



RESEARCH PROJECT



# T-rELMA

**Tourism**-related **ENTREPRENEURIAL LIFESTYLE MIGRATION**  
in the **Algarve**

**DISSEMINATION REPORT ON  
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS OF THE  
T-rELMA RESEARCH PROJECT**

// JULY  
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funded by:



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# THE STORY BEHIND THE T-RELMA PROJECT

We were in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and I was talking to my fellow researchers about topics for future projects. It was a difficult time for everyone, but I realised that the quality of life arising from just being able to open my door in the midst of the spectacular Algarvian countryside was priceless.

The desire to move from city life to a more rural place was something that had also recently led two of the project research team members to the rural Algarve. They had bought old houses and were in the process of renovating them with the idea of eventually moving to the Algarve, from Holland and England, and offering B&B accommodation at the same time. Another research colleague, himself a migrant from Holland to Sweden, has already studied lifestyle migration in remote areas of Sweden. So, we thought, why not study this here?

We know that the Algarve has been heavily developed and promoted as a 'sun and sea' destination, but the region has vast rural spaces with so much potential that they also deserve to be considered and developed from a sustainability perspective.

There are more and more migrants moving to the rural areas of the Algarve, from other countries but also from the big cities of Portugal, and they are often interested in enhancing the places they have adopted as their new homes, and in rejuvenating local traditions.

Having put our ideas together, joined by colleagues from the University of the Algarve and CiTUR Algarve research centre, we made a project application to the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). This project – T-rELMA – was approved and funded!

As the project is an exploratory study in the field of social geography, we wanted to get away from numbers and figures and really get to know people. We went out into the field, and we did many interviews, across the Algarve. We got a feel for what it's like to be in each place. We heard the stories of many entrepreneurial migrants. They are all very different, but they have in common a deep-felt wish to enjoy life in the best way possible, while respecting the place where they live.

We also wanted to understand, through talking to representatives of local governance and other stakeholders, how tourism has developed in rural areas of the Algarve - including the challenges and ideas for the future - and also what is known about these migrants and the potential impacts, both positive and negative, of this phenomenon of lifestyle entrepreneurship.

This report is a first summary of many aspects that we have discovered. We want to disseminate the results of this project as widely as possible, in the hope of giving voice to those involved in it and to offer our contribution to improving policies and strategies for the sustainable development of tourism in rural areas.

**KATE TORKINGTON**  
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# THE RESEARCH TEAM



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# INTRODUCTION

## Tourism-related Entrepreneurial Lifestyle Migration in the Algarve (T-rELMA)

The 18-month exploratory T-rELMA project, which began in January 2022, is funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) and has an international research team made up of nine researchers.

This report follows the seminar on **Algarve Tourism: Sustainability, Competitiveness and Entrepreneurship**, jointly organised by the T-rELMA and IMPACTUR Algarve research project teams at the School of Management, Hospitality & Tourism, University of the Algarve, on 22 June 2023.

During the event, some of the preliminary results of the T-rELMA project were presented.

Since one of the main aims of the T-rELMA project is to encourage active communication and cooperation among all the stakeholders involved in the production of tourism in rural areas of the Algarve, a roundtable session was organised where participants in the project were invited to share their ideas and thoughts and to discuss some of the issues raised by the project's findings.

The report presents a brief outline of the project's aims and methodology, a summary of the presentations given during the event, and concludes with some reflections on the issues raised by the roundtable discussion.



# 1 THE T-rELMA PROJECT

The T-rELMA project aims to explore the phenomenon of entrepreneurial lifestyle migration, in the geographical context of the rural spaces in the Algarve, Portugal.



**The main objective of the research was to explore the extent to which tourism-related entrepreneurial lifestyle migration has the potential to contribute to the sustainable development of rural areas.**

## Background assumptions

Lifestyle migrants are generally conceived as relatively privileged and affluent individuals whose migration is primarily motivated not by economic factors but rather by the quest for a better **quality of life**. They have mostly been studied from the perspective of consumption-based mobilities.

However, there is a growing tendency, in the case of the Algarve, for such migrants to settle in rural areas, renovating old properties for residential use, and also pursuing entrepreneurial activities such as B&Bs and rural tourism units and activities.

Many rural areas of the Algarve have been deeply affected, both socially and economically, by dwindling and ageing populations, as well as the sharp decline in traditional activities and the gradual abandonment of the land and properties.

Migrant-entrepreneurs may have the potential to contribute to the regeneration of these areas, in a range of ways.

