

Lavender fields in Spain. Tourism articulation of imaginaries from a Provençal Mediterranean oneiric

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Abstract | Lavender tourism is known in countries such as France and England and is a growing activity in Turkey and East Asia. In Spain, however, this kind of tourism project is just beginning to emerge. Consequently, the literature on its scope and impact is also still in its early stages. This paper aims to explain the potential role of creativity and experiential activities in promoting lavender tourism, describe the structure of existing tourism products associated with Spanish lavender fields and elucidate the part these have played in economic diversification in rural areas, some of which are experiencing a severe rural exodus. These specific goals will contribute to a better understanding of the distinctive features of Spanish lavender field tourism and will help improve planning and management of its implementation in new territories.

Keywords | Lavender tourism, creative tourism, rural development, Spain

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1. Introduction

Tourists have begun to seek new ways of travelling in pursuit of memorable and attractive experiences. Experiential tourism encourages interaction between people and tourism resources by offering active participation in local cultures and activities (Mazarasa, 2016). This can also lead to creative experiences, in which visitors are given the opportunity to take part in learning and co-creation activities (Richards and Raymond, 2000). These proposals show promise for rural environments because they foster development processes based on creative approaches that leverage endogenous resources (Richards, 2019).

Taking the French tourism model as a template, the expansion of lavender fields in Spain has helped to promote emerging experiential and creative tourism initiatives. However, this topic requires further specific research regarding its impact on rural areas, as well as accurate data — in line with the provisions of the current Governmental Sectoral Plan on Nature Tourism and Biodiversity — that will make it possible to assess: a) potential tourist use, b) the presence or absence of interactions between territories and c) the activity's importance for the rural environment, in order to facilitate management.

To date, only the study by Serrano (2021) has shed light on these issues as a whole. Consequently, this paper aims to explain the role of lavender tourism as a tool for economic diversification in rural areas in Spain, describe the creativity and experiential activity proposals related and elucidate the structure of existing tourism products.

This article is organised as follows. The first section presents the theoretical and conceptual framework. This is followed by a description of the methodology used, an analysis of the presence of lavender tourism in Spain as a whole and a case study of the town of Brihuega, which is undoubtedly the most outstanding example of this tourism segment in Spain. The paper ends with a discus-

sion of the results and some brief conclusions.

2. Theoretical framework

Small Spanish communities face several challenges, including depopulation, a lack of economic activity and ageing. Because of their potential benefits, tourism activities are viewed by small villages as an opportunity for demographic rejuvenation, providing a supplementary income and offering a source of economic diversification (García-Henche, 2005). However, many authors contend that rather than displacing previous economic and cultural activities, tourism in rural areas should stimulate and support them. To achieve this, tourism must assume a major role in the conservation and rehabilitation of socio-cultural and historical-artistic heritage and the revitalisation of local life by encouraging interaction between rural societies and the tourist population (Ascanio in López-Sanz et al., 2021; Okech et al., 2015). Furthermore, in the field of rural tourism it also is essential to pay attention to exchanges in all aspects of the environment, the economy and society (An & Alarcón, 2020), in order to identify ways of enhancing sustainable rural destination development.

At European level, the 2003 common agricultural policy (CAP) reform led to a significant change in how rural development was implemented. Since then, governments and institutions have viewed rural tourism as a tool for development, implementing policies through various EU funds (Nylander and Hall, 2005; European Commission, 2017). As a result, studies now suggest that rural tourism is not a minor agent in the rural economy, but instead spurs social, economic and landscape changes, and has become a prime driver of development while making the best use of local resources (Hall et al., 2004; Lane et al., 2022).

One of the core ideas related to the development of new agricultural products for rural tourism

is that there is a deep-seated connection between rural tourism and agriculture. In relation to agricultural production, demand for herbal products is increasing in the pharmaceutical, cosmetic, perfumery and food industries, and in many cases, can also be leveraged as a tourism attraction (Başaran, 2017). In some areas, lavender cultivation tourism provides an opportunity to increase the rural population's income by adding a new economic activity and diversifying tourism activities. Perhaps the region most internationally renowned as a lavender destination is Provence, in France (Naviner, 2002; Monge, 2012; Ruggieri, 2021), but other destinations also merit mention, including southwest Turkey (Giray et al., 2019), the Hvar Island (Croatia) (Morić-Španić, 2017), Somerset (England), Tihany (Hungary), Ostrow (Poland) and the municipality of Brihuega, in Guadalajara, Spain (Serano, 2021).

The use of lavender as a tourism resource in Provence is explained not only by the long-standing cultivation of this crop, but also by a historical process that developed in response to tourists' aesthetic appreciation. Development of the "Routes de la Lavande" programme (1994), a tourism industry facet of a Production Recovery Plan, proved crucial in this trajectory (Monge, 2012). As a result, the landscape has been optimised for profit through interactions between aesthetic consumption and economic and social behaviours (Naviner, 2002).

Rural tourism has developed rapidly as urban residents seek places to escape from the city's busy everyday life. In this context, it is likewise critical to consider the advantages of remodelled tourism activities because of a series of profound sociological changes that have been identified in the recent past, linked to postmodernity and globalisation (Gössling et al., 2020). In recent decades, as the number of destinations has proliferated and it has become ever more difficult for these to differentiate themselves from one another, the tourist industry has witnessed substantial transformations,

shifting from Fordist production models to others in which supply segmentation has increased in response to consumer preferences for individualisation and sophistication. In reaction to new demands, the sector has adopted new criteria when assessing destinations. According to Urry and Larsen (2011), this "tourist gaze" is driven by a need for fulfilment and pleasure and a desire for new experiences (experience economy) beyond everyday existence (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

Creativity in the tourism provides novel activities, consolidating the emergent field of creative tourism, which encompasses a range of proposals that offer tourists the chance to develop their creative potential through active participation in experiences, learning and activities (Richards and Raymond, 2000). These all belong to a new generation of products that enable visitors to learn about and experience local culture while also participating in artistic and imaginative activities with locals through co-creation (Creative Tourism Network, 2020). The active engagement, the desire for "genuine experiences", the potential of activities to foster users' creativity and the development of personal skills are among the common elements that such proposals share (Richards, 2011).

These products are primarily related to daily life in the destinations, which is connected to a significant fund of "know-how" in communities and territories (e.g. handicrafts, the decorative arts, cuisine, dance, customs, time-honoured practices, preparation of local dishes, traditional farming). Furthermore, such new tourist consumption experiences are built on co-creation or "prosumption" (a portmanteau of production+consumption) activities that involve active visitor engagement and create a feedback loop in which the experience helps foster microclimates favourable to innovation (Binkhorst, 2019).

