

## Article

# The Effects of Tourism on Local Development in Protected Nature Areas: The Case of Three Nature Parks of the Sierra Morena (Andalusia, Spain)

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**Abstract:** In rural spaces, new activities are developed to add to the traditional ones in the context of multifunctionality, considering the protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage, as in natural parks. These incorporate new recreational and tourist functions, understood as an instrument for local development. This research aims to study the relationships between tourism and local development in three natural parks (Sierra de Aracena and Picos de Aroche, Sierra Norte de Sevilla, and Sierra de Hornachuelos) in Andalusia (Spain). The research uses a mixed methodology consisting of, on the one hand, selective interviews with stakeholders focused on tourism and local development processes and, on the other, secondary data to analyse the repercussions on local development. The results show (1) the prevalence among the informants of the economic dimension in local development above the environmental and sociocultural dimensions; (2) the influence of declarations of protection and implementation of development policies on the growth of the tourist offer; (3) uneven tourism development in the different municipalities and natural parks; and (4) the limited effects of tourism on local development.

**Keywords:** local development; natural parks; Sierra Morena; stakeholders; tourism



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## 1. Introduction

Rural spaces are considered “places that do not matter” [1] and have been marginalised from the “dominant development processes” [2] (p. 162). Thus, a structural crisis occurs, with a progressive disempowerment of rural communities [2,3]. These spaces lack infrastructure [4] and specialise in a declining primary sector [5–8]. These areas continuously lose competitiveness and employment [4,7], appearing depopulated and marginalised [1,5,8]. Multifunctionality and diversification become challenges to facing reality [9]. This takes place through promoting non-productive socioeconomic activities, such as leisure and recreation, residential areas, conservation and maintenance of biodiversity, and valorisation of heritage or the reinterpretation of traditional productive activities [4,6,10]. As a result, rural areas become cultural and environmental symbols [11], since “they are no longer just places where people live and work, but at the same time have vital functions for society” [12] (p. 12).

The peripheral rural areas mainly affected by this crisis [2,4,5,8] generate a challenging development context. Remote rural areas become multifunctional spaces where the environment is essential [2,13]. The protection, conservation, preservation, and safeguarding of natural (and cultural) resources is necessary [8]. Thus, protected nature areas (PNAs) are established to conserve biodiversity and ecosystems [14], so as to provide ecosystem services [15] or face the effects of climate change [16]. Rural spaces lose their dominant social positions, become depoliticised [17], and lose their productive function [2]. They

appear as “preserved spaces” [18], where environmental attractiveness and relatively easy access make local decision-making subject to space preservation criteria [2,19]. Different PNA categories are created, ranging from total protection (i.e., naturalisation) to flexible protection formulas, in which natural and cultural heritage protection coexists with socioeconomic development and production and extraction activities [20], such as in natural parks (NtPs) in Spain [21]. The conception of rural space as an environmental reserve produces advantages and limitations [2] that are not exempt from contradictions that imply the creation of genuinely anthropic spaces [22]. Such a relationship between the social system and its environment results in the manifested dialectic between conservation and socioeconomic development [23,24], and between new uses and the agrarian bases of society [13]. Therefore, there is an evident need to integrate the local population in the declaration processes, in PNA decision-making and management processes, to evolve from the “museum-like” to the conservation approach, understood as the rational use of resources by applying management instruments [24,25]. In this way, an essential role in the NtPs is attributed to tourist and recreational activities [13,21,26], insisting on the relationships between tourism, NtPs’ management, and rural development [13,26,27].

On the other hand, it is necessary to highlight that rural tourism is a complex and diverse reality [28,29], since there are (1) different tourism models and activities that are not very well integrated [28,30]; (2) a great variety and, thus, quality of “services, infrastructures and equipment” (SIEs) [29–31]; and (3) a diversity of actors involved [31,32]. In addition, rural tourism development often depends on resources, content, and specific territorial contexts [30,31] and, in many cases, the only common element is that it takes place in a rural space [33]. Although the environmental motivation defines the classic tourist in PNAs, it is not ecotourism or nature tourism but rural tourism, which includes nature-based products [27,34–36]. In this way, PNAs become a critical typology for attracting large-scale tourists in peripheral rural spaces [7], positioned through “autonomous tourism” [37].

In the EU, *The Future of Rural Society* [12] represents a turning point in facing rural areas’ issues, proposing rural development from within, according to the endogenous social and environmental resources [38]. Accordingly, rural development becomes the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)—after production—influencing strategies and political measures that reinforce the idea that “rural and agrarian are not synonymous” [39] (p. 204). The objective of the CAP is to maintain and preserve rural landscapes by integrating new activities to revitalise traditional activities, improve living conditions, foster population growth, generate employment, etc. [40]. Leisure and tourism appear as an opportunity to reconnect with the world [3,29,39], as they are adaptive [9] and innovative strategies [41] that enable the reinvention of these rural spaces. Multifunctionality and diversification become a part of community rural development policies that consider the community’s capacities and characteristics to enhance and value their assets and resources through activities [39,42,43].

Consequently, it generates endogenous development [4] and community empowerment [44], which is especially important in PNAs [27]. The EC introduced a participatory and local “bottom-up approach” [42] in search of solutions to rural issues by endowing the CAP with the LEADER initiative (1991), implemented by local action groups (LAGs) to generate political, administrative, and inter-territorial contexts for governance [42,45]. However, LAGs, in many cases, have been indicative superstructures intended to finance projects rather than to provide overviews [46]. This has resulted in uneven effects of rural development and increasingly significant differences between central and peripheral rural areas [2,47]. Even though rural areas received more funds [48], the results were no better, because these funds could be mismanaged [49]. The LEADER I, II, and + initiatives, the associated national programs (in Spain, PRODER I and II), and the new CAP instruments (through the EAFRD) integrated leisure and tourism into the rural development paradigm as part of the LEADER approach [50]. Thus, although these instruments have not been of a tourist nature, they have functioned as if they were [35,39,51] by focusing on “the diversification of agriculture through tourism” [46] (p. 1).

Academic and political discourses have highlighted the role of tourism in revitalising rural areas [52], insisting on the tourism-equals-development binomial. Many rural spaces in which “any economic diversification will be welcome” [53] (p. 532) have seen tourism as a challenge [54] and a “desirable diversifier” [55] (p. 391) to face the economic decline [56] and regenerate traditional livelihoods [57], generating idealisations and (re)constructions of the past that (re)define the territories [3]. In tourism in rural areas, the issue of sustainability is closely linked to local, endogenous development processes [4,31] as a “catalyst for innovative local development” [55] (p. 383) by reducing regional disparities [48] and local connection [3], especially in peripheral areas [54]. In these areas, local development is not a desire but a need to maintain the community based on endogenous resources [55]. However, the community-driven scenario often identifies multifunctionality with diversification and multiactivity [58], which nearly assimilates rural development and rural tourism [4], resulting in an extensive focus on tourist activity [59].

The commitment to tourism as an instrument for development has led to competition between activities or mono-specialisation, perceiving tourism as a panacea [44,60,61]. However, this hypothesis has been formulated from a community, state, or regional geographic scale, without considering the county and local scales beyond case analysis and often out of context. Thus, tourism is not a “Cinderella” activity for all places [62], making it necessary to call for the moderation of the optimism that floods the rhetoric of its role in development [63], generating contradictions, potential negative impacts, and conflicts [64]. The current results have contributed to a critical vision [65], emphasising that not all places are touristic or have the same potential [40,66]. Tourism is an activity plagued with limitations, often hidden in political and popular discourses for development [48,67], assuming, for some, the commercialisation of the rural space [35,68,69].

Therefore, it is necessary to check whether the tourism-equals-development correlation is a myth or a reality [48,54]. The analysis is carried out at the immediate local level, i.e., at the scale where local development, sustainable development, and sustainable tourism are based on the integration of endogenous natural, cultural, economic, human, and social resources [4,59,70,71]. For this, it is necessary to analyse the contribution of tourism to local development and its impacts on the environmental (i.e., the protection and conservation of the environment, the quality of the landscape, etc.), economic (i.e., regeneration, the influx of capital, effective source of income and job creation, synergies, maintenance of traditional economic activities, etc.), and social (i.e., empowerment, improvement of quality of life in the long term, equity, etc.) dimensions [4,29,39,46,61,63,70,72]. Moreover, it is necessary to study the territorial context of development in terms of cooperation, imbalances, and accessibility, among others [7,30,48,73], to establish the conditions under which development occurs [63]. The analysis requires consideration of the evidence that there is a tendency towards the concentration of tourists in a limited number of regions [48], and that the PNAs need socially viable strategies for conserving biodiversity and a positive relationship between conservation and multifunctionality [25,46].

Considering the above context, the analysis of the dimensions of local development becomes valuable [4,40] in the community-driven periphery. Therefore, this research aims to study tourism in the context of multifunctionality in three NtPs in Andalusia (Spain), along with the importance of tourist activity for local development processes. While supply and demand demonstrate that tourism and tourist activities are a fact and are necessary functions that are critical in PNAs, the analysis focuses on (1) how the relationship between tourism and development is perceived, (2) what impacts tourism generates, and (3) whether tourism generates local development.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Data and Methods

The analysis of pairing tourism and local development recommends using the case study approach, which has been applied to tourism and local/rural development [40,51,54,59,71,74] and in the PNAs [20,24,27,32]. This research is part of a broad project on sustainable tourism,

governance, and local development in PNAs, focused on analysing the perceptions of those who participate in or influence tourism activities and the planning process [7,59,75,76]. Therefore, the authors applied a mixed methodology.

On the one hand, semi-structured interviews helped to analyse the primary and secondary issues addressed by the stakeholders and the importance with which they perceived them [59,75] on three topics: (1) the perception of the relationship between tourism and development, including its dimensions [76–78]; (2) the problems derived from tourism [15,24,52]; and (3) tourism as a driver of local development [40,74]. The interview (Int) had 10 open questions, of which 9 asked directly about the contributions of tourism to local development. At the same time, the rest contributed to understanding the dimensions of development and perceived impacts (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Interview questions.

Code	Question	Topics
(q1)	What function do the nature park and biosphere reserve have in your destination (and others)?	(2)
(q2)	What is the value of the landscape in tourism?	(2)
(q3) <sup>(a)</sup>	How do you perceive sustainable tourism development in your destination?	(2)
(q4) <sup>(b)</sup>	Does sustainability have a substantial effect on the tourism development of your destination? Why?	(1)(2)(3)
(q5) <sup>(a)</sup>	What kind of conflicts related to sustainability exists between stakeholders?	(2)(3)
(q6) <sup>(a)</sup>	Could you give a practical example of sustainable tourism development in your destination? What would you improve?	(2)
(q7)	What happens in the context of global change with your destination?	(2)(3)
(q8)	Are there difficulties in managing the tourist space?	(2)
(q9) <sup>(b)</sup>	Does tourism contribute to local development?	(1)
(q10)	What consequences has COVID-19 had on the destination?	(2)(3)

<sup>(a)</sup> Questions based on Renfors [77]. <sup>(b)</sup> Questions adapted from Renfors [77]. Authors' elaboration.

Forty interviews were conducted between April and July 2021, applying a non-probabilistic sampling method considering the territorial balance of the interviews (relevance within each NtP; centrality/periphery) (Figure 1). Some interviewees were directly identified: directors of NtPs, managers of LAGs, municipal political actors and tourism technicians, and a private nature conservation foundation. Tourism companies and tourism business associations were selected based on their offers of services such as accommodation and/or tourism activities [79] and their local or foreign character [52,80], while also applying the snowball technique [81] based on good practices described by other interviewees. The interviews were transcribed and coded, depending on whether they verbalised the ideas (emic) or the researchers identified them a posteriori (etic) [82]. Given the restrictions imposed by the sanitary measures due to COVID-19, the interviews were virtual, using Google Meet®, which made it impossible to carry out systematic interviews with the local population.

Moreover, the results of the interviews were contrasted with other sources: (a) the results of the territorial survey, carried out between September and November 2021, analysing accessibility and conducting informal interviews with the local population; (b) the results of the analysis of secondary data [40,83] from official statistics and official databases [79,84–88].

## 2.2. Case Study

The study area is located in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula, in the Sierra Morena—a typically Mediterranean middle mountain range. Its specific characteristics have led to the formation of the Dehesa—a thinned Mediterranean forest where forestry, livestock, and hunting activities are combined. It is a unique agrosilvopastoral exploitation system around which an exceptional landscape with outstanding heritage attractions has developed [89]. The Dehesa is subject to changes in coverage and degradation due to abandonment or overexploitation [90]. In addition, the Dehesa is currently facing the



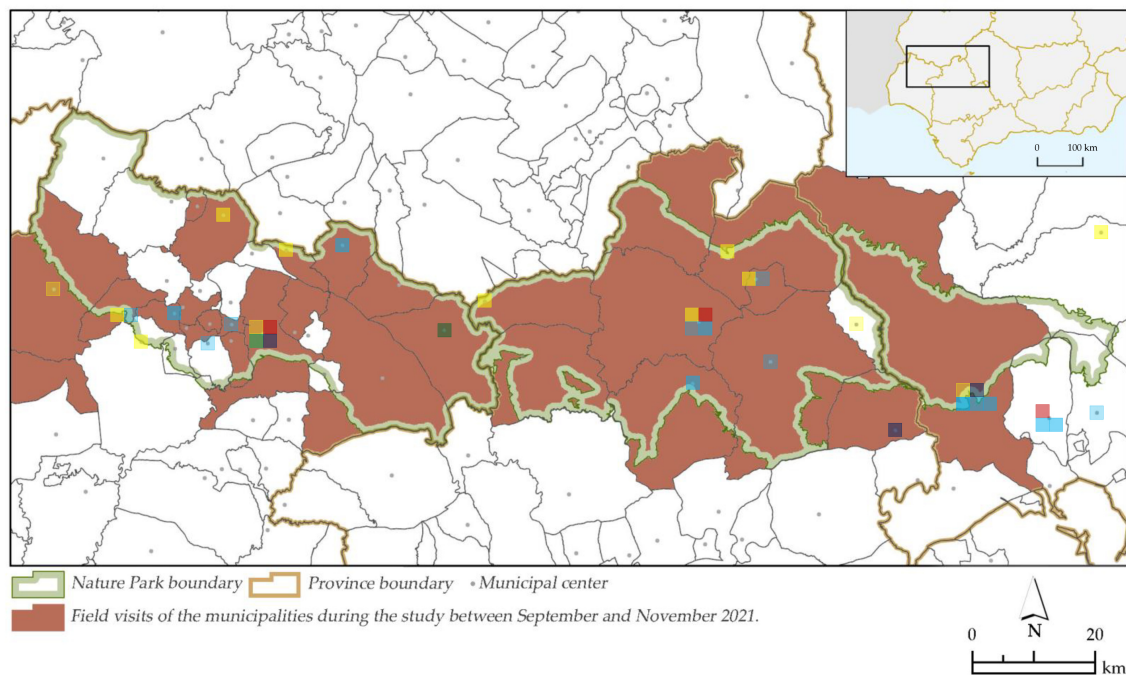
effects of climate change and the “dry” (a fungal disease of *Quercus ilex* and *Quercus suber*—the main species of the Dehesa) [16].