## A word about sustainability

In a nutshell, **sustainable development** is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

## Research objectives



The project aimed to:

- Explore the extent to which lifestyle migrants in the rural Algarve are taking up tourism-related entrepreneurial opportunities and activities which contribute to the production of tourism in rural spaces;
- Explore how tourism-related entrepreneurial lifestyle migration has the potential to contribute to the sustainable development of both tourism and rural spaces in the Algarve;
- Go beyond the dominant understanding of lifestyle migration as a form of consumption- and leisure-based migration.

Although originally focused on the environment, nowadays the concept of sustainable development seeks to reconcile a sustainable form of economic development with social and environmental concerns.

According to the UNWTO, **sustainable tourism development** means taking full account of economic, social and environmental impacts, both present and future, and trying to achieve a suitable balance among these different aspects in order to address the needs of all stakeholders.

The Algarve is not only beach resorts! A large part of the region is rural in character, with the *serra* (low mountain ranges) in the north and the *barrocal* - the main agricultural area - providing the rural transition between the coast and the mountains. Although not traditionally one of the main **rural tourism** destinations in Portugal, the rural Algarve has great potential for the development of tourism-related activities.

## Key concepts and underlying ideas



The Algarve as a rural space



The growing trend for rural tourism



The need for sustainable development (including sustainable tourism) of rural areas



The involvement of and opportunities for migrants in entrepreneurial activities in rural areas

### Problems & Challenges in the rural Algarve

Many of the **problems and challenges** identified in the rural Algarve are similar to those identified in other rural areas of southern Europe: the outward migratory flows since the mid-20th century have severely disrupted the social, economic and environmental fabrics of the inland Algarve; resulting in:

- a growing loss of human resources, abandonment of traditional activities, an accentuated ageing index and population decline;
- a sharp disparity in socio-economic development indices between the inland and the coastal zones of the Algarve;
- a low density of business activities and limited job opportunities; a lack of housing and basic infrastructures;
- difficulties in attracting and fixing new residents in these areas.

The application of strategies, policies and investments have so far not managed to reverse these trends, so the prospects for sustainability of local communities are not good without some focused intervention.

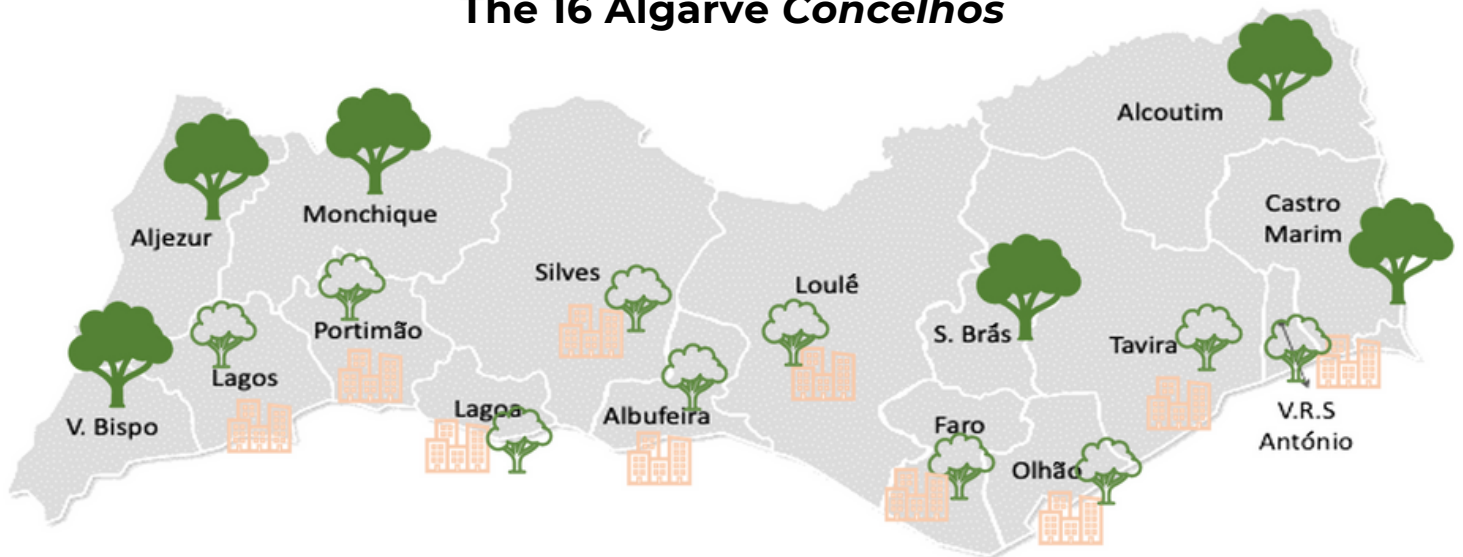
## The Rural Algarve

All 16 of the Algarve *concelhos* (municipalities) have at least some rural *freguesias* (local administrative areas).

The urban areas of the Algarve are concentrated along the southern coastline.