Currently, three stages of creative experience can be identified, depending on the level of experientiality (adapted from Richards, 2011):

- First generation (passive). Creativity as a framework for consumption: shopping, itineraries, art galleries, etc.
- Second generation (moderate activity). Consumption of creative activities with some degree of participation, through intangible cultural heritage, food, handicrafts, performing arts, gadgets, etc.
- Third generation (creative activities). Co-creation or consumption, with greater tourist participation through open workshops, courses, co-creation productions, performances with tourists, experience of daily life in destinations, etc.

Rural environments are especially suitable for fostering tourism initiatives based on creative tourism approaches. Visitors can expect authentic, active, engaging, participatory, instructive and transformative vacations, as well as the opportunity for participation in creative activities and mutual meaningful interaction with host communities (Richards, 2021). Accordingly, Serrano (2021) argues that the increasing size of lavender fields in Spain show potential for developing tourism destinations with co-creative experiences. Serrano also contends that the sensory stimuli of extensive lavender fields (colour, shapes and perfume) combined with the seasonality of blooming could act as experiential attractor.

3. Methodology

Given the scarcity of studies on the subject in Spain, an exploratory, mixed-method study was conducted to lay the ground for further research. The procedures followed were divided into two main stages linked to the objectives pursued, and a constructivist methodology was employed in which stakeholder testimonies, on-site observation and

social media analysis were key elements. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources alike, specifically in the following logical and intermediate-results-integrating sequence. Consequently, the methodological sequence included two data collection sub-stages, followed in both cases by a data analysis sub-stage. Between the two stages, intermediate outcomes were produced. In a final process, the partial results of the two stages were integrated into the final conclusions.

Data Collection 1 included the following actions:

- Extensive literature review, in relation to the previously defined theoretical framework, aimed at identifying and understanding: (1) the preconditions for the development of successful lavender tourism in rural areas; and (2) the potential of creativity and experiential activities in the current development of rural tourism;
- Exploration of official statistical data, mainly from MAPA (2010, 2020, 2022) and analysis of these using Geographical Information Systems to evaluate the evolution of lavender crops in Spain;
- Internet search using general search engines to identify tourism products related to lavender crops (for September 2020 to January 2021). The absence of some specific statistics rendered it a challenge to find all the existing tourism products on the internet. The search terms used were: “turismo de lavanda” [lavender tourism], “campos de lavanda” [lavender fields] and “experiencia lavanda” [lavender experience]. The categories of analysis used to characterise the activities and the companies that offer these tourism products were based on a literature review, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 | Categories of analysis used to describe the lavender tourism product through online searches

• "Land ownership": distinguishing tourism companies that own the fields or are allowed to exploit them, independently/local networks
• "Tourism infrastructure": whether tourism companies have the infrastructure to accommodate tourists
• "Female entrepreneurship": women's enterprises form part of the new rural landscape and are conceptually associated with the revitalisation of rural spaces, in addition to providing a gender perspective in areas where this is lacking (Diéguez et al., 2010)
• "Sustainable approach": beyond the semantic content of the general discourse on sustainability, we sought to identify the presence of practices that pursue this goal
• "Tourist accommodation": identification of the combined offer of activities and tourist accommodation by crop owners enabled detection of the more consolidated initiatives
• The future prospects of activities related to lavender in companies: "lavender specialisation", "lavender main activity", "lavender distillery"

Source: Elaborated by the authors

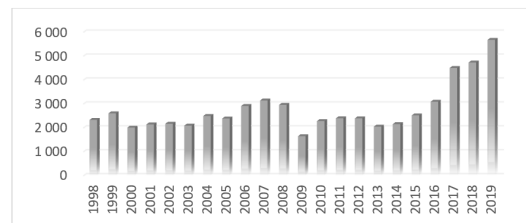
Data Collection 2

Primary qualitative data were collected to complement the quantitative data and further our understanding of experiential lavender tourism, based on managers' perspectives and on-site observation. The core content of the interviews was based on two main categories: i) company owners'/ managers' motivation; ii) expectations and perception of trends. The aim of these categories was to advance our understanding of the role of lavender tourism in the economic diversification of rural areas and firms alike. Additionally, we aimed to attain a deeper understanding of managers' perspectives of the context, potential and challenges of lavender tourism activities. Four in-depth interviews were conducted with promoters and managers of companies offering activities related to lavender tourism (the interview guide is given in Appendix I). The information thus obtained, together with an internet analysis and the literature on international and national cases, enabled us to describe the lavender tourism supply.

Our case study centred on Brihuega (Spain), a unique place that —applying the previously mentioned steps— was classified as a lavender tourism destination. This municipality boasts a significant lavender tourism infrastructure which has fostered local transformations and community activities revolving around this tourism segment.

4. Lavender fields in Spain: location and production

The evolution of lavender fields shows a significant increase in surface area since 1998 (first data available), rising from 2,325 hectares in 1998 to 5,671 hectares in 2019 (Figure 1). By 2021, production had increased considerably to 8,099 ha (MAPA, 2022). This figure renders Spain one of the main European producers, behind Bulgaria and France but comparable to Croatia, Italy and Turkey (Crişan, 2023). Two stages can be distinguished in this evolution, the first spanning the period 1998 to 2009, when the cultivated surface area remained stable without any significant fluctuations, and the second spanning the period 2009 to 2019, when a substantial increase in surface area occurred, especially since 2017, doubling the cultivated area.

**Figure 1** | Lavender field surface area in Spain (ha) 1998-2019

Source: Anuario de Estadística Agraria (MAPA), 1999-2020.

Produced by the authors.

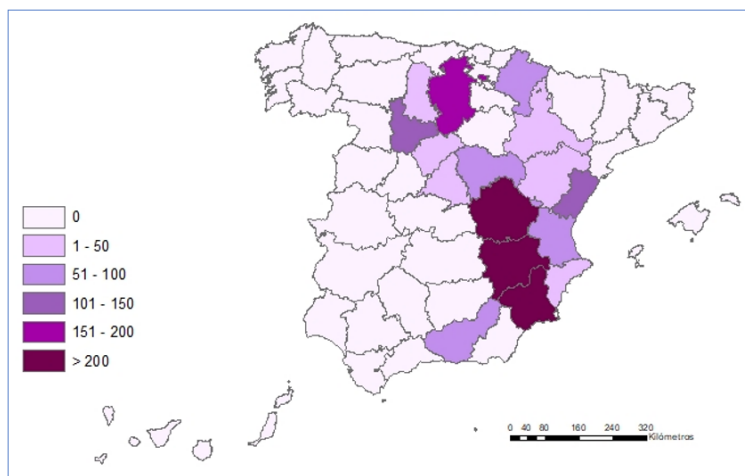
This trend is also apparent in the increase in the number of provinces that have begun cultivating this crop since 2008, rising from around 1,600 ha and 16 provinces in 2009 to 2,500 ha and 19 provinces in 2015, 4,500 ha and 18 provinces in 2017 and 5,700 ha and 30 provinces in 2019 (Figures 2, 3 and 4). In 2009 (Figure 2), only three Spanish provinces exceeded 200 ha, namely the provinces of Albacete (213 ha), Cuenca (285 ha) and Murcia (406 ha), while the rest presented much lower figures.

