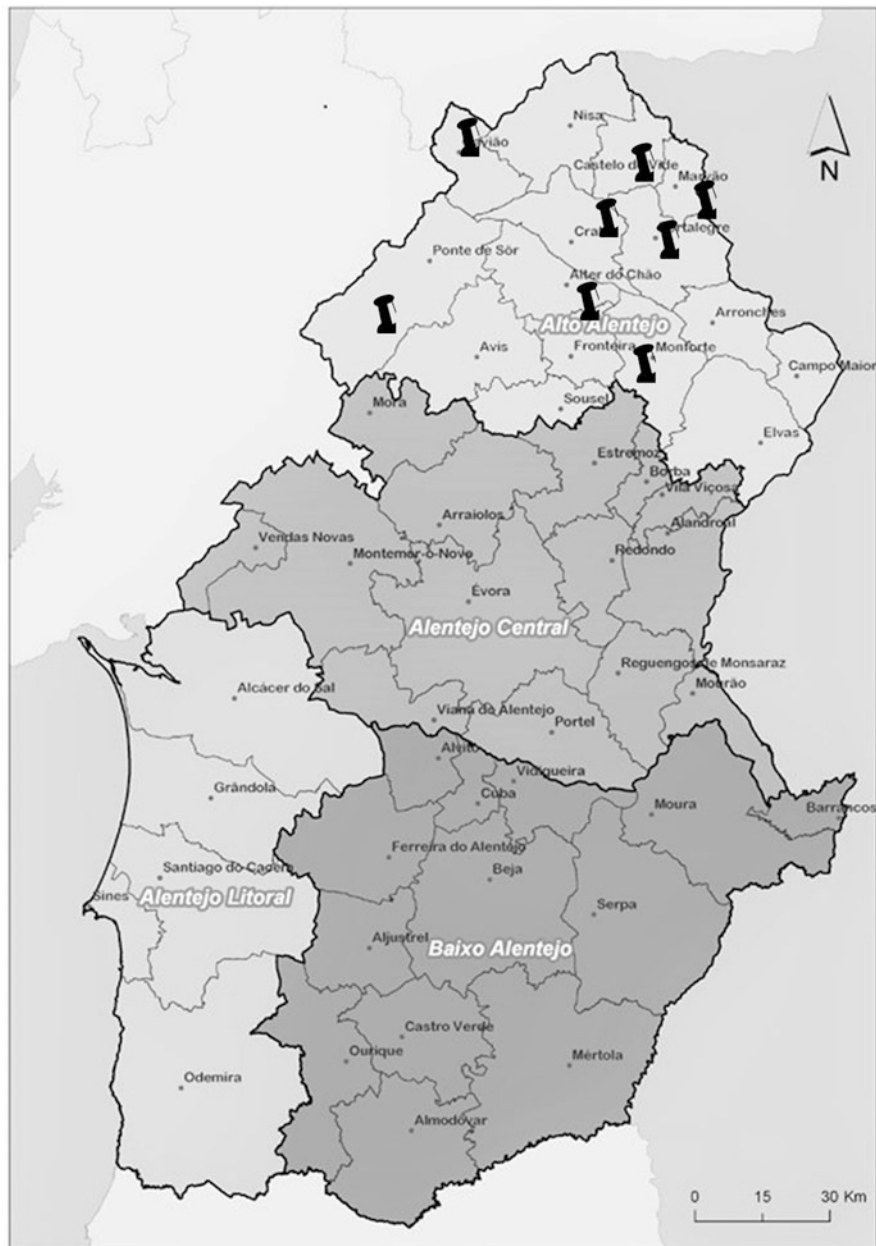
## 5 Results

Lifestyle entrepreneurs create small businesses and, as already discussed, small tourism enterprises do not present very good results, when analysing it through a tight economic lens. Entrepreneurs in this study consider, however, they have successful businesses. In fact, in most of the studied cases, economic figures are modest, but the owners claim their success lies in their client's satisfaction and loyalty, in the products and services' quality offered, in the self fulfilment of doing something in which they believe being of interest and value, for the communities where they live and for themselves.