Six of the *concelhos* are classified by the PDR 2020 (national rural development plan) as being entirely rural: Alcoutim; Aljezur; Castro Marim; Monchique; São Brás de Alportel; Vila do Bispo.

### The 16 Algarve *Concelhos*



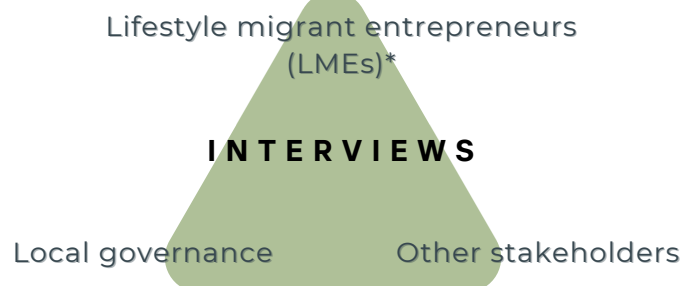
based on PDR, 2020

**Our research covered the rural spaces across the whole Algarve region, with a particular focus on the 6 rural municipalities (6RMs).**

## Research methodology and data

We followed a 3-stage methodology:

- 01 identify and document tourism-related entrepreneurial activity among migrants in rural areas of the Algarve
- 02 online questionnaire survey aimed at profiling entrepreneurs and their businesses
- 03 in-depth interviews with migrants and stakeholders to explore motivations, experiences, impacts, challenges and successes



In this report, we will be using the abbreviation **LMEs** to refer to **Lifestyle Migrant Entrepreneurs**.



### DATA OBTAINED



**60** completed and validated responses to questionnaire survey



#### 62 Interviews

- 37 LMEs
- 16 representatives from local governance (one from each municipality)
- 9 other stakeholders (regional development agency, local development associations, business associations and support entities, experts with detailed local knowledge)
- Carried out between July 2022 and January 2023

# 2

## PERSPECTIVES OF THE LOCAL GOVERNANCE



Our aim was to identify local public policies and measures endorsed by municipalities that can provide economic, legislative and operational backup to support businesses operating in the tourism service sector owned and run by Lifestyle Migrant Entrepreneurs.

**We conducted interviews with officials from the 16 municipalities in the region and asked about the following:**

- **overview of tourism** in the *concelho*;
- **evolution of rural tourism** in the *concelho* (in different parishes, what activities, what impacts);
- **entrepreneurial migrants in the tourism sector** in the region (foreigners living in the *concelho* and investing in tourism-related businesses, in particular, the creation of small businesses);
- **profile** of these migrants (eg. nationalities, where they live, age, occupations, type of business);
- **impacts** on the municipality (eg. economic, social, environmental, integration into local networks or partnerships);
- municipality activity(ies) and **support to attract** people and **encourage** them to settle and set up businesses in the area.





## geography, climate and territory

### Constraints to development

- climate change;
- the land has important constraints (agriculture and ecological reserves);
- investments are linked to the Municipal Development Plan, which creates relevant barriers.

### Positive traits of the municipality's geography, territory and climate

- unique setting with a lot of diversity;
- unique possibilities;
- enviable natural richness.

## What do municipalities say about lifestyle migration entrepreneurship?



### what the councils (don't) know

- do not have data about LMEs;
- BUT**
- want to know more about them;
  - are interested in collecting systematized data.



### sustainable practices of LMEs

- In general, more environmental awareness than the Portuguese local community;
- **However**, there are different levels of awareness, and not all foreign residents show these concerns.



### integration

#### Two main groups:

- those who are integrated and participate fully in the local community activities;
- those who do not want to integrate and live in very close-knit communities.



### challenges

- Problems associated with ageing LMEs;
- some non-legalized activities (e.g. kindergartens, local accommodation units, open market sales,...);
- unfamiliarity with legal procedures and local customs;
- need to devise a communication plan to include and integrate the foreign local communities.

The **6 rural municipalities** (6RMs; see page 8) seem to understand better the migrant communities' needs and aspirations and have a vision for the future of sustainable rural tourism.

## how the 6RMs see sustainable rural tourism development

- Awareness that the 6 rural municipalities have different natural characteristics from those of the other ('more touristy') municipalities and want to maintain and enhance these differences;
- Feel some pressure to develop tourism in a way that isn't in keeping with their vision;
- Visitors and tourists in these areas have a very different profile from 'mass' tourists.
- They want to develop small-scale rural tourism and local accommodation - not huge resort hotels;
- They want to continue developing nature tourism and related activities (e.g. hiking, cycling, surfing, birdwatching, nature festivals, hunting);
- Less seasonal tourism;
- Use of local resources.