By 2019 (Figure 3), the number of provinces growing lavender had increased, but the surface area allocated to this crop remained very small (20 provinces allocated less than 20 ha). The only notable provinces as regards surface area were Guadalajara (1,851 ha) and Murcia (1,350 ha), followed at quite some distance by the provinces of Albacete (478 ha), Valladolid (409 ha), Granada (233 ha), Cuenca (230 ha) and Burgos (207 ha).

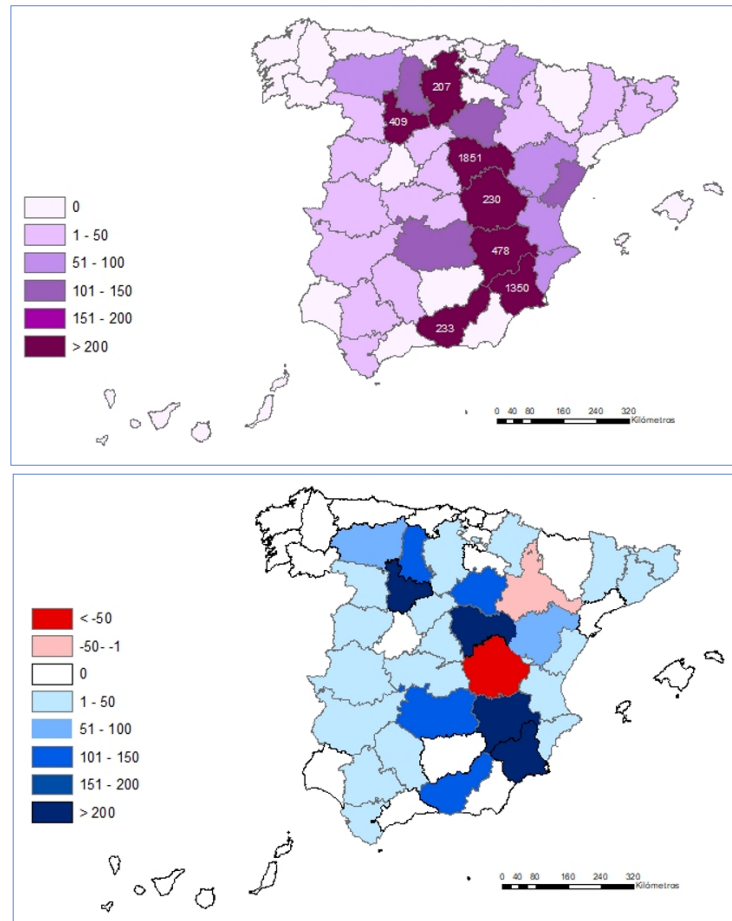
Figure 4 shows the evolution of lavender crops over the period 2009 to 2019. Most provinces presented a slight increase in cultivation area, but only four provinces showed pronounced growth. The case of Cuenca province is notable because it had been one of the outstanding provinces in 2009, but 10 years later, the surface area devoted to this crop

had decreased. The provinces of Valladolid and Albacete showed increases, but the figures were notably lower. Although not shown on the map, it should be noted that at the time of writing (2022), the Region of Castile-La Mancha has the largest surface area devoted to lavender cultivation (approximately 5,000 ha), of which 3,000 are in the province of Guadalajara (Gil, 2022).

The increase in cultivated area in the case of Spain is not related to tourism, except in the municipality of Brihuega (Guadalajara). Initially, these initiatives (the introduction of new aromatic and medicinal plant production) have been aimed at creating a diverse and sustainable agriculture framework in line with the common agricultural policy guidelines. All are viewed as opportunities to embark on specialised production of crops in high demand, are linked to eco-friendly agricultural systems suitable for areas with special rural development challenges and offer an alternative to crops with an uncertain future (Navarro, 2018). Production is also related to climatic conditions and soil types, growing drought resistant plants suited to rain-fed production methods that do not need nutrient-rich soils (Innovatione, 2020). It is also important to note the synergy between aromatic plant cultivation and beekeeping.



Figures 2 | Lavender field surface area in Spain (ha) 2009
Source: MAPA 2010 and 2020. Produced by the authors.



Figures 3 and 4 | Lavender field surface area in Spain (ha) 2019; evolution of lavender field surface area in Spain (ha) 2019-2009. Source: MAPA 2010 and 2020. Produced by the authors.

The increased cultivation of lavender has been accompanied by a corresponding increase in the production of extracts for cosmetics. According to the National Association of Perfumery and Cosmetics, Spain is almost “a benchmark” in the production of essential oils such as lemon, lavender, lavandin, rockrose and sage. In fact, lavender, lavandin and sage cultivation alone supports over 5,000 jobs and generates 10.5 million euros per year (Ruiz, 2022).

5. Lavender fields as a tourism resource in Spain

As explained in the methods section, production figures are well documented but official Spa-

nish statistics at municipal level are scarce. Consequently, lavender-related rural tourism can only be identified by other means such as website analysis or direct observation, as presented below.

A website analysis of this tourism product in Spain yielded a very brief list of places that include lavender tourism among their attractions. As regards online publicity concerning tourism experiences related to lavender fields and produced by professional platforms and individual content creators (bloggers, YouTubers) alike, most locations seem to emulate the model of Provence (France) or are related to the growing tourism supply in the municipality of Brihuega (Guadalajara).

A comparative analysis shows that most of the national supply can be classified as single, regi-

onally scattered lavender tourism activities. An internet search for businesses offering tourism activities related to lavender cultivation yielded the following results, which are also shown geographically in Tables 2 and 3 and Figure 5.