NtP	Interviews										NtP
SAPA	(Int05) Manager F 50–59 Aracena	(Int08) Director M 50–59 Aracena	(Int27) Technician F 40–49 Aroche	(Int28) Technician F 50–59 Aracena	(Int07) Mayor F 40–49 Cañaveral de León	(Int29) Mayor F 30–39 Cumbres Mayores	(Int30) Councillor F 30–39 Almonaster la Real	(Int37) Councillor F 40–49 Cortegana	(Int31) Owner F 30–39 Cortegana	(Int32) Manager M 20–29 Santa Olalla del Cala	SAPA
	(Int01) Manager M 50–59 Obejo (a)	(Int09) Director M 50–59 Córdoba (a)	(Int19) Technician M 40–49 Hornachuelos	(Int02) Councillor M >60 Villaviciosa de Córdoba	(Int15) Owner M 50–59 Hornachuelos	(Int34) Manager M 50–59 Jabugo	(Int35) Manager M 40–49 Arroyomolinos de León	(Int33) Owner F 50–59 Alájar	(Int36) Owner F 50–59 Los Marines	(Int40) Technician F 50–59 Aracena	
SH	(Int04) Manager M 50–59 Posadas	(Int03) Director M 40–49 Sevilla (a)	(Int06) Technician F 20–29 Las Navas de la Concepción	(Int17) Mayor F 40–49 Alanís	(Int10) Manager F 30–39 Hornachuelos	(Int11) Manager F 30–39 Posadas	(Int12) Manager M 50–59 Posadas	(Int13) Owner M 40–49 Hornachuelos	(Int14) Owner F 30–39 Almodóvar del Río	(Int16) President M 40–49 Hornachuelos	SH
	(Int21) Manager M 30–39 Cazalla de la Sierra	(Int18) Mayor M 50–59 Cazalla de la Sierra	(Int20) Councillor M 50–59 San Nicolás del Puerto	(Int23) Councillor F 30–39 El Real de la Jara	(Int26) Manager M 20–29 El Pedroso	(Int38) Manager M 40–49 Cazalla de la Sierra	(Int22) Manager F 40–49 Constantina	(Int24) Owner M 50–59 Cazalla de la Sierra	(Int25) Manager F 30–39 San Nicolás del Puerto	(Int39) President M 50–59 La Puebla de los Infantes	
SNS											SNS

(Int05) Manager F 50–59 Aracena	(Interview) Position Genre Age range Municipality	Stakeholders	LAG	NtP	Politicians	Technician	Tourist company accommodation and services	Tourist company services	Business association	Foundation
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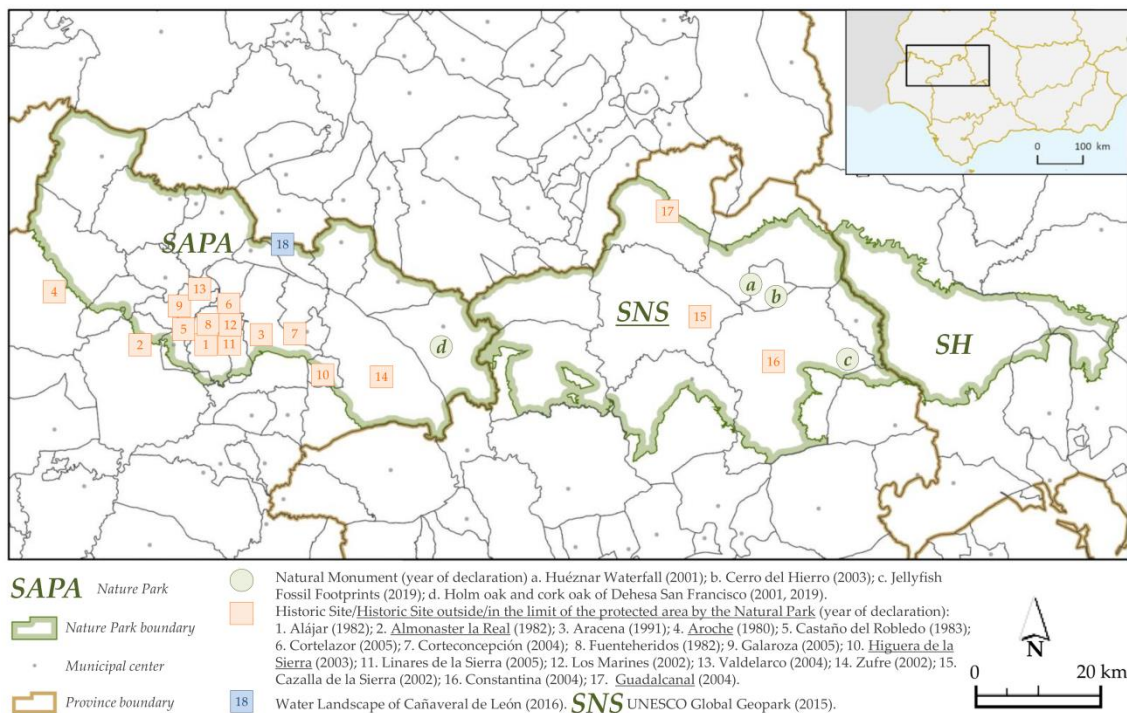
Distribution map of the interviews and territorial recognition



**Figure 1.** Conducted interviews and the types and personal characteristics of the interviewees according to the natural parks that they represent. In addition, a map presents the territorial distribution of the interviews carried out and the territorial recognition. Source: authors’ elaboration.

In 1989, the Andalusian regional government declared six NtPs in the Sierra Morena for its ecological and landscape richness [86]. Of these six NtPs, this study focuses on the three westernmost (Figure 2)—namely, NtP Sierra de Aracena and Picos de Aroche (SAPA), NtP Sierra Norte de Sevilla (SNS), and NtP Sierra de Hornachuelos (SH)—that since 2002 make up the UNESCO Dehesas de Sierra Morena Biosphere Reserve (DSMBR) [86]. In addition, since their declaration as NtPs they have accumulated other nature protection

categories, including special conservation areas, special protection areas for birds, and natural monuments, and the SNS was declared a UNESCO Global Geopark (UWGpSNS) in 2015 [86,88]. On the other hand, protected cultural heritage is also important, among which 17 historic sites stand out [87].



**Figure 2.** Scope of the study. Source: [87,88]; authors' elaboration.

The NtPs have the particularity that most of their protected area is private property [91,92], reaching 98% in SH [21,93], and historically large estates were developed [94,95]. SAPA and SNS have a significant area (Table 2) and have population settlements within them, while SH has a smaller area and lacks an internal network of settlements [21,96].

**Table 2.** General data of the natural parks.

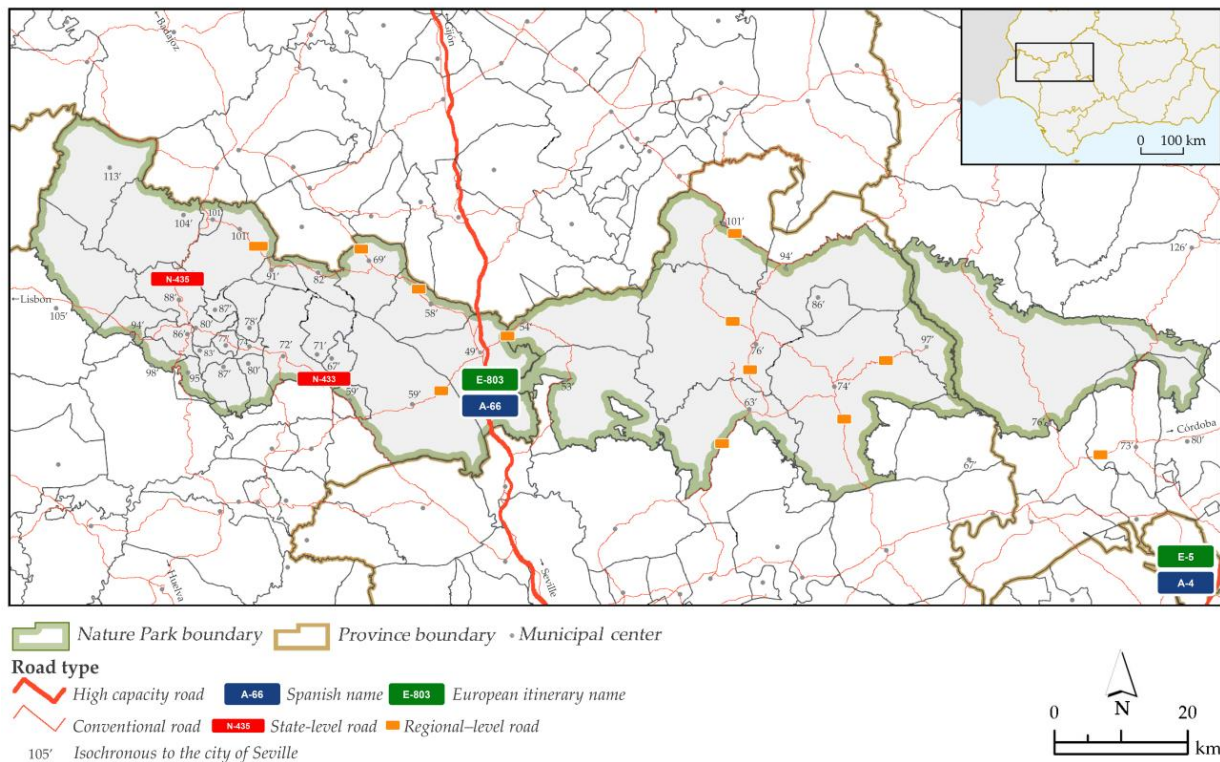
NtP	Province	No. Municipalities <sup>(a)</sup>	Area (ha)		Total Population		Population Density (pop./km <sup>2</sup> )
			NtP	Total <sup>(b)</sup>	1960 <sup>(b)</sup>	2020 <sup>(b)</sup>	
SAPA	Huelva	28 (20)	186,827	280,318	72,478	36,202	12.91
SNS	Sevilla	10 (4)	177,484	238,486	55,452	24,790	10.39
SH	Córdoba	5 (0)	60,031	171,094	32,213	14,998	8.77
Total/Mean		43	424,342	689,898	162,103	75,990	10.69

<sup>(a)</sup> With part or all of their area within the NtP; in parentheses, those where the NtP includes 100% of their territory. <sup>(b)</sup> Excluding the municipality of Córdoba's capital, with a small protected area that distorts the data. Source: [84,86,88]; authors' elaboration.

The study area has been affected by a profound crisis since the 1960s, which caused a massive rural exodus [97], and today it has an ageing population with low demographic density (Table 2). Of the 42 municipalities (excluding Córdoba's capital), only 4 have >5000 inhabitants (2020), while 18 have <1000 inhabitants [84].

In SAPA and SNS, agricultural activities linked to the Dehesa predominate [91,95], highlighting Iberian pig farming, around which the Iberian pig industry is based [97–99]. Hunting and forestry activities predominate in SH [21]. Public and private services are concentrated in the county capitals (SAPA, SNS) and the municipalities of the Guadalquivir Valley (SH) [90,97]. LAGs have been implemented in the territory since 1991, coinciding with the areas of SAPA and SNS with LAGs, while SH was divided between two others.

It is a space with a marked peripherality, bordering provinces, regions, and states, with poor communications by road with the provincial capitals, and especially within the counties. High-capacity networks only cross the territory. This situation means that 13 SAPA municipalities are better connected with Seville than with Huelva, and also better than the SNS municipalities with their provincial capital (Figure 3).

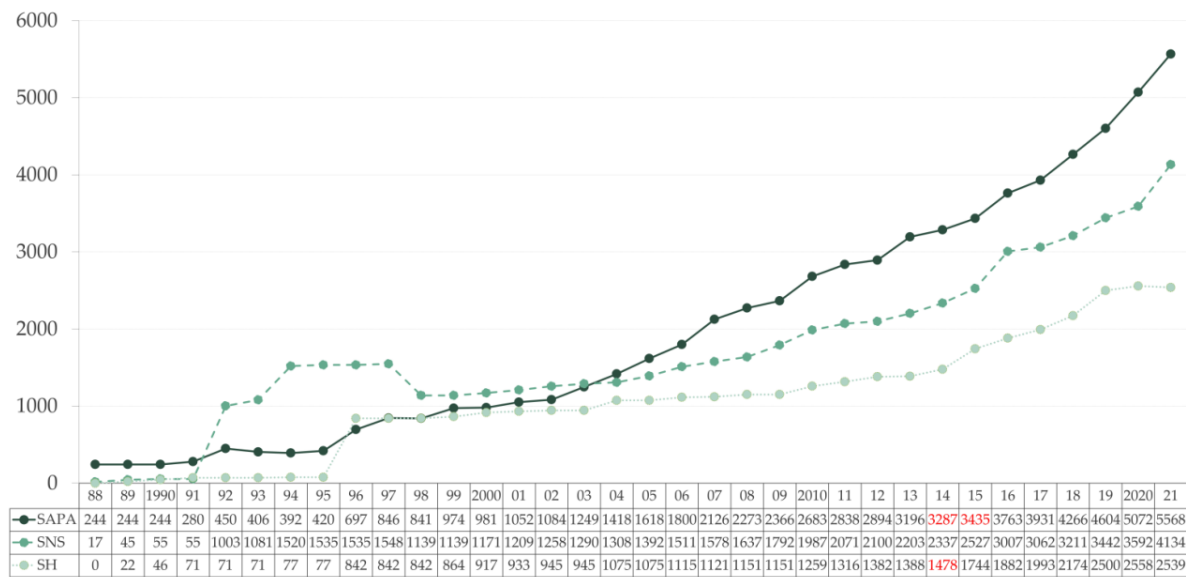


**Figure 3.** The communications network of the study area. Source: authors' elaboration.

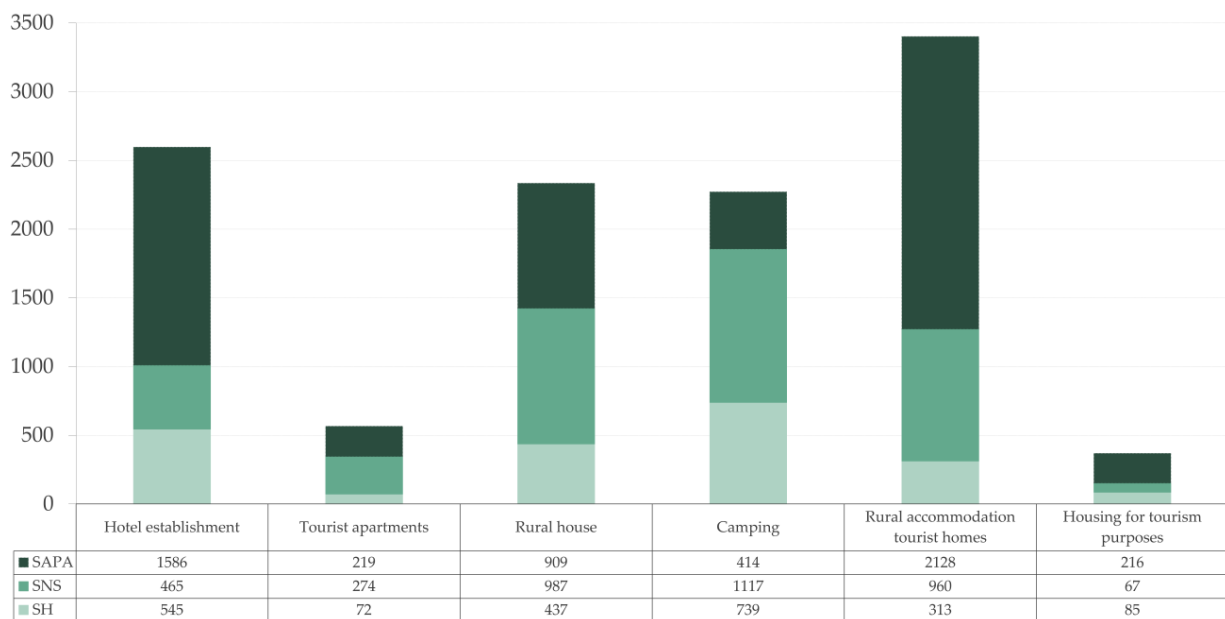
### 3. Results and Discussion

In their provincial groups, the three NtPs are secondary because of the importance of urban cultural tourism, i.e., the cities of Seville and Córdoba and the coast, i.e., the Huelva coast [100], assuming that the 12,241 places of accommodation in the study area account for only 1.24% of the Andalusian total [79,85]. At the time of the declaration of the three NtPs (1989), there was practically no tourist offer [21,101] (Figure 4). According to the interviewees, the declaration of the NtPs generated a favourable context for the development of tourism, as has been highlighted for the Spanish NtPs [27,29,39]. However, they emphasise that it was the institutional framework established by the CAP and the implementation of the LAGs (SNS in 1991; SAPA in 1995; SH in 1995 and 1997) that represented a turning point for the implementation of leisure and tourism as new activities [29,45,46]. Nonetheless, a particular initial oversizing (SNS) generated a decline in supply before 2000. Growth has been continuous since the beginning of the 21st century, despite the cessation of activity caused by the international economic crisis. Except for SH, the offer skyrocketed in the post-crisis period, even with the COVID-19 pandemic. The accommodation offer was developed earlier in SNS [91]. Still, it is more significant in SAPA, while it is the most recent and scarce in SH [21]. There has been an initial predominance of camping places, especially in SNS and SH, compared to rural houses in SNS and regulated establishments in SAPA, standing out after the international financial crisis due to the increase in non-business activities, particularly in SAPA<sup>1</sup> (Figure 5).