## what the 6RMs see as opportunities

- They are aware of the importance and opportunities that lifestyle migrants bring to the municipality and are very willing to host and support them, **but** say they only want to encourage those who are aligned with the vision of sustainable development of the territory;
- They feel indebted to foreign residents who boost the local economy and services, promote the reconstruction of old ruins and build small businesses;
- They are proud of the number of foreign families and children of different nationalities in local schools;
  - They feel close to the foreign communities and seek to communicate directly with them.



## the problems the 6RMs face

- Lack of specialised staff (to support entrepreneurship, to communicate with migrants) but seek to be proactive in their support and licensing;
- Sometimes LMEs do not understand local customs, e.g. they are too radical in their approach to environmental protection and they do not always comply with the law.



# 3

## CHALLENGES FOR THE RURAL AREAS OF THE ALGARVE PERCEIVED BY OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

### Interviews with other stakeholders



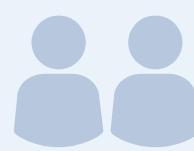
**Regional development agency**



**Non-governmental local development associations**



**Entities that support entrepreneurs and small business owners**  
(2 public offices, 1 private)



**Experts with detailed knowledge in rural areas of Algarve**

The questions we asked were about: their role, the evolution of tourism in rural areas, the development of these areas and what they know about the lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs.

### What they say about the Lifestyle Migrant Entrepreneurs (LMEs)

Before it was very common to see foreign people with the same nationality living as a “closed community”, with little connection to the territory and not much social impact.

Nowadays, many migrants are integrated in wider communities and play an active role in the local community, even if they are older, retired people.

There is also a new profile emerging – the “second chancers” or “neo-rurals”. They are usually **young adults with small children who want to change their lives**, with a new life project. They are from diverse nationalities, with high levels of education, but often with a lack of experience in tourism business.



They are often happy to settle in less developed areas - rural areas - since they are tired of stressful urban life.

These migrants can have a big impact on local communities, as they want to preserve and empower the local heritage and traditions, bringing new visions, ideas and products to the territory.

They are oriented towards sustainable practices and are connected with the land (e.g. agriculture). When they need to, they ask for help or advice and they are often approved by the local people.

### Policies for LMEs

The stakeholders we interviewed agreed that there are no current actions or strategies to attract LMEs; this type of migration is a phenomenon that happens 'naturally'.

On the other hand, there is financial support available for both locals and foreigners, and even more so in low density areas.

The lack of assistance mentioned by many LMEs contrasts with the perspective from the local development associations, whose role it is to publicize the support measures available and give advice.



This is connected to the biggest obstacle they face – bureaucracy - a barrier that affects the whole country.

The stakeholders themselves point to the lack of coordination between entities in terms of vision and strategy, and the difficulty of working together.

### About rural areas

*"it's a growing market"*



# QUALITY OF LIFE

is the keyword

*but...*

**“WITHOUT PEOPLE, THERE IS  
NO DEVELOPMENT OF THESE  
TERRITORIES”**

## The main challenges of rural areas & barriers to investment



Weak telephone network & internet **connection**

**Housing**  
(lack of; speculation; abandoned houses)

Lack of **jobs** / low salaries

No access to potable **water** & basic sanitation

Shortages in **health** services

Poor **public transport** network

**Illegal businesses**

Lack of **promotion** of the rural areas as a place where you can have quality of life

Limitations in territorial planning and management

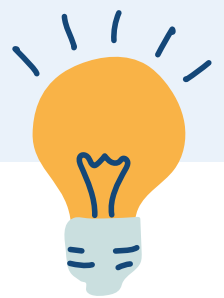
Inland areas of the Algarve have little political representation

Lack of **vision** and lack of pragmatism by the leadership bodies

PDM, PROTAL  
RAN, REN

**THERE IS A CLEAR NEED FOR MORE KNOWLEDGE, COOPERATION AND INVESTMENT ON THE PART OF THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES.**

## How to deal with the challenges of rural areas of the Algarve?



To deal with these challenges, stakeholders proposed a few **management strategies**, however they made it clear that raising issues is easy, more complex is to find solutions and implement them.