The vast majority of municipalities where lavender tourism is located leverage their local heritage as their main tourist attraction (Table 3), the only exception being the rural area surrounding Lleida, a provincial capital that promotes its natural heritage as its main attraction beyond the city centre. Table 3 also gives the tourist accommodation available, which shows that these municipalities are not important tourist destinations,

so any added tourism activity is important locally in terms of rural economic diversification. Every small economic project, such as the ones considered here, is critical to the rural world in Spain. This is equally true of the rural tourism industry, which typically has a much smaller presence than that in some other European countries, still relies too heavily on the accommodation segment—which continues to have low occupancy rates—and has a weak productive structure. Nevertheless, its promotion offers a lifeline for rural areas, because rural tourism helps to conserve heritage landscapes and to mitigate depopulation to some extent (Grande, 2020).

Table 2 | Businesses offering tourist activities centred around lavender fields

Business name	Municipality	Province	Webpage
Mas Sampera	Santa Eulàlia de Ronçana	Barcelona	https://barcelonacolours.com/campo-de-lavandas-en-barcelona-en-mas-sampera/;
Viu Els Ports	Forcall	Castellón	https://www.viuelsports.com/es/visitas-aromaticas;
Aromes Can Rosselló	Lleida	Lleida	https://www.aromescanrossello.com/;
Essential Oils	Campo de Béjar (Moratalla)	Murcia	https://www.essentialoils.es/;
Queen Country	Olite	Navarra	http://www.aceiteesenciallavanda.com/
Hotel Las Abadías	San Felices	Soria	https://www.lasabadias.com/lavanda-trufa.html
Civitatis	El Romeral	Toledo	https://www.civitatis.com/es/el-romeral/tour-lavanda-molino-romeral/
Abadía Retuerta	Sardón de Duero	Valladolid	https://www.abadia-retuerta.com/experiencias-unicas/temporada/experiencia-lavanda-valladolid;
Centro de Interpretación "Tierra de lavanda"	Tiedra	Valladolid	https://tiedradelavanda.es/

Source: Elaborated by authors, based on an analysis of online advertisement

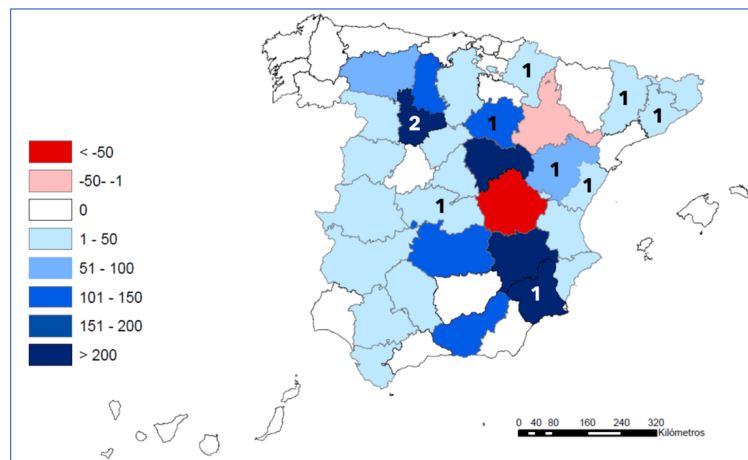


Figure 5 | Evolution of lavender field surface area in Spain (ha) 2019-2009 and number of businesses offering tourism products published on the internet (2022) MAPA 2010 and 2020 and online advertisement. Produced by authors.

Table 3 | Tourist accommodation and main attractions in the municipalities, besides lavender activities

MUNICIPALITY (PROVINCE)	NUMBER OF BEDS	NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATIONS*	CAMPING (Camping/capacity)	MAIN ATTRACTIONS PROMOTED BESIDES LAVANDER FIELDS /source
Santa Eulàlia de Ronçana (Barcelona)	35	5	1 (210)	Built rural heritage (https://patrimonicultural.diba.cat/municipi/santa-eulalia-de-roncana)
Forcall (Castellón)	155	13	-	Built rural heritage and archaeological sites (https://www.forcall.es/visitantes/que-visitari)
Lleida* (Lleida)	11	1	-	Natural heritage in rural areas (https://www.turismedelleida.cat/)
Moratalla (Murcia)	155	6	-	Built rural heritage, archeological sites and natural heritage (https://www.turismoregiondemurcia.es/es/moratalla/)
Olite (Navarra)	w.o.d.	8	1 (w.o.d.)	Olite royal palace (https://www.visitnavarra.es/documents/8257989/cbb8de0a-322c-b2d6-d5ff-d6192f4425c8)
San Felices (Soria)	19	1	-	Built rural heritage (http://www.sanfelices.es/)
El Romeral (Toledo)	9	1	-	Built rural heritage (http://www.turismocastillalamancha.es/patrimonio/el-romeral-21531/)
Sardón de Duero (Valladolid)	138	8	-	Built rural heritage (https://sardoneduero.ayuntamientosdevalladolid.es/home)
Tiedra (Valladolid)	53	4	-	Built rural heritage and lavender's interpretation center (https://tiedra.es/)
w.o.d.: without official data * Accommodations: rural tourist accommodation, hotels, B&B are included. Sources: Spanish Statistical Office of Spain and Statistical Offices of the Autonomuos Communities. Instituto de Estadística de Cataluña (https://www.idescat.cat/emex/?id=251207&lang=es); Institut Valencià d'Estadística (https://pegv.gva.es/es/fichas); Instituto de Turismo Región de Murcia (https://www.itrem.es/itrem/registro_de_empresas/); Olite Mayor Office (http://www.olite.es/turismo/comer-y-dormir/donde-dormir/); Sistema de Información Estadística Junta de Castilla y León (http://www.jcyl.es/sie/v2/turismov2irAmodulo.html); Portal de Transparencia de Castilla-La Mancha (https://datosabiertos.castillalamancha.es/search?query=&sort_by=changed&sort_order=DESC)				

Source: Produced by authors

The main characteristics of the businesses involved in lavender tourism are shown in Tables 4 and 5. This information was obtained from a content analysis of online advertising and from the four telephone interviews with the business managers. To maintain the companies' anonymity, the order in which they appear in the following two tables does not coincide with that of Table 2, in which the business names are given. Only nine companies are shown, as the case of Guadalajara will be analysed separately due to its unique destination profile.

Our results indicate that there is no single business model. In general terms, private ownership of the land predominated, which is typical of inland rural Spain, where the majority of farms are small and run by the owners, who are usually farmers. Although not in the majority, some of the businesses had been set up by women. In addition, exploitation for tourism purposes was highly diverse, with the establishment of tourist accom-

modation being a minority activity. This is understandable, as accommodation activities (accommodation infrastructure, catering, reservation management, etc.) need to be compatible with agricultural activities.