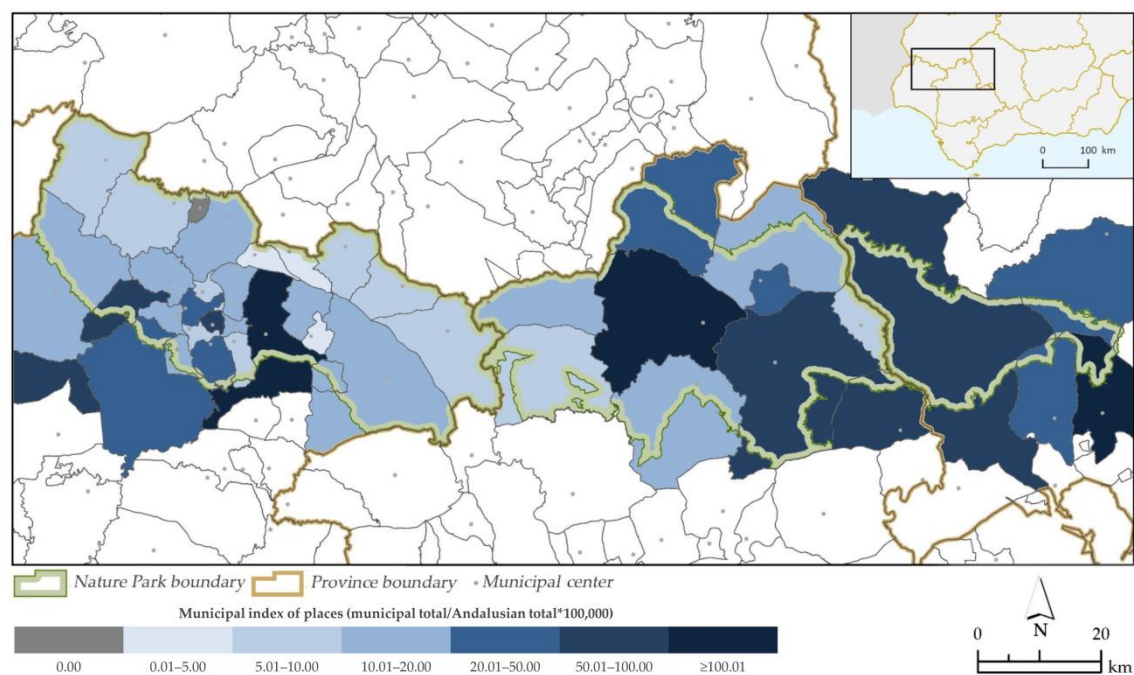
**Figure 4.** Evolution of the number of accommodation places. Data in red indicate estimations. Sources: [79,85]; authors' elaboration.



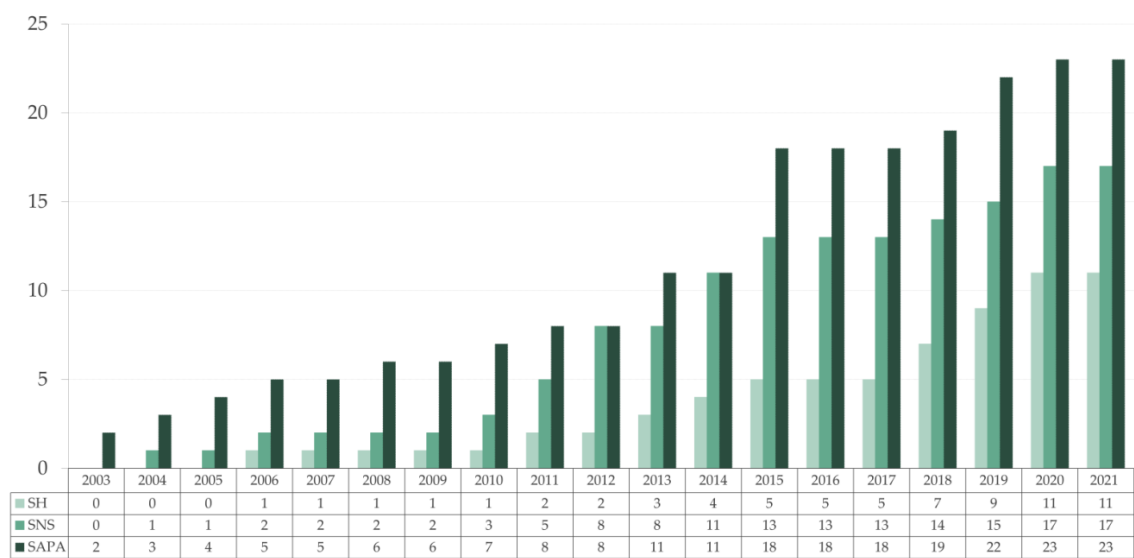
**Figure 5.** Offer of accommodation places by type (May 2021). Source: [85]; authors' elaboration.

The accommodation (Figure 6) in SAPA is concentrated in the central–eastern municipalities [101], while in SNS it is in the central–southern ones [91]. In the case of SH, the offer is located outside the ENP, in the urban centres. However, only in Hornachuelos municipality is the accommodation offer directly linked to the NtP [21], while the rest are related to the Guadalquivir Valley and the city of Córdoba (Int04, Int11, Int14). The average size of the accommodations (9.7 beds) makes marketing difficult [35,77] and limits the presence of organised groups [104], favouring autonomous tourism [37], since only 18 hotel establishments (11 in SAPA) have  $\geq 50$  beds.

Initially, passive rural tourism was developed [105]. Still, since the beginning of the 21st century, activities and products based on segmentation and the search for experiences have been incorporated [14,27,34,36], favouring activities in nature, adventures, and eco-tourism [106]. Thus, the offer of tourist activities is recent, as it appears in the Andalusian legislation in 2002 [102], predominating in SAPA (Figure 7).



**Figure 6.** Municipal index of tourist places (May 2021) (over the total of Andalusia). Source: [85]; authors’ elaboration.



**Figure 7.** Evolution of receptive companies and activities. Source: [79]; authors’ elaboration.

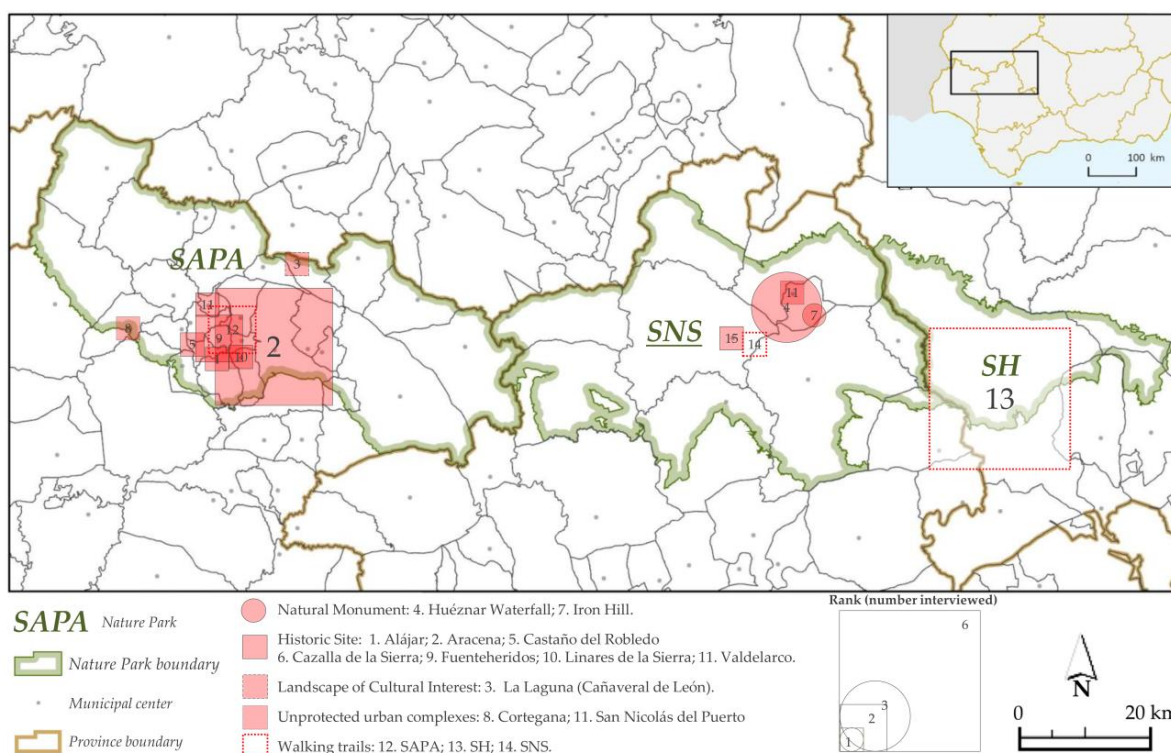
### 3.1. The Environmental Dimension of Local Development

The environmental dimension is fundamental in tourism planning and public management in PNAs [77] to achieve conservation and avoid the associated issues [27,39].

Exceeding the physical load capacity generates environmental impacts [107]. The informants appreciate overload in specific places and moments (Figure 8). They include central areas that have a more significant offer (especially in SAPA), well-known natural attractions (highlighted in SNS), specific trails (highlighted in SH), places where cultural events take place, and the most accessible spaces. However, some municipal stakeholders consider that “there are more people, but not overcrowding” (Int19). The cause of the overload is attributed to the lack of awareness among the local population, visitors, and tourism companies, and to “companies prioritising flow over quality” (Int07). Some companies self-limit (Int31, Int33), and some municipalities act by limiting capacity (Int27).



Informants highlighted that this was an effect of the pandemic and a consequence of the perimeter closures of the provinces. Municipal stakeholders and some tourism companies pointed out the lack of planning and the absence of control by the regional environmental administration (NtPs), standing out in SNS and SH more than in SAPA. In this sense, what is the appropriate growth rate of tourism? While some informants defend the increase in tourist flows (Int19) or holding massive events (Int30), others speak of the need for a continuous (but not increased) flow (Int01, Int24) that allows the (economic) viability of the companies.



**Figure 8.** Overload, according to the informants. Source: Interviews, 2021; authors' elaboration.

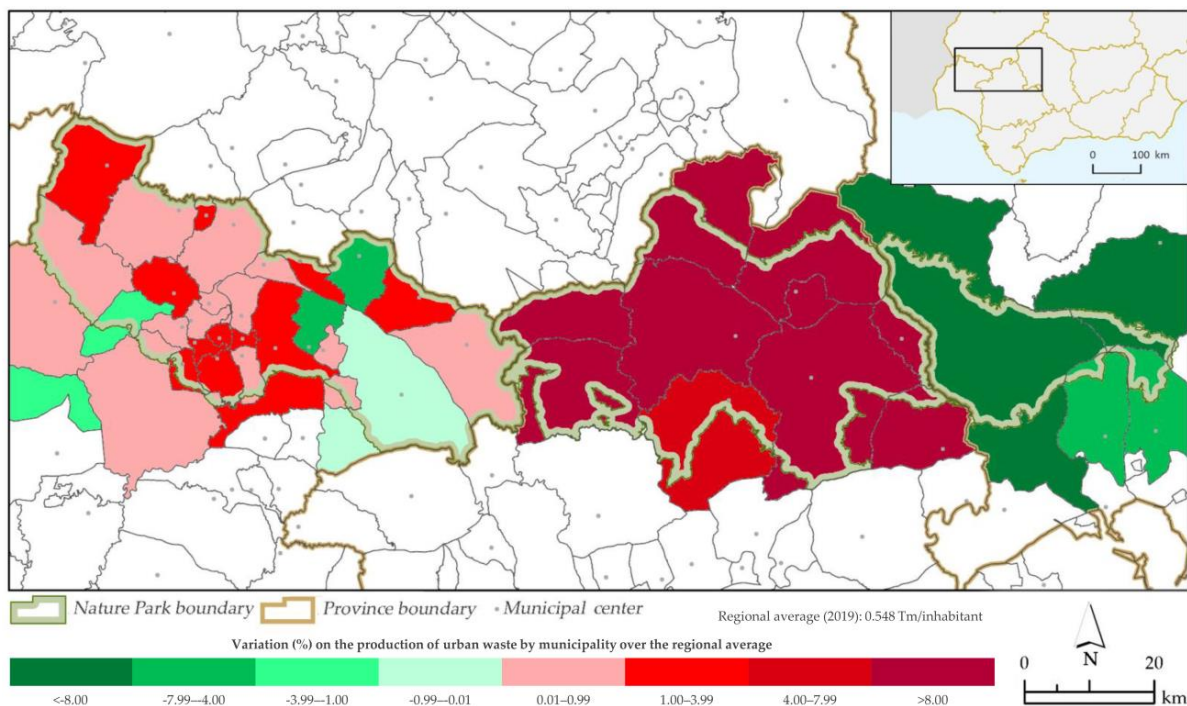
In contrast, they asked whether there was the possibility of “increasing the number of tourists without environmental costs” (Int33) and claimed low tourism rates (Int27, Int31, Int32, Int33). The management of NtPs and the protection of their environmental values, given the increase in recreational and tourist activities and the growing number of visitors, is complicated [27] in territorial contexts that lack physical barriers and where most of the property is privately owned [21,91–93]. Thus, there are no limits—such as physical load capacity or a control instrument [107]—to guarantee protection [14]. The establishment of such is necessary [108], and tourism must be considered in a steady state [109]. There was a contrast between the opinions of those who feel fulfilled by tourism and hungry for tourism [56] and those who prefer relaxed and respectful tourism [110].

Over-frequency generates fragility [68]. According to the informants, this is a specific issue coinciding with the seasonality of the activity (e.g., spring/autumn, weekends/holidays, holding events), and its main effect is that it “compromises quality care” (Int05). The interviewees insisted that hikers rather than tourists (who tend to be more respectful) caused most of these problems. Especially during the pandemic, over-frequency increased (Int03, Int05, Int28, Int29), with a concentration in the summer (2020 and 2021). Over-frequency is the effect of the existence of heterogeneous flows [14] in which entertainment/education/conservation [23] and hiking are mixed with tourism [111]. Nonetheless, the increase produced by the pandemic has been temporary [112].

Considering the fragility of the Mediterranean terrestrial systems [113] and, specifically, the Dehesa [16], it is essential to consider the perceptions of the informants about

global change and its repercussions. Stakeholders with a holistic vision (e.g., directors of NtPs, managers of LAGs, some municipal stakeholders, tourism companies, and the Foundation) identified this as a severe problem. They considered that global change affects the environment, the population, agricultural activities, and tourist flows. These stakeholders highlighted that those who notice the changes the most are the smallest towns (Int05), although the population tends to think that global change is not imminent (Int04, Int05). Most municipal stakeholders and tourism companies did not understand the concept of global change, relating it to changes in tourism and technology. At the same time, a small number referred exclusively to climate change, but they did not see it as a priority because “it has not affected us yet” (Int27) or “we are used to it” (Int06). Overall, there is a disconnection from the reality of this problem, and in order to be appreciated, it must directly affect the community [16]. Tourism companies focus on the issues that affect their business directly due to the decline in long-distance travel [114,115] and consider how to avoid damaging natural capital [116] by looking for local tourists [117].

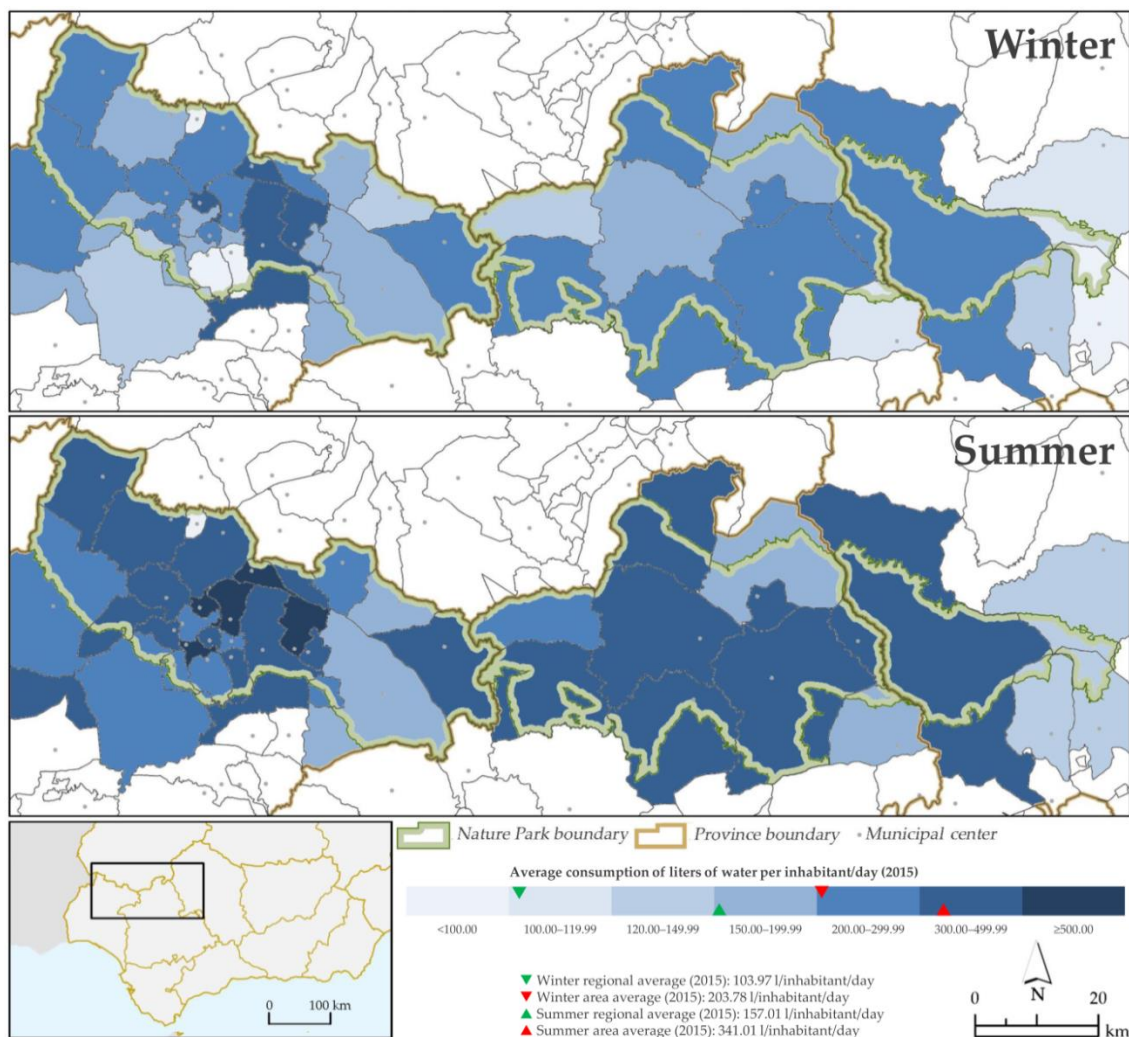
The generation of waste is a substantial environmental impact [118], since in the NtPs there are limitations on its collection and processing, with “the costs assumed by the local population” (Int21, Int39). Solid waste generation is higher than the regional average in 34 municipalities in the area—especially in SNS (Figure 9)—coinciding with the interviewees’ opinions. However, there is no direct relationship between waste generation and the number of tourist locations, except in the case of SAPA, where certain correspondence can be attributed to second homes. However, the interviewees related this problem to the economic dimension (e.g., collection, transportation, and processing costs) [119]—not to the environmental issues derived from it.



**Figure 9.** Urban waste generated in the study area (2019). Source: [85]; authors’ elaboration.

The waste of water in a Mediterranean climate with cyclical droughts is a crucial impact [120], and in an increasingly arid context [113] it was highlighted only by one NtP director (Int08), who associated it with swimming pools with tourist accommodation—especially during summer. However, water consumption is not exclusively related to tourism in the area, yet it exceeds the regional average in winter and summer (Figure 10), which must be associated with the doubling of the population due to second homes—especially in SAPA—and the efficiency of the supply networks. At the same time, the

interviewees did not perceive it as an issue due to the existence of water reserves (reservoirs) [121].



**Figure 10.** Municipal water consumption in the area in winter and summer (2015). Source: [85]; authors' elaboration.

In general, the informants agreed that tourism and tourism activities are sustainable, since heritage (natural and cultural) is (re)valued, frequentation is limited, infrastructure is scarce, and tourists are interested in the local environment [4,39]. In addition, in the NtPs, there are limitations of use, although sometimes the management instruments fail [122]. Opinions on the environmental dimension and tourism differed according to the personal characteristics of the informants, i.e., age, gender, training, place of residence, and ties to the area. The innovators, trained people, women, and young people strongly perceived environmental dimensions, as they know how the market works [19]. They introduce environmental values, are concerned about climate change [77], and have a better perception of the issues among informants linked to traditional agricultural activities [114]. However, the rest of the stakeholders tended to downplay this dimension [77].

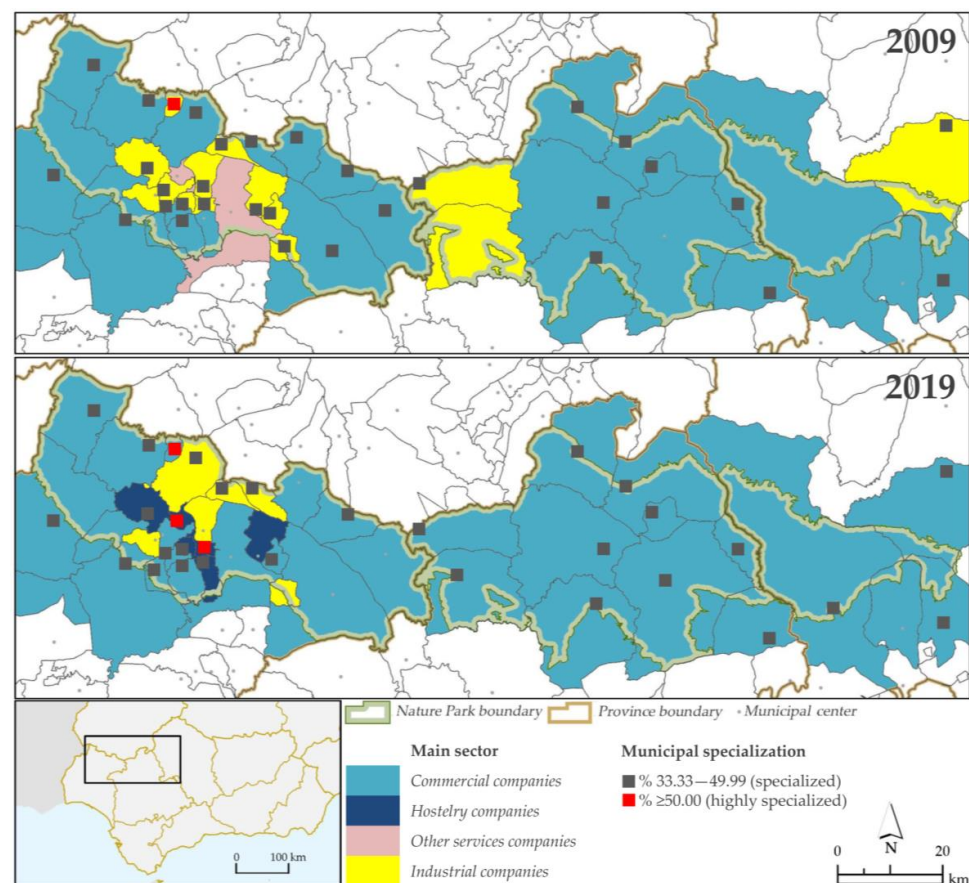
### 3.2. The Economic Dimension of Local Development

In the scientific literature, emphasis is placed on the contribution to the economic growth of rural tourism at the local scale [23,105].

Tourism is perceived locally as an engine of economic activity [29]. For some interviewees, tourism has ceased to be a secondary activity and become the main one, as



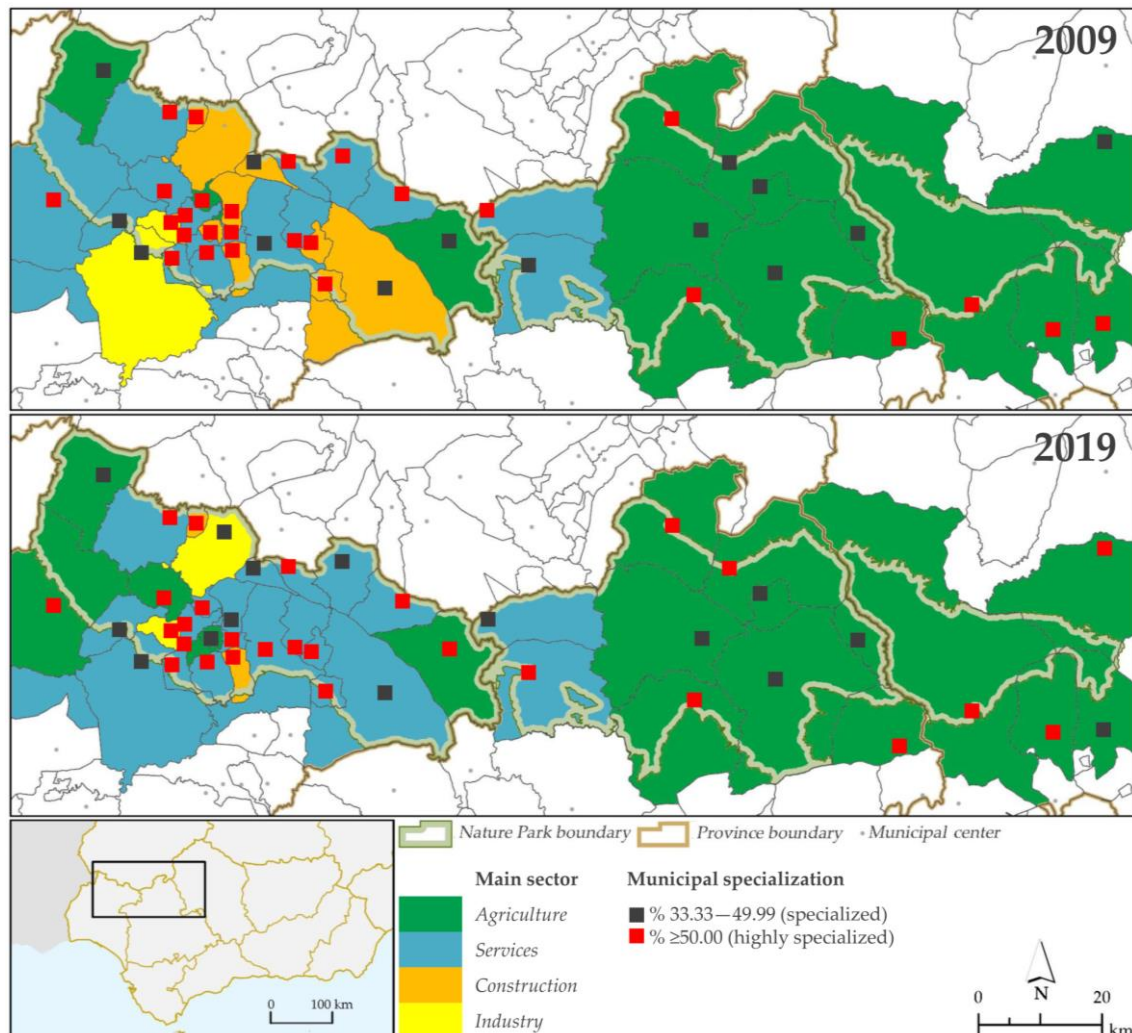
an opportunity to replace traditional activities in times of crisis (Int19, Int20, Int40). For others, tourism is a complementary activity (Int03, Int05, Int08, Int09, Int21, Int32) that “generates excessive expectations” (Int21) and “policies focused exclusively on tourism are a problem” (Int05), while the traditional activities are still needed (Int03, Int08, Int09). Finally, for municipal stakeholders from the periphery of the NtPs (Int29) and with only a part of their municipality protected (Int23, Int27, Int30), traditional activities are the basis of the economy, because there is productive specialisation. Taking as a reference the data of companies by sector of activity (excluding agriculture) in 2009 (the beginning of the international economic crisis) and 2019 (in recovery and pre-COVID-19), tertiarisation is observed (Figure 11). However, in services, retail and commercial companies predominate, and in five municipalities (SAPA) the percentage of hospitality companies in 2019 was higher than the rest. The data show that tourism is not the main economic activity in the municipalities, except in those with a sparse and aged population, where it appears feasible [123]. Changes in business activity coincide with the crisis and post-crisis recovery of traditional industries [98,99] and construction [124,125]. While tourism activity boosts other sectors, its development has not met expectations [26,44,48,61,105].



**Figure 11.** Companies by central activity sector (excluding agriculture) in 2009 and 2021. Source: [85]; authors’ elaboration.

Employment is frequently seen as one of the most significant benefits of tourism in rural areas [4,7,19], particularly in NtPs experiencing chronic unemployment [26,126]. However, it is not an aspect that was highlighted by the interviewees. LAG managers emphasised that there are families that live from tourism (Int05), generating employment for young people, entrepreneurship, and self-employment (Int04), with which some municipal stakeholders agreed (Int18, Int30). In contrast, job creation is low for tourism companies, as they are micro-enterprises that generate part-time and temporary employment (Int15), although there are new job opportunities with nature tourism (Int35). No tourism em-

ployment data are available by municipality. Instead, tourism employment is considered within the services sector, generating more employment than others. Taking employment by activity sector in 2009 and 2019 as a reference (Figure 12), how agricultural employment dominates in SNS and SH can be seen. In SAPA, there is a limited increase in this sector and a high increase in outsourcing.