### OPERATIONAL IDEAS

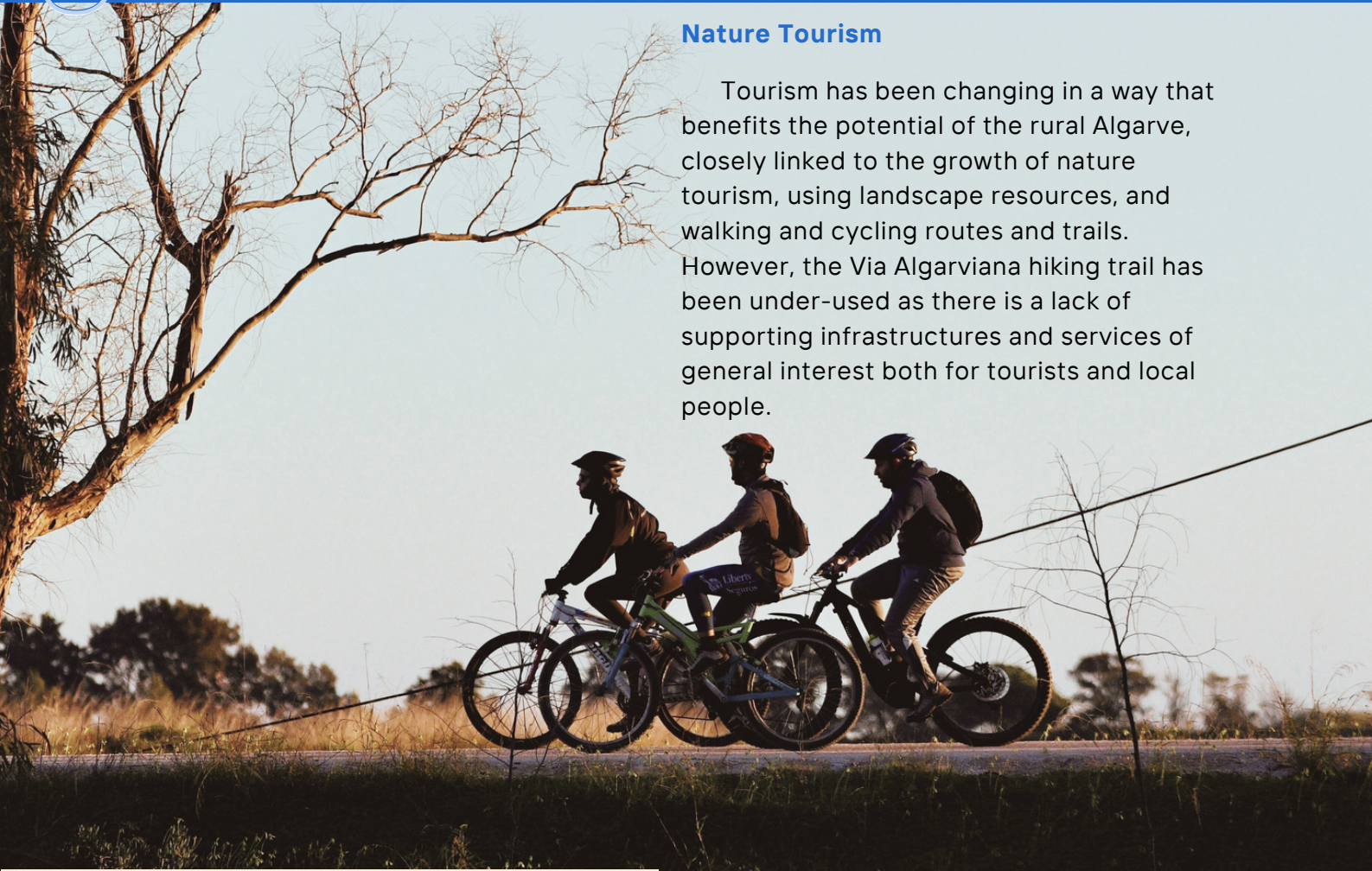
**Create a "greenway" to facilitate projects in the interior**

Local governance needs to focus more on these rural and inland areas, organising them according to their **characteristics** and preserving their unique values, resources and traditions so that a sense of **pride in belonging** is spread in the local communities and encourages people to stay.

**Use the tourist tax generated in the coastal areas to create and support projects in rural areas**

## Nature Tourism

Tourism has been changing in a way that benefits the potential of the rural Algarve, closely linked to the growth of nature tourism, using landscape resources, and walking and cycling routes and trails. However, the Via Algarviana hiking trail has been under-used as there is a lack of supporting infrastructures and services of general interest both for tourists and local people.



*“The problem is that tourism is too concerned with promotion and less with management.”*



## Vision for tourism in rural areas of the Algarve

well-structured, qualified and professionalized tourism sector

locally- and community-based tourism

small in size (small groups)

involving visitors in local experiences

very focused on the principles of nature tourism

# 4

## ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY: PROFILE OF LIFESTYLE MIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS AND BUSINESSES

Between May and December 2022, 60 lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs from rural areas of the Algarve answered an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was available in Portuguese, English, French, and German and was aimed at discovering LME profiles, their businesses, motivations, and the obstacles they faced. Below is a summary of some of the results of this survey.