Our analysis also revealed evidence in relation to business philosophy, whereby the prevailing vision went beyond the merely economic to embrace sustainability. In their online advertising, most of the businesses emphasised their ecological credentials through an explicit commitment to "sustainable crop and product management" (company 1), "use of recycled or recyclable products and energy efficiency" (company 2), "organic production" (companies 3, 5, 6 and 9) and "conservation of native flora" (company 4).

In most cases, the crops themselves were also exploited by setting up small distilleries for the production of essential oils or other derivatives. This indicates that these businesses relied heavily on diversification of production and marketing stra-

tegies. In Spain, production diversification strategies are crucial for the economic survival of much of the rural world in general and for businesses in

particular (Plaza Gutiérrez, 2005), and lavender exploitation is no exception.

Table 4 | Main characteristics of the lavender tourism companies identified

LAVENDER BUSINESS	FIELDS OWNERSHIP	FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP	SUSTAINABLE APPROACH	TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE	TOURIST ACCOMMODATION	LAVENDER SPECIALISATION	LAVENDER AS MAIN ACTIVITY	LAVENDER DISTILLERY
1	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	In part	No	No
2	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	In part	No	No
3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In part	No	Yes
5	Yes	WD	Yes	Yes	Yes	In part	Yes	Yes
6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Yes	WD	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Yes	WD	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	No	No	WD	No	No	No	No	No
TOTAL YES	7	4	7	6	3	4	5	6

Source: online advertising and interviews. Produced by authors.

Table 5 | Activities offered by lavender tourism establishments

BUSINESS	FIELD VISIT	SENSORY ACTIVITIES	ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION ACTIVITIES	EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES
1	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
2	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
3	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	No	Yes	No
5	Yes	WD	WD	WD
6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Yes	No	No	No
9	Yes	No	No	No
Total yes	8	2	4	4
SENSORY ACTIVITIES: provide tourist experiences based on the visitors' sensory perception of the organoleptic properties of the lavender fields. EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES: active tourist participation (performativity, learning to do, presumption, ...), i.e. co-creative tourism products. Classification follows Carvalho <i>et al.</i> , 2021.				

Source: online advertising and interviews. Produced by authors.

By far the most common tourist activity was a visit to the fields, an experience that relies heavily on the flowering season, in summer. Obviously, this type of activity fades into insignificance when attempting to overcome the seasonality of demand. The scant provision of sensory or experiential activities that engage tourists in more active participation (third-generation creative tourism proposals) represents a lost opportunity. Other factors should be taken into account when expanding the type of tourism activities provided by businesses, such as potential demand and the extra investment or additional employee training required, all aspects that were highlighted by

some of the interviewees.

In relation to lavender tourism in Spain, it is worth asking whether the tourism product on offer is related to the magnitude of the lavender fields, since the Provencal model (France) is in part based on the vast scale of the lavender landscape, fuelled by tourists' enthusiasm for this plant (Ruggeri, 2021). In consequence, lavender landscapes in Provence have become a symbol of the region and a mark of identity (Monge, 2012). To answer this question, we compiled all available municipal statistics on lavender crops in municipalities with lavender tourism (Table 6; only municipalities with available data). We found no clear rela-

tionship between extension and lavender tourism, since some farms offering this product are very small, and may also offer a large and diverse range of sensory and experiential products. However, it should be noted that in the case of Brihuega and its

surrounding area, extensive swathes of land were devoted to this crop and visiting the fields to see large expanses in flower was the main attraction, as will be seen below.

Table 6 | Lavender surface area in municipalities offering lavender tourism

MUNICIPALITY	PROVINCE	LAVENDER AND/OR LAVANDIN AREA (HA, 2020)
Santa Eulàlia de Ronçana	Barcelona	2
Forcall (Tudela)	Castellón	16
Adreça	Lleida	2
Campo de Béjar (Moratalla)	Murcia	1227
San Felices	Soria	36.05
Sardón de Duero	Valladolid	6
Tiedra	Valladolid	186.8
Brihuega and surroundings	Guadalajara	2000

Source: Estadísticas agrícolas: Generalitat de Catalunya, Generalitat Valenciana, Comunidad Autónoma de la Región de Murcia & Junta de Castilla-León, 2021. Produced by authors.

Next, we analysed the combination of lavender tourism and other types of rural tourism activity (see Table 7). In practically all identified cases (nine companies), we found a relationship with other activities associated with agricultural activities and traditions but transformed into tourist experiences, such as mushroom or truffle collecting, visits to saffron fields, beekeeping and honey production, as well as wine production, winery or vineyard visits and wine tasting. Another common product is the combination of wine tasting and gastronomy.

Based on the available information, four out of the six companies offering lavender tourism combined this activity with gastronomy or product tasting. Other experiences may also be included, such as co-creation workshops (e.g. cooking, aroma-

tics, essences, oils and perfumes), star gazing and mindfulness activities. The product encompasses symbolic or intangible elements, which are becoming more common as a type of postmodern consumerism (Brown, 1992; Ekinici, et al., 2013). According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), a consistently high standard of product and service quality no longer serves to differentiate options for consumers, because these latter now seek unique experiences beyond mere product and service consumption (experience economy). These ideas are in line with proposals for creative tourism, which entails “a shift from conventional models of heritage-based cultural tourism to new models centred on contemporary creativity, innovation and intangible content” (Richards, 2020).

Table 7 | Tourism activities offered in municipalities with lavender tourism

COMPANY	GASTRONOMY	MYCOLOGY	BEEKEEPING/HONEY	TASTINGS/WINE	STAR GAZING	THEMATIC WORKSHOPS	MINDFULNESS/YOGA
ELS PORTS (Castellón)	X	X	X	X	X	X	
ABADÍA RETUERTA (Valladolid)	X		X	X	X	X	X
TIEDRA (Valladolid)		X		X	X	X	X
LAS ABADÍAS HOTEL (Soria)							
ADREÇA (Lleida)				X		X	X
EL ROMERAL (Toledo)					X		

Source: Produced by the authors based on online advertising and interviews.

In general terms, these activities are related to novel rural tourism proposals, which combine a more intimate experience of nature and a peaceful environment with a variegated offer of services and activities. It is widely acknowledged that rural tourism is on the rise, as tourists begin to turn away from package holidays, and rural tourism activities such as those studied here may be perceived —correctly or incorrectly— as being more natural and sustainable options (European Commission, 2017).