Profitability and controlled growth are among lifestyle entrepreneurs goals. Economic results are, though, carefully pursued, and although recognized as vital for the future of the business, they understand that economic goals must be balanced with other kind of objectives, namely, lifestyle, quality and sustainability. Previous research has already reported the same concern (Bosworth and Farrell 2011; Claire 2012; Cunha et al. 2016; Komppula 2004).

The entrepreneurs with lifestyle profile show significant concern with the quality of life in the villages, and feel responsible for the improvement of the community's living standard. They realize that they can contribute to stimulate local economy and to induce the generally appreciated contacts between locals and tourists.





**Fig. 1** Businesses location in Alto Alentejo Region (Portugal). Source: CCDR Alentejo (2015)



I like the contact with different people, otherwise we would die here. . . have you noticed that people here in the village like to talk to the tourists? They appreciate to tell them stories and help them to understand our traditions. I like to contact and talk to people, very much.

Sustainability concerns are also related to nature and landscape. Lifestyle entrepreneurs in this study clearly wish to contribute to a preserved countryside, to use appropriately the local resources, and in regard to nature, live in a more responsible way.

We see nature in a completely different way (. . .) we feel sad with the way we see some people mistreat the land. . . the care they should have and they don't. . . 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.

The desire to maintain heritage and family memories, preserving it to future generations, is also a strong motive to create tourism businesses, in many of the cases. Some entrepreneurs keep high expectations that second generation will continue business.

We hope our son (he's an agronomist engineer) will be interested in this project, the farm. . . and will help us defining strategies for the future of the business. We have the expectation he will soon take care of business management.

In one of the cases, second generation has already assumed the business management. Younger generations bring new ideas, skills and probably a vision of the future. But they also bring their families and young children to these rural territories, helping to keep them alive.

I had this idea since University time. . . to develop a project of organic farming. I've worked outside the village for years. . . in Lisbon and abroad. . . but it was time to return and make my own path. My father had this farm and already the accommodation unit. It was time to do new things, interesting things and help my village and also create my own job, raise my son here, where we all belong.

Lifestyle entrepreneurs in this study are qualified individuals, with relevant professional experience and, in several cases, management background. They chose rural villages to live and bring their knowledge and experience to create innovative products, adding value to local products and other resources. This way, their contribution extends further than their own business, because in attracting tourists to villages they are fortifying other businesses as well (e.g. Restaurants, local commerce).

We wanted to bring to the farm and to the accommodation unit the knowledge, skills and the accuracy we have gained in our previous jobs (. . .) we wanted to do something different, something that could be appreciated and admired (. . .) we have achieved quite good professional standards in our life. . . we wouldn't invest so much effort just to do something unoriginal. . . commonplace.

The importance of quality and authenticity of the products served in the lodgings and the way the guests are treated is well expressed in owner's discourses:

I personally put quite high expectation; that's how we think about quality. Taking into account my own experience [as a tourist]. . . what happened there that made it memorable? Was it the people? Was it the products? Homemade bread. . . marmalade, jams, that sort of things. . . or a genuine interest to make something better?

Yes, we only serve local products. That is a must. Our breakfast includes the regional cheese, the traditional chorizo, and homemade bread. No supermarkets stuff.

The rural tourism businesses' typical small dimension and the complex and articulated nature of the overall tourism experience highlight the relevance of networks. Local and non-local networks play a determinant role in the tourism supply chain and also in assuring memorable experiences to tourists. As said, tourism experiences are complex, based on different elements such as heritage, landscape, people's way of life and their memories, requiring the involvement of many destination actors and features. Lifestyle entrepreneurs are sensitive to this reality and seem aware this is not a "one man's task", stating the importance of partnerships in diversifying services and obtaining a representative offer of the village products and appealing countryside experiences.

We have a variety of regional products because we have partnership with other producers, our neighbours. We have the olive oil, they have wine, tea, honey and cheese. . . food tourism is inseparable of rural tourism, we make that blend and we work together to achieve good results.

Networks are considered by lifestyle entrepreneurs of great value to improve business and to help extend the average stay of tourists in the villages.

We are trying to organize ourselves, learn about the 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.

We have been talking with 2 other businesses of rural tourism nearby about marketing the 3 businesses together, and the Park as central, and maybe also 2 or 3 restaurants. . . there's interest in it and I think something may develop from there.

Entrepreneurs understand the contagious effect of the way the several tourism businesses are operating in a village. If someone is not offering quality, all the others will be affected by bad image.

In small villages like this one, if one—and one is enough—is not working well, that will ruin the image of the village (. . .) tourists say they had a bad experience in that village, they generalize their discontent to the overall experience

Lifestyle entrepreneurs show pride in what they have achieved, being aware that their businesses, although small, have impacts in the villages and communities.

The public recognition concerning the project originality, the press and other media (TV channels) giving much attention to the farm and our services. . . yes, we are very proud we, urban people, created such a thing. . . the farm goes beyond ourselves.

I think this was quite interesting for the village. . . there was nothing here. At least we contribute to keep some restaurants open. And if tourists had no place to stay, there were no events organized here, as well.

I did something courageous: this house, a XVIII century house was falling down. . .nobody was interested in it. I invested; I took the risk and brought life to it.

The local and non-local networks created in these territories enhance wealth creation, improving the quality of products and services offered, as well as the overall tourism experience, as already discussed. Lifestyle entrepreneurs show a very positive attitude towards the possibility of working together with other entrepreneurs from the villages as well as with outside partners. In fact, they are very proactive in this matter, maintaining active links in other locations, frequently urban, which in this particular context, maybe of great value. External networks may help to guarantee some important resources to business management (e.g. information, specialized advice, marketing) and are, therefore, an important contribution to the territory's development.

## 6 Conclusions

The tourism lifestyle entrepreneurs analysed in this study on rural tourism in South Portugal are business owners who contribute to the development of the territories where their businesses are located. This research, in line with other studies (Bosworth and Farrell 2011; Cunha et al. 2016; Keen 2004; Lewis 2005) highlights the importance this unique way of doing business may have for high-quality tourist experience and through this, better business results. Lifestyle entrepreneurs in rural tourism are embedded with a sense of "mission", a strong identification with the product and the place, a passion for the countryside that is, undoubtedly, reflected in business management and results. In this sense, as suggested by Lane (2016), the arrival of lifestyle entrepreneurs should be welcomed because they bring new skills, additional capital, ideas and market knowledge.

It should be considered as well that these entrepreneurs may help diversify the economic activity in rural areas, add dynamism through multiplier effects, which is usually related to positive economic results (Aldrich 1992). They thereby also promote investment in locations with typically low attraction potential (Gelderen 2007; Lane 2016).

Businesses created based on lifestyle goals are, generally, more innovative and creative, with lifestyle entrepreneurs being presented as important players in creating innovative products designed for emerging market segments of high value (Ateljevic and Doorne 2000). In the particular context of rural tourism, these entrepreneurs are characterized as showing high levels of innovation, diversity and uniqueness, aspects which are highly valued by hyper-segmented markets, as found in rural tourism (Lane 2009). Studies suggest that the benefits sought by the "new" niche markets with high potential (including the unique, authentic, different experience, independence, knowledge, interpersonal relations) are more easily found in small-scale tourism services, promoted and managed by entrepreneurs motivated also by non-economic factors (Ateljevic and Doorne 2000; Cunha 2016).

Lifestyle entrepreneurs in this study, as reported in other studies (Ateljevic and Doorne 2000; Bolluk and Mottiar 2014; Bosworth and Farrell 2011; Cunha et al. 2016), are more aligned with sustainability values and that fact is expressed in their management conduct. Business concepts have embedded this concern, visible in the small dimension of enterprises, in networking efforts, in the highly personalized offers, in organic farming or in the diverse and complementary activities (commerce, tourism, agriculture) frequently offered, which helps to achieve positive business results and future sustainability.

Tourism entrepreneurship can thus positively impact on villages and their communities in rural areas if some conditions are taken into account. Sustainability issues have to be addressed to assure the development achieved is the one desired. Tourists are important to foster the local economy dynamics; however rural territories are also socially and environmentally fragile, and models of development must take this reality into account. Attracting and supporting actors with the “right” attitude and the willingness to invest and live in these places and positively integrate in existing communities maybe a forehand interesting strategy.

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