### ENTREPRENEURS

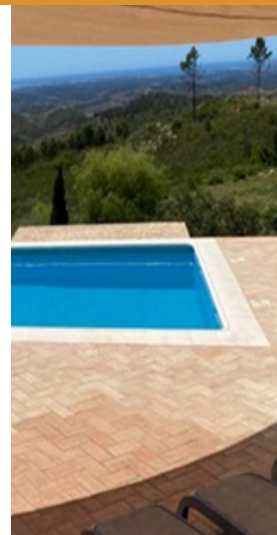


- **58%** are **male**;
- An average age of **57 years**;
- They have been **living in the Algarve for more than 6 years**;
- Many of them have **English, German, Dutch**, and also **Portuguese nationality**;
- With a **high level of education**;
- Before they came to the Algarve, most of them were **employed in skilled professions and high-level positions**;
- When they came to the Algarve, **they had the intention to start a business**;
- **41%** of the LMEs managed to open their business within a year. **Another 41% needed up to 5 years**;
- Most of the LMEs **have difficulties** with the **Portuguese language**;
- They choose to **live in a rural area in the Algarve** due to the **natural environment**, the **climate**, the **lifestyle**, and the **Portuguese people**.

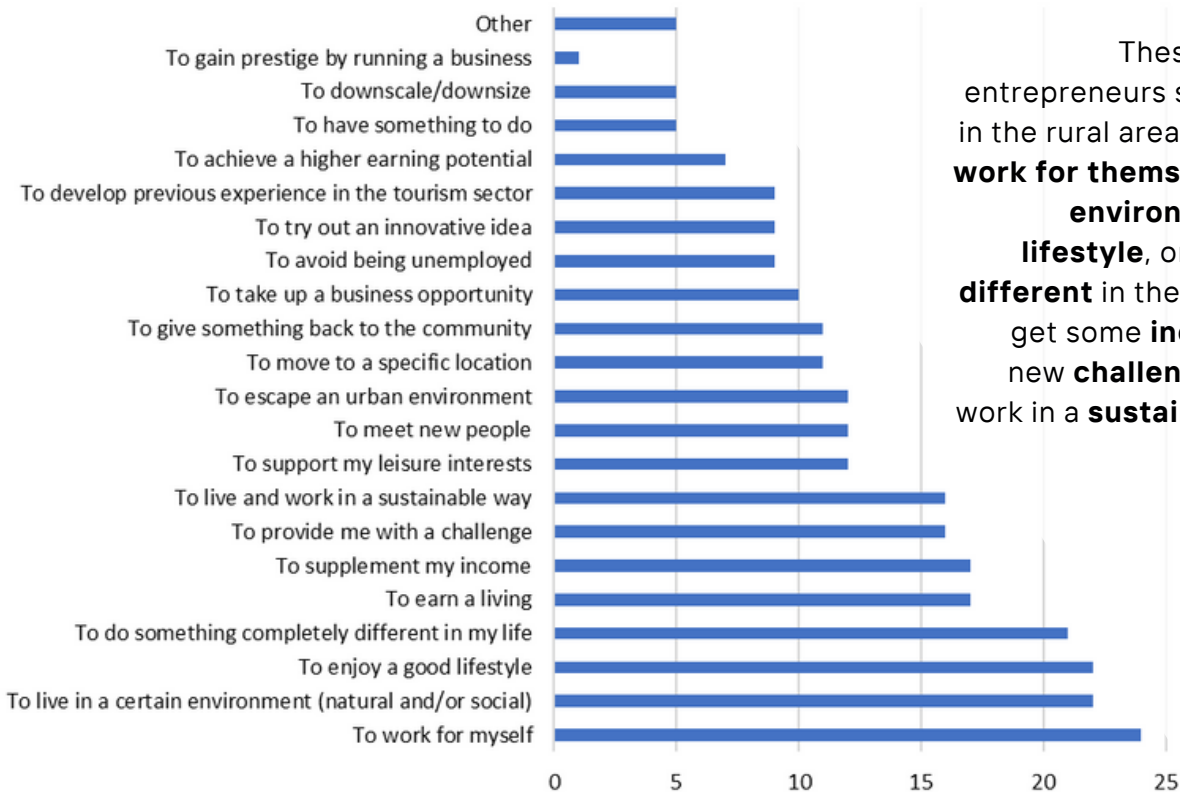


### BUSINESSES

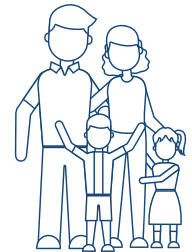
- Most of the businesses are in the **accommodation sector**, mainly **alojamento local**, but also they also have **restaurants**, and **tourist activities**;
- These businesses are **mostly open all year round**;
- Most of their **clients are foreigners**, e.g. from Germany, Netherlands, England, and France;
- They are involved in **informal partnerships**, namely with other complementary local businesses;
- These LMEs **don't always need employees outside the household**;
- Most of the LMEs think that their **business has a good performance**;
- In the next years, these LMEs expect to **invest** mainly in **sustainability**, namely in renewable energies, water management, re-use of materials, and importantly, job creation. Additionally, they plan to invest in **digital marketing**.



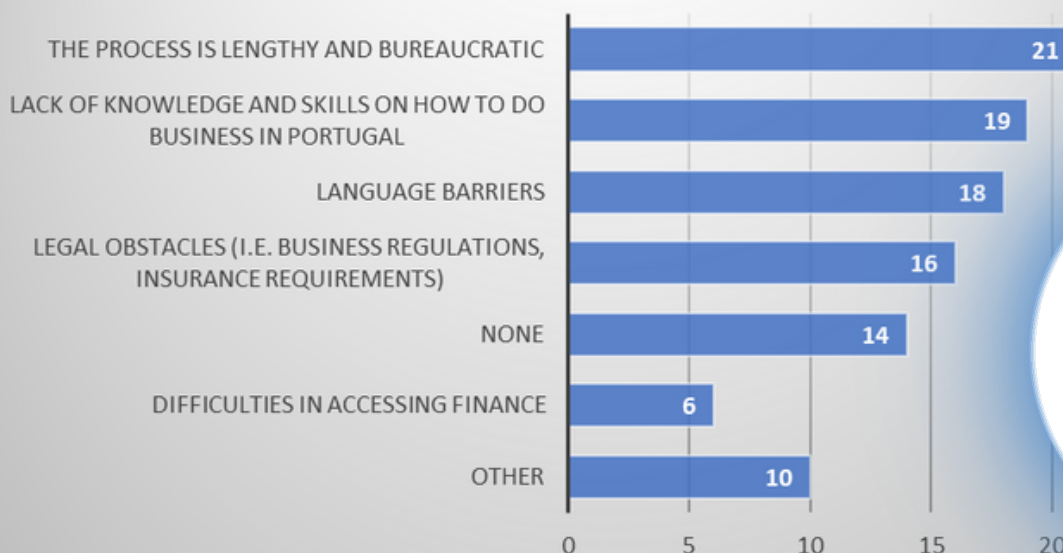
## Reasons for starting a business



These lifestyle migrant entrepreneurs started businesses in the rural areas of the Algarve **to work for themselves**, in a **certain environment**, with a **good lifestyle**, or **to do something different** in their lives, and also to get some **income**, to take up a new **challenge**, and to live and work in a **sustainable way**, among other reasons.



## Main obstacles to start the business in the Algarve



The main obstacles to starting the business in the Algarve were the **bureaucracy** and **legal obstacles**, and the **language barrier**.

# 5

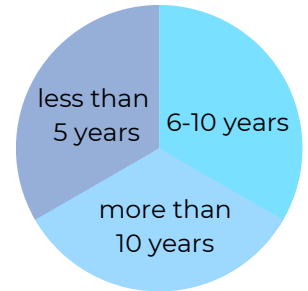
## INTERVIEWS WITH LIFESTYLE MIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS: OVERVIEW OF DATA



### Profile of the participants

The LMEs we interviewed came from a wide range of different places before moving to the Algarve. Many came from big urban centres; others arrived after extensive periods of travelling - including by boat, bike and motorhome. Some had arrived within the past year; others had been in the Algarve for a long time.

HOW LONG LIVING IN THE ALGARVE



- **Nationality:** we interviewed people of 19 different nationalities (12 EU and 7 non-EU).
- **Age:** ranged from early 30s to late 70s (at the time of the interview). Many had young children, whilst others were running businesses on their own.
- **Education:** generally, are highly educated, at academic and/or professional level.
- **Previous working lives:** included a wide range of occupations from higher and skilled professions, the civil sector, corporate and management, finance and sales, sports, etc.
- **Experience in tourism:** interestingly, the vast majority (84%) had no previous experience in the tourism sector and, for 68%, this was their first business venture.
- **Language:** the majority speak very little Portuguese, although many are trying to learn and those who have been in the Algarve longest are able to communicate in Portuguese.



### Profile of the businesses

- The businesses covered a range of tourism-related products and services, with accommodation units being the most frequent;
- 9 of the businesses had opened in the past year; 12 had been operating for 1-5 years; 8 for 6-10 years and 8 for more than 10 years;
- 30 of the businesses are open all year round, with 7 operating seasonally (or closing for a prolonged period);
- 26 of the businesses employ staff, either full or part-time;
- The majority of the businesses cater to the international market, although some note an increase in Portuguese clients.

Types of activity
Accommodation (guesthouse; B&B; AL; self-catering)
Wellness retreat
Motorhome park / campsite
Café / restaurant
Vineyard + accommodation
Catering
Bike rentals /tours
Walking tours
Buggy tours

# 6

## GOOD PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY LIFESTYLE MIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS

In order to explore the potential for enhancing the sustainable development of tourism and rural areas, we were interested to hear what kind of good practices were being implemented by the entrepreneurs, from the socio-economic and environmental perspectives.

### Positive practices mentioned:

#### Socio-economic benefits

- Boosting local economies (cafés, restaurants, shops, markets...);
- Using/promoting other local tourism service providers;
- Using local products and produce;
- Creating jobs for local people;
- Recuperating abandoned houses and buildings.



#### Environmentally-friendly practices

- Using renewable energies;
- Reducing carbon footprint;
- Using local materials and techniques in building work;
- Efficient water use and water collection;
- Recycling and avoiding use of plastic;
- Land use: planting new trees/vegetables; organic production; improving the soil; increasing biodiversity;
- Educating guests/clients about local environment and appropriate behaviour.



Besides the good practices engaged in by LMEs, they were able to identify many challenges and issues which, to some extent, hindered the success of their business operation or their level of satisfaction with the new way of life they had chosen. Some of these challenges are listed below. The most recurrent problem faced is the **level of bureaucracy** and the **difficulties encountered in legal processes**.

### Challenges & issues mentioned:

#### Socio-economic challenges

- Difficulties in procuring service providers (electricians; builders; plumbers, etc.) in rural areas;
- Difficulties in sourcing some products locally (e.g. specialized vegan products; legally required items);
- Lack of housing (for employees);
- Lack of socio-cultural and leisure facilities;
- Lack of information about local events etc.;
- Difficulties with bureaucratic and legal processes.

*"It's a nightmare!"*

*Lack of reliable and consistent information; long waiting times (years!); processes blocked; language barrier*

#### Environmental issues

- Difficulties in recycling and waste disposal (at municipal level);
- Difficulties with water supply (when not connected to mains supply);
- Lack of funding/support for investing in environmentally-friendly systems;
- Climate change: rising temperatures and drought situation.



# 7 EMERGING CONCLUSIONS AND ENVISAGED OUTCOMES

The **analysis** of the data we collected is still **ongoing**, but we have some **emerging conclusions** that we think it's important to share.

Although there are some downsides to be noted from the growing tendency towards entrepreneurial lifestyle migration in rural areas of the Algarve, including its contribution to the rising prices of houses and land and the conceivable divisions and possibly conflicts arising among 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in long-standing rural communities, in general we can conclude that LMEs have the potential to impact positively on the sustainable development of both tourism and rural spaces.

This potential is multi-faceted, but in particular we can highlight the following aspects:

- (i) Slowing down or even reversing the exodus and ageing of local communities in sparsely populated areas.
- (ii) Contributing to socio-economic development by applying new skills, know-how, resources, innovative ideas and international contacts to develop diversity in local businesses; boosting local economies (commerce and services); creating informal, locally-based networks and partnerships and employing local people.
- (iii) Attracting new types of 'niche' tourism and tourists (and other LMEs) to the area, through offering services and products that blend innovative ideas with local traditions and resources. Although this is necessarily small in scale (too much tourism would hardly be sustainable in rural areas!), it nevertheless

creates a 'multiplier effect' of like-minded people who are likely to engage in sustainably-oriented behaviours based on respect for the local people, place and culture.

- (iv) Engaging in environmentally sustainable practices and, leading by example, encouraging others to do the same (as many stakeholders confirm).

However, this potential is hindered by a lack of networking, support and cooperation among all the stakeholders involved (which, after all, is a fundamental requisite for any form of sustainable development). Specifically, there is a general lack of communication and collaboration between local governance (mostly at the municipal council level) and LMEs. On the other hand, local governance do seem willing to embrace and foster lifestyle migration entrepreneurship, and are aware of the need to remove some of the bureaucratic barriers and create better channels of support in order to better achieve this.

On a final note, we found that there is a strong commitment on the part of the LMEs to the local area in which they live and operate. Almost without exception, they wish to stay in their adopted home, and continue to run small-scale but generally very successful businesses which tie in with their individual lifestyle ideals, values and practices.

## What next?

### ENVISAGED OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT



#### For migrants

We hope that the final outputs of the project will provide **support** in terms of developing networking activities, deepening their understanding of the challenges faced and the support measures available to overcome these challenges.



#### For local governance

We also hope to lend support and ideas for the **emerging policy agenda** of rural areas in the Algarve.



#### For fellow researchers

We hope to provide a framework for similar **future, comparative research**, perhaps in other rural areas of Portugal and beyond.

IF YOU HAVE ANY COMMENTS, QUESTIONS OR IDEAS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH US, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT US AT:

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