6. Brihuega: a lavender tourism destination

Located 96 kilometres from Madrid, Brihuega (Guadalajara) is a historical town in the Tajuña Valley with a population of 2,835 inhabitants that serves as an important tourist attraction in the province thanks to its cultural heritage. In 1965, the mayor applied to the Ministry of Information and Tourism to register a slogan for the village: “Brihuega, Jardín de la Alcarria” [Brihuega, the Garden of Alcarria]. The town is also relatively well known because of literary references (Camacho, 2018) and because the village centre was declared a historic and artistic heritage site in 1973.

Lavender cultivation started more than 40 years ago on the private initiative of pioneering farmers and developers, and initially covered around

600 ha (Alemani, 2022). In 2005, the surface area devoted to lavender cultivation increased to about a thousand hectares and a private family gathering was held to celebrate the first harvest with a barbecue and live music. In 2012, this was transformed into the first public lavender party, which can be considered the turning point between the locals’ enjoyment of the lavender-scented summer sunset and the growing development of lavender tourism (interview with the main lavender grower). By 2021, lavender fields covered 2,000 ha approximately, accounting for most of the province’s production (RTVE, 2021).

Thanks to its tourism background as a heritage site, Brihuega has a relatively well-developed accommodation sector, which currently totals sixteen establishments, having increased from eight since 2014. Three of these are 2- and 3-star hotels, and the rest are self-catering houses and apartments. In total, they provide more than 200 beds. It is estimated that during the flowering season (mainly July and August), the town receives around 20,000 visitors (Brihuega Town Council, 2021), accounting for approximately 58% of total annual visitors. Figure 6 shows the growing number of tourists who have visited the Tourist Office in recent years. Seasonality and the increase in lavender tourism (shown in violet) are clearly evident even though the data collected pertain solely to tourists visiting the Tourist Office.

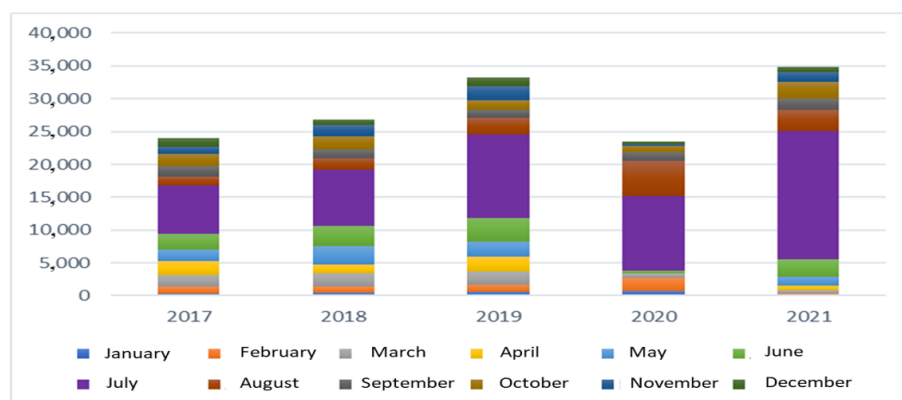


Figure 6 | Evolution and monthly distribution of visitors to Brihuega
Source: Records provided by the Brihuega Tourist Office, 2022. Produced by the authors.

Unfortunately, the data obtained do not quantify in absolute terms either the total or the place of origin of the visitors. Most of the Spanish tourists came from the nearby Region of Madrid, and many of the international tourists, who were in the minority, came from China and France (Tables 8 and 9).

One very important factor in the development of lavender tourism has been promotion by the town council, the Guadalajara provincial council and the regional government. Tourism events have also been reported in the national and international media, reaching a much wider audience than the publicity campaigns run by local and regional government. As a result, lavender tourism in Brihuega has become a major tourist attraction

and is leveraged as the main element in publicity campaigns to encourage tourists to explore other parts of the province.

The largest fields, where rows of lavender extend to the horizon and the mountains of the Central System range appear in the distance, are located between the towns of Villaviciosa de Tajuña, Brihuega and Malacuera (Figures 7 and 8). Our fieldwork showed that only large expanses are attractive, and that small fields are insufficient to attract visitors unless there are other quality landscape features in the surroundings that enhance the fields' attractiveness for tourists. This generates a high concentration of tourists in a limited number of areas, leading to overcrowding and trespassing.

Table 8 | Place of origin of Spanish tourists visiting the Brihuega Tourist Office

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Region of Madrid	71.20%	70.36%	62.49%	69.07%	66.15%
Region Castile-La Mancha	10.43%	8.84%	8.59%	14.90%	15.18%
Region of Valencia	4.11%	4.06%	6.11%	4.39%	4.23%
Catalonia	3.72%	4.13%	7.42%	3.23%	3.73%
Basque Country	2.56%	3.25%	3.75%	-	2.36%
Andalusia	2.04%	-	2.58%	-	-
Region of Castile and Leon	-	-	-	1.83%	-
Rest of Spain	5.93%	9.36%	9.06%	6.58%	8.35%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Brihuega Tourist Office, 2022. Produced by the authors.

Table 9 | Place of origin of international tourists visiting the Brihuega Tourist Office

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
China	21.82%	22.40%	9.49%	33.90%	-
France	16.36%	19.13%	6.72%	7.91%	13.97%
Germany	7.27%	13.66%	9.49%	-	-
United Kingdom	7.27%	7.10%	-	-	-
Belgium	7.27%	-	-	-	7.26%
Russia	4.24%	-	-	7.91%	-
United States	-	7.10%	11.86%	-	-
Italy	-	3.28%	-	-	-
Argentina	-	-	7.11%	5.08%	-
Portugal	-	-	6.72%	-	13.41%
South Korea	-	-	-	8.47%	-
Venezuela	-	-	-	5.65%	-
Peru	-	-	-	-	10.61%
Rest of the world	35.77%	27.33%	48.61%	31.08%	54.75%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Brihuega Tourist Office, 2022. Produced by the authors.



Figure 7 | Tourists visiting lavender fields near Brihuega.
Photo: Fernando Santander

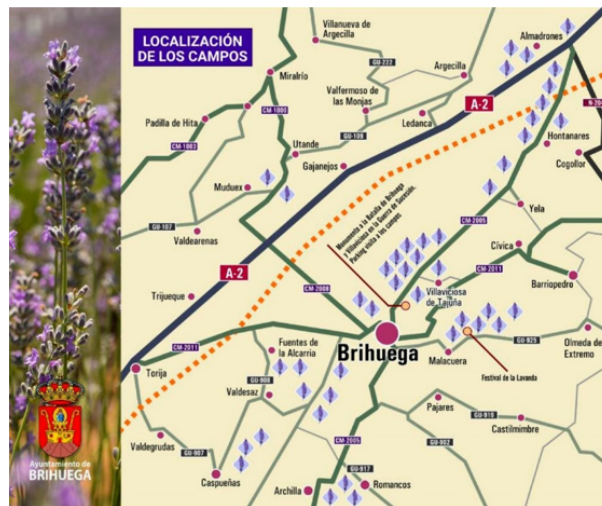


Figure 8 | Tourist map. Lavender fields near Brihuega

Source: Brihuega Town Council, 2019. (https://turismobrihuega.com/images/FOLLETO_ACCESO_CAMPOS_DE_LAVANDA.pdf)

The data show that tourist activity consists mainly of day trips, with overnight stays being uncommon. Brihuega's proximity to Madrid, the main source of demand, means that activities consisting mainly of visits to the countryside and the historic centre can be carried out in a single day, at most two. There is, therefore, a high turnover of customers in hotel establishments. However, should the high demand experienced in the flowering season increase further, this might lead to a concomitant rise in demand for accommodation and a consequent shortage of beds.

In July, Brihuega town council organises guided tours of the lavender fields for groups of about 55 people on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, with two slots each day in the hours around sunset.

These trips attract 3,300 people every year. Despite the provision of organised tours, many tourists visit the fields independently, indicating weak management of the huge influx of visitors.

In addition, other tourist companies based in Madrid, Guadalajara and Brihuega itself also provide guided tours, offering activities such as hot air balloon flights and paragliding. What Richards (2011) has termed third-generation creativity activities are also offered, such as landscape photography courses, beekeeping workshops, cocktail workshops and open-air painting workshops, and companies that process lavender organise guided tours to the distilleries where lavender essence is extracted.

During the flowering season, Brihuega's stre-

ets and squares are decorated with purple elements, evoking the fields in flower, and local businesses sell a range of products related to lavender, from little bags of dried lavender flowers, floral decorations, essences, honey and lavender sweets and lavender-themed ceramics, to specific products made with essential oil of lavender such as cosmetics. For instance, the town's bakery makes various types of lavender sweets, another shop sells lavender ice cream and a craft brewery produces lavender-flavoured beer.

At the same time, Brihuega town council runs a programme of activities that includes a lavender street market, lavender craft workshops, book presentations and street decoration contests. The main event is the Lavender Festival: a concert by renowned artists that takes place in the lavender fields. All of these activities are carried out while the lavender is in flower. Recently, approval was granted for the construction of a Lavender and Perfume Museum, within the framework of a Tourism Sustainability Plan drawn up by the provincial council.

As regards the future, the local, provincial and regional authorities are committed to lavender tourism, which shows great promise. At present, it increases the visibility of other, nearby natural and cultural resources, with the consequent rise in benefits. Evidence of this commitment is the Plan for Sustainable Tourism in Literary Alcarria, endowed with €1,386,000 (Next Generation Fund), of which €710,000 has been allocated for construction of a Lavender and Perfume Museum in Brihuega (JCCM, 2022).

It seems that local interests have converged in the development of lavender tourism here, bringing together the local council, traditionally interested in promoting the municipality, and the private initiative and entrepreneurship of farmers, traders, artisans and hoteliers. To this must be added the interest shown by the regional government, in line with the new CAP that is acquiring a significant environmental dimension (JCCM, 2021).

7. Discussion

The first notable issue is the scarcity of lavender tourism in Spain beyond Brihuega, especially bearing in mind the popularity of this municipality and the activities that it offers. Furthermore, the lavender tourism that does exist in Spain is not always related to the area of lavender cultivated in the municipality in which the business is located. Tourism products associated with lavender fields may be offered in villages, such as in the Els Ports (Castellón), with the town of Forcall as the lavender centre, and in relatively humble establishments, such as those that can be found in villages in the provinces of Toledo, Soria and Lleida, but also by exceptional luxury establishments, such as the Abadía Retuerta Le Domaine Hotel, which unusually among Spanish hotels provides a 24-hour butler service.

In the cases analysed, we found a direct relationship between lavender tourism and rural tourism. Tourist activities associated with lavender were almost always combined with other elements related to the natural environment, such as landscape viewpoints, interpretive routes, bird observatories or sport activities. In addition, explicit reference was made in all cases to cultural heritage, whether tangible or intangible.

The examples studied went hand in hand with renewed or reactivated tourist activities due to the existence of lavender fields. These facilitate both the emergence of new activities and diversification of the product in places where tourism is not a major economic factor. Of particular note is the relationship with the new experiential trend in tourism, whereby lavender-related products leverage originality and co-creation initiatives.

These initiatives are linked to a variety of management models based mainly on rural policies, but also on land ownership and a range of farmers' associations. In general, lavender crops are promoted by official agro-food research centres, principally with the goal of achieving environmental

and social benefits such as crop eco-compatibility, ecological health, diversification of rural industries and the pursuit of diversified and sustainable agriculture, in line with the new common agricultural policy.

The processes documented in Brihuega have wrought a transformation in the municipality's economic activity, shifting towards lavender-related tourism activities. The increase in hotels appears to be linked to the arrival of lavender tourists, although most of these are day-trippers from Madrid. However, the supply of hotel accommodation in Brihuega might become insufficient if more tourists arrive during the lavender flowering season.

Regarding tourism, the lavender fields represent the main resource, serving to attract tourists. Once these have arrived at the destination, local businesses—supported by public institutions—have been able to benefit from the visitors, transforming the area into a tourist destination. Lavender tourism has had a marked theming effect on the village.

In this respect, the case study can be compared to Provence. Although less extensive than those in this French region, the lavender fields at Brihuega represent a landscape that has only recently been invented in the context of local development and which has subsequently been transformed into an economic asset that the local and then regional authorities have considered valuable, including it in planning policies. Thus, the landscape must be viewed in relation to aesthetics, economics and social practices (Naviner, 2002). In this regard, it is crucial to have a firm grasp of the complexity of assigning values (Plieninger et al., 2015) when making decisions about the preservation or development of cultural landscapes. Studies have shown the vital significance of being able to see and engage with landscapes through landscape-related activities, although the process whereby people construct values out of tangible landscape structures remains poorly understood

(Stephenson, 2008).

As an interpretative framework, general explanations are already available related to the symbolic nature that consumption has begun to acquire. The promotion of these destinations forms part of a “new cultural economy of space”, which encompasses and fosters novel, more complex spatial experiences (Terkenli, 2002), where such places have not only expanded the services provided for visitors but have also heightened the symbolism attributed to these services (Pratt, 2008), which then become fundamental to the identity of said destinations. One of their main features is that they are highly themed. Theming is a means to assign value to and signify products through a narrative that can be aesthetic (shapes, colours, designs), in relation to the activities offered, or through a story that is usually shared through popular culture (Lukas, 2012). This culture strongly favours visual communication through social media, where images that depict collective preferences prevail, prioritising particular places that share common attributes (Tieskens, et al., 2018). Lavender tourism in Spain still remains a minority interest in this respect, but similar dynamics operate for other flowers, such as saffron (Bachiller, 2022) and cherry blossom (Engelmo et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, lavender cultivation needs to strike a balance between profitability mechanisms and sustainability processes that are not solely dependent on tourism. The decision to cultivate or to maintain lavender crops will depend on market developments and production costs. There are also threats to production, such as strong competition from China and South Africa, as well as European regulations. A draft EU sustainability strategy envisaged the inclusion of lavender and lavandin essential oils in the chemicals category because of their linalool content. For now, mobilisation of the sector in Europe has succeeded in ensuring that this product is not included in the list of chemical products in the new regulation (AgroCLM, 2022a and b).

In relation to the exploitation of lavender fields for tourism, there is also a need for holistic approaches to ensure sustainability. In the case of Brihuega, we found that visiting the fields in the flowering season was an ephemeral practice in terms of the duration of the visit (day trips), the period in which it took place (a few weeks in July) and the tourists' consumption behaviour, which could be characterised as fluid (Bauman, 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic was viewed by some critics as an opportunity to take stock of territories heavily dependent on tourism and consider how these could rebuild their economies to increase their sustainability, prioritising the concept of "mobility justice". This concept is based on ecological and participatory approaches (including community organisations and people's assemblies) as a means to tackle the transition to sustainability (Sheller, 2020). Mobility justice also emphasises slow tourism approaches applied to consumer behaviour, forms of management and business operations (Heitmann et al., 2011). However, in the case of Brihuega, as with many other destinations, a significant increase in tourists was witnessed after the pandemic (35,000 visitors in the year 2021), partly in response to a major advertising campaign run by the local and regional authorities (DCLM, 2023). In this regard, we have some doubts that the studied strategies do have sustainability as their primary objective.

8. Conclusions

More lavender is being grown in more places, and new agricultural and tourism stakeholders—including politicians and planners—are exploring the potential of lavender crops as both raw material and a feature of leisure services. The Governmental Sectoral Plan on Nature Tourism and Biodiversity (Spanish initials: SPNTB) notes the need for studies that evaluate nature tourism; con-

sequently, we hope that our research results will prove useful for stakeholders and society in general. In particular, we believe they will be useful when implementing strategic territorial plans with a strong sustainability focus that view lavender crops as an experiential tourism resource. In addition, our results lay the groundwork for future research.

In line with the results obtained, lavender tourism can currently be categorised according to two main trends, namely rural tourism and experiential tourism. Creativity and experiential activities are proving essential in the gradual progress of lavender tourism. The tentative initiatives launched to date have been based on sensory perceptions and on the experience of processing flowers, activities generally classified as first- and second-generation tourism experientiality.

The rural initiatives examined here suggest that this experientiality based on an endogenous resource or capacity linked to rurality has the potential to attract tourist flows and thereby support a certain level of social and economic dynamism in small towns. Increasing the experiences on offer to reach the third generation could stabilise flows and mitigate the effect of seasonality.

However, participatory planning will be an essential element in this process in order to safeguard against the risk of overtourism. It is therefore necessary to reflect on whether we want a scenario where an excessive number of people visit every summer, as in the case of Provence (Ruggieri, 2021). To this end, forums should be organised for local stakeholders (farmers, entrepreneurs, the general population, public planning bodies, authorities). It would also be useful to hear the opinions of local residents in addition to those of the people with an economic stake in the matter. Some means of increasing Sustainability are recommended in other studies on rural Tourism, such as, extend stays through more immersive, slow tourism stays, providing the offer with more activities in the countryside than only lavender field visits

for taking photos, recommending routes that increase tourists' curiosity in visiting additional locations in the area; these proposals can be later included into longer programs or packages (Hall et al., 2005; Bramwell, 1994).

As research limitations, the principal shortcoming encountered in this study was the lack of high-quality data related to official rural tourism statistics. As a result, it was impossible to determine the number of visitors at municipal level in Spain, or their motivational priorities when visiting a municipality.

As noted earlier, Brihuega is the only destination at present to have achieved a certain degree of economic diversification, the magnitude of which requires further research in order to quantify it. Lavender tourism is being leveraged by new entrepreneurs as a resource to generate tourist flows, and to some extent, it has helped to rejuvenate the life cycle of some rural destinations where former resources have become complementary. The results of our analysis and our main findings (strengths and weaknesses) will be very useful when advising on the design of new lavender tourism initiatives.

Nonetheless, questions remain for new research: will it be possible for lavender thematisation to reduce seasonality? Will territorial lavender branding be possible despite the marked seasonality of flowering? will experiential tourism be able to extend sensitive activities beyond the flowering season and conserve a destination's attractiveness? and do locals identify with lavender as local icon or should other distinctive features be added as tourism resources? In other words, from a social and environmental standpoint, will lavender tourism be sustainable?

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Annex I

Stakeholder interview guideline

- Who started the business: man/woman, family, investor, others?
Who directs the business: man/woman, family, investor, employee, others?
- How many jobs does the business generate (men/women, gender roles)?
- Do you belong to an agricultural or tourism business association? Or to any other that you consider to be a benefit or support to your activity?
- Who is the owner of the lavender crops (man/woman)? Do you have an agreement with the crop owners (man/woman)?
- What surface area does the lavender (or other aromatic herbs) occupy?
- In which municipality are the crops located?
- Are you thinking of increasing the area under cultivation?
- How did the lavender tourism initiative arise? Did you grow lavender crops before tourism? Was cultivation planned together with lavender tourism? Is the tourism initiative explained by the abundance of crops in the region?
- What are the motivations behind the initiative? (male/female motivations)
- How long has your lavender business been in operation?
- Did you receive a public subsidy to begin cultivating lavender crops? If yes, was this for cultivation or tourism?
- Is the activity working well? Is it economically sustainable?
- What are the main economic activities in the municipality?
- What do you think your tourism activity brings to the municipality?
- In its initial design, did your business include specific and explicit considerations that yielded sustainability (environmental, social and/or economic)? If yes, did these relate to cultivation or to tourism?
- Have such initiatives been introduced later? (related to cultivation/tourism)
- Do you keep a record of activity data: demand, customers served, seasonality of activity, requests for information?
- What do tourists who are interested in your product demand?
- How has your activity been affected by the pandemic (closure, previous expectations, variations from previous expectations, current evolution)?