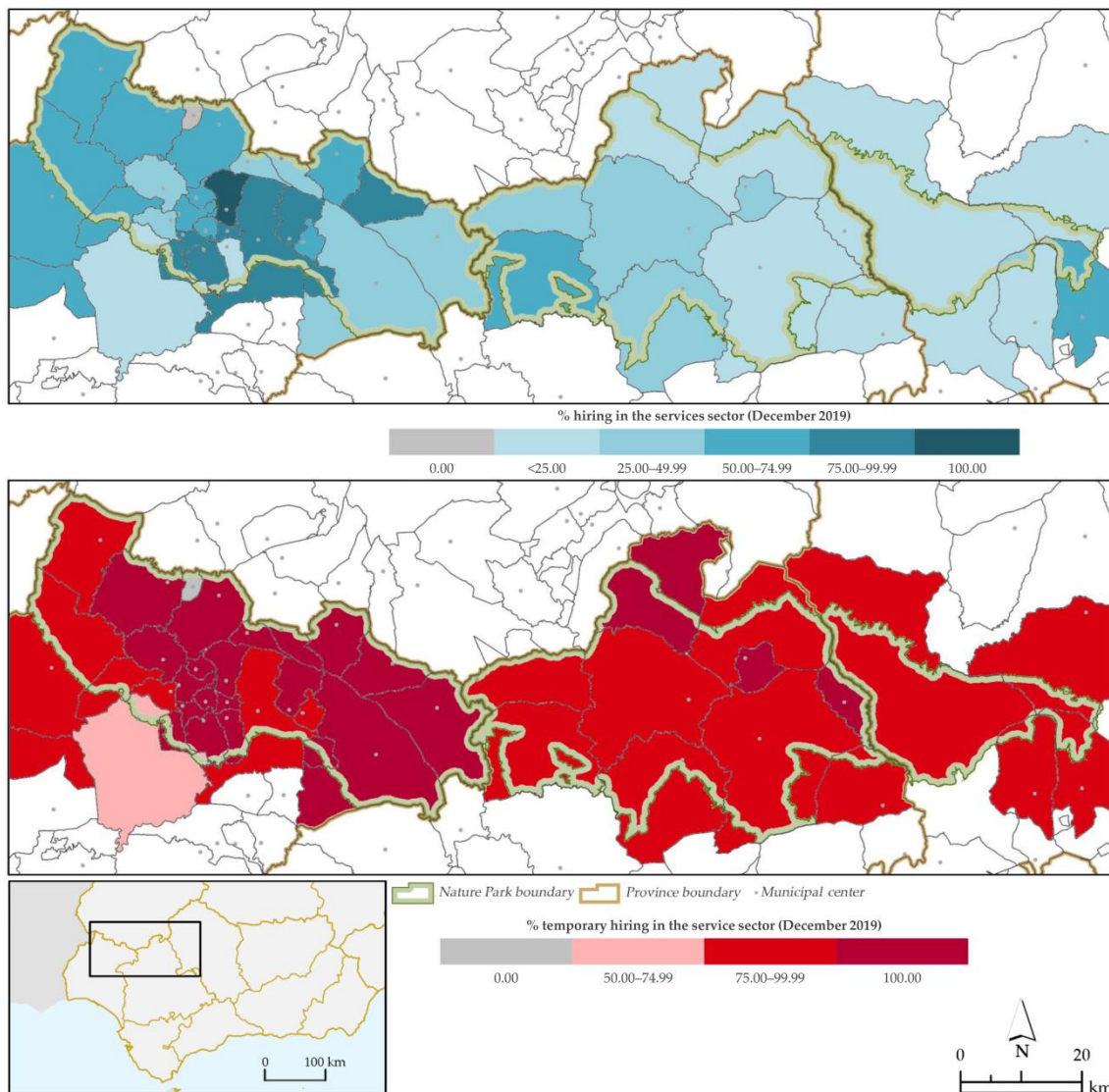


**Figure 12.** Employment by central activity sector in 2009 and 2019. Source: [85]; authors' elaboration.

Considering the contracting generated in the services sector in December 2019 [127] (the high tourist season in an average year) (Figure 13), in half of the municipalities, it is >50.00%, being higher in municipalities with a concentration of tourist offers for SAPA. However, when analysing the temporary nature of these contracts (Figure 13), it is >50.00% in all of the municipalities, standing at 100.00% in 23 of them, highlighting the most peripheral ones and those with a less diversified economy, but also the small municipalities with many places of accommodation (SAPA). Similarly, municipal unemployment rates (2019) [85] are higher than 25.00% in 27 municipalities, including some of the most touristic ones (Figure 14). Thus, there is no direct relationship between the numbers of tourist companies, accommodation places, and employment in services justified by public employment and private services (commerce), predominating in the municipalities (county capitals) in which there is a micropolitan effect [128]. The interviewees could not affirm tourism as the main economic activity, since agricultural activities continue to dominate, albeit with differences from west to east [129]. Tourism does not immediately affect employment [63] and has not managed to balance the labour market. Since tourism microenterprises and



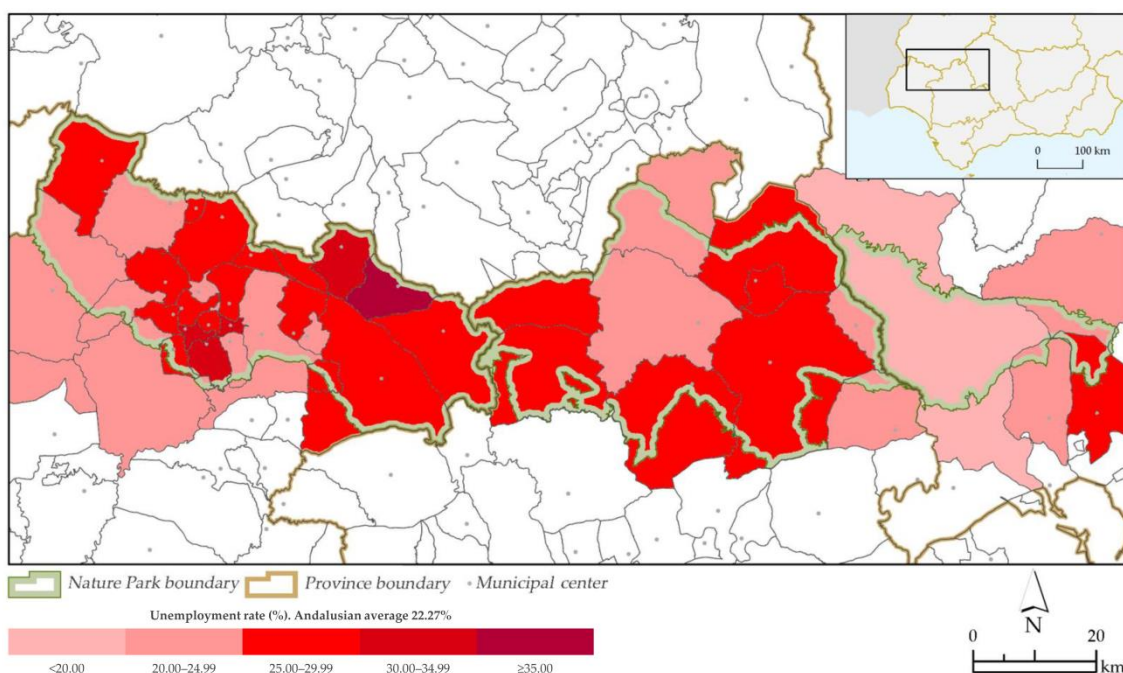
non-business activities stand out, they generate scarce employment that is low-skilled, short-term, seasonal, precarious, and with low remuneration [29,77,130,131]. Although tourism generates job opportunities [132], it also contributes to underemployment and illegal activities [21]. In addition, the expansion of non-business activities does not generate employment, while unemployment continues to be a structural problem [26].



**Figure 13.** Hiring (upper map) and temporary employment (lower map) in the services sector (December 2019). Source: [127]; authors' elaboration.

An important problem is the loss of traditional activities within the NtPs and the introduction of new ones [4,6,10]. The interviewees appreciated the increased tourist activity and the continuous decline of traditional activities. Still, they did not establish a relationship between the two processes or with the loss of agricultural employment. They attributed the abandonment of primary and secondary traditional activities to internal factors—i.e., ageing, abandonment of the farms, costs, low employment, and working conditions (Int19, Int20, Int26, Int35, Int39)—and external factors, i.e., low profitability, risky activity, and the need for investment (Int05, Int39). However, while some pointed to the fact that tourism is a secondary activity as a problem, coming to identify the abandonment of traditional activities with modernity and the future (Int13, Int26), others maintained that traditional activities are essential for the conservation of the NtPs (Int03, Int08, Int09), and that tourist activities are complementary to maintaining them (Int08, Int04, Int21,

Int22, Int32, Int33, Int39). The managers of LAGs observed conflicts between tourism and traditional activities, with the economic losses faced by farmers due to the theft of fruit and mushroom picking (Int05) or invasions of farms that generate costs (Int21). However, according to the tourist companies, the fact that most of the property is private and there can be no tourist use is considered to be an issue for tourism (Int12, Int13). Thus, agrotourism appears to be an innovative response to the loss of traditional activities [133] for the conservation of agricultural heritage [134] and the revaluation of traditional practices and customs with additional income [46].



**Figure 14.** Unemployment rate (2019). Source: [85]; authors' elaboration.

Nonetheless, the development of agrotourism is complex [133], identifying a scarcity of initiatives of this type despite the insistence on them in the last two programming cycles of European funding [46]. On the other hand, carrying out fieldwork allowed us to talk about distortions in the labour market [110]. The latter is a redundant topic among agricultural entrepreneurs, who emphasise the difficulties of finding workers in the season due to tourism as a source of attraction that offers advantages over primary activities [126]. The conflicts between visitors and traditional activities result from urban visitors understanding that the countryside belongs to everyone [77,92]. This results in competition and is a source of conflict between antagonistic activities [39].

A network of tourism entrepreneurs and services is essential to generate local development [52,132,135]. However, according to the LAGs, the lack of entrepreneurial culture stands out (Int05, Int21). Tourism companies and business associations pointed out that the expectations of business creation have not been met (Int36, Int40). At the same time, some municipal stakeholders spoke of difficulties (e.g., population size, income, and investment) for entrepreneurship and the presence of non-entrepreneurial activities [103] (Int20, Int29). Out of the 1007 tourist activities registered in 2021, including accommodation and receptive companies/tourist activities (Figures 6 and 7), only 421 were business activities [79], representing an expression of scarce entrepreneurship [39,136], fragmentation, and individualism [19,35,39,46,77], frequently due to contextual limitations such as ageing or financing [45,67].

The institutional sustainability of tourism depends on continued funding [40,46]. Some municipal stakeholders pointed out that the municipalities do not have the resources for actions in the tourism field (Int17). However, they have directly invested in support

infrastructure without considering the implementation costs. Others have launched SIEs (e.g., information points or accommodation) with their funds and invested funds from subsidies or aid, which tourism companies see as competitors (Int12, Int15). Moreover, others stated that the issue is not due to financing but because aid and subsidies result in the same actions (Int23).

Similarly, business associations highlighted that sometimes it is not a problem of the amount invested “but of putting a value on what the territory has” (Int39). Most tourism companies indicated that although rural tourism is a priority objective (Int14, Int16), aid is scarce, as is the public and specific investment (Int10, Int15, Int16), resulting in a lack of SIEs, requiring the use of the companies’ resources (Int24). Thus, municipalities appear as facilitators of tourist activity [77], while micro-operations depend on scarce public European, state, and regional resources [28,39,136]. The available public funding is concentrated on opening tourist establishments without planning [21], location, and accessibility [45], and without evaluating their use [137], due to the belief that the resources generate tourist flows by themselves, forgetting that not all spaces have the same tourist potential [40], so there has been uneven success of the initiatives [45].

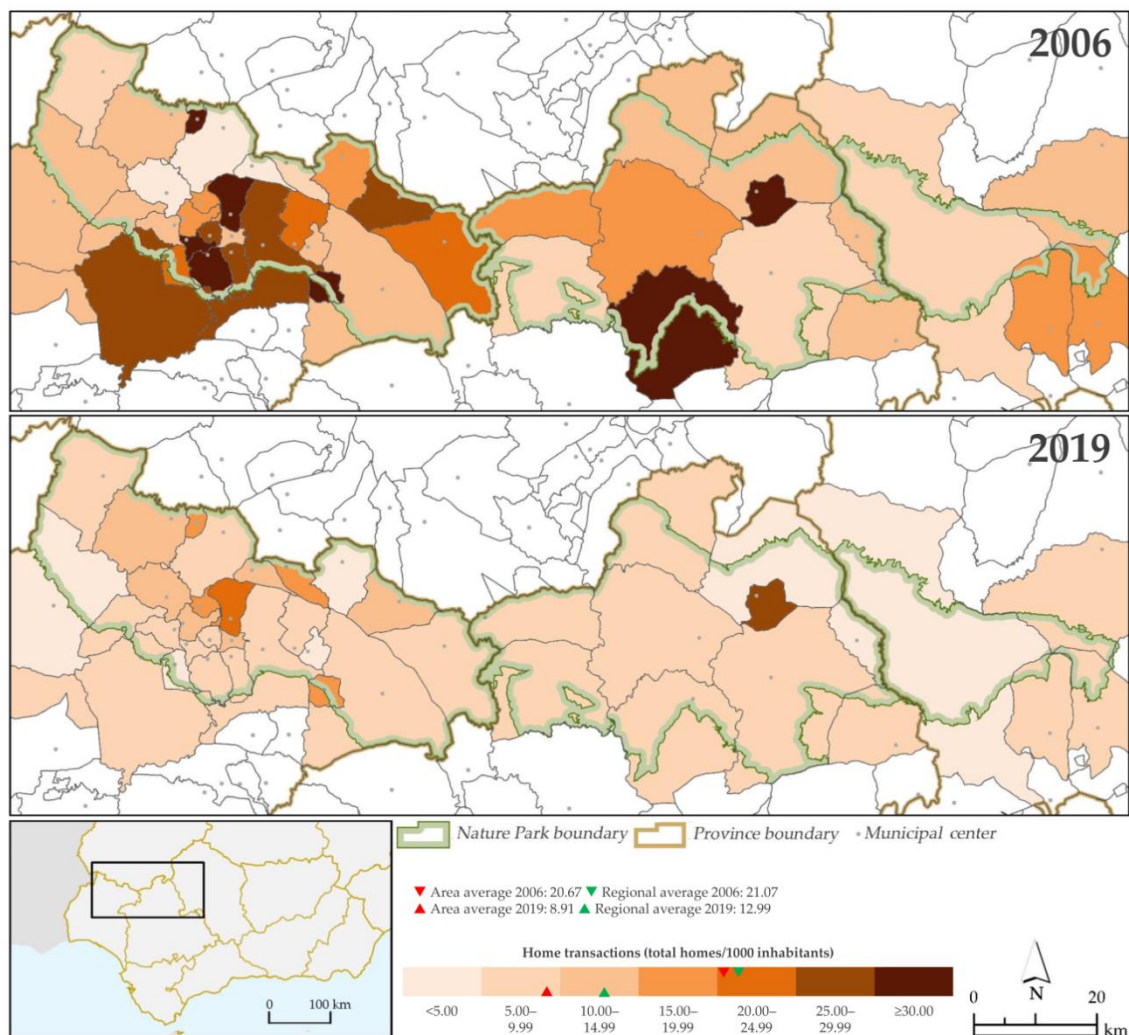
Investment constraints and opportunities [72,73] call for capital inflow [40,54,72]. Even acknowledging the role of LAGs and NtPs in the development of tourism, LAG managers (Int05, Int21) and some tourism companies (Int13, Int22, Int35) highlighted that external investments are flowing into the tourism sector through investors, speculators, operators, tourist chains, and intermediaries, with the acquisition of second rural and urban homes and the opening of accommodations. Real estate transactions indicate the flow of capital, e.g., second homes or housing. Based on the data from 2006 (real estate bubble) and 2019 (normality) (Figure 15), the area average is lower than the regional average, but it is significantly greater in aged, sparsely populated municipalities with demographic decline. In 2006, most of the transactions were for new housing, implying limitations for the planning of the territory, resulting in conflicts between land uses. In 2019, it corresponded to used housing, i.e., for rehabilitation, and there were no construction limitations in the town, except for historical sites. In 2006, the micropolitan effect [128] was detected and led the inhabitants of the most touristic municipalities to move their residences to other, less attractive nearby municipalities (SAPA), along with the deurbanisation of Córdoba in the Guadalquivir Valley (SH) and Seville (SNS). Generically, tourism is not perceived as a condition for the flow of capital towards the NtPs [72,73]. Despite their importance in the field (SAPA, SNS) [91,124,125], none of the informants referred to second homes for the urban population and the effects of real estate speculation (e.g., land and housing inflation) [39,110,124,125].

In contrast, the effects of gentrification can be detected in municipalities with a concentration of heritage [40]. Dependency relationships are generated by external decision-making, taking advantage of economies of scale, seeking short-term benefits, receiving subsidies, and reverse capital flows [39,77,136] that do not contribute to development [54]. On the other hand, large operations have proven to be of little viability, as was the case with the closure of public initiatives in the mid-2000s and private businesses during the international financial crisis due to their disconnection from rural tourism in NtPs and their low yields [54].

Poverty is a redundant problem in the PNA [15,23]. Only some of the informants directly referenced income (Int02, Int19, Int34) or tourism as a source of direct income (Int05, Int07, Int15, Int21, Int32, Int39). When analysing the data of the declared income variable between 1989—the time of the declaration of the NtPs—and 2019 (pre-pandemic time) (Figure 16), the area’s average income increased by 45.90%, but 26 of the 42 municipalities lost income above the average. As an LAG manager pointed out, “income has worsened” (Int01), producing growth in municipalities that concentrate more services (e.g., county capitals) and undergo residentialisation due to urban effects in SH or micropolitan effects in SAPA. Tourism does not show an immediate effect [63], nor in the medium term, since



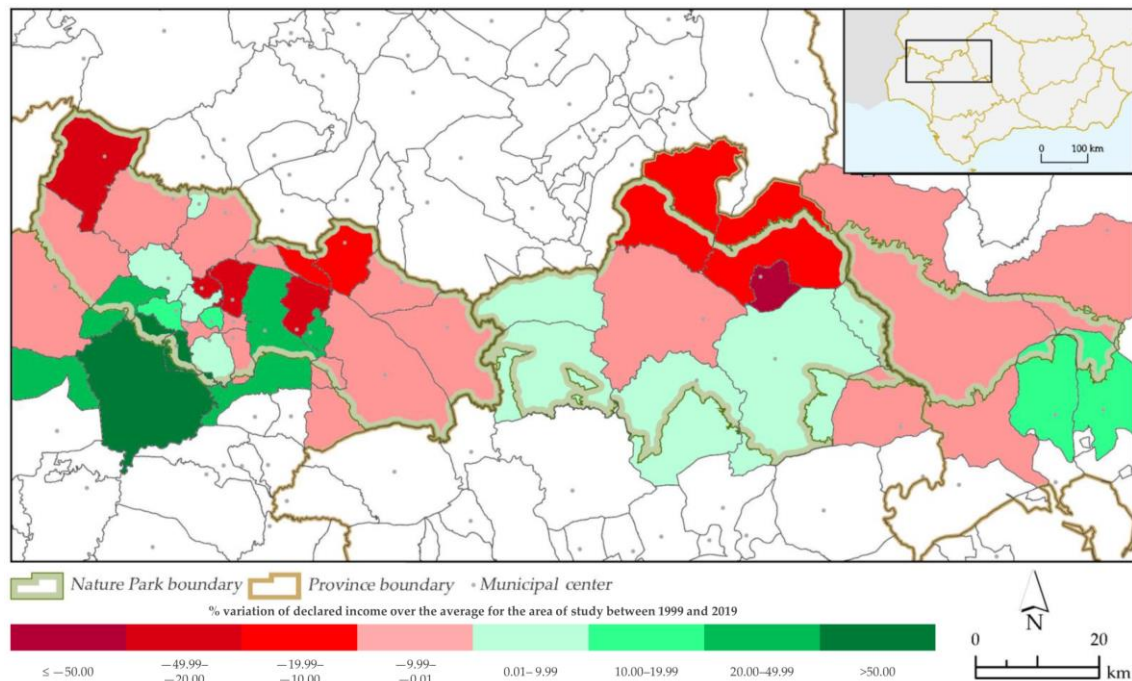
more tourism offers do not necessarily mean that income increases, playing a small role in changes in poverty [131].



**Figure 15.** Real estate transactions in 2006 and 2019. Source: [85]; authors' elaboration.

This economic dimension predominated in the informants' discourse [77,130], with the majority considering it to be the most important. It stood out among municipal stakeholders, characterised by geographical centrality and concentration of offers and attractions, tourism companies, and business associations—and even in a hidden way through references in actions or models. However, it reflected the preconceived scheme presence, given that the topics addressed in the tourism study were repeated. Still, the perception did not respond to the evidence of a multiactivity approach [39] that insists on economic growth indicated by profitability [77]. Profitability is a more important objective than development itself, without considering that this is anti-economic in PNAs, as it assumes the decline of natural capital [138] and shows short-termism [139]. In this sense, tourism is seen as a private economic activity [140] from which people can live in the ENP, without seeing it as an instrument of capitalism confronted with the sustainability [141] of traditional activities that are necessary for the conservation of the resources that are the main attraction [25]. The critical vision was found among those with humanistic, technical, and environmental training. These were those who established the need for development in NtPs to be socio-economic and who saw a disconnect between the measures that promote tourism/leisure and the agrarian bases of society [13], despite pan-tourism risks that suggest dependency issues [25] and monoculture [39]. This approach is based on multifunctionality [39], un-

derstanding that tourism is not an alternative to the problems of the primary sector but, rather, a form of diversification [35,46]. Faced with the expectations created in this way, the economic effects of tourism have been more limited than expected [26], not resulting in a solution to all problems [44,60,61].



**Figure 16.** The variation in declared income over the average for the study area between 1989 and 2019 (%). Source: [85]; authors' elaboration.

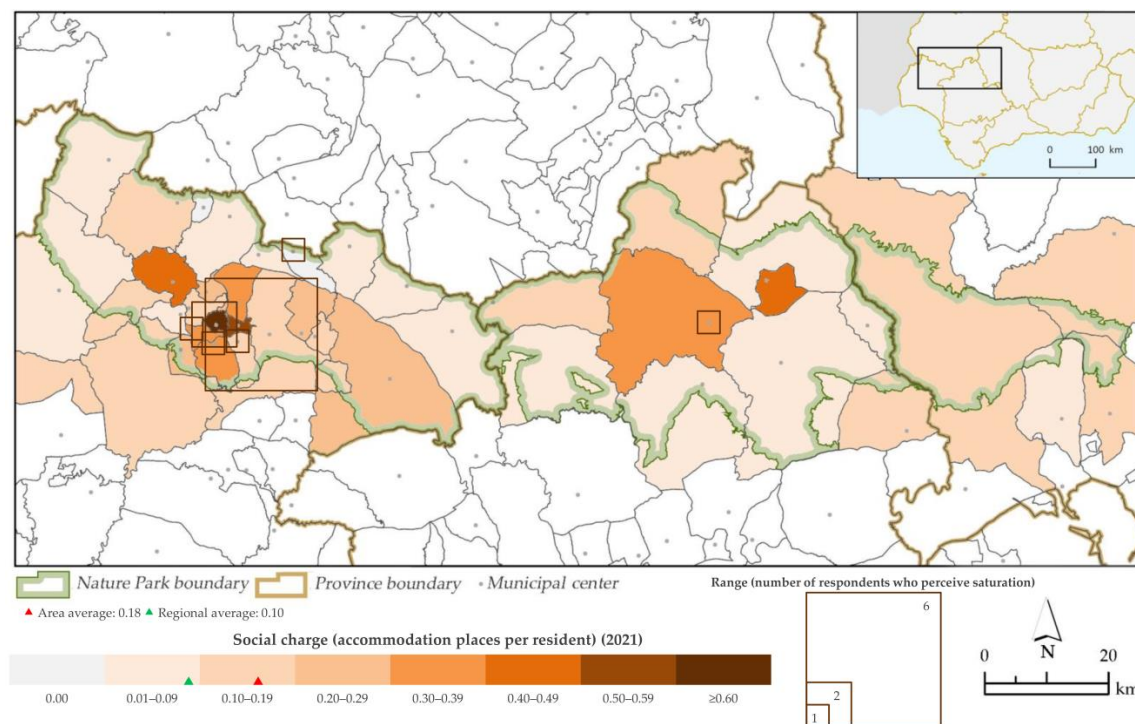
### 3.3. The Sociocultural Dimension of Local Development

The sociocultural dimension is essential to address the problems of tourism development and local development [40,83,142] in the PNA [24].

Improving the quality of life appears as one of the objectives of the NtPs [27,44,126]. For NtP directors, the foundation, and proactive tourism companies, the existence of NtPs has an intrinsic value and improves living conditions “for economic growth” (Int08) through new functions and diversification that provide sources of income and opportunities (Int03, Int08, Int09, Int11, Int35). For the managers of LAGs, along with most of the municipal stakeholders, tourism companies, and business associations, the existence of NtPs limits development expectations, and the population “does not live better or does not perceive it” (Int05) due to the imposition of plans from the top down, because the critical matter is nature (Int01, Int02). This interrelation with the economic dimension [77,78] is linked to the means to continue living in the place and not to achieve better places to live and visit [143].

Studying the social carrying capacity is essential to establish the host community's and individuals' capacity to absorb tourism inputs and functions without disrupting social harmony [144]. The social carrying capacity was a limited variable for the informants, concentrated in SAPA (Figure 17), where they referred to it with respect to saturation (Int05, Int07, Int08, Int09, Int27, Int30) in the places that have more urban services and attractions, even if there is no accommodation (Int07). The number of accommodation places per inhabitant (Figure 17) makes the social burden higher than the regional average, with a greater concentration in central areas (SAPA and SNS) and very high in municipalities with low populations.





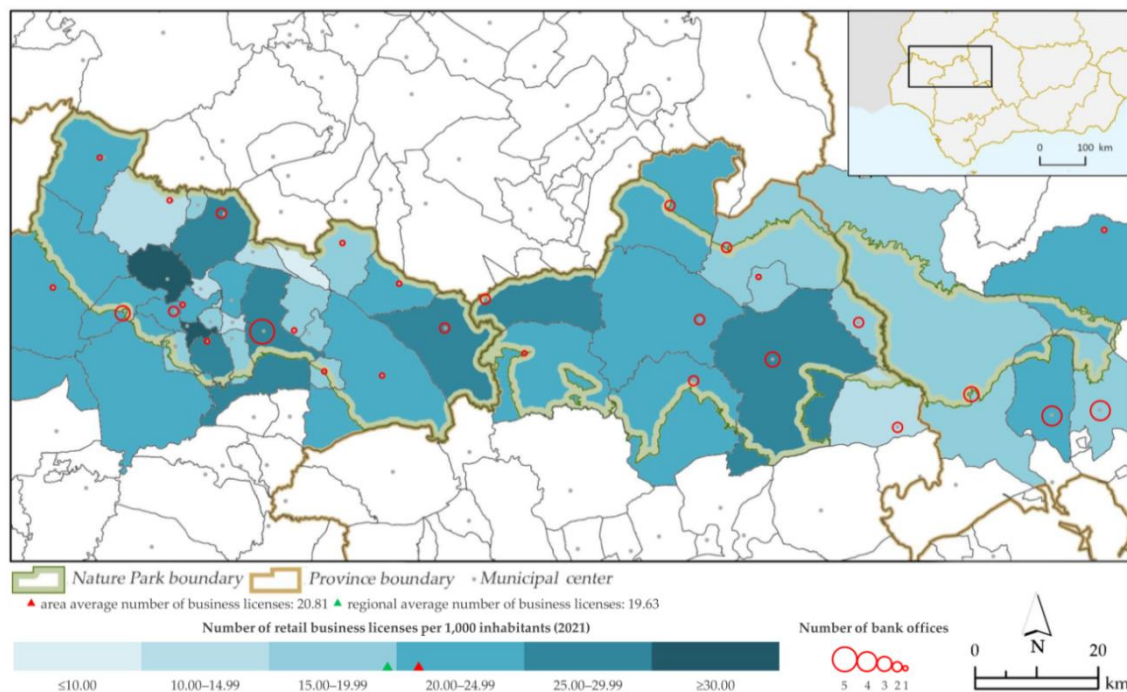
**Figure 17.** Social burden (accommodation places/inhabitants) (2020). Source: [85]; authors' elaboration.

Tourist and resident interactions generate different attitudes towards tourism [77,142]. Seasonality, the segmentation of tourism with activities not integrated into the territory, lack of planning, and coordination cause over-frequency, concentration, and over-dimension of the offer, producing negative social impacts on the host community population [39,56,144].

The provision, improvement, and maintenance of SIEs (public and private; not only tourism) and achieving thresholds [145] are important in the sociocultural dimension. Most of the informants highlighted the precariousness of the support SIEs through—for example—electricity networks, water supply, and waste treatment, due to the limitations of the PNA (Int21, Int25) and the fact that tourism has not only failed to improve it yet, but is also limited by that precariousness (Int21, Int25). In this sense, the lack of communication networks stands out, preventing “being connected” in places with neither Internet nor telephone coverage (Int01, Int25), hindering tourist activity and the life of the resident population (Int01, Int07, Int17, Int18, Int20, Int21, Int22, Int24, Int25, Int30, Int33, Int37). The continuous flow of tourists and visitors allows commercial services to develop in most touristic municipalities and county seats (Figure 18). However, foreign companies predominate in municipalities with a low population and many tourist accommodations, and commercial services stand out above the three NtPs and the regional average. Both banking and health services are linked to external thresholds, e.g., profitability, population, and public policies, which have not improved as a result of tourist demand. Municipalities have difficulties maintaining public services, e.g., recycling or waste collection [77]. Furthermore, they also struggle to obtain and guarantee private services, e.g., telephone lines or Internet, with limitations due to NtPs that expand towards the peripheries through service thresholds and costs [54], resulting once again in an economic vision.

Community empowerment is an essential indicator of local development, as it contributes to improving wellbeing in the long term [4]. Among the informants, there was a feeling that sometimes everything is done for tourists (Int01, Int05, Int10, Int31), and even the loss of local political power in favour of residents from outside (SNS) was verified, while in informal interviews the local population highlighted that they feel alien to the development of tourism. Thus, the local community is disempowered, feeling that it does not participate in implementing the activities when the priority should be given to their

needs and interests [39]. In contrast, the importance of tourism activities among women and young people in terms of entrepreneurship and job performance was detected, but it was more qualitative than quantitative and served as an example of proactive tourism companies [29,80,133]. Rooting and uprooting are endogenous and show the empowerment of small businesses [71], linked to neo-ruralism—frequently from other European countries. This is a new philosophy of life, according to Lordkipanidze et al. [135]: “model entrepreneurs” who generate employment and, curiously, establish roots through propensity for local consumption or hiring the local population [43].



**Figure 18.** Private services: retail trade and bank offices. Source: [85]; authors’ elaboration.

Valuing heritage produces a revaluation of local authenticity and identity [3,39]. Managers of LAGs (Int04) appreciated this process, while tourism companies and business associations (Int10, Int40) highlighted that tourism values heritage and traditional work, but they valued the territory as a “stage” for tourism activities (Int02, Int16, Int17, Int30, Int36, Int37, Int40). In the context of global cultural models [35], there is a loss of cultural identity among the local community as a symbol of sociocultural deterioration [4]. This was identified with the trivialisation of the territory [115]. In this regard, some farmers are willing to preserve tangible heritage on their lands [134] with agrotourism, which allows them to share local culture with visitors [46]. However, sometimes agricultural rituals are trivialised as simple representations disconnected from rural reality [146], not contributing to promoting the values of rural life or exchange [29].

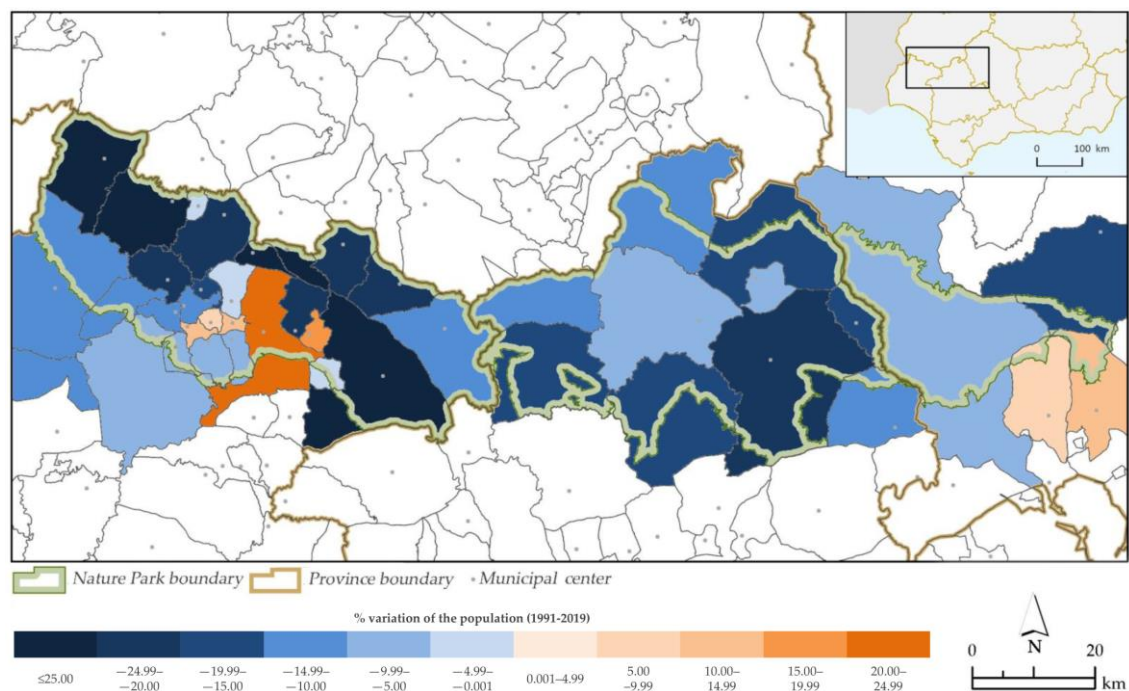
The scientific literature indicates that demographic rural tourism effects fix the population and counteract emigration [7,26,29,35,41,48], while slowing depopulation [29,46], attracting population [147], and offering disadvantaged groups—especially women and youth—opportunities to remain in traditional societies [29,80,133]. For the interviewees, the role of tourism in the face of the demographic challenge—i.e., ageing, depopulation, and emigration—was seen as a pressing issue (Int01, Int02, Int17) of particular importance. The interviewees similarly presented three visions:

1. Tourism contributes to fixing the population (Int18, Int35), slows depopulation, and increases opportunities for women and young people (Int04, Int19). It appears among all of the stakeholders and in the three NtPs. Still, the municipal stakeholders are the

most optimistic—especially in the municipalities that concentrate on tourist attractions and offers (Int18)—and are better connected (Int23).

2. Tourism has a limited effect on demography and does not contribute to the fight against depopulation (Int01, Int05, Int21, Int33), since the increase in the population (i.e., fixation and attraction) depends on SIEs (technological and communication), as seen during the pandemic (Int01, Int21, Int29). Some recognise that tourism is an opportunity (Int39).
3. Tourism does not stop depopulation (Int02), and emigration is the cause of depopulation (Int06). This is a vision of peripheral municipal stakeholders with little tourist offer.

The demographic data between 1991 and 2020 (Figure 19) indicate that only eight municipalities have gained population: six of them in SAPA and two of them in SH due to the deurbanisation effects of the city of Córdoba. The most touristic and best-communicated municipalities (SAPA) are gaining population. However, informal informants emphasised that the micropolitan effect is more present [128], generated by the development of supra-municipal services in the county capitals rather than by tourism and the emigration of young people due to the impacts of gentrification and urban speculation towards very small and aged municipalities.

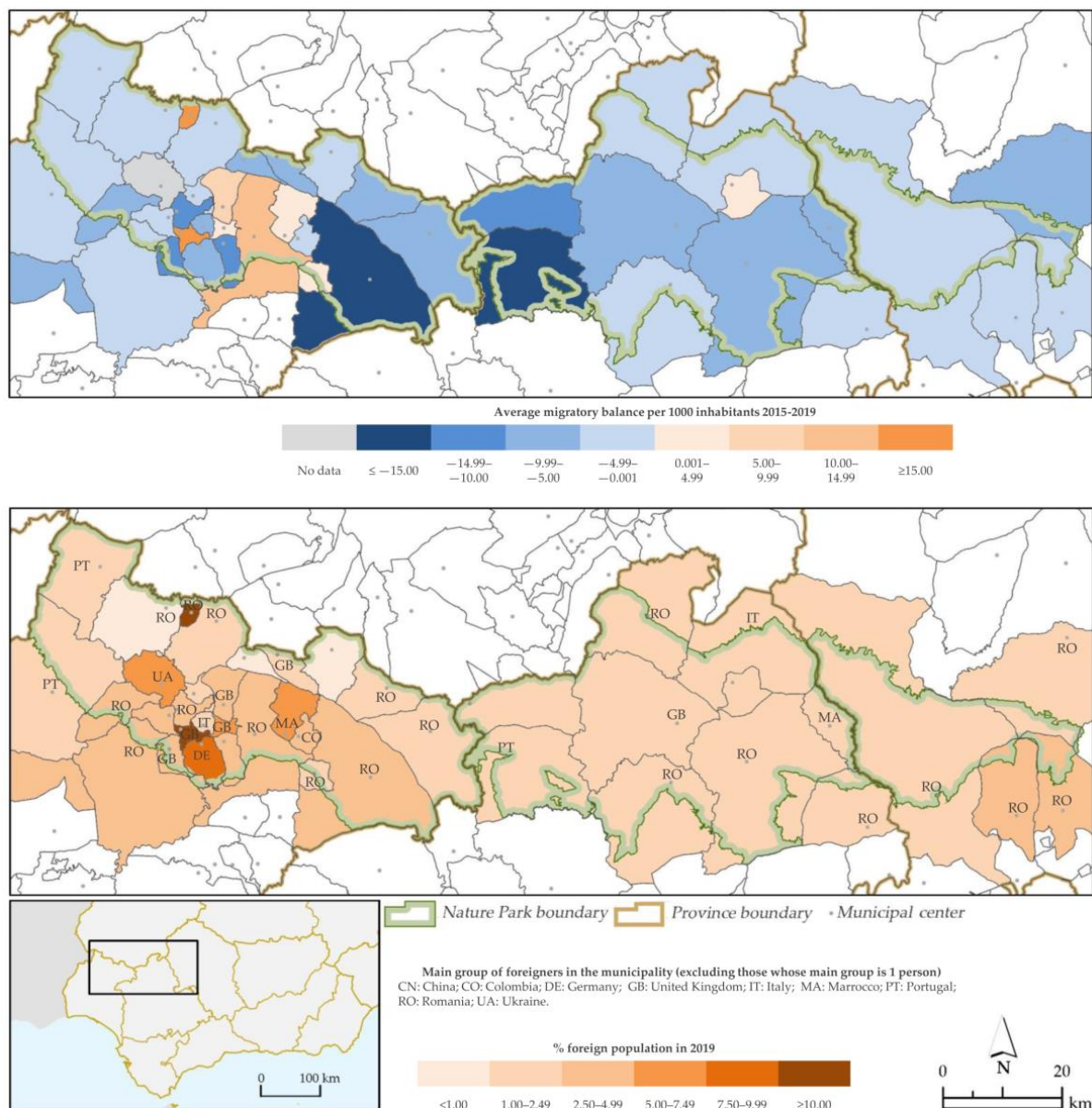


**Figure 19.** The variation of the population between 1991 and 2019. Source: [84]; authors' elaboration.

Within the demographic processes, the arrival of neo-rural and foreign entrepreneurs observed in other rural spaces occupies a prominent place [147]. The interviewees emphasised foreign entrepreneurs in SAPA and SNS (Int04, Int21, Int31; neo-rural informants did not talk about themselves). While foreigners participate in traditional customs and use, the vision of the other is still present, observing them with reluctance (Int10, Int21). In addition, young returnees appear to set up companies (Int26, Int35; they do talk about themselves). It stands out that all of them are proactive and dynamic, but also few in number. Considering the 2015–2019 period (Figure 20), the migratory balance of the area was negative, but there were great contrasts, concentrating the growth on SAPA and well-connected municipalities. Similarly, the micropolitan effect predominated (SAPA) with the residentialisation of nearby or accessible areas and the concentration of supra-municipal services generating dynamism [128]. Immigrants (2019) from Germany, Italy, and the



United Kingdom represent the main group of foreigners in nine municipalities—seven in SAPA (Figure 20).



**Figure 20.** Migratory balance for 2015–2019 per 1000 inhabitants (upper map), and percentage of foreign population and the main group of foreigners in the municipality (lower map). Source: [85]; authors' elaboration.

Returnees, neo-rurals, and foreigners have prior contact with the territory and decide to move. They start undertakings coinciding more with vital than with economic strategies [147], with a tendency towards territorial concentration [80], taking advantage of the financing of local or rural development programs and the opening and mobility process, thereby connecting with external markets [80]. In addition, immigrant settlements appear in abandoned or aged villages [123] with local-based tourism development [22]. Thus, the effects of tourism on demography are more limited than expected [29]. Tourism has energised the areas demographically but has not alleviated depopulation or ageing [39]. While the development of tourism would sometimes coincide with a slowdown in the decline or fixation of the population, a generalised process cannot be indicated [39].

The informants did not share homogeneous views on the sociocultural dimension that would allow them to be grouped according to their discourses; rather, the different topics were addressed differently. Therefore, this dimension is the most contradictory and weak [77] and appears to be interrelated with the economic one [77,78]. The interviewees addressed this in a limited way, compared to the importance that it arouses among the local population [148], as verified in informal interviews.

### 3.4. The Territorial Dimension of Local Development

Territorial cohesion is essential in local development processes [66] within the municipalities, as well as in the territorial results in the regional contexts that the NtPs and LAGs represent [149].

In theory, the favourable framework of LEADER for developing tourist activities has been the same for all municipalities [60]. It has enabled a more balanced development of the most marginal, disadvantaged, and isolated areas [35]. However, marked territorial imbalances in tourism development [30] are evident in the concentration of initiatives in some municipalities. Thus, the informants highlighted the existence of imbalances in tourism development that influence local development. These imbalances were expressed by all types of informants in all of the NtPs, especially in SAPA. Only the municipal stakeholders of the places with the highest tourist concentrations and some peripheral ones denied them (Int02, Int18, Int28). The private supply of services is concentrated in the central areas of the three NtPs (Figure 21) in the case of the accommodation supply in six municipalities. Service companies, even though they are few, are distributed throughout the area. However, they tend to be concentrated in the most central locations and have direct access to the NtPs.

The endowment of SIEs for public and social leisure and recreation use in the NtPs (Figure 22) depends on the regional ministry with environmental competences [21]. In contrast, the tourist endowment depends on the regional administration and its competencies in tourism [150]. From the responses of the municipal stakeholders, the non-existence of tourist information points (Int06, Int19, Int20, Int23) or actions of the NtPs that link the region with them stood out, which was accentuated in the peripheries (Int27). Public provision was more prominent and was more equipped in SNS and SAPA than in SH (Figure 22), with a greater concentration in the central areas of SAPA and SH, and a more significant territorial balance in the case of SNS. However, the non-existence of feasibility studies [27] was detected with tourist actions such as the construction of tourist villages and hotels at the end of the 1980s [150] that have been closed for more than a decade, as with other SIEs of the NtPs—sometimes outsourced or managed with mixed public–private partnerships [23].

To what did the interviewees attribute this concentration of activities and SIEs? In the first place, there was no agreement on the definition of concentration, since for some informants it means concentration of the offer, while for others it is about visitors (including hikers), in such a way that the offer does not coincide with that concentration (Figure 23). Stakeholders directly or indirectly attributed the concentration to different factors.

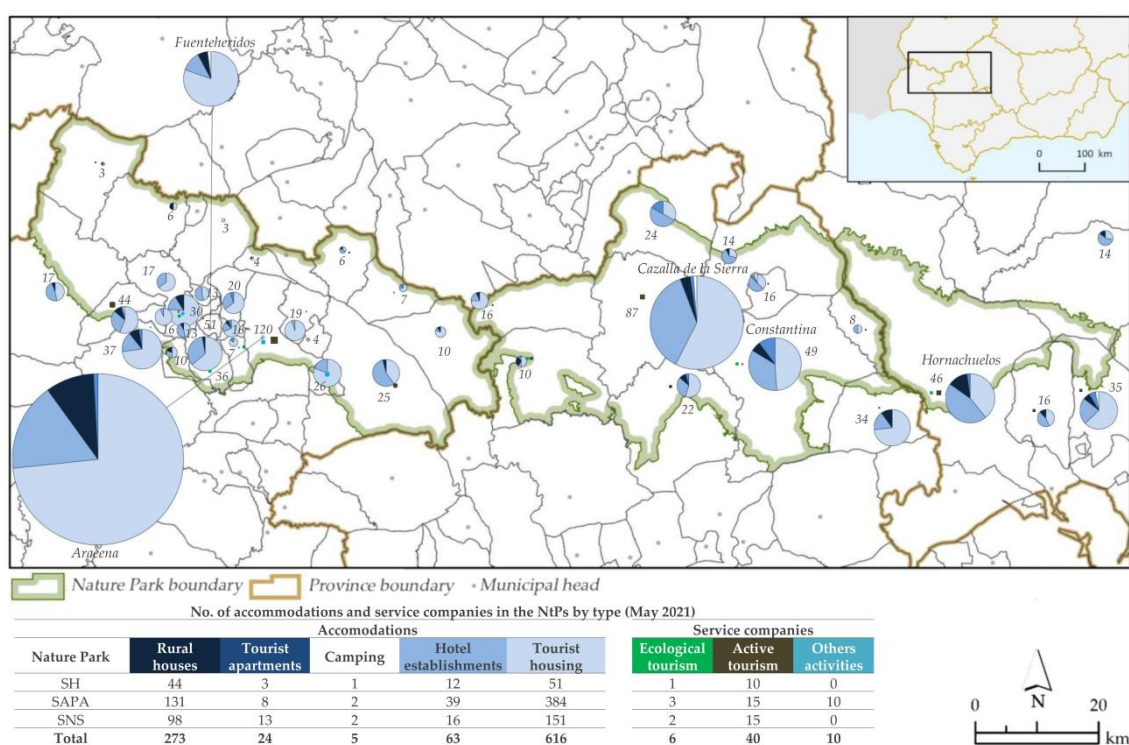
The accessibility, centrality, and proximity to the issuing markets (such as Seville) was the activity concentration factor highlighted by all of the interviewees. In this regard, the NtP directors and LAG managers pointed out the deficiencies in the transport and communications infrastructure, i.e., shortage, state of conservation, and absence of high-capacity roads (Int03, Int04, Int09, Int21). Similarly, businessmen demanded improvements to create SIEs (Int08) that add to the deficiencies or non-existence of regular transport services outside and within the NtPs (Int05, Int21, Int33, Int39). Municipal stakeholders perceived this issue differently. Since some of them are close to high-capacity communication routes or closer to provincial capitals and/or issuing centres, they do not perceive that it affects them (Int28). At the same time, it stands out among peripherals (Int06, Int07, Int27, Int30). Still, a repulsion effect due to proximity (Int04) was also detected—which reversed during the pandemic, as the interviewees emphasised—when discovering nearby places (Int18,



Int21). There was a general impression that mountain spaces are abandoned by competent administrations (Int03, Int08). Likewise, from one of the peripheral municipalities, it was highlighted that the particularities of the territory are neglected (Int23), limiting the tourist flow. It is a fact that public SIEs are developed parallel to the roads and in the accesses from Seville to the NtPs [129]. Connectivity is essential for developing tourism in peripheral areas [7]. They are distinguished between disconnected peripheral destinations, which have the challenge of establishing viable connections and intermediate destinations accessible by road [7,37], with the development of leisure activities and second homes [35] in SAPA and SNS, i.e., in the municipalities best connected to Seville [91,96,124,125].

Secondly, the interviewees emphasised the presence of cultural and natural attractions. Historical heritage was highlighted by LAG managers (Figure 2). The natural attractions were cited in SAPA and SNS, indicating their concentration and the potential of the locations [7,21,40,66]. Thus, as isolation increases, “the scale of attraction must increase, as well as its uniqueness factor if viability is to be achieved and increased” [41] (p. 379), since tourist environmental units need a minimum level of complementary resources for destination conformation [151] to guarantee the economic viability of tourism companies [77].

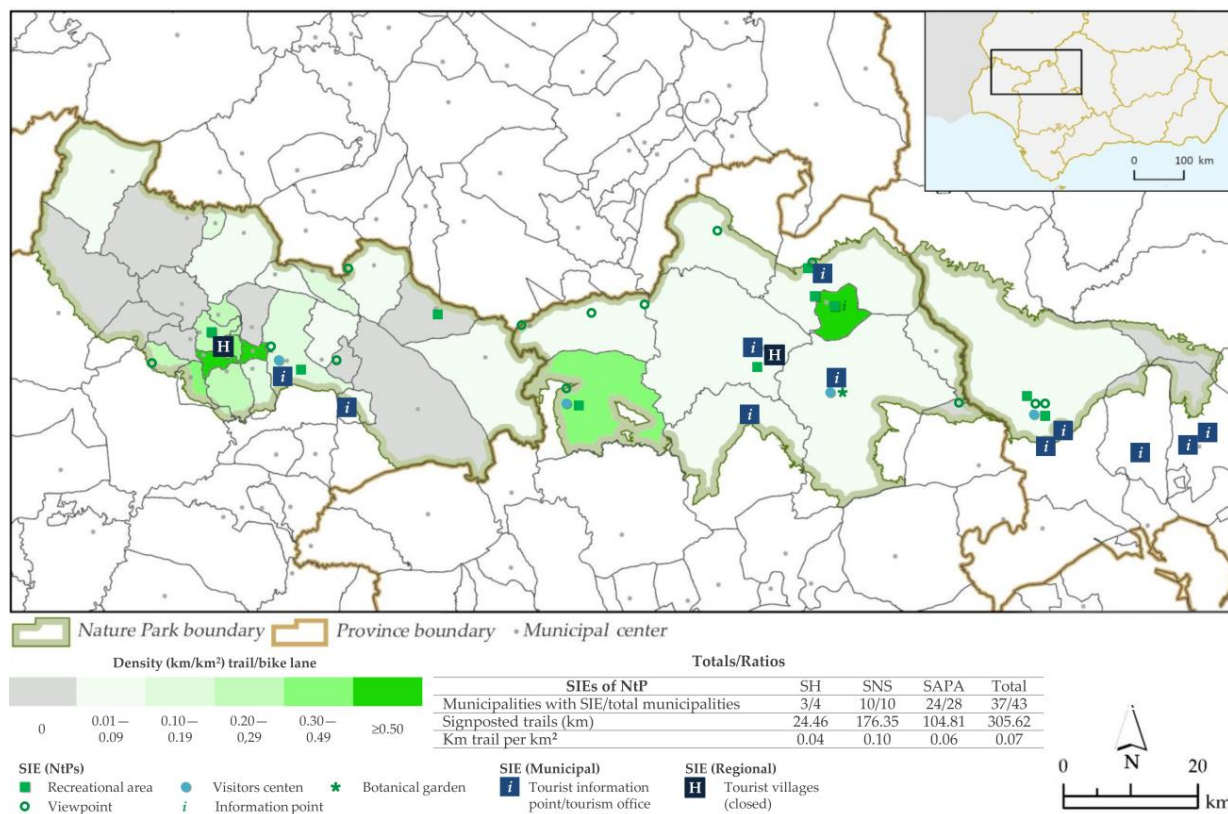
The accumulation of services in the county head appears as a factor of activity concentration in SAPA, i.e., micropolitan effects and proximity services [128], along with financial capacity (Int07, Int34). The deficiencies in public SIEs [7] stand out, as their creation is controversial in PNAs, since it is incompatible with the more significant numbers of tourists [20].



**Figure 21.** Tourist activities by type in the study area (2021). Source: [79]; authors' elaboration.

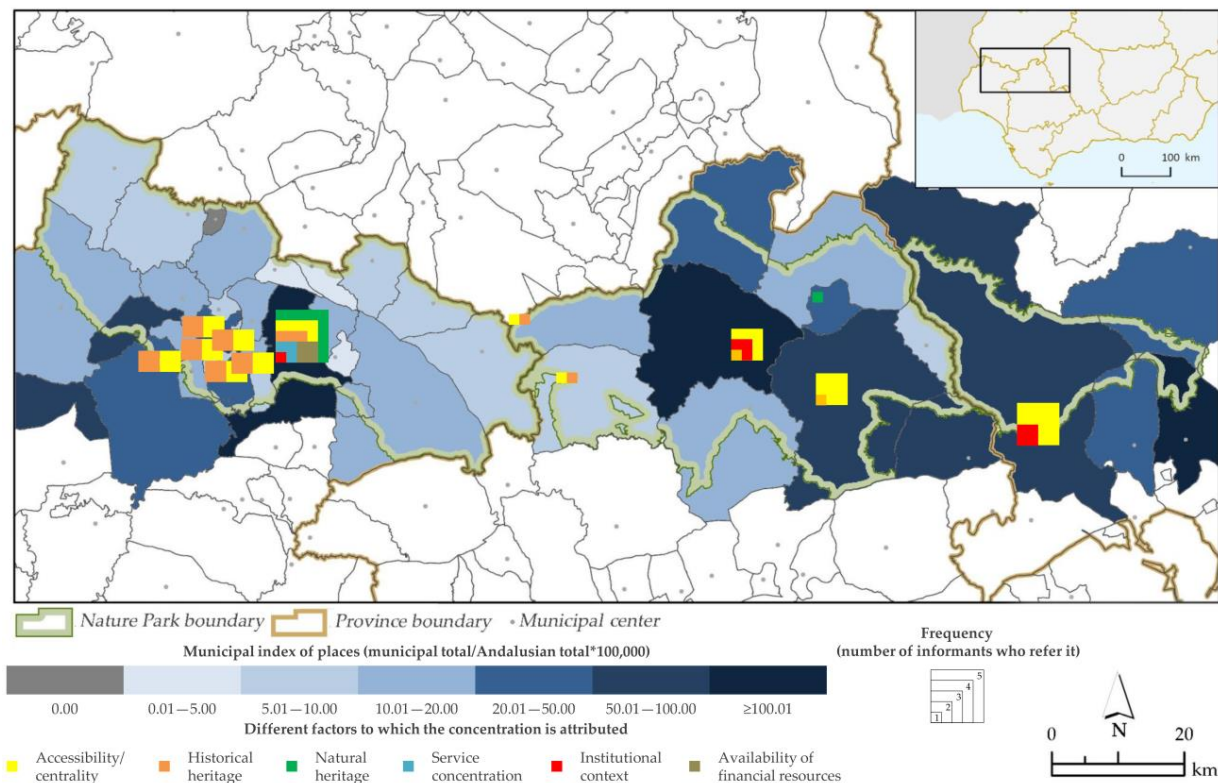
Sometimes, the informants indicated that the concentration is because some municipalities receive more aid and support from the LAGs and have a favourable institutional context (Int10, Int13, Int30, Int38, Int39). In this regard, several interviewees emphasised the existence of municipal lobbies in the LAGs (Int23, Int27, Int30) and the weight of certain municipalities in political decision-making at the provincial and regional levels (Int30). Accordingly, favouritism, additional aid, and institutional support result in a concentration (Int30), significantly harming the smallest municipalities (Int07). In contrast, the LAG managers talked about competition between municipalities and a lack of subsidiarity due

to the centre and periphery effects and autistic development. This prevents a shared vision and generates tourist micro-destinations (Int05), with the municipal stakeholders of the most touristic municipalities (Int17, Int18, Int28) and a business association pointing out that the concentration of activities in municipalities exists, but “it is not planned” (Int40).



**Figure 22.** Public services, infrastructure, and equipment in the study area (2021). Sources: [79,86,88]; authors’ elaboration.

Since their implementation, the LAGs have generated a joint dynamic with the NtPs to present investments and projects, favouring the best-communicated areas [21], with the greatest concentration of projects in SAPA and SNS [152]. This concentration replicates centre and periphery models corresponding to generating municipal lobbies in the LAGs [153]. They also occur in other formal cooperation networks (e.g., municipal associations) and harm the more minor, peripheral, and less-accessible municipalities [66], denoting the lack of coordinated actions [101] and indicating gravitation [4]. However, the favourable context is also given by the existence of leadership and community cohesion that decide the municipality’s tourist vocation or lack thereof [66]. Tourism allows for the development of tourist activities in peripheral areas related to urban spaces [6,41] and overcoming the obstacles of peripherality [7,41,48]. Although politicians insist that tourism can reduce regional disparities, expectations are overstated [48], and unequal distribution of touristic activity remains. Ultimately, it is “the more central and more connected actor capable of influencing its structure or its potential to grow or, on the contrary, remain static” [4] (p. 363). Additionally, there are marked imbalances in the promotion of rural tourism [30], with the interests of each party prevailing over the construction of a joint destination, and with the DSMBR being an opportunity, as highlighted by the NtP directors (Int03, Int08, Int09). The initiatives have been an uneven success, depending on investment, location, the presence of protected resources, and accessibility for tourist survival [154].



**Figure 23.** The concentration of tourist activity according to the stakeholders. Source: Interviews, 2021; authors' elaboration.

#### 4. Conclusions

The peripheral rural spaces are territories with a bleak future [44], with fewer opportunities and a structural crisis in which natural and cultural heritage, its conservation, and its enhancement have become the advantage comparison that generates diversification opportunities from tourism [53,54] to achieve local development [40,48,54].

The declaration of the three NtPs and implementation of the LAGs have been essential for developing the supply and demand of tourism. As a sample of a diverse rural society, stakeholders' perceptions differ and depend on their personal characteristics and external factors [155]. Agreement levels decrease from the centre to the periphery and are more homogeneous in SAPA and SNS than in SH. Overall, the municipalities' stakeholders participating in the development of tourism have a more positive view of it [39,70] and establish a correlation between tourism and development. Those with more training—including those responsible for successful initiatives—provide a critical vision when considering that increasing tourism implies a decrease in natural capital [138]. A deviation of the interviewees towards the economic dimension is often observed, perceiving tourism as a panacea [60,62]. However, the environmental dimension is limited and discursive, and the sociocultural one is ignored. Economic and demographic trends that are favourable to tourism are indeed observed. Still, they are sometimes subtle [55], since limitations, risks of specialisation and monoculture, environmental impacts, and adverse sociocultural effects that limit their contribution to development are also identified. In addition, tourism has not contributed to alleviating territorial inequalities, and the implemented initiatives have shown limited results given the concentration of activities and supply, which reinforces inequalities and centrality [18] as an expression of the paradoxes of development in the peripheries, in which some places become the periphery of the periphery. Thus, new functions and old problems coexist [2].

The expectations generated by tourism have not been met [54,55]. Thus, the results invite more reflection than optimism. Viable long-term economic activities through economic diversification that provides socioeconomic benefits to all interested parties—



including employment, income, poverty reduction, and services—are required [26]. In these instances, tourism complements development strategies [55] while protecting the environment in the NtPs [26]. In this regard, it is necessary to segment the tourist offer and increase the complementary offer [29], integrating traditional activities and promoting agrotourism [133,142]. Carrying capacity limits [107]—despite stakeholder resistance and being unfashionable [108]—and indicator systems [156] need to be established to ensure the long-term sustainability of the NtPs. Cooperation between stakeholders at different levels is necessary [157], as is the formation of territorial networks and clusters [66].

The limitations detected throughout the research address (a) to what extent to trust the opinions of the interviewees [76], who construct their reality based on their discourse and interests; (b) the lack of systematisation of the interviews with the local population, due to which the sociocultural dimension appears in a limited way; and (c) the non-existence of statistical series at the local level focused on tourism aspects—e.g., flows or employment—that limit studies of the scope of the activity.

In future studies, it will be necessary to address the fulfilment of the local community's aspirations [76] by systematising through the analysis of the local population's perceptions. In addition, it will be necessary to study the governance context to determine its influence on local development processes [27,158]. Finally, it is interesting to analyse gender issues, neo-rurality, and neo-endogenism [47] with respect to the propensity to generate local development.

Our study shows that conditions determine stakeholders' perceptions of local development, where reality differs from theory, and the data do not necessarily coincide with what is perceived. Processes, instruments, and perceptions do not differ from others studied, and the issues are common throughout the Western world. Our contribution is the use of mixed methodologies to study the pairing of tourism and local development to establish results, achievements, failures, and impacts, which can be extrapolated to other ENPs. The dominant idea about local development, focused on the economic dimension, conditions it. The paradox of basing development on endogenous resources and losing them because they are not sustainable activities, or due to not knowing how to manage them, can occur while detecting a gap in the opportunity. Once this is undertaken, companies do not necessarily head towards local development [52]. Stakeholders need to believe in local development as the objective of NtPs, since many act out of inertia, considering fashion or demand, rather than conviction and the achievement of objectives, requiring all participants to internalise all dimensions and effects in territories to achieve this long-awaited development.

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### Abbreviations

DSMBR	Dehesas de Sierra Morena Biosphere Reserve
Int	Interviews
LAGs	Local Action Groups
NtP	Nature Park
PNA	Protected Nature Area
SAPA	Nature Park Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche
SH	Nature Park Sierra de Hornachuelos
SIEs	Services, infrastructures and [types of] equipment
SNS	Nature Park Sierra Norte de Sevilla
UWGpSNS	UNESCO World Geopark Sierra Norte de Sevilla

### Note

- <sup>1</sup> Among the types of accommodation established by Andalusian legislation are “rural accommodation tourist housing” (VTAR) [102] and “housing for tourism purposes” (VFT) [103]. Both types with some differences between them represent accommodation without services, e.g., food, daily cleaning, or laundry. They are not legally considered business activities, but income from real estate capital. In practice they are not subject to fixed costs and only declare taxes according to their turnover.

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