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Tourism Development in the Framework of Endogenous Rural Development Programmes—Comparison of the Case Studies of the Regions of La Vera and Tajo-Salor (Extremadura, Spain)

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Abstract: The promotion of rural tourism is one of the measures that has aroused most expectations in the application of the endogenous rural development programmes promoted by the European Commission at the beginning of the 1990s. Using the case study methodology, this research aims to compare the implementation of the aforementioned measure in two regions which, according to their characteristics, could be considered as antagonistic examples: one, La Vera, has all the conditions to successfully develop its tourism sector; the other, Tajo-Salor, with an adverse climate, lacking in outstanding tourism resources and far from the main centres of demand, could be considered the opposite. The results of the research show the risks inherent in an excessive specialisation in tourism within development strategies. Paradoxically, in La Vera, the concentration of investment in the tourism sector has resulted in a higher number of failed and transferred projects, as well as the dissatisfaction of most of its tourism promoters with the viability of their businesses. In contrast, in Tajo-Salor, the results are more positive, despite the fact that this region has given less relative importance to the tourism sector.

Keywords: leader initiative; Proder programme; tourism promoters; failed projects; semi-structured interviews; rural accommodation; economic viability



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1. Introduction

This introductory section is divided in two parts, the first of which deals with a review of the contributions of other authors in relation to the research topic, while the second subsection defines the objectives and approach of the research.

1.1. Literature Review

The origin of European rural development programmes dates back to the 1980s, when the European Commission (EC), through various documents [1–3], showed its growing concern about the consequences that future reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) would have on the European rural environment. A few years later, with the first call for proposals under the Leader Initiative [4], the EC marked a milestone in its commitment to economic diversification and endogenous development in Europe's rural areas. What began as an experimental Initiative did not take long to consolidate [5]; so much so that, from then until now, the Leader approach has been applied uninterruptedly in the different periods of execution of the European Funds. Moreover, in its first calls for proposals, given the expectations that the Leader Initiative aroused in rural areas, certain European countries, such as Spain, were obliged to complement it with other development programmes that, based on the model and characteristics of the Leader Initiative, would meet the development aspirations of their rural areas [6,7].

From a theoretical point of view, the Leader approach have been studied by the European Association for Information and Local Development (AEIDL) [8], as well by a multitude of authors who, in view of the EC's concern for the development of the European rural environment and the approval of the Leader Initiative and other development programmes inspired by it, have tried to conceptualise the philosophy and principles of these programmes [9–18]. However, beyond the theoretical sphere, a quick review of the existing literature suggests that researchers have put the most effort into the analysis of the results achieved with the application of these programmes. This purpose has been approached from very different disciplines, such as sociology, geography and economics.

From a sociological perspective, Bourdieu [19], with a classification of the different types of capital that exist, Coleman [20] with his approach to the concept of social capital in educational settings, or Putman [21–23] with his research on the crisis of social capital in American society, were some of the pioneers in attaching importance to this issue. The concept of social capital and its relevance in development processes, the real participation of the population in decision-making based on the bottom-up approach, or other intangible aspects such as the profile of the promoters, are some of the questions that have aroused the interest of those who have tried to analyse the application of rural development programmes from a sociological perspective. Applying a synthesis of Woolcock's theories [24], Garrido and Moyano [25] attempt to design a series of indicators capable of quantifying the existing social capital in different regions; they do so within the framework of the application of the Leader II Initiative and the Proder I Programme in Andalusia. Buciega [26], Esparcia, Escribano and Serrano [27] and Saz-Gil and Gómez-Quintero [28] are other authors interested in analysing the relevance of social capital in the implementation of rural development programmes, however, this does not prevent that Shortall [29] criticises the secondary role given to the concept of social capital in development theories. Guiberteau [30] analyses the weaknesses of the bottom-up model, taking as a reference the application of this type of programme in Extremadura; along the same lines, but using the cases of Andalusia and Wales, are the works of Navarro, Woods and Cejudo [31]. Similarly, other authors, such as Osti [32], Esparcia, Noguera and Pitarch [33], or Navarro, Cejudo and Maroto [34], focus their research on the analysis of the participatory processes inherent in the implementation of rural development programmes. The contributions of Lukic and Obad [35], or Cejudo, Navarro and Camacho [36] who, more than in the projects implemented, focus their interest on the profile of the promoters, could also be framed within the sociological perspective; or those of Bryden and Munro [37], Pérez Rubio [38] and Castellano-Álvarez, Nieto and Castro [39] who, placing the emphasis on the immaterial contributions of the programmes under analysis, study what they call the “intangibles” of rural development.

This research focuses on the rural tourism sector. This is one of the sectors in which the emergence of the Leader Initiative and those other development programmes referred to above have raised the highest expectations. Bryden [40] was one of the first authors that showed his interest in the capacity of tourism to become an instrument of development; Patmore [41] or Butler, Hall, and Jenkins [42] became interested in the new demands that were being placed on the rural environment as a leisure space; Lane's [43] or Sharpley and Roberts' [44] research can be considered as authentic references in the conceptualisation and definition of rural tourism; Perdue, Long and Allen [45] opened the way for research into the perception of the local population with regard to the practice of tourism in rural areas. At present, following the line marked by the latter authors, the analysis of this question from its more sociological aspects is an important line of research. Thus, for example, reference could be made to the work of Quaranta, Citro and Salvia [46], who are interested in the capacity of the social capital of rural areas to become a driving force for innovation in the rural tourism sector; or to Muresan et al. [47,48] who, taking as a reference the case study of an eminently tourist region, analyse the perception and attitude of the local population towards the development of rural tourism.

Geography is another of the disciplines that is most interested in the study of rural development programmes and the analysis of their impact in very diverse geographical areas. An example of this is the work of Cejudo and Navarro for the province of Granada (Andalusia) [49]; Delgado and De la Fuente [50] take Cantabria as a reference to study the results obtained with the implementation of the Proder Programme; Ruíz, Frutos and Climent [51] analysed the application of the Leader II Initiative in Aragón and Alario and Baraja [52] in Castilla y León; Alberdi [53] is interested in the involvement of the business sector in the application of rural development programmes in the Basque Country; or Nieto and Cárdenas [54–56] study the application of the Leader approach in Extremadura. However, apart from general analyses of the results obtained by rural development programmes [57], geography has also paid special attention to the impact of these programmes on the rural tourism sector; in these studies, the scope of the study is also usually linked to a specific geographical area, such as the provincial or regional level. This is the case of research such as that of Candela and García [58], who study the capacity of the Leader Initiative to promote rural tourism in the Alicante mountains; or Hernández, Moltó and Rico [59], who propose a similar approach but extend their analysis to the Proder Programme and take the Valencian mountain areas as a reference. Similar research on the impact of rural development programmes on the tourism sector takes the province of Ávila [60], or the regions of Castilla la Mancha [61], Murcia [62], Andalusia [63] or Extremadura [64] as references, to give just a few examples.

Rural development has also attracted the research interest of economics from various perspectives. Many agricultural economists have been interested in the relevance of the rural development in the CAP reforms; examples of this are García Álvarez-Coque [65], Compés [66], Massot [67], Colino Sueiras and Martínez Paz [68], García Grande [69], Castillo Valero and Ramos Real [70], or Etxezarreta et al. [71]. With a more theoretical and transversal character, Delgado et al. [72] or Viladomiu and Rosell [73] study the evaluation systems inherent to the implementation of rural development programmes. The distribution by axes, measures and territories of the investments implemented under rural development programmes, their evaluation and impact, has also received attention from this academic discipline; in this line of research, analyses based on specific geographical areas are frequent, such as, for example, the work of Vargas and Mondéjar [74] when they analyse the distribution of European funds linked to rural development in the region of Castilla La Mancha (Spain), or the research of González Regidor [75,76] and Rangel-Preciado et al. [77] who, from different perspectives, study the implementation of rural development programmes in Extremadura (Spain).

In line with the research topic, the contributions of economists who try to evaluate the impacts of rural development programmes on the tourism sector deserve a reference. Thus, for example, we can mention the work of Mondéjar, Mondéjar and Vargas [78] who study the contribution of the Leader and Proder programmes to cultural tourism in Castilla La Mancha; Pérez and López [79], based on the analysis of the Leader Initiative, are interested in the contribution of tourism to the economic diversification of the Galician rural environment; Toledano and Gessa [80], taking the provincial level as a reference, analyse the rural tourism projects promoted under the Leader II and Proder programmes in the province of Huelva; or Castellano-Álvarez [81] and Castellano-Álvarez et al. [82,83], based on the case study methodology, go down to the regional level to study the limitations and potential of rural tourism as an instrument of development. Iakovidou, Koutsouris and Partalidou [84] and Apostolopoulos et al. [85] study the development of Greek rural tourism on the basis of the application of European rural development programmes; Marques [86] is interested in analysing the prospects generated by wine tourism in the regions of northern Portugal; Gatti, Incerti and Ravagli [87] deal with the same subject but focusing on the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna.

Leaving aside the question of the variety of disciplines that are interested in the analysis of rural development programmes, the methodology used for this purpose deserves a comment. As many of the works cited above demonstrate, case studies are a valid analytical

tool for studying the impacts of rural development programmes on the tourism sector. This is evidenced by the fact that many authors use this type of methodology as a basis for their analyses; this is the case of Lakner et al. [88] who, based on the case study of two tourist regions in Hungary, study the conflicts arising from the development of rural tourism and the role of tourist agents and administrations; Haghiri and Okech [89] use the case study of two Canadian regions to analyse the capacity of agrotourism as an instrument of rural development; along the same lines, the works of Giacco et al. [90] and Ciolac et al. [91] could be cited, referring to case studies in Italian and Romanian regions respectively. In short, the case study methodology has proven to be a useful tool to analyse different aspects related to the promotion of rural tourism in different contexts and different countries. In addition to those mentioned above, other works that could be mentioned are those of Brankov et al. [92], Shin, Kim and Son [93], Giannakis [94], Garau [95], or Martínez-Roget, Moutela and Rodríguez [96].

1.2. Objectives and Approach of the Research

Based on the aforementioned methodology, the aim of this research is to compare the strategies for promoting rural tourism in the regions of La Vera and Tajo-Salor. These two regions, although belonging to the same region (Extremadura, Spain), have very different characteristics, to the point of being considered as antagonistic cases. La Vera has enormous environmental, climatic, cultural and heritage resources [97] which, together with its relative proximity and good communications with Madrid, make it a paradigmatic example on which to apply the policies for the promotion of rural tourism implicit in the Leader Initiative or other rural development programmes such as, in the Spanish case, the Proder Programme; Tajo-Salor, for its part, despite having heritage resources of undoubted interest, does not have the same tourist potential, nor the same proximity to the main centres of tourist demand. Moreover, in the latter case, the tourism resources of the region must face the considerable competition posed by its proximity to Cáceres, capital of the province and World Heritage City which, as a result, has a powerful tourism sector and is the place chosen for overnight stays by many of the region's visitors [98]. The objective of comparing the tourism development strategies of these two cases will be approached on the basis of the analysis of: (1) the relevance that the development strategies proposed by the counties attach to investments in rural tourism; (2) the long-term survival of the private tourism projects implemented under the rural development programmes; (3) the profile of the tourism promoters; and (4) their assessment of the investments implemented and the situation of the tourism sector in their regions.

In line with Navarro, Cejudo and Cañete when they look at the continuity of the enterprises created under Leader I and II initiatives [99], or when they analyse the failed projects within this type of programme in the region of Andalusia [100], with its approach, this research aims to go beyond the information provided by official evaluations (often the main source of documentation for those interested in studying the issue); It aims to go beyond them, by focusing on the analysis of the impacts of rural development programmes on the tourism sector in a very long-term scenario. With this approach, this research would be taking on board the criticisms of Navarro, Cejudo and Maroto when, in reference to official evaluations, they consider that "they do not sufficiently take into account the impacts that these programmes generate in the territory" [101] (p. 349). In this endeavour, the methodology employed is essential; unlike most of the studies which, from different perspectives, attempt to evaluate the impacts of rural development programmes on the tourism sector, this research (and this is one of its novelties) adopts an intermediate approach between the merely quantitative and the strictly qualitative. Interviews with tourism promoters make it possible to assess their degree of satisfaction with the investments made and their assessment of their viability.

Given the heterogeneity of the European rural environment and the characteristics of the two counties taken as the object of study, the conclusions of this research, its desire to analyse the footprint of rural development programmes beyond the period of eligibility of

investments, may be of great interest to managers, technicians and promoters involved in the implementation and evaluation of rural development programmes in other territories.

After this introduction, the following section characterises the two counties chosen as case studies. In a third section, the temporal scope of the research is defined, and its methodological aspects are detailed. The results are dealt with in the fourth section and then, in the discussion, they are compared with the work of other researchers in the field. Finally, in the sixth section, the conclusions of the research are presented.

2. The Counties of La Vera and Tajo-Salor as the Subject of A Case Study

Located in the northeast of the province of Cáceres (Figure 1), La Vera is bordered to the west by the district of Plasencia, to the north by the Jerte Valley, to the east by the provinces of Ávila and Toledo, and to the south by the river Tiétar, which forms the natural border with the district of Campo Arañuelo. In total, La Vera covers an area of 885.98 km² and is made up of a total of 19 municipalities, most of which are characterised by a combination of high mountain areas in the north and fertile irrigated areas in the south.

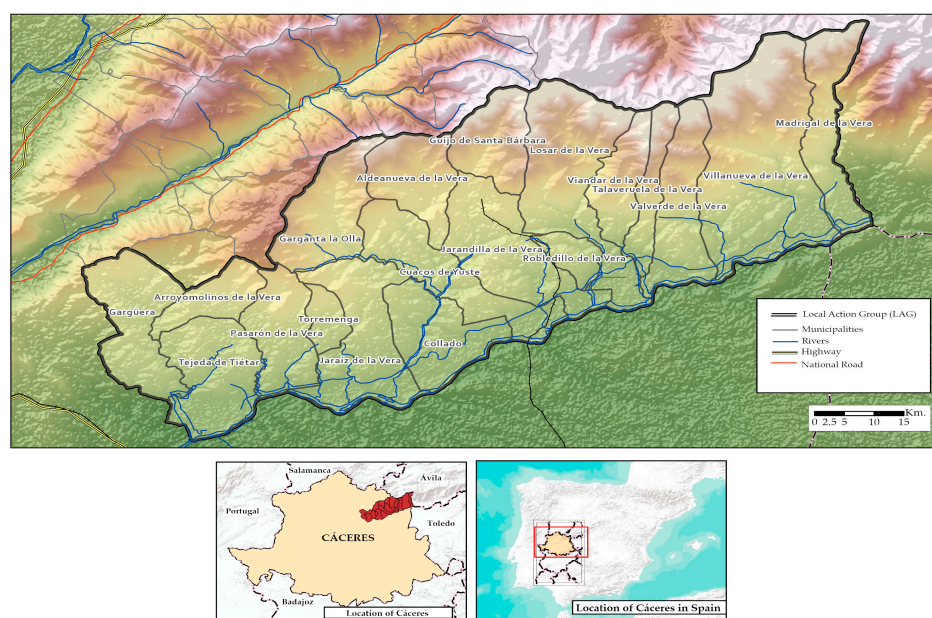


Figure 1. Location of La Vera region, Source: Own elaboration.

The main element that characterises the orography of La Vera and provides it with a notable wealth of scenery and a large part of its tourist attractions is the Sierra de Gredos mountain range. One of these attractions is the climate; La Vera has a microclimate characterised by milder temperatures than would correspond to its latitude. The Sierra de Gredos makes contribution to this: protecting the region from the cold north winds in winter and mitigating the high summer temperatures. The monumentality of the Gredos massif also provides the region's main tourist resource in the summer months: an infinite number of gorges with pure, crystal-clear waters embedded in its granite bed, giving rise to bathing areas that are highly appreciated by tourists. These resources, together with the luxuriant vegetation resulting from the abundance of water, have led to La Vera being known by many as "Extremadura's Switzerland" [102].

With regard to the tourist potential of La Vera, it is also necessary to refer to its enormous architectural, artistic and cultural heritage. Examples of this are the five municipalities in the region that have been declared Historic-Artistic Sites, and the Monastery of Yuste, a place chosen by Emperor Charles V as a place of retreat.

Although in La Vera there are those who differentiate between the areas of Vera Alta (more closely linked to the orography of the Sierra de Gredos) and Vera Baja, there is a

deep-rooted sense of regional identity in the area as a whole. Within the Local Action Group (LAG), the Association for the Integral Development of the Region of La Vera (ADICOVER) brings together all the municipalities of the area, as well as a representation of its social groups.

The Tajo-Salor region is located to the northwest of the Cáceres peneplain and borders: to the north, the Tajo river; to the south, the Sierra de San Pedro, whose foothills delimit the provinces of Cáceres and Badajoz; to the west, the Portuguese border; and, to the east, the municipal district of Cáceres, whose extension surrounds one of the municipalities of the region (Aliseda). The Tajo-Salor region is extensive (2176.04 km²) and is made up of 15 municipalities [103]. Although the Tajo, Salor and Almonte rivers flow through the region, their confining nature means that the dominant landscape is steppe-like, with a territory characterised by its aridity. The marked low water levels mean that many stretches of the aforementioned Salor and Almonte disappear for a good part of the year [104]. In contrast to the benign climatic conditions of La Vera, in Tajo-Salor, we find rigorously cold winters and a great summer drought.

Tajo-Salor (Figure 2) is an extension of the Trujillo-Cacereña peneplain, formed by slate, quartzite and heavily eroded granite. The sum of the soil and climate characteristics condition a vegetation made up of scrubland and pastureland, together with areas of holm oak and cork oak groves, mostly located around the Sierra de San Pedro [105]. Linked to these conditions of the physical environment, tourism resources deserve to be highlighted [106] such as the Tajo-International Natural Park; the crags which, in “Los Barruecos”, have been declared a Natural Monument; or the fauna of the penillanura, which has led to the cataloguing of a large area of the region as a Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA), given the presence in it of one of the largest concentrations of steppe birds in the whole of western Europe.

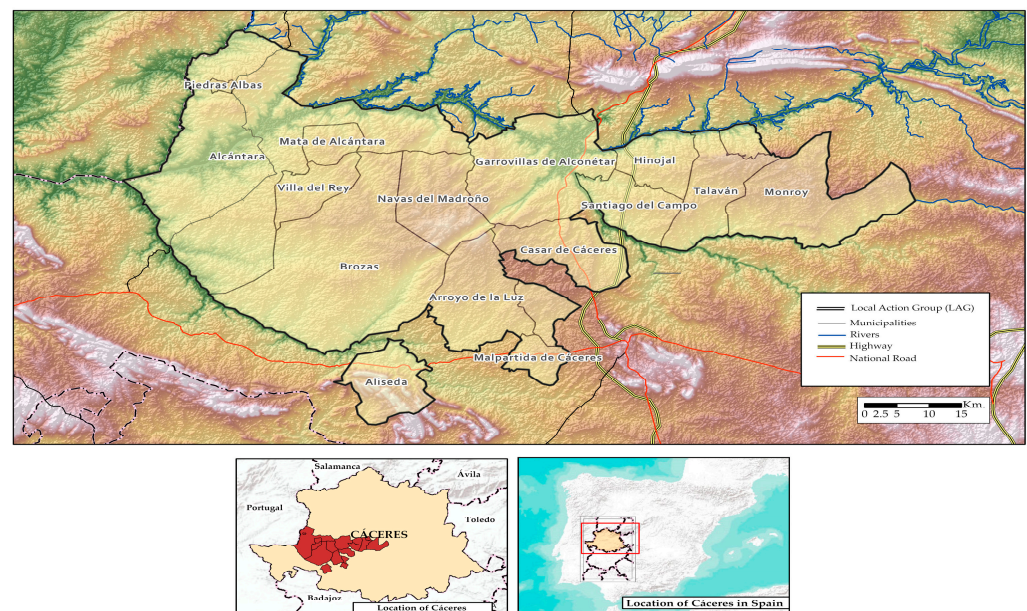


Figure 2. Location of the Tajo-Salor region, Source: Own elaboration.

In addition to natural resources, heritage resources such as the Alcántara Bridge (World Heritage Site), or the Plaza de la Constitución in Garrovillas (Historic-Artistic Monument) deserve a mention. However, despite these resources, and unlike what happens in La Vera, in Tajo-Salor there is no positioning of the region as a whole as a tourist destination, but rather an interest in certain resources or certain enclaves; the absence of a regional identity may contribute to this [98]. In fact, the current configuration of the Association for the Integral Development of Tajo-Salor-Almonte (TAGUS) is the result of a long evolution of the candidatures presented by the municipalities of the area to access the concession

of rural development programmes. Moreover, in the current region, three areas can be distinguished: (1st) The municipalities located to the east (Hinojal, Talaván, Santiago del Campo and Monroy), known as “Los Cuatro Lugares” (The Four Places) among which there is a sense of identity; (2nd) The localities located to the west (Alcántara, Brozas, Navas del Madroño, Villa del Rey, Piedras Albas, Garrovillas and Mata de Alcántara) which, together with Zarza la Mayor, managed the Leader I [4] and Leader II [107] initiatives within the Association for the Development of the Alcántara Region (ADECA); and (3rd) Those located around the city of Cáceres (Casar de Cáceres, Malpartida de Cáceres, Arroyo de la Luz and, to a lesser extent, Aliseda), which bring together most of the population of the region and which, together with the municipalities belonging to the “Four Places”, managed the first call for the Proder Programme [6] through the Association for the Integral Development of Salor-Almonte (ADISA).

3. Time Frame and Methodology of Research

3.1. Time and Scope of the Investigation

In order to assess the survival of tourism investments, it is necessary to use a long-term time horizon; a time horizon that goes beyond the period of eligibility for aid, during which promoters who do not maintain their operational projects would be obliged to repay the subsidies received. For this purpose, the time frame of the research will be the second half of the 1990s and the 2000s. This analysis would include up to three different programming periods in which the counties under study have managed various rural development programmes (Table 1). In the case of La Vera, the research would include the implementation of the Proder I [6], Proder II [7] programmes, as well as the first edition of the so-called Leader approach [108,109]. On the other hand, given the evolution experienced during this long period by the municipalities that today make up TAGUS, the implementation of the Proder I Programme by ADISA in the second half of the 1990s, as well as the application of the Leader + Initiative [110] and the first call for proposals of the Leader Approach [108,109], managed directly by TAGUS during the 2000s, will be the object of analysis.

Table 1. Programming periods and programmes implemented in the study areas.

Programming Periods	Programmes Implemented	
	La Vera	Tajo-Salor
1996–1999	Proder I	Proder I
2000–2006	Proder II	Leader +
2007–2013	Leader Approach	Leader Approach

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2. Methodology and Phases of Research

To achieve its objectives, this research resorts to the case study methodology [111,112]. Yin [113] recommends the use of this methodology when the element to be studied interacts with its context. This is the case here: it is not possible to separate the strategies for promoting rural tourism from the tourism potential of the counties described; this conditions the commitment of the development programmes to tourism investments and, in turn, these in turn provide their counties with a series of services that revalue these same tourism resources. For his part, Coller [114] considers that the application of this methodology requires that the chosen case has clear limits and is valid for contrasting what is to be studied. The municipalities that make up the counties of Tajo-Salor and La Vera are clearly defined; and, in relation to the suitability of the study area, the aforementioned counties represent two cases that could almost be considered antagonistic; thus, fulfilling the objective of analysing the characteristics and results achieved with the application of rural tourism promotion strategies in territories with different characteristics.

Methodologically, the basis of this research is extensive fieldwork in which it is possible to distinguish three phases or stages using different approaches:

- (1) A preliminary phase of contact with the technical staff of the associations that managed the programmes under analysis, as well as a study of the development strategies employed, especially those relating to the promotion of tourism. The investments made were analysed and quantified, their distribution by lines of action, the relevance of public investments within the measure for the promotion of rural tourism, the objectives of these actions and their synergies with private investments. Additionally, in this phase, with the aim of tackling a second stage of the fieldwork, the contact details of the tourism promoters who received subsidies from the programme's funds were located.
- (2) Analysis of tourism projects implemented and interviews with their promoters. In his studies on qualitative research, Yin [115] defends the usefulness of interviews as a research tool and source of information. He argues that the interview allows interaction with the interviewee, contextualising his or her opinions, and thus optimising the understanding of the information and assessments offered by the interviewee. Given the large number of private projects carried out during the three six-year periods under analysis, it was necessary to select a sample of them on the basis of the following criteria: (1) that most of the investment was private; (2) that the subsidy received had a minimum amount of €12,000; and (3) that this subsidy had a certain relevance in the overall investment made, representing at least one fifth of the project. As a result of the application of these criteria, a total of 42 projects were selected for the region of La Vera (Table 2) and 23 for Tajo-Salor (Table 3). Tables 2 and 3 show the total number of private tourism projects implemented with those selected in the sample, as well as the relative importance of the latter in the total investment in the promotion of rural tourism.

Table 2. Sample of private tourism projects in the region of La Vera.

Development Program	Private Projects	Project Samples	Investment Private Project Samples	% Sample of Private Projects to the Total Investment of The Measure
Proder I	16	13	1,734,496.52	80.39
Proder II	18	11	1,445,888.78	69.76
Leader Approach	33	18	2,966,147.97	79.44
Total	67	42	6,146,533.27	77.18

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3. Sample of private tourism projects in the Tajo-Salor region.

Development Program	Private Projects	Project Samples	Investment Private Project Samples	% Sample of Private Projects to the Total Investment of the Measure
Proder I	7	5	731,509.26	89.03
Leader +	15	12	2,018,857.20	84.35
Leader Approach	16	6	1,294,216.23	71.60
Total	38	23	4,044,582.69	80.53

Source: Own elaboration.

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, the criteria used to design the sample make it possible to select a group of projects representing 77.18% of the total investment in the rural tourism measure in the three editions of the programme implemented in La Vera and 80.53% in Tajo-Salor. As there are differences between the programmes implemented by the two counties and in the names given to the tourism measures within each of them, it should be clarified that the criteria defined for the selection of the sample have been applied to all the projects implemented within the “Agrotourism” and “Local Tourism” measures of the Proder I programme for both counties; The criteria defined for the selection of the sample were applied to all projects implemented under the “Agrotourism” and “Local Tourism” measures of the Proder I programme for both regions; “Promotion of Tourism in the rural world” for the implementation of Proder II in La Vera and “Tourism” for the

management of Leader+ by Tajo-Salor; and, with regard to the Leader approach managed by both regions, the projects studied were those included in the “Promotion of tourism activities” measure.

Among the possible interview models that could be used, semi-structured interviews were chosen, given that this interview model represents an intermediate option between closed surveys (incapable of gathering the contributions of interest that may arise spontaneously from the interviewee, in the atmosphere of dialogue and interaction typical of the interview) and open interviews (lacking a script that makes it difficult to focus attention on those aspects that are of most interest to the research, as well as the subsequent processing of the information).

The questionnaire used is made up of five parts: After a first part in which the profile of the promoter is defined (age, sex, origin, place of residence, level of studies, type of activity); the second block focuses on the characteristics of the investment (motivations, objective, amount, form of financing) as well as the relevance that the programme managers, and the subsidy received, had in the execution of the project. A third part looks at the contribution of the development programme to the tourism sector in the county and its articulation. The fourth section tries to obtain the promoter’s evaluations on the contribution of the development programme to the growth and economic diversification of the county, the evolution of the population, the level of income of the population, etc. Finally, the promoters are asked to assess the real viability of their projects, the situation of the tourism sector and the existence of a sense of county identity. In addition, in this last section, the interviewees are allowed to make any other contribution they consider to be of interest with respect to the issues addressed in the interview.

- (1) Triangulation of results. Given the qualitative nature of the research and the long period of time that elapsed between the implementation of the projects and the interviews, in order to avoid any biases that might have been incurred by the interviewees, a final stage of the fieldwork consisted of contrasting the conclusions initially obtained in the two previous phases with the assessment offered by the main technical managers of the programmes. They are privileged witnesses to the evolution of their counties and the development strategy applied to them.

4. Results

4.1. Implementation of Development Strategies in the Regions of La Vera and Tajo-Salor:

4.1.1. Relevance of Investment in The Promotion of Rural Tourism

Tables 4 and 5 show the distribution of the investment executed by the development programmes in the counties of La Vera and Tajo-Salor during the three six-year periods that make up the temporal scope of the research. The analysis shows that these are two counties with very different development strategies, especially in terms of the importance they attach to the promotion of rural tourism. As Table 4 shows, in La Vera, the resources allocated to productive measures are concentrated in the aforementioned measure. As a whole, this measure accounts for slightly more than 60% of productive investment and 40% of all investment implemented by the three development programmes. Therefore, in line with the tourism potential described in the second section, it seems that, in its development strategy, the district of La Vera has opted to concentrate its investment in the tourism sector.

Table 4. Investment by measures in the region of La Vera.

	Proder I	%	Proder II	%	Leader Approach	%
Rural tourism	2,157,490.16	40	2,072,606.99	38	3,733,694.87	42
SMEs, crafts and services	943,459.43	17	722,488.60	14	1,350,660.99	15
Agricultural valorisation and marketing	483,272.34	9	886,140.89	16	571,066.91	7
Productive measures	3,584,221.93	66	3,681,236.48	68	5,655,422.77	64
Recovery of rural heritage	1,227,340.71	23	1,097,471.54	20	1,898,051.36	21
Operating costs and assistance	608,532.98	11	666,967.20	12	1,297,185.49	15
Unproductive measures	1,835,873.69	34	1,764,438.74	32	3,195,236.85	36
Total investment	5,420,095.62		5,445,675.22		8,850,659.62	

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 5. Investment by measures in the Tajo-Salor region.

	Proder I	%	Leader +	%	Leader Approach	%
Rural tourism	821,601.20	14	2,393,457.27	19	1,807,502.00	19
SMEs, crafts and services	2,275,493.48	39	4,279,825.42	34	4,379,545.28	46
Agricultural valorisation and marketing	1,316,348.47	22	3,482,283.66	27	156,524.32	2
Productive measures	4,413,443.15	75	10,155,566.35	80	6,343,571.60	67
Recovery of rural heritage	936,749.45	16	865,719.48	7	1,443,123.98	15
Operating costs and assistance	544,212.56	9	1,710,748.42	13	1,731,478.83	18
Unproductive measures	1,480,962.01	25	2,576,467.90	20	3,174,602.81	33
Total investment	5,894,405.16		12,732,034.25		9,518,174.41	

Source: Own elaboration.

However, in the Tajo-Salor region (Table 5), the productive measure to which most resources are committed is that aimed at promoting SMEs, crafts and services. This measure accounts for 50% of productive investment (a percentage ten points lower than the importance of the promotion of rural tourism within productive investment in the district of La Vera). In the case of Tajo-Salor, barely a quarter of its productive investment is committed to the tourism sector. These are, therefore, two regions with very different characteristics and development strategies. In contrast to La Vera's specialisation in tourism, the Tajo-Salor region directs its investments towards strengthening its business fabric, without any one type of sector or economic activity clearly predominating in this endeavour. The proximity of many of the localities in the region to the city of Cáceres, the main economic engine of the province, is probably of some relevance in the application of this development strategy.

As Table 6 shows, the total investment executed by the three development programmes implemented in Tajo-Salor exceeds the total resources mobilised by La Vera by 30%. Despite this, the total resources earmarked for tourism development in Tajo-Salor barely represent 60% of those committed to this area by La Vera. This is a good illustration of the tourism bias that the latter region has given to its development strategy.

Table 6. Comparison between total and tourism investment.

	Total Investment	Tourism Investment
La Vera region	19,716,430.46	7,963,792.02
Tajo-Salor region	28,144,613.82	5,022,560.48

Source: Own elaboration.

4.1.2. Distribution, by Type of Activity, of Investment Earmarked for The Promotion of Rural Tourism

Having studied the importance that both regions attach to investment in rural tourism, it is now time to analyse the type of projects to which the resources have been committed. In this respect, although this is a productive measure, two types of action can be distinguished:

investments in which the promoter and the majority of the financing are private; and other actions with a cross-cutting nature and majority or entirely public financing.

Within private projects, a distinction can be made between: (a) investment aimed at creating or modernising rural accommodation; (b) investment in catering businesses; and (c) investment aimed at creating complementary activities for tourist recreation. In turn, although Figure 3 groups them all together in the same category, in the public actions, a distinction can be made between investments aimed at creating tourist facilities and signposting tourist resources (mainly footpaths and monuments); tourism promotion (advertising campaigns, presence at tourism fairs); and other promotion activities.

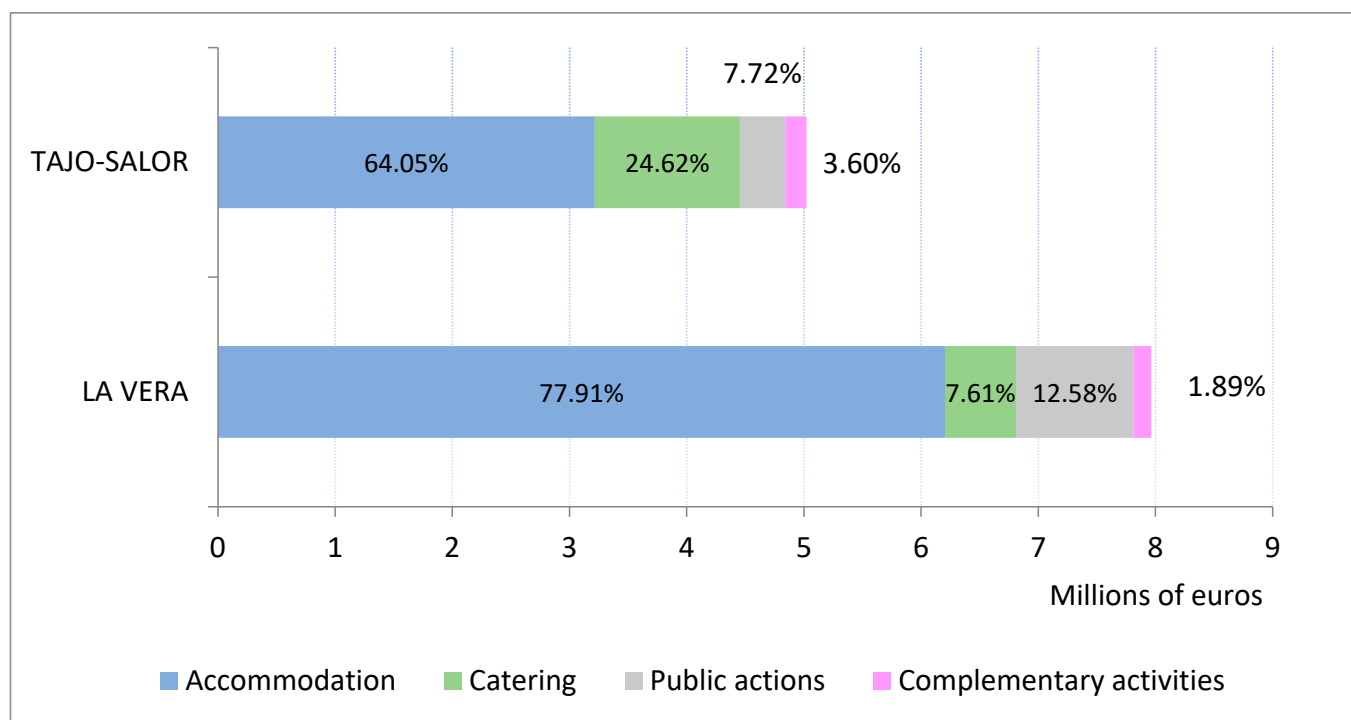


Figure 3. Distribution of tourism investment in the regions of Tajo-Salor and La Vera, Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 3 shows a double specialisation in the development strategy of La Vera: on the one hand, the aforementioned relevance of the rural tourism measure within the programme as a whole; and on the other hand, the fact that around 80% of tourism investment is concentrated in projects aimed at the creation and/or modernisation of accommodation; a percentage which, in the first edition of the Proder programme in this region, reached almost 90%.

In Tajo-Salor, although investment in the creation or modernisation of rural accommodation is also in the majority, its relative importance is not so high. This fact allows other types of projects, equally necessary for the practice of tourism, to have a greater presence. Is the case of investments in catering, which in this region account for a quarter of tourist investment (compared with barely 8% in La Vera), or projects aimed at creating complementary activities for tourists, whose relative importance in Tajo-Salor is double that of La Vera. However, with regard to the latter type of project, a common feature of both regions is the negligible importance of the investment committed to them.

The tourism specialisation of La Vera development strategy is also reflected in the importance of these other types of public and cross-cutting projects within tourism investment as a whole; they account for 13% of tourism investment in La Vera compared with 8% in Tajo-Salor. However, by type of action, the main difference between the two regions refers to the resources committed to promotional campaigns which, in La Vera, exceed 5%

of all tourism investment, while in Tajo-Salor, they represent barely 0.76%. Apart from the differences that this represents in absolute terms, the relative importance of the resources committed to the other two public actions is similar in both regions. The type of projects they implement is also similar. By way of example, in the case of Other revitalisation actions, in both counties, the aim is to enhance the value of their most characteristic resources. For example, in the case of La Vera, there is ongoing support for the “Emperor’s Route”, while in Tajo-Salor, gastronomic events related to typical local products such as Torta del Casar or tench have been promoted.

4.2. Failed Tourism Projects

Failed projects are a first indicator of the long-term viability of the investments. Table 7, based on the sample of projects in La Vera (Table 2) and Tajo-Salor (Table 3), details the investments that remain operational, those that have ceased activity and the projects that, having been transferred by their original promoters, remain in operation.

Table 7. Operational, failed and transferred projects in the regions of La Vera and Tajo-Salor.

LA VERA	Proder I	Proder II	Leader Approach	Total
Operational projects	10	8	12	30
Investment in operational projects	1,368,481.94	1,108,030.26	2,332,379.97	4,808,892.17
% of total investment in the sample	79%	77%	79%	78%
Failed projects	3	3	6	12
Investment failed projects	366,014.58	337,858.52	633,768.00	1,337,641.10
% of total investment in the sample	21%	23%	21%	22%
Projects carried over	2	3	2	7
Investment in projects carried over	240,691.13	562,125.53	159,620.60	962,437.26
% of total investment in the sample	14%	39%	5%	15%
TAJO SALOR	Proder I	Leader +	Leader Approach	Total
Operational projects	4	8	6	18
Investment in operational projects	649,420.6	1,565,978.58	1,294,216.23	3,509,615.41
% of total investment in the sample	89%	78%	100%	87%
Failed projects	1	4	0	5
Investment failed projects	82,088.66	452,878.62	0	534,967.28
% of total investment in the sample	11%	22%	0%	13%
Projects carried over	0	0	1	1
Investment in projects carried over	0	0	52,270.24	52,270.24
% of total investment in the sample	0%	0%	4%	1%

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 7 shows results that could be described as paradoxical: despite its tourism resources, the number of failed projects and the investment associated with them is clearly higher in the region of La Vera which, in turn, is the region that has given most importance to this type of investment in its development strategy. Compared with the five projects that have ceased activity in Tajo-Salor (accounting for 13% of the total investment of the projects selected in the sample), there are 12 failed projects in La Vera (representing slightly more than one fifth of the total investment in the sample). Moreover, in the latter region, the number of failed projects linked to the implementation of the Leader approach is twice as high as in previous six-year periods. Interviews with promoters may help to shed light on the reasons for this trend and confirm, whether or not there is a certain saturation in the county with regard to the promotion of tourism projects. Be that as it may, the number of failed projects linked to the application of the Leader approach in La Vera contrasts with the fact that, in the application of the same programme in Tajo-Salor, all the projects implemented are still operational today.

In the case of the transferred projects, as the original promoter (the one who implemented the project with funds from the rural development programmes) is no longer involved in the activity, the interview is not appropriate. However, the fact that the project is still operational makes it necessary to differentiate it from projects that have completely ceased their activity. In this type of project, the differences between regions are even more striking: compared with only one project transferred in Tajo-Salor (representing barely 1% of the total investment of the projects selected in the sample), a total of seven projects were transferred in La Vera, representing 15% of the investment in the sample (almost 40% of the investment in the case of the Proder II programme).

Based on Table 7, the sum of failed and transferred projects reflects very different realities: in the most touristic region, 19 projects (45% of those selected in the sample and representing 37% of the investment executed) have been closed or transferred, compared to six projects in the Tajo-Salor region (representing barely 14% of the investment). Undoubtedly, these data contrast with the tourism resources of both regions; the interviews with the tourism promoters should serve to clarify this apparent contradiction: has there been an excess of tourism specialisation in the development strategy implemented by the region of La Vera?

With regard to the characteristics of the failed projects, in Tajo-Salor they do not obey a specific profile since the investments that do not continue to operate are heterogeneous: the modernisation of a hostel, the extension of the restaurant of a campsite, or the frustrated creation of a tourist hostel, an inn and a rural hotel are the failed projects; the project transferred corresponds to the creation of a cultural café-lounge. However, in La Vera it is possible to define a profile of failed projects: of the 12 projects that have ceased their activity, seven were aimed at the new creation of tourist accommodation; if we add to these, the businesses transferred that had the same purpose, the result would be that 12 of the 19 projects closed or transferred (representing 89% of the investment) correspond to this profile.

4.3. Profile of Tourism Promoters

After deducting from the sample, the failed and/or transferred investments, a total of 17 projects would remain in the Tajo-Salor region for the interview phase (of these the one referring to the creation of a Riding School in Arroyo de la Luz, which is promoted by a non-profit association, must be excluded) and 23 projects who keep their businesses in operation in the La Vera region. The Table 8 summarises the profile of the promoters by type of activity, differentiating, in terms of their origin, between neo-rurals (those of urban origin who migrate to the rural environment without prior knowledge of it), returnees (former rural inhabitants who, having migrated in the past, return to their environment of origin) and natives (habitual residents of the rural environment).

Table 8 shows a defined profile of the “typical” promoter in Tajo-Salor: female, between 40 and 60 years old, native and with a basic level of education. Women outnumber male promoters threefold; there is practically unanimity regarding their native origin and the predominance of those with a basic level of education is also evident. For its part, in La Vera region it is also possible to outline a promoter profile: male, between 40 and 60 years old, native of the region and with a basic level of education. In terms of education, in this last case, this profile is very well defined, as the five promoters with higher education are either neo-rural or returnees.

Table 8. Characteristics of the interviewees in the regions of Tajo-Salor and La Vera.

TAJO-SALOR	Sex		Age			Origin			Formation	
	Man	Woman	<40	Between 40 and 60	>60	Native	Returned	Neo-Rural	Basic	University
Accommodation creation	2	8		7	3	9	1		7	3
Accommodation modernisation		1		1		1			1	
Catering	2	2		4		4			3	1
Other activities		1			1	1			1	
Total	4	12		12	4	15	1		12	4
LA VERA										
Accommodation creation	12	2		11	3	8	3	3	9	5
Accommodation modernisation	3	2		4	1	5			5	
Catering	4			4		4			4	
Other activities										
Total	19	4		19	4	17	3	3	18	5

Source: Own elaboration.

Apart from the question of gender, the most obvious difference between the profiles of the promoters in the two regions relates to their origin. In La Vera, although it coincides with Tajo-Salor in the fact that the majority of promoters are natives, there is room for other types of profiles, such as returnees and neo-rural promoters (in Tajo-Salor, there is no neo-rural promoter and there is only one returnee promoter). In most cases, this type of promoter makes significant investments in the creation of rural accommodation; in fact, as Table 8 shows, within this type of action, in La Vera region, these promoters have a certain relevance. This is the usual project of the neo-rural or returnee promoter, both in the operational businesses and in the five failed and/or transferred projects carried out by this type of promoter over the three programming periods analysed. In the interview phase, the presence of these promoters in La Vera led this research to look into their motivations, highlighting that, for many of them, their main motivation was not economic, but that other types of desires were fundamental in their decision, such as their desire to “change their life” or escape from the stress and demands associated with the day-to-day life of a big city.

Finally, it should be noted that, in both counties, the catering activities or the modernisation of existing rural accommodation were undertaken entirely by promoters of native origin.

4.4. Interviews with Promoters

4.4.1. How Does the Existence of Subsidies Condition the Implementation of Private Investments in The Tourism Sector?

At this stage of the fieldwork, one of the questions of interest to this research is the role that the possible receipt of a subsidy may play in the promoter’s decision process regarding the realisation of their investment. Figure 4 reflects the responses of the promoters in relation to this question.

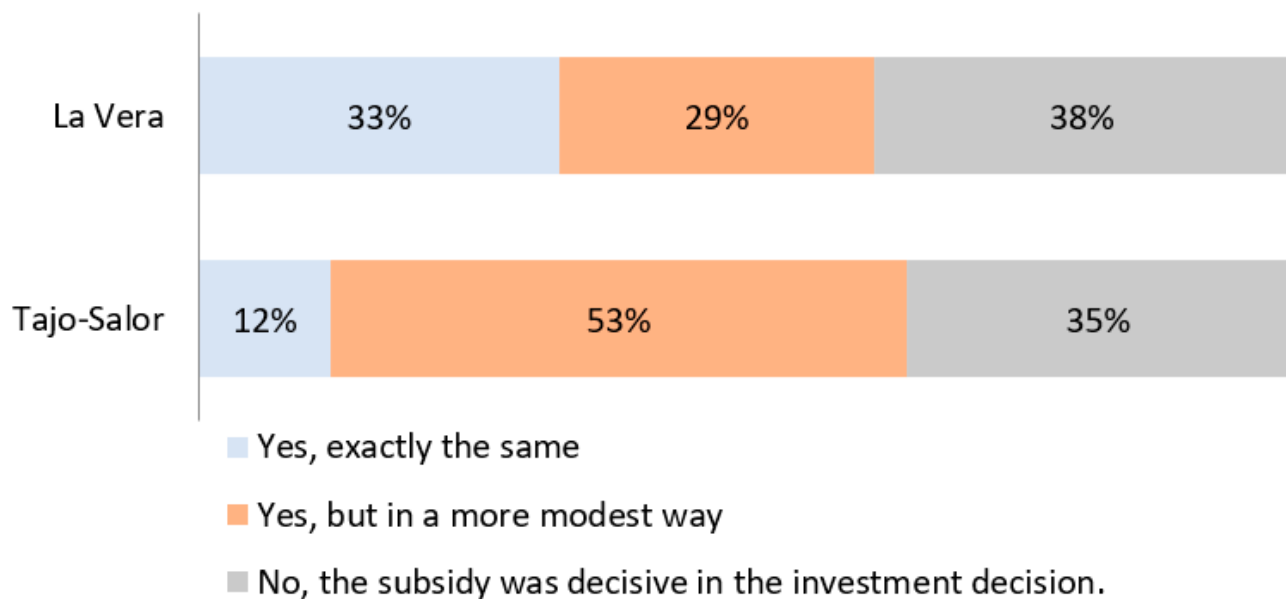


Figure 4. Would you have undertaken the investment without the grant received? Source: Own elaboration.

In both counties, the percentage of promoters who recognise that they would not have carried out their investment without the LAG subsidy is similar. Based on the relative importance of those who say so, it seems that these programmes have a certain capacity to condition the investment decisions of local promoters. However, in both counties equally or in one more than the other? The promoters' answers might indicate the latter: in Tajo-Salor, barely a tenth of the promoters say that they would have approached their project in the same way if they had not received a subsidy; this percentage is almost three times higher in La Vera, and this is because, in the latter, the promoters might be convinced of the viability of their investments given the tourist resources of the area. The lower relative importance of the promoters who, in Tajo-Salor, are convinced that their projects can be carried out, is offset by the greater importance of those who consider that without the subsidy, they would have undertaken their projects but in a more modest, more prolonged and, in short, less ambitious way.

Given the heterogeneous responses of the promoters, it does not seem possible to differentiate their investment decisions according to their origin. Based on the example of the neo-rural promoters in La Vera, the interviews show promoters who do not attach any importance to the question of the subsidy (remember that the motivation of this type of promoter is often neither exclusively nor mainly economic) and others who openly admit that, if it were not for the subsidy, they would not have made major investments in the expansion of their businesses.

4.4.2. Promoters' Assessment of the Viability of Their Investments

As Table 9 shows, in the Tajo-Salor region, most of the promoters are satisfied with the profitability of their investments. The new creation of rural accommodation is the only type of project in which a clear majority of the promoters have a negative assessment of the viability of their business. Of the three promoters who carry out this type of project and consider their businesses to be viable, two of them complement their accommodation activity with catering and cafeteria services; a third justifies their positive assessment on the basis of the accommodation model created (tourist flats) and the lower staffing requirements associated with it. In turn, the satisfaction of catering business promoters with the viability of their businesses is evidence that these projects can function on their own or as a complement to accommodation activities.

Table 9. Assessment of the viability of tourism projects in Tajo-Salor and La Vera region.

TAJO-SALOR	Operational Projects	Interviews Conducted	Feasibility Assessment	
			Unprofitable	Profitable
Rural accommodation (New creation)	9	9	6	3
Rural accommodation (Modernisation)	1	1		1
Creation of accommodation + catering	2	2		2
Catering	3	3		3
Complementary activities	2	2	1	1
Total	17	17	7	10
LA VERA				
Rural accommodation (New creation)	11	10	9	1
Rural accommodation (Modernisation)	8	7	3	4
Catering	4	4		4
Complementary activities				
Total	23	21	12	9

Source: Own elaboration.

In the cited region, the nature of the two projects classified as complementary activities conditions the assessment of their promoters. One of these projects, the creation of a service area for motorhomes in Casar de Cáceres, was conceived from the outset as a complementary and ancillary activity to the main one; this is how it is currently operating, despite the fact that, by its very nature, it is not an activity likely to offer high profitability. The other project concerns the creation of a Riding School in Arroyo de la Luz, the development of which is very positively valued by its promoters, even though it is a non-profit activity.

The interviews with the promoters of Tajo-Salor showed that the viability of the investments is not a controversial issue in this region. The six promoters who assessed the profitability of their businesses negatively all agree on the type of investment: the creation of rural houses in which only the activity of accommodation is carried out. However, up to four of these promoters recognise that their idea was never to make a living from their businesses, but that, from the beginning, they considered them to be a complementary source of income; therefore, despite their limited profitability, they consider their purpose to have been achieved. The other two promoters who assessed this question negatively, justified their answer on the basis of the financial burdens they assumed in the execution of their projects, “these are very long-term investments; I am retiring and I have not finished paying the mortgage. I want to sell the Casa Rural, I’ve been doing it for 21 years and I’m tired of it”, concludes one of the promoters who is most pessimistic about this issue.

The above table also summarises the assessment of La Vera promoters regarding the viability of their businesses. In the case of La Vera region, it was not possible to interview all the managers of the selected projects due to the lack of interest of the promoters of two of these projects in collaborating with this study.

Despite the differences between the two counties studied, there seems to be a certain coincidence with regard to the viability of the projects depending on their typology. In both regions, the promoters of projects consisting of the new creation of rural accommodation are those who are most critical of the profitability of their businesses. Only one of the promoters in the district of La Vera is satisfied with this issue (although he acknowledges that he complements the income obtained from his accommodation with other income from agricultural activity).

Within the accommodation modernisation projects, there is a clear difference between the assessments of those who only provide accommodation (the three promoters are dissatisfied with the profitability of their businesses) and those who, in addition to the aforementioned activity, provide cafeteria and restaurant services. The latter, as well as the

four promoters of catering projects, consider their projects to be viable, something in which they also coincide with the promoters of this type of business in the Tajo-Salor region.

In La Vera, a large majority of those who only work in the accommodation sector have a negative assessment of the profitability of their businesses. Unlike what happened in Tajo-Salor, the interviews with these promoters show that this is indeed a controversial issue in the aforementioned region. A good example of this are the answers obtained during the interview phase, which allow us to outline the situation of this activity in this area, as Castellano-Álvarez et al. [82] pointed out in their analysis of the limitations of rural tourism as an element of development.

One of the most frequent criticisms made by the developers of rural accommodation refers to the execution of large investments which, in reality, were not justified by the existing demand. A good example of this is the assessment of one of these promoters who, in addition, due to his knowledge of architecture, participated in the execution of many other rural houses: “all the projects I have designed have been with a projection and quality far superior to the expected profitability; the investments made are not justified and it will be difficult to recover them”. In the same vein, when assessing the contribution of the development programme to the rural tourism sector, another interviewee admits that: “many things have been done; another question is the real viability of these projects; I will never recover the investment I made in the rooms”. When a third promoter is asked whether she would have tackled her project without the subsidy granted, she replies: “Not at that time and even less so today; in fact, the investment made was not justified by the existing demand (...) We did not approach the action as a business and now we are paying the consequences, we have reduced all expenses to the maximum and, in spite of this, the numbers do not add up”. In this sense, when another interviewee assesses the viability of this type of accommodation, he states: “if a study were to be carried out on the viability of rural tourism businesses, the result would be that the vast majority of them are unviable”.

The fact that the profitability of these projects is not as high as desired is related to the oversizing of the investments made; but also, many of the developers point to a second factor: the shortage of demand. In this respect, several interviewees are very critical of the official statistics on occupancy levels. “The data that the administrations handle in relation to occupancy levels are totally wrong”, denounces one of the developers; “the statistics that speak of occupancy levels of over 20% are false”, corroborates another. Even a third, in relation to the shortage of tourists, says that “10–11 years ago there was more demand for tourism and moreover, it had more purchasing power. Now, tourists arrive at the Casa Rural and try to stay there, filling the fridge and spending as little as possible”. The seasonality of tourist activity is another of the issues to which the interviewees refer when they allude to the weakness of demand. “You cannot live exclusively from a rural tourism business. The winter is very long, and the season almost depends on the month of August”, says the promoter of one of the oldest lodgings in the region.

In its origins, the Leader Initiative proposed rural tourism as a complementary source of income for farming families who, on the basis of modest investments, could rehabilitate old rural buildings. It seems that, to the extent that the implementation of this type of project has moved away from this original purpose, the investments have lost their viability. It is a different matter that, apart from the economic aspect, there may be other motivations for these investments. All the promoters of neo-rural origin in the region of La Vera would identify with the response of one of them, who openly acknowledged that “creating a Rural Hotel was the way to change his life; that was the objective”; in the case of this promoter, the project was carried out without resorting to debt, which has allowed him to “survive” to this day (despite the low profitability of the project). “A Rural accommodation is not a business; it is more a way of life”, says another of these promoters.

The third of the issues with which the promoters of this type of business are most critical is the over-supply of rural accommodation. Moreover, when interviewees refer to this issue, they do not hesitate to blame what they consider to be an inadequate implementation of the development programme. One of the promoters, referring to the recent

resolution of a call for aid by the LAG, laments: “where most projects have been presented is in the tourism sector, we are changing the monoculture of tobacco for the monoculture of tourism, and we are seeing that rural tourism is not a panacea”. When asked if she believes that the development programme has been able to encourage other people to undertake projects similar to hers, she replies: “I’m afraid so, in the last ADICOVER call for proposals, twelve new tourism-related projects were presented, and in my opinion, they are not sustainable. In the region there is an excess of tourist accommodation; a bubble has been created around rural tourism and the truth is that you can’t demand the impossible; you can’t ask for wonderful accommodation, with huge investments that can’t be maintained, and the profitability? Tourism is not what it seems, and profitability is very limited, it is a complementary source of income, but you can’t live on that alone. The responses of this promoter reflect the general feeling of the interviewees regarding the imitation effect promoted by the development programme in this region. “In our village, for decades we have been the only accommodation business; now there are three or four other businesses”, acknowledges another developer.

Some consider that, “in its beginnings, PRODER was fundamental for the creation of accommodation, but, after that first stage, it was not known how to reorient the programme. More accommodation continued to be created, which led to an oversizing of the sector; there is now more supply than demand”. Along the same lines, other interviewees state that “we have gone from a situation in which there was no accommodation capacity to one in which there is an excess of supply (...) if I did not have to comply with the subsidy requirements, I would consider closing my business”.

4.4.3. Situation of The Rural Tourism Sector in The Regions of Tajo-Salor and La Vera: Main Handicaps

When this study asked about the type of clientele, the first promoter interviewed from Tajo-Salor replied: “Here, it is very rare for a tourist to come and see this area of ours; it is very rare indeed”. This response is very common among tourism promoters in this region. So much so that it might seem that in Tajo-Salor there is “tourism without tourists”; at least, if we consider tourists as someone who stays overnight in an area to get to know it and enjoy its tourist resources during their stay. The majority of promoters in this region coincide in their description of their guests: firstly, they highlight the importance of emigrants who maintain family and sentimental ties that make them return to the village in the summer, on public holidays (Christmas, Easter) or on special long weekends. Secondly, they mention those who take advantage of the central location of the region within the regional geography and the proximity of some of its localities to the Autovía de la Plata to stay in their establishments and, from there, visit the tourist attractions of the region, starting with the city of Cáceres, very close to many of these localities. “People stay here, but they come to get to know Cáceres”, admits the promoter of an accommodation in one of the localities bordering the capital. “Here the attraction is Cáceres and Monfragüe”, says another of the promoters with several accommodations in a town close to both sites. Thirdly, the promoters located in the towns closest to the Sierra de San Pedro or the Monfragüe National Park, highlight the importance of hunting tourism; within this group, Garrovillas de Alconétar should also be included, given the existence of an important small game reserve in this town; for these accommodations, this type of tourist is the main tourist during the hunting season. Although they are of lesser importance, some promoters also refer to tourists (normally of international origin) interested in bird watching (it should be remembered that a large part of the region is an SPA). Finally, some promoters refer to the importance for their businesses of overnight stays by workers who have travelled to or are passing through the area on a one-off basis, but who have no tourist vocation.

The varied typology of the people who stay in the establishments of the region, the scarcity of those who do so with the intention of getting to know and enjoying its resources during a specific stay, could be evidence of the absence of a tourist vocation in the territory. This is what some of the promoters point out when they recognise that “this area is not

very touristy either, we have a couple of “little things”, but they are very specific. There is no tourist product for the region as a whole”. In order to make up for this lack, it is common for those interviewed to agree on the need to strengthen tourism promotion: “It is necessary to promote the region much more, so that people come to see it, to get to know it”, claims the owner of a tourist accommodation; “Our region is not well known”, acknowledges another, who also highlights its remoteness from the main source markets; “The tourism potential has not been exploited. La Vera sells itself, but not this”, are some of the observations that reflect the feelings of the promoters. At the same time as denouncing the scarcity of tourism promotion, some interviewees were critical of the excessive publicity which, in their opinion, is given to certain products which are supposed to be associated with the region, such as *Torta del Casar*, and which, in their opinion, are no more than something representative of a specific locality.

The problems inherent to a peri-urban environment and the way in which this conditions the tourist and economic activity of the towns located in it can be seen in some interviews, especially those carried out with promoters of catering businesses located in the towns closest to the city of Cáceres. One of these interviewees sums up the idea perfectly when he states: “perhaps the towns that are close to the city suffer even more, because people go to the city to go out, to do their shopping, to dine”; in a very similar vein, a second promoter says: “we are very close to Cáceres; that is why, perhaps, more than one business is not started (...) people go to Cáceres”, she says. To such an extent, this type of promoters perceive this issue as a burden, that a third one goes so far as to say: “I regret not having set up the business in Cáceres”. For all these promoters, their usual clientele is the local population. However, a good part of the accommodation located in the same peri-urban environment recognises that its proximity to Cáceres is a notable tourist attraction. Despite having to face competition from tourist accommodation in Cáceres, or in other towns which, as part of the *Monfragüe National Park*, have developed their tourist potential, it is curious how this type of promoters seem to have been able to adapt their business strategies. Thus, for example, the tourist accommodation in the *Cuatro Lugares* has been able to take advantage of its relative proximity to the *Monfragüe National Park*. This idea is perfectly reflected by one of the promoters when she acknowledges that, among her guests, it is common for those “who try to stay in *Torrejón el Rubio* and, as it is full, they come here”; In a very similar vein, the owner of a hotel of a certain size located in one of the towns closest to Cáceres acknowledges that “when Cáceres is full and people are looking for something cheaper, they choose us”.

Another of the most common criticisms of the *Tajo-Salor* promoters refers to the role of their respective town councils; the interviewees demand greater involvement in tourism development, greater efforts in the signposting, conservation and recovery of tourist resources, and in the dynamisation of their municipalities; but, most especially, the local entities are criticised for their cumbersome bureaucracy. One of the promoters sums up this criticism when she states: “The Town Council is part of the problem, rather than the solution. The paperwork they demand from you is horrendous (...) It took me three years from the time I started the project to the time I started it”.

The seasonal nature of tourist activity (which some promoters limit to the summer months, public holidays and special days); the lack of valorisation and signposting of natural resources (hiking routes) and heritage; the absence of complementary activities for tourists; the shortage of skilled labour for the provision of catering services; and the proliferation of dwellings that are rented for tourist use without being so, are some of the other problems which, according to those interviewed, negatively condition the development of tourism in this region.

When considering the handicaps facing the development of the tourism sector in *Tajo-Salor*, it is necessary to refer to the existence of a sense of regional identity. If the aim is to promote the territory as a whole, it is clear that the existence of this idea of a region will be relevant. However, the interviews show that, among the *Tajo-Salor* tourism promoters, there is no such feeling of regional identity and/or belonging. None of those interviewed

identifies with the current regional configuration; 10 of the 17 promoters (58%) deny this feeling; and all those who respond positively, qualify their answer to identify their region with the different natural areas that currently make up the Tajo/Salor/Almonte region. Thus, the promoters of the municipalities located to the west of the region, who consider that this sense of belonging does exist, believe that it refers (only) to the localities that have historically made up the Alcántara region. The promoters of the Cuatro Lugares reason their response in the same sense but referring to these four localities; and those of the municipalities closest to Cáceres state that they lack this county perspective, to the extent that some of them go so far as to say: “here the head of the county is Cáceres”. The absence of elements representing the region as a whole, the distances between the different municipalities (more than 100 km separate the towns of Monroy and Piedras Albas), or the existence of a deep-rooted localist sentiment, are some of the reasons given by those promoters who rule out the existence of this sense of regional identity.

With regard to the region of La Vera, the analysis of the situation of the sector by the tourism promoters cannot ignore the issues relating to the viability of the accommodation businesses set out in the previous section. However, apart from this, the interviewees also point to a series of problems which, in their opinion, hinder the development of this sector. The role of public administrations, especially the regional one, is often criticised by promoters who, among other issues, denounce overwhelming bureaucracy, excessive legal obstacles, or the imposition of a conservationist dogma by the administration. As an example of these criticisms, the following reflections are worth mentioning: “The processing of the files by the Junta de Extremadura is disastrous, slow and cumbersome”, says one of the interviewees; “The Junta de Extremadura is demanding what is not required anywhere else in the world (...) They force us to work outside the law”, complains another; “Here the bureaucracy is only to sanction; not to help”, laments a third. Some promoters, who conceived their accommodation businesses as a complementary source of income, complain that excessive legalism is undermining the original philosophy of the development programmes, when they referred to the modest rehabilitation of rural buildings. These promoters criticise the fact that strict compliance with the various regulations obliges them to make substantial investments, so that “it is not enough to reform an “enramá”; the administration has made it much more difficult”, says one of the promoters; “I did this with the aim of supplementing income, but then the administrative requirements are those of any other larger tourist business”, criticises another. This opinion is widespread among developers who consider the administration “a burden” in the execution of their investments. “It’s a pity that you have money, that you have initiative and that you can only do something when the official on duty wants you to (...) I have to comply with the same regulations regarding the swimming pool as the Hotel V Centenario in Cáceres. It doesn’t make any sense”, reflects one of the promoters interviewed.

La Vera is an established tourist destination. Proof of this is the diversity of geographical origins of those who come to visit and get to know it from both within and outside the regional and national borders. It is therefore the same scenario as the Tajo-Salor region (where, remember, the idea of “tourism without tourists” was put forward). However, the type of tourist that La Vera receives is another of the most frequent criticisms among the promoters interviewed, who are very reluctant to see the region specialise in low-income mass tourism. “There is a lot of summer tourism here, but people who bring a full fridge and only leave rubbish behind”, says one of the promoters, “a lot of people, but little movement. We have a lot of tourism but with little income”, summarises another; “the tourism we have here is that of ‘walk, pipes and go home’”, criticises another, resorting to a very graphic expression to describe the habits of tourists that another of the promoters describes as “tourism of slippers and espadrilles”, “not everything that comes through the door leaves you money”, argues the latter, while defending the imposition of taxes and public prices for the provision of tourist services, “including gorges”. Therefore, among La Vera promoters, there is a perception that it is necessary to evolve in the development of tourism in the region, focusing on attracting tourists with higher incomes. This idea is

summed up by one of the interviewees when he considers that “the administrations and official statistics focus all their attention on the number of tourists and the important thing would be to quantify how much these tourists spend on their visit”.

Deficient promotion of the region, the development of an extensive programme of activities to encourage more overnight stays by tourists, the high seasonality inherent in the practice of this activity, and the lack of training in tourism development for municipal representatives are some of the other issues that the promoters referred to during the interviews.

Unlike in Tajo-Salor, there is a deep-rooted sense of belonging to the region among La Vera promoters. More than 75% of those interviewed confessed to feeling a sense of belonging to the region; some of them even acknowledged the existence of a localist feeling in some of the municipalities in the region. The promoters who consider that this idea of a region does not exist are returnees or neo-rurals; or belong to the town of Gargüera, a municipality historically linked to the Plasencia region and recently attached to La Vera.

5. Discussion

In line with Castellano et al. [82], this research shows the challenges faced by those territories that entrust their development strategy to the rural tourism sector. La Vera has undoubted tourism potential, but this should not make us forget the limitations of this activity, including its notable seasonality. When assessing the role that this sector should play in the development of the territory, it is important to bear in mind the original philosophy with which the European Commission proposed this type of project at the beginning of the 1990s (to supplement agricultural incomes in order to alleviate the impact of the imminent reforms of the CAP) [4]. The experience of La Vera shows that overestimating the possibilities of this sector jeopardises the viability of the investments made.

During the three six-year periods that make up the temporal scope of the research, no evolution in the development strategy undertaken by the region of La Vera can be glimpsed. In this sense, following the recommendations of Leal-Solis and Robina-Ramírez [116] or Martins [117], perhaps it would be advisable for this region to continuously monitor the application of its tourism development strategies. Although the results in Tajo-Salor are more favourable (something in which this research coincides with that of Engelmo, Nieto and Mora [118]), in order to avoid future deviations, it would also be advisable to monitor this other region.

With regard to the capacity of public aid to stimulate the action of private investors, it may be interesting in future research to compare the responses of the tourism promoters of Tajo-Salor with those of the promoters of the other two productive measures, and to study whether there are differences in the importance they attach to obtaining a subsidy in their investment decisions. In this respect, Castellano, Nieto and Castro [38], in their analysis of the intangibles of rural development in La Vera, show that, in the first call for proposals of the development programme of this region, those who were most stimulated by the approval of a line of aid were the tourism promoters, given that the percentages of public subsidies for this type of project were higher.

Local people's perception of the impacts of tourism development has been extensively studied in the literature. Kayat, Sharif and Karnchanan [119], Andereck et al. [120], Johnson, Snepenger and Akis [121], or Milano, Novelli, and Cheer [122] are some of those who have taken an interest in this issue. However, the interest of these authors has left aside the main actors of this development: the tourism promoters. Their assessments are one of the cornerstones of this research and provide a realistic view of the main handicaps facing tourism development in rural areas.

6. Conclusions

The counties chosen as the object of study represent two antagonistic cases in terms of their tourist orientation. The development strategies implemented by the two regions show this: while La Vera focuses its development strategy on the promotion of rural tourism,

concentrating more than 60% of its productive investment on this measure, the Tajo-Salor region devotes barely 25% of its resources to this purpose.

Despite the above-mentioned differences in the distribution of their tourism investments, both regions coincide on two points: (1) the concentration of their resources on projects aimed at modernising and/or creating rural accommodation. It is true that, in La Vera, this specialisation is even more intense (practically 80% of the resources dedicated to the promotion of rural tourism are committed to this type of project); and (2) in the anecdotal importance given to investments aimed at the creation of complementary activities for tourists, so necessary to occupy the leisure time of visitors and increase the number of overnight stays.

This unequal execution of resources is key to understanding the shortcomings with which, in both regions, the measure to promote rural tourism has been implemented. This is so, given that the investments with the highest number of failed and/or abandoned projects, those whose viability is openly questioned by their own promoters, are precisely those related to the creation of new rural accommodation. Therefore, in La Vera, the special concentration of investment in this type of project has a negative effect on the overall implementation of the programme. In contrast, in the case of Tajo-Salor, the lower relative importance of the resources committed to this type of action is offset by a greater number of projects aimed at the creation and/or modernisation of catering businesses whose economic viability is not questioned by the promoters in any of the regions.

The number of failed and transferred projects corroborates the above. In La Vera, the sum of these two types of projects totals 19, accounting for almost 40% of the investment made, compared to the six projects in Tajo-Salor, which barely represent 14% of the resources allocated to the promotion of rural tourism. These data could be evidence that La Vera's commitment to specialising in tourism has not borne the desired fruit; in this region, the model of the failed project is clearly defined: investments aimed at the creation of new rural accommodation.

The profile of the promoters in both counties has differences and similarities. Starting with the latter, in both cases, promoters with a basic level of education are clearly in the majority. This fact should lead the LAGs to pay close attention to the training needs of these people. The differences lie in the presence in La Vera of a certain number of neo-rural or returnee promoters, which may be a sign of the tourist vocation of this region. The involvement of this type of promoter cannot be assessed a priori; although it is true that their motivations are not usually solely economic but are related to a desire to "change life". In all cases, this type of promoter makes investments aimed at the new creation of rural accommodation.

The assessment made by the Tajo-Salor promoters regarding the viability of their businesses is more positive than that offered by La Vera promoters. Once again, the key to explaining these differences lies in the answers given by the promoters of rural accommodation. In Tajo-Salor, several promoters of this type of business are satisfied with the evolution of their businesses and justify their response given the complementarity between accommodation and restaurant and cafeteria activities; in this region, even those who bet exclusively on accommodation businesses and who, therefore, offer a more negative assessment, differ from most of La Vera promoters in that, from the beginning, they considered their investments as a complementary source of income and executed projects with a more modest dimension.

Compared to regions with great natural and scenic resources, in territories with "little" tourism potential, the articulation of subsidies within rural development programmes may have greater relevance when it comes to stimulating investment in this sector. This idea, together with the fact that the percentages of failed and/or transferred investments in Tajo-Salor are clearly lower than those of La Vera, or together with the positive assessment of their promoters regarding the viability of their businesses, could be a sign that, in future editions, the rural development programmes of this region have room to maintain the resources destined to the rural tourism sector.

In La Vera, on the other hand, the results obtained are not so positive; a good example of this is the fact that promoters of rural accommodation denounce the oversizing of this sector or are deeply critical of the viability of their businesses. In the light of the above, it might be advisable for this region to reorient its development strategy: (a) reducing the resources earmarked for tourism promotion; (b) focusing on other types of tourism projects such as catering businesses and, especially, those aimed at creating complementary activities for tourists; and (c) increasing the conditionality of projects aimed at creating new rural accommodation (increasing their eligibility period, requiring a greater contribution of own funds in order to reduce the indebtedness of the promoters; rejecting those projects that aim to become the main, or even the only source of income of the promoters; giving priority to those projects that propose their complementarity with catering and/or café activities).

Despite the limited tourist potential of the Tajo-Salor region, its promoters have been able to take advantage of the proximity of many of its municipalities to the city of Cáceres, the Monfragüe National Park and the Autovía de la Plata motorway. The economic viability of these businesses may have been helped by the fact that this is a region that has only relatively recently made a commitment to tourism development; in fact, in Tajo-Salor there does not seem to be a problem of an excess supply of rural accommodation. The implementation of future editions of the development programme will have to be attentive to avoid a repetition of the experience recorded in La Vera in this region.

Among the main problems pointed out by the promoters of Tajo-Salor, the seasonality of tourist activity, the lack of involvement of the town councils in the valorisation of tourist resources or in the diligent processing of the files, and the absence of tourist promotion campaigns stand out. With regard to the latter issue, many of those interviewed considered that the region lacks a link that would unite it as such; this is a handicap for its tourism promotion. The results of the research show that, among the promoters of the county, there is no sense of identity with respect to the county. Moreover, the proximity of the “Cuatro Lugares” to the Monfragüe National Park, the linking of the tourist activity of most of these municipalities with this enclave, together with the lack of a feeling of territorial identity with the rest of the region (and of the rest of the region with them), could make a possible future linking of these municipalities with those that make up the Monfragüe National Park Development Association recommendable.

The promoters of La Vera agree with those of Tajo-Salor in identifying as one of the main problems of the sector the role of the administrations, especially the regional one, whose intervention they describe as a “burden” for the sector. An example of this would be the technical requirements linked to the approval of projects, which represent a significant increase in costs and hinder their economic viability. Beyond the granting of subsidies, the creation of a specific and more flexible regulatory framework for these small accommodations could strengthen the viability of many of these investments and thus contribute to the development of the rural environment. As an indication that this area could be at a more advanced stage of development, the promoters of the area are critical not of the shortage of tourists, but of the excess of tourists during the summer season, and demand that the development strategy be oriented towards more selective and higher income tourism.

Although the choice of the counties chosen as the field of study has been justified, the limitations of this research are linked to the methodology used and, specifically, as in any other case study, to the difficulty of extrapolating (universally) the conclusions obtained to other territories. This is so, since the conclusions of the research are inevitably linked to the socioeconomic characteristics of the territories studied and their experience in the execution of the development programs studied. As future lines of research, it could be interesting to extend the time period of the research by looking at investments and projects implemented in new programming periods